



Conversations
about God

GRAHAM MAXWELL with LOUIS VENDEN
Edited by JON PAULIEN

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Preface

The title of this book, *Conversations About God*, not only reflects its content, but also its origin in a series of twenty programs by that name presented at the Loma Linda University Church in 1984. In that memorable series, Dr. A. Graham Maxwell opened each evening's topic with a presentation, followed by questions and comments from the audience, moderated by then-pastor Louis Venden. The book you hold in your hands is an edited version of the original "conversations." The editor, Jon Paulien, has sought to preserve the flavor of the original conversations as much as possible; guided by Graham's daughter, Audrey Zinke, and his close friend, Cherie Kirk. The manuscript was also enthusiastically examined by Pastor Venden himself.

These conversations offer another look at our heavenly Father in the larger setting of a universe-wide conflict over His character and government. God is infinite in majesty and power. Yet, when He came in human form, He didn't try to intimidate or overwhelm people with a show of majesty and power. Instead, He sat down among them. He conversed with them. He even invited their questions. As a matter of fact, Jesus taught some of His most important truths while reclining at tables, eating supper with His audiences.

As indicated in the title of this book, these twenty conversations are primarily about God. But one could fairly raise the question, *whose God* are we talking about? God is not the exclusive property of any particular denomination. For example, the Methodists and the Baptists worshiped God before Seventh-day Adventists came on the scene. The Lutherans were worshiping God before the Methodists and Baptists came on the scene. The Jews were worshiping God centuries before there were any Christians. Adam and Eve were worshiping God before there were any Jews. And before there were any people on our planet, God's loyal angels worshiped Him throughout the universe.

God belongs to all of us. While there are religious differences among us, we are all members of His family. Or should we rather say that only the good ones among us are members of God's family? Is it the way you count your children? Will you report today that you have only one child; while tomorrow you may report three? And the next day only two? Do you only acknowledge the children who are behaving well? Frankly, we have all misbehaved. And yet God recognizes every one of us, counts every one of us as members of His family. It is this amazing, gracious God that is the subject of this book. And "conversations" like this are needed today and will continue to be needed. Even eternity will not be long enough to fully understand and celebrate our God.

Another Look at God

I believe that the most important of all Christian beliefs is the one that brings joy and assurance to God's friends everywhere—the truth about our heavenly Father that was confirmed at such cost by the life and death of His Son.

God is not the kind of person His enemies have made Him out to be—arbitrary, unforgiving and severe. God is just as loving and trustworthy as His Son, just as willing to forgive and heal. Though infinite in majesty and power, our Creator is an equally gracious Person who values nothing higher than the freedom, dignity, and individuality of His intelligent creatures—that their love, their faith, their willingness to listen and obey, may be freely given. He even prefers to regard us not as servants but as friends. This is the truth revealed through all the books of Scripture. This is the everlasting Good News that wins the trust and admiration of God's loyal children throughout the universe.

Like Abraham and Moses—the ones God spoke of as His trusted friends—God’s friends today want to speak well and truly of our heavenly Father. They covet as the highest of all commendations the words of God about Job: “He has said of Me what is right.”

Chapter One

The Conflict In God's Family

Our heavenly Father is so incredibly gracious, even toward those of us who have misbehaved. But the Bible describes an amazing reality. Long, long ago, even in the presence of perfect love and freedom, conflict broke out in God's family. There was war in heaven. The most vivid description of this war is presented in the last of the sixty-six books of the Bible, the book of Revelation:

Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, who fought back with his angels; but the dragon was defeated, and he and his angels were not allowed to stay in heaven any longer. The huge dragon was thrown out! He is that old serpent, named the Devil, or Satan, that deceived the whole world. He was thrown down to earth, and all his angels with him.

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven saying: "Now God's salvation has come! Now God has shown his power as King! Now his Messiah has shown his authority! For the accuser of our brothers, who stood before God accusing them day and night, has been thrown out of heaven. Our brothers won the victory over him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the truth which they proclaimed; and they were willing to give up their lives and die. And so rejoice, you heavens, and all you who live there! But how terrible for the earth and the sea! For the Devil has come down to you, and he is filled with rage, for he knows that he has only a little time left." Revelation 12:7-12, GNT.

As we read these words, it's good to know that before there was war, there was peace throughout the whole universe. There was peace because all the members of God's vast family trusted each other, and all of them trusted their heavenly Father. The Father in turn could safely trust in them. Where there is such mutual trust and trustworthiness, there is perfect freedom. Perfect peace. Perfect security. And that's the

way it's going to be in the hereafter. The Bible never talks about prisons in eternity. There will be no police on every corner. And women will be safe walking the streets alone at any hour.

How the prophets must have enjoyed describing the peace, security, and freedom of the hereafter! Isaiah, for example, says there will be wolves, leopards, and lions mixed in with the farm animals. And little children will lead them (Isaiah 11:6–9). While there may be lions in heaven, there will be no reason to be afraid. Zechariah says that in the city to come, elderly men and women will sit in the streets with staff in hand, while boys and girls play safely there (Zechariah 8:4–5). But not yet.

The Origin of the Adversary (Satan)

Looking far into the past when there once was peace, a crisis of distrust broke out in God's family. *Sin in its essence is a breach, a breakdown of trust* (Romans 14:23). And thus sin entered our universe for the first time. We all know the story if we've ever read the Bible through. It begins with the most brilliant of all God's creatures. He is pictured in Ezekiel 28 as standing in the very presence of God. He is pictured in Isaiah 14 as knowing God so well that he went forth from the presence of God bearing light and truth to his fellow angels. That is why he was given the name Lucifer (Isaiah 14:12, KJV), which is a Latin term for "bearer of light" or teacher of truth. A Greek version of the same name is applied to Jesus Christ Himself in Revelation (22:16 — "morning star," see also John 1:4–5). So Lucifer had a Jesus-like role among the angels before sin.

Moved by jealousy and pride, this brilliant, most trusted, even revered, angel set out to undermine trust in God by circulating misinformation and lies about our heavenly Father. And thus he became, not a bearer of light and a teacher of truth, but a bearer of lies (John 8:44). The name Lucifer no longer applies to him. He no longer bears light; he is now the bearer of lies. His real name is Satan, the opponent, the adversary, the slanderer (Zechariah 3:1–2).

And how this adversary worked among the angels! In a pious manner he insinuated that God Himself was an untrustworthy liar. Specifically, he charged that God did not respect the freedom of His children; He was arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe (based on Genesis 3:1–5). With carefully chosen words he hoped to turn his fellow angels away from God and win them to worship *him* instead. It seems unbelievable that a creature could presume to think of himself as

God and suggest that angels worship him. But the Bible records that Satan (Lucifer) is actually capable of such insanity:

How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star [Lucifer in the KJV], son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High." Isaiah 14:12-14, RSV.

Later on Satan even asked his creator to get down on His knees in the wilderness of temptation and worship His own creature:

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Begone, Satan! for [sic] it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'" Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and ministered to him. Matthew 4:8-11, RSV.

The angels watched that whole experience. They must have been stunned to see one of their fellow angels, a created being, asking God to get down on His knees and worship.

God bore long and patiently as He watched this insurrection developing in His family. He watched until one-third of His brilliant, intelligent angels agreed with Satan that God was not worthy of their trust. This means that even God, though infinite in power, could not persuade one-third of the brilliant angels that Satan's charges were false. Finally, as we saw in Revelation 12, war broke out in heaven.

Satan not only shared these false charges (that God is an untrustworthy liar) with the angels, he wasted no time passing them on to our first parents in the garden, thus involving us in the conflict as well:

Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden, but

God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” 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, knowing good and evil.” Genesis 3:1–5, RSV.

The word “subtle” in this text means the serpent was more cunning or crafty than any other creature God made. I don’t blame Eve for wanting to be like God; isn’t that your prayer as well? But here the serpent (Satan) deceived her into thinking there was a miraculous shortcut to becoming like God.

Our Role in This Conflict

So whether we want to be or not, all of us are now caught up in the consequences of this war. Everyone in the universe is unavoidably involved. And the future of God’s family, to which we all belong, depends upon the outcome of this war. Compared with God’s solution of this problem, our own personal salvation, while important, is relatively inconsequential. For if God does not win this war, who would want to be saved?

For God to win this war, however, does not leave out our salvation. The way God has worked to win you and me is the same as the way in which He won the war among the angels. In other words, the methods that God has used to win us back to repentance and faith (trust) are the same methods that have led the unfallen universe to tell Him He’s absolutely trustworthy. Even if He should fail to win you and me, they will trust and worship Him for the rest of eternity because of the demonstration of His goodness and trustworthiness.

So as much as God wants to save all of us, He could fail to do this and still not lose the war. For in heavenly places the war was already won two thousand years ago. All through the book of Revelation, angels are celebrating God’s victory in the war. They never cease telling Him that He’s proved Himself to be righteous and holy and just and good and infinitely worthy of their trust (Revelation 5:9–12, 15:3–4). And that victory is the foundation of our salvation.

The early Christians sorely needed Revelation’s encouraging picture of the angels celebrating because there were several serious crises among them at that time. For one thing, the Second Coming seemed to be indefinitely delayed. They thought He would come around 50 A.D.,

and Paul had to tell them, “No, not yet” (2 Thessalonians 2:1–3). There were still more things to happen (2 Thessalonians 2:4–12). But by the 90s Jesus had still not returned. And besides this, there were heresies in the church. Some, for example, were teaching that Christ had not really come in human form. He had not really suffered and died. He had faked it all. For that reason, they were sometimes called the *Docetists* (from the Greek word for “seeming to be”). And then there was great opposition and serious persecution. Not only that, the apostles were all dead, except one. And he was the elderly John, now a prisoner on the island of Patmos (Revelation 1:9). What good news was there to encourage the early Christians?

You can count on God, when things are that bleak, to send a message of encouragement and explanation to His people. He surely wouldn’t send a book of mysteries and dates and schedules of events that they could not possibly understand. Rather, the sixty-sixth Bible book that God did send is titled “Revelation,” or “Clarity.” The book of Revelation is an invitation to discouraged early Christians to look a little higher, to take the *larger view* of things. It helped them see how they’d all been caught up in a vast conflict that affects the whole universe! And that it’s a conflict over God’s own character and government.

Not only that, as you read through the book of Revelation you see that God has already won this war, and the angels in heaven all agree with Him. This is the good news. Revelation also invites us to join in the celebration and then to go out to the world and invite all, who are willing to listen, to join in God’s victory in the war. When Christians discover this bigger picture, they don’t need to be on the defensive all the time; they have good news to tell. There is no way God and His side can lose. The invitation of the Bible’s sixty-sixth book is to *join the winning side*.

The book of Revelation also says that you can count on God to wait until this truth about Him, this good news about His character and government, has been spread all over the world. God is the kind of person who will wait until His children have had an opportunity to understand the issues in the war. He wants them to be ready for the awesome events the Bible describes as taking place before Jesus’ return. The highest privilege of God’s friends on this planet today is to understand and to present the plan of salvation in the larger setting of the Great Controversy.

Summing up, the first step in the journey of faith is to recognize that we are sinners and that we need to be saved. It is understandable, there-

fore, that we might, at first, be preoccupied with what God has done in order that we might be saved. But as we grow in the journey of faith, and our knowledge of the Bible deepens, we learn to take the Bible as a whole. It then becomes apparent that our own personal salvation (important as that is) is only a small part of a far larger picture that involves the peace and security of the whole vast universe. It involves the confirmation of the truth about our God Himself.

The Larger View of the Bible

Having said this, it is important to recognize that not all Christians have understood God's plan of salvation in this larger view. Even the great theologians of the Reformation did not see things in this way. Luther, for example, was preoccupied with God's gracious provisions to save you and me. One reason Luther does not emphasize the bigger picture is that he was unable to make much use of the book of Revelation. Luther correctly insisted that we should use "the Bible and the Bible only" (*Sola Scriptura*), but he himself was not able to use all sixty-six books. He particularly regarded Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation as inferior to the other books in the New Testament. In the book of Revelation he said he found "too little about Christ, and too much no one could understand." And then he summarized, "There's no way the Holy Spirit could have inspired this book!" But as a result of not being able to use the book of Revelation, his understanding of the gospel did not include the war in heaven.

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When a person has been falsely accused, it is only by the demonstration of trustworthiness over a long period of time, and under a great variety of circumstances, especially difficult ones, that trust can be re-established and confirmed.

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Some of us though, have been greatly helped by Luther in placing the Bible as the highest of all authorities. We have done what Luther recommended and we've studied the Bible seriously, not just sixty-two books or fewer, but all sixty-six. We have learned to read the Bible as a whole and relate all its parts to the one central theme, the revelation of the truth about God in the Great Controversy. I have had the privilege of leading groups through all sixty-six Bible books more than a hundred

times. Every time I do this, it becomes even clearer to me that the Bible is an inspired record of how God handled the crisis in His family. I think if Luther were alive today, he too might rejoice in this bigger picture.

There are no shortcuts to trust, or the Bible would be a much briefer book. Claims prove nothing. Even when a person has been falsely accused of being untrustworthy, *it is only by the demonstration of trustworthiness over a long period of time, and under a great variety of circumstances, especially difficult ones, that trust can be re-established and confirmed.*

The Larger View of the Cross

The Bible records just such a demonstration, beginning with the entrance of sin into the universe and climaxing with the death of Christ on the cross. My understanding is that Christ died to reestablish peace in God's family. The apostle Paul explained the purpose of the cross, and why Jesus had to die, in a number of passages. Look at Colossians, for example:

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. Colossians 1:19–20, RSV.

The word “reconcile” here means to atone, to bring to unity. Note also where peace is made. It is at the cross. Let's look at the same text in another version:

For it was by God's own decision that the Son has in himself the full nature of God. Through the Son, then, God decided to bring the whole universe back to himself. God made peace through his Son's sacrificial death on the cross, and so brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in heaven. Colossians 1:19–20, GNT.

Notice two other passages in Ephesians that make the same point:

For he 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 fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. Ephesians 1:9–10, RSV.

Here we have a glimpse of the ending of the war, when God's purpose is fulfilled and the whole universe will be united. Uniting all things is the opposite of war; when you have unity, you also have peace. Now to the other text in Ephesians:

...and to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. Ephesians 3:9–10, RSV.

According to Ephesians, the way God is demonstrating the truth about Himself and winning the war is through His church, through His people. This is explained in a dramatic way in another of Paul's letters: "...we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men." 1 Corinthians 4:9, RSV. The Greek word for spectacle is *theatron*, from which we get "theater." Some saints might be reluctant to attend the theater, but Paul tells us we live in a theater all the time. God's stage. And on this stage, He is demonstrating the truth about Himself by the way He is dealing with His church.

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God includes the whole family in the results of this demonstration: "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to me." John 12:32, GNT. The *Good News Bible* here expresses the real meaning of the original. The word translated "everyone" is not limited to human beings. It is the word for the entire universe, everyone and everything. Not just people on this planet, but even the loyal angels, I believe, were drawn closer to God by this costly demonstration. These verses say to me that Christ died for sinless angels too. And they certainly needed no forgiveness or adjustment of their legal standing. Yet the Bible says they needed the message of the cross as well.

The Larger View of the Gospel

So what is the message of the cross? Evidently, it's much more than the payment of a legal penalty so that somehow God can justly forgive

you and me. The cross was also needed by the loyal angels. And this truly suggests that we ought to go back to the foot of the cross and join the family of the universe in watching closely just how Jesus died. We will listen very carefully to His words on the cross: “My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken Me?” Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34, KJV. What does that mean? And how does that suffering and death restore peace to God’s family? I believe that in the Great Controversy, all Christian beliefs take on much broader significance.

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The gospel most certainly is the good news about what God has done for me and you. But in the larger great controversy setting, the gospel is the truth about our gracious God. It is the truth that ends the war, confirms the loyalty of the universe, and wins some of us back to repentance and to trust. I believe that the most important of all our beliefs is the truth about God. God is not the kind of person His enemies have made Him out to be—arbitrary, vengeful, and severe. He is instead precisely what His Son revealed Him to be. We believe the testimony of Jesus when He said: “If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father.” John 14:9. God is just as loving and gracious as His Son, just as willing to forgive and heal.

Could there be any better news than that? To me, that’s the everlasting good news that maintains the loyalty of the universe. That is the gospel that wins us back and will maintain our loyalty and trust for the rest of eternity. And this is the message we have the high privilege of sharing with people all over this planet. People who may not know they are members of God’s family. People who deserve to know, and who deserve to hear, this truth. So the ultimate question for this book to address is: *Can we be sure God is just like this?* Jesus always welcomed questions, and we ought to do the same.

Questions and Answers

Louis Venden: We’re calling this book *Conversations About God*. But just above, you said that Jesus is the One who reveals God; if we’ve seen Him, we’ve seen the Father. Then why shouldn’t this book be

called “Conversations About Jesus”?

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God is just as loving and gracious as His Son; just as willing to forgive and heal.

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Graham Maxwell: I’ve run into that question several times. Since Jesus is the One who came to reveal the truth, why don’t we talk more about Him? This implies some interesting things. If we believe that Jesus Christ is God, when we talk about Christ we are talking about God anyway. If the whole purpose of His coming to this earth is to reveal the truth about His Father, He is also revealing the truth about Himself. So whether we talk about God or Christ, we’re talking about God. But I think it adds focus to our discussion to say that the ultimate question really is about God. It is God who came in human form as Christ; this is the ultimate method He used to reveal the truth about Himself. In a sense, it is much ado about nothing when someone asks, “Shall we talk about God, or shall we talk about Christ?”

Lou: If I’m hearing you rightly, you’re saying that Jesus Himself would really be happiest if we’re talking about the One He came to reveal.

Graham: I’m impressed that when Jesus was here, He would suggest, “Don’t look to Me, look to the Father.” John 5:19, 30, 8:28–29, 14:6–11, 15:15, 16:26–27. It suggests to me that we should always outdo one another in giving honor. The Trinity does that. The Son is always outdoing Himself to give honor to the Father. But I have noticed that it comes back the other way as well — the Father gives the Son the name above every other name. Philippians 2:9–11. And the Holy Spirit, in a self-effacing way, is always drawing our attention to the Father and the Son. John 4:23–24, 15:26, 16:13–14. The way those three divine Persons behave is a model for us.

Lou: Here’s a related question: How can you really have a conversation about God? After all, how can we really know God? Take Paul’s statement in Romans: “How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable are His ways.” Romans 11:33, RSV. If that’s the case, who are we to question? God is sovereign, so why should we be sitting here having conversations about God?

Graham: Ah, who are we to question the inscrutable ways of God? And that’s in Romans. But we need to balance that with Romans 1:19–

20, where Paul says (in my words), “You’re without excuse if you don’t know God.” So on the principle of taking the Bible as a whole, and not just “here a little and there a little,” I would have to put Romans 1 alongside Romans 11.

I think when Paul is saying that God’s thoughts are so far above ours (see also Isaiah 55:8–9), that is a reverent recognition that God is infinite. Think of all He knows! We’ll never fully understand God; we’re mere creatures. And at times we need to be reminded of His infinite superiority. But then it’s marvelous that the Infinite One would want to be known by us.

All through the Bible He says things like, “Israel is destroyed because they don’t know Me” (see Hosea 4:6), and, “I’ve come to this earth that you may know Me” (see John 17:1–5). So it’s pretty clear God wants to be known. But we shouldn’t pretend we’re gods who could know everything that He knows.

Lou: So we should not use the idea of God’s sovereignty as an excuse to ignore issues related to His character.

Graham: I think where that idea really comes from is Romans 9, where you have the verse: “Who are you to question God? Who are you to answer back to God?” Romans 9:14–26, especially 20–21. But Romans 9, I believe, has been misunderstood by some very saintly people, including a notable theologian in Reformation days. One really needs to put Romans 9 in the whole context of Romans — certainly in the context of chapters 1 through 9.

In Romans 1–8, Paul has been saying to his audience (which is made up of both Jews and Gentiles), “I have great good news for you. God will save all who trust Him — whether you are Jew or Gentile, bond or free, male or female (Romans 1:16–17, 3:21–30). He’ll save everybody who trusts Him.” And as Paul was developing chapters 1–8, he could sense that certain members of his audience (descended from Abraham) were not taking this too kindly, because they thought that they had a *special relationship* with God. It was as if God had made a deal with their ancestor in their behalf. That’s why they were so concerned with things like their genealogy.

When Paul got to the end of chapter 8, therefore, he sensed that some of his readers would be quite offended. So in essence he turned to them and said, “I sense that some of you don’t like what I’ve said, that God is the kind of God that would save all who trust Him. But when you think that way, aren’t you suggesting that you would run the universe

better than God? Are you saying God cannot save all who trust Him? Let me tell you something: God is going to run this universe precisely as He wishes. Just as the potter takes a lump of clay, and makes of the same clay a vessel for honor, and a vessel for dishonor (Romans 9:21), so God has the right — if He wants to exercise it — to run His universe any way He likes!”

Some people take that out of context and say, “God takes the material we are all made of and makes some to be saved and some to be lost. So what’s the use of trying to know Him at all? Our destiny has already been determined.” No, what Paul is saying in Romans 9 is that God has just as much authority as the potter — actually much more so. He created this universe. He’s going to run it precisely as He wishes. And He won’t ever change. You can count on it. Does Romans 9 mean that God is arbitrary? Not in the context of chapters 1–8 where Paul has already explained how God runs the universe. God is so infinitely gracious that He values nothing higher than our freedom, and will save all who trust Him. But He doesn’t expect us to trust Him as a stranger, so at infinite cost He has revealed the truth about Himself. And that’s what Paul’s implied audience didn’t like. So Paul is really saying in Romans 9, “You impudent, irreverent people. How dare you tell God how to run His universe! How *does* God run His universe? Please read Romans 1–8. God’s treatment of the universe is infinitely gracious.”

Lou: But that raises another question: Why would a God who is infinitely powerful, who can run the universe any way He wants to, allow a conflict like the one we read about in the twelfth chapter of Revelation? Why would He allow a war in heaven to happen?

Graham: That’s a great question. If God has that much authority and power, how could a war in heaven even take place? This question is the reason why those who stress the sovereignty of God have great difficulty allowing for a war in heaven. And it’s the reason many of the Reformers really couldn’t use that sixty-sixth book of the Bible. Luther, for example, says, “It was fancied that there was a war.” He just couldn’t wrap his mind around the idea. But to me it’s one of the most wonderful things about God. Though He had the infinite power necessary to stop such a war before it even started, He did not do so. God must consider something else of far greater value than our mere submission to His power because He allowed Lucifer’s rebellion in heaven to grow and grow. By secular standards of good administration, God was weak. It was bad management. I mean, how long would a pastor last in our church if

there was such chaos in the membership? The committee would meet!

Lou: The pastor would move on, wouldn't he!

Graham: Yes. Shall we ask God to move on, then, because of weakness on His part? We know He has infinite power, yet He allowed this war to develop. He allowed the questions to arise. That tells me there is something of even greater importance to God than our mere submission to His infinite power.

Lou: Here's a question related to the war in heaven. What about the angel who seems to start the war, the one named "Day Star" or Lucifer? If God knew that there would be all this trouble, and that Lucifer would be at the center of it, why did He create Lucifer?

Graham: That, of course, raises the question whether God *does* know everything in the future. And there are good saints who wonder about that. I would rather find an explanation that would allow me to say God can see the end from the beginning. The past, the present, and the future, they're all alike to Him. And yet I'm still free. My understanding would be that when God created Lucifer, He knew what Lucifer would do. And yet He went ahead anyway. He knew what it would cost Him. He knew what it would cost His children. And yet He went ahead. And when you think of the anguish that has been involved in solving this problem and settling this war, there must be something of infinite value at stake, or God would not have done this.

He certainly had other options that might have seemed easier. When Lucifer began to entertain these rebellious thoughts, God could have eliminated him right there and then. What damage would that have done? Well, the angels looking on might think, "I'd better not have bad thoughts or I might get eliminated too." But after eliminating Lucifer, God could then have blotted out all memory of the elimination so no one would know. And He could do that an infinite number of times and no one would know but God.

So why didn't He do it? Is it that He couldn't live with the fact that He was doing that? Or is it that He wants us to know what He *did* do? He definitely did not take a shortcut. He allowed Lucifer to develop these thoughts, and to spread them among the angels, knowing what it would cost Him and cost His friends on this planet. We've all participated a little in the Great Controversy. But knowing the thousands of years it would take, and all the misunderstanding and the anguish, God said, "I will go ahead anyway." And the angels understand this and tell Him, "You did this magnificently. And we're with you for the rest of eterni-

ty.” So what was at stake in this decision? That’s the big thing.

Lou: This perspective that you’re sharing here and throughout this book includes a war, a crisis of distrust, and whether God can be trusted!

Graham: Right. It’s not about power. If it was about God’s power, He could have settled things in a second. It would be easy to show that God is more powerful than Satan. In fact, such a demonstration is hardly necessary, since even the Devil is already convinced. James tells us that when the Devil thinks about the power of the One who hung the whole vast universe in space, it scares him. He shudders with fear (James 2:19). So I don’t think we should spend too much time arguing about God’s power. *Of course* He’s infinite in majesty and power. The conflict is not over *who has the power*, but over *who’s telling the truth*. God has been accused of abusing His power.

Lou: Graham, you mentioned that Martin Luther couldn’t see this perspective and that he had trouble with the book of Revelation. Why do you suppose he had that kind of trouble?

Graham: Why don’t we read it in his own words, from his *Preface to the book of Revelation*, in English translation of course. “It [The book of Revelation] approximates the Fourth Book of Esdras. I can in no way detect that the Holy Spirit produced it.” And he gives his reasons. As he looked at it, “Christ is neither taught nor known in the book of Revelation,” even though it’s “The Revelation of Jesus Christ.” And we know what his policy was for evaluating books in the Bible, because in the *Preface to James* he wrote, “All the genuine and sacred books... preach and inculcate Christ...” If even Peter or Paul should write a book, it’s not apostolic if it doesn’t teach Christ. And a little later on he writes, “This is the principle that I use in my evaluation of books.” We have a name for that: the “Christomonistic principle.” That’s the “Christ alone” principle. If I don’t find Christ in the book, then it doesn’t belong in the canon. That’s a very good principle in theory. But what if the one making the evaluation doesn’t have a full picture of Christ? Based on his picture of Christ, Luther was ready to rule out four books of the Bible.

Lou: Rather than letting these books expand his understanding and picture of Christ.

Graham: Yes. It was a little backwards for Luther to do it that way. But when you think of the many wonderful things he did, I suppose we should allow him that. But based on what we know today, can

we find Christ in the book of Revelation? I think so. So on the Christomonistic principle which Luther laid down, I take all sixty-six books seriously. The principle's alright, but we've made a little progress since then.

Lou: And that would be supported by the book of Revelation's own claim to be the "revelation of Jesus Christ."

Graham: Right at the beginning (Revelation 1:1). And look at the whole first chapter. It's all about Christ, in His human form. And later on in the book, it's about how He's coming back and what He's doing in the heavenly sanctuary. The book of Revelation is full of Him.

Lou: But now, Graham, in our reading in the book of Revelation, which you shared with us, it seems so clear; there's a statement here that war broke out in heaven, and so on. But I'm wondering — how widely is this perspective shared by the Christian world in general? That is, the idea of a war, and the Great Controversy, this "larger view," as you refer to it.

Graham: It's strange that not many know about this. It's as if there is a conspiracy of silence. Yet we're finding more and more people in the nineteenth century and earlier who did see glimpses of this larger view. Since college days, I've always enjoyed Milton's *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*. There's part of the picture there, not the full picture.

One of the best at expressing a larger view was a preacher named Henry Melvill, who lived in England in the mid-nineteenth century. He was a magnificent preacher, and his wife used to neatly write out his sermons for him to present in no less a place than St. Paul's Cathedral in London. Melvill preached about a crisis among the angels, how they needed their loyalty confirmed by the very things God revealed through the death of Jesus. And Melvill was no minor figure; after his death, he was buried in St. Paul's Cathedral, an honor restricted to a very few.

One person who particularly enjoyed his writings was Ellen White. She had his book in her library. I don't know anyone to this day who has expressed the "larger view" as well as Ellen White. Her work was based on all sixty-six Bible books and reading the marvelous writings of Melvill and others. Let's look at one place where she lays out this bigger picture:

But the plan of redemption had a yet broader and deeper purpose than the salvation of man. It was not for this alone that Christ came to the earth; it was not merely that the inhabitants of this little world might regard the law of God as it should be regarded; but

it was to vindicate the character of God before the universe. To this result of His great sacrifice — its influence upon the intelligences of other worlds, as well as upon man — the Saviour looked forward when just before His crucifixion He said: “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all unto Me.” John 12:31, 32. The act of Christ in dying for the salvation of man would not only make heaven accessible to men, 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. Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 68–69.

Although the *King James Version* says “draw all *men*” here, Ellen White leaves the word “men” out in this quotation. She says simply “draw *all*,” which points to a much larger view of things. While there were saints through the years who spoke about this bigger picture, Ellen White is the one who summed it up the best to date, and seemed to understand it the most clearly.

Lou: I suppose part of the problem has been our tendency to focus on our own salvation. You have referred to how our salvation needs to be seen in the larger perspective. What I’m wondering is, how does this perspective affect Christian belief in general? Does it make a difference?

Graham: I don’t think it minimizes our Christian beliefs in any way; it rather makes them more significant. As I mentioned earlier, the gospel takes on a much broader meaning in the context of the Great Controversy. But that’s not all. Some of us regard the Sabbath as a privilege to observe and a great blessing. A typical approach to the Sabbath is preoccupied with what God has done for our own salvation and what God has done for this planet. But if you limit your understanding to this planet, then the Sabbath was given *before* sin. And as such it is merely a test of our obedience, to show God’s authority and test our willingness to obey.

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Sin is much more than just breaking the rules, it is a break-down of trust and trustworthiness.

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In the larger view, however, the Sabbath was given to man after

sin entered the universe. Then it's no longer an arbitrary test of obedience. It's a great gift that God gave to remind us of all the things the Bible associates with the Sabbath, things like the freedom and the perfection of Eden, and the freedom that He gave to all of His creatures. God's rescue of His people in the Exodus. And then the events of crucifixion week. The seventh-day Sabbath is connected with all of those.

Similarly, the law in the Larger View is God's emergency measure to help us. Paul specifically says that in Galatians 3:19. Take, for example, The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. They were not to eat the fruit of that tree in the garden. In the narrower view, which is preoccupied with what God has done for us on this planet, God said, "Don't touch that tree," *before* sin. And that would simply be a test of their obedience, or so it's often explained. But in the larger, great controversy view, they were told not to go near that tree *after* sin entered the universe. With that in mind, the tree was not so much a test of obedience as something given to protect us. You see, God permitted Satan to tempt Adam and Eve, but Satan was only allowed to approach them at that particular tree. God was not limiting them; He was limiting Satan! You see, the more one views things from the larger perspective, the less arbitrary God's requirements, measures, and provisions look. He simply looks a whole lot better in the great controversy view.

Lou: This definitely helps us understand the reason and the meaning behind God's actions and, at times, lack of action. But this leads me to one final question, "If God won the war at Calvary, then why isn't it over? Why is it still going on? In fact, why didn't it end when God threw Satan and his angels out of heaven?"

Graham: Obviously, the expulsion of Satan from heaven was a victory, a physical victory. But God was not satisfied with that alone. There were still unresolved questions and wonderings among His family. And so He waited. But when Jesus said, "It's finished" (John 19:30), something was finished. And Revelation indicates He was recognized in heaven as having won the war (Revelation 5:6-14). So why does He still wait? Is it that the war has been won in the minds of His children throughout the universe, but not here on this planet? We're still trying to make up our minds. And it's essential that we not only make up our minds, but be so settled into it that we cannot be moved during the terrible events that will happen before the Second Coming. It is in mercy that He waits.

Lou: I'm sure we'll have more on this as the series progresses. Tell

us about the next chapter.

Graham: The next chapter deals with the question, “What Went Wrong in God’s Universe?” What went wrong in the family? It will be a fresh look at sin in the larger setting of the Great Controversy. Sin is much more than just breaking the rules; it is a breakdown of trust and trustworthiness. This will take us to the heart of the issue in the war. Until we know what’s gone wrong, how can we understand God’s efforts to set things right?

Chapter Two

What Went Wrong in God's Universe

The Bible describes sin as a breakdown of trust and trustworthiness, a stubborn and suspicious unwillingness to listen. In the biblical perspective, sin is much more than mere “breaking the rules”. Left untreated, sin makes peace impossible. Sin began in heaven, in the mind of God's most honored and trusted angel. Revelation 12 describes the context of conflict and even war within God's family, developing right in His very presence.

This raises a question. *What really went wrong in God's universe?* This question is important because understanding what went wrong helps us to understand the methods God is using to put things right again. In the larger view of the Great Controversy, the plan of salvation is God's way of setting things right in such a way that they will never go wrong again.

To understand what went wrong, it helps to consider what made things go so right before the war in heaven began. Before the war there was peace. There was peace because all the members of God's vast family trusted each other. They trusted their heavenly Father. And He in turn could safely trust in them. Where you have that kind of mutual trust and trustworthiness, there is perfect peace, perfect freedom, and perfect security.

What Sin Is All About

A crisis of distrust, nevertheless, developed in the family. As we reviewed earlier, our heavenly Father has been accused of being unworthy of our trust. Specifically, He has been accused of being arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe. And thus sin entered our universe for the first time. In the Bible, sin is much more than a mere breaking of the rules, serious as that might be. In its essence, sin is a violation of mutual trust. It is a breakdown of trust and trustworthiness, a stubborn unwillingness to listen to the One who is so eager to help us in our predicament.

Doesn't the Bible specifically state, however, that sin is breaking the rules? How about the key text we've learned from childhood up, “Sin is the transgression of the law”? 1 John 3:4, KJV. Actually, that's a rather free translation. The Greek word that John used is *anomia*, and

it means, literally, lawlessness. “Everyone who commits sin commits lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.” 1 John 3:4, *Williams*. In other words, sin is described as a state of mind, an attitude. And anyone in that state of mind is a continuing threat to the peace and security of the universal family. Sin will not have been truly dealt with until our lawlessness has either been changed or eliminated. Sin begins with a lawless, rebellious state of mind.

The hazard of regarding sin primarily as breaking the rules is that such a mindset tends to encourage an impersonal, even fearful relationship with God. If we regard sin as primarily a breaking of the rules, God’s commandments may be misunderstood as arbitrary regulations designed to show His authority and test our willingness to obey. If we obey, we’re rewarded. If we disobey, we’re destroyed. Would you want to live under those conditions?

Since we all have sinned, should we be fearfully awaiting the execution of the sentence? Or have we been spared because God found some legal way to give us yet another chance? And if we turn down that second chance, will He punish us with even greater severity for our ingratitude? Would such an understanding help produce the peace and the freedom from fear that God desires so much in His universal family?

Actually though, if rightly understood, there is a sense in which one *can* say that sin is a breaking of the rules. Let’s look again at God’s commandments, particularly the Decalogue. All the Ten Commandments ultimately require is that we love God and we love each other (Matthew 22:36–40). And if we really did that we would have peace and freedom. In fact, in the tenth of the Ten Commandments it says that we should not even *want* to sin. If we lived in that state of mind, not even wanting to do anything unloving, we would have freedom to be sure, and all kinds of peace and good will.

But can love actually be commanded? Or produced by force or by fear? Has God ever said to His children, “Love Me, and love each other, or I’ll have to kill you”? Have you husbands ever tried that on your wives and children? Did it work? Imagine your wives and children trembling in front of you and saying in unison, “Oh, yes, Daddy. We love you very much.” Would you be pleased? Would you be satisfied? If so, then you’re a brute. And the God some of us worship would never settle for that.

Having said that, we all must admit that the Bible is full of references to law, discipline, punishment and rewards, even final fiery

destruction. And since our purpose in this book is always to look at the Bible as a whole, not just “here a little and there a little,” we must look at all these other passages seriously. In fact, several chapters of this book will be devoted to God’s wide use of law and why Jesus indeed had to die. And we will talk about how, in reality, God’s law is no threat to our freedom! To understand *that* is really the truth that sets us free.

Going back to the beginning, sin entered our universe when angels ceased to trust. As a consequence, they themselves became untrustworthy. James 4:17 (RSV) offers a familiar definition: “Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.” It is rebellious to act that way. It is lawless to act that way. Anyone who behaves like that is certainly not trustworthy to have around in a free universe.

Look at Romans 14:23 in several, different versions: “Any action that is not based on faith is a sin” (*Moffat*). “Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin” (RSV). “When we act apart from our faith we sin” (*Phillips*). In a text from the book of Ezra, the Jews who returned from Babylonian captivity are confessing that they have done several things that they should not have done. But they describe their misbehaviors in these words: “We have broken faith with our God” (Ezra 10:2, RSV). “We have been unfaithful to our God” (Ezra 10:2, NIV). These texts underline that the essence of sin is a breach of faith; it’s a breakdown of trust and trustworthiness.

Sin as a Breach of Trust in the Story of Moses

I know of no greater illustration of how sin is a violation of trust than the one involving the great saint Moses. When the people were complaining about the lack of water, they came to Moses and grumbled. They even said they wished they had died in the wilderness. “Why did you bring us here from Egypt? We have no water” (based on Numbers 20:5). They behaved so badly that Moses ran to God and prayed, “God, what shall I do?” And God said: “Give them water. Take your rod and go to the rock and speak this time. Don’t hit it, don’t make a scene, don’t be angry with the people or condemn them. Just speak to the rock, and they’ll have all the water they want” (based on Numbers 20:7–8).

Instead of following God’s instructions, Moses went back to the rock, struck it smartly (Numbers 20:11) and said: “You ungrateful rebels! Must we bring forth water from this rock?” Numbers 20:10. According to Numbers 20:12 (NIV), God responded: “Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not

bring this community into the land I give them.”

Now on the surface, doesn't that seem a bit arbitrary and severe? All the old man did was to get irritated and impatient. He disobeyed God by hitting the rock with his rod. Was that enough to keep him out of the Promised Land? For forty years he had led the people. And think what he had put up with all those years. But God says, “Because of what you did at the rock you may not take this people in.” Does that seem severe, for God to treat His old friend like this? How could what Moses did be serious enough to call for such a terrible consequence and penalty?

Understandably, Moses begged God, “Please may I take the people in?” And finally God said, “Speak to Me no more on this matter.” Deuteronomy 3:26. Now how could it be that serious? Or is the answer in the text that we read? It doesn't say in Numbers 20:12, “Because you disobeyed Me, you cannot take the people in.” It actually says, “*Because you did not trust in Me enough* [emphasis supplied] to honor Me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you may not bring the people in.” Why?

Moses was one of the best friends God ever had. God talked to him face to face, even more directly than the visions and dreams He gave to the prophets. He said, “I talk to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friends” (see Exodus 33:11). So the people knew Moses had a special relationship with God. They revered him—at least when they were behaving. They had seen him go up on Mount Sinai and come down carrying the Ten Commandments (Exodus 32:15–16). If your pastor came down a mountain carrying the Ten Commandments with his face shining so brightly that you couldn't look at him, wouldn't he have increased influence in your congregation?

Moses had enormous influence with the people of Israel. That's what made his behavior at the rock so serious. He said, “Must *we* [emphasis supplied] bring forth water from this rock?” Numbers 20:10. Moses implied with the “we” that he was speaking and acting in God's behalf (Numbers 20:10–11). Moses had pictured God as angry when He was not. God had wished by His kindness to lead some of those Israelites to repentance (Numbers 20:7–8; see also Romans 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9). But by his behavior, Moses deprived God of that opportunity. Standing as they were on the verge of going into Canaan to meet those well-armed tribes there, they needed to trust God very closely. And God purposed to win them over to trust, in spite of all their complaining and grum-

bling. He was not going to condemn them or criticize them; just give them abundant water in one of the driest of deserts. “Moses,” He said, “don’t even strike the rock” (Numbers 20:8). But Moses pictured God as angry.

What a contrast to the way Moses had behaved earlier when God said, “I’m tired of these people. Step aside. Let Me destroy them and I’ll make a great nation out of you” (see Exodus 32:10). At that time Moses responded, “God, You couldn’t do that. Think what it would do to Your reputation. What would the Egyptians think? They would assume that You couldn’t take Your people to the Promised Land!” Exodus 32:11–13. And God said, “I love that, Moses. Who knows Me as well as you do? You really are My friend” (see Exodus 33:9–11). But later on, under pressure, Moses let God down. He misrepresented God as vengeful, unforgiving, and severe. And that was precisely Satan’s sin in the beginning, the sin that is the most devastating of all.

God has honored His friend Moses ever since. He even personally buried him (Deuteronomy 34:6), resurrected him (Jude 1:9), and later sent him down to comfort His Son on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:3–4; Mark 9:4–5; Luke 9:30–33). But God had to go on record before the eyes of the onlooking universe regarding the terrible seriousness of Moses’ sin. It wasn’t just about disobedience, or that by smiting the rock he had “spoiled a symbol.” He had certainly done both. But more than that, Moses had broken faith with God. The most destructive thing a person can ever do is to be a person of influence and misrepresent the truth about God. Moses hadn’t shown himself to be God’s trusted, trusting friend. And that’s the essence of sin.

How many of us have committed the same sin in words or actions? How many of us have hurt our own children, and others, who trust us to tell the truth about our God? Have you ever apologized to God for putting Him in a bad light or leaving the impression that He’s not the kind of person we know Him to be? Moses repented and became a better friend of God than ever before. But so many people have continued to mistrust.

The Consequences of Mistrust

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Sin changes us, producing fear and mistrust of God.

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Sin changes us, producing fear and mistrust of God. The results of

centuries of mistrust are catalogued in Paul's letter to the Romans. Let's look first at Romans 3. What makes this quotation from Romans so significant is that it's made up of six Old Testament passages; one from Isaiah, and five from the Psalms (in the order they are quoted in Romans 3:10–18: Psalms 14:1–3, 5:9, 140:3, 10:7; Isaiah 59:7–8; Psalm 36:1). This is a summary of the Old Testament picture of the consequences of mistrust:

As the Scriptures say: "There is no one who is righteous, no one who is wise or who worships God. All have turned away from God; they have all gone wrong; no one does what is right, not even one. Their words are full of deadly deceit; wicked lies roll off their tongues, and dangerous threats, like snake's poison, from their lips; their speech is filled with bitter curses. They are quick to hurt and kill; they leave ruin and destruction wherever they go. They have not known the path of peace, nor have they learned reverence for God." Romans 3:10–18, GNT.

Paul has a lot more to say about the consequences of mistrust in Romans 1. There (verses 18–20) Paul points out that there is no excuse to be ignorant about God. God has revealed Himself in creation and in human experience. So lack of knowledge is actually rooted in human rebellion. Notice some of the consequences of that rebellion:

They know God, but they do not give him the honor that belongs to him, nor do they thank him. Instead, their thoughts have become complete nonsense, and their empty minds are filled with darkness. They say they are wise, but they are fools; instead of worshiping the immortal God, they worship images made to look like mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles. Romans 1:21–23, GNT.

We know from ancient records that the Egyptians worshiped crocodiles and even beetles. Think what that would do to a person. We'll look more closely at that in a later chapter. But Hosea says it is a law that we become like the object of our worship: "When Israel came to Baal-Peor, they began to worship Baal and soon became as disgusting as the god they loved" (based on Hosea 9:10). That's the devastating consequence of worshipping a false picture of God. Those who worship the Father through the revelation we have in Jesus become more like Him.

Those who follow Satan become like him.

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It is a law that we become like the object of our worship.

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How God has tried to keep in touch, but how unwilling we have been to listen! Because people have refused to keep in mind the true knowledge about God (Romans 1:18–23), Paul goes on to say (Romans 1:25, GNT): “They exchange the truth about God for a lie.” And you know who the father of lies is (John 8:44). Paul then outlines the devastating consequences of this exchange:

(God) has given them over to corrupted minds, so that they do the things that they should not do. They are filled with all kinds of wickedness, evil, greed, and vice; they are full of jealousy, murder, fighting, deceit, and malice. They gossip and speak evil of one another; they are hateful to God, insolent, proud, and boastful; they think of more ways to do evil; they disobey their parents; they have no conscience; they do not keep their promises, and they show no kindness or pity for others. They know that God’s law says that people who live in this way deserve death. Yet, not only do they continue to do these very things, but they even approve of others who do them. Romans 1:28–32, GNT.

Notice how the Bible says (to our comfort) that there will be no gossips in eternity! The saved will be those who can be trusted with the memory of other people’s sins and still treat them with dignity and respect. Paul also mentions people who break their promises, a translation of the Greek word for “faithless” (ESV, NIV) or “untrustworthy” (NASB). These are all consequences of a breakdown of trust in God’s human family.

The stubbornness and unwillingness to listen that Paul features in Romans 1:28–32 is echoed in Hosea 4:16–17: “Israel is as obstinate as a stubborn heifer. How can the Lord feed them now like lambs in a broad meadow? Ephraim is wedded to idolatry, let him alone” (*Phillips*). When people don’t love, trust, and admire God, “their spirit is steeped in unfaithfulness and they know nothing of the Lord.” Hosea 5:4, *Phillips*. Notice also the following selections from Hosea: “There is no honesty nor compassion nor knowledge of God. . . . My people! Asking advice from a piece of wood and consulting a staff for instructions!” Hosea 4:1, 12, *Phillips*.

This raises a significant point, how could it be said that *Israel* does not know God (see also Jeremiah 5:4; 9:3)? Who else knew God so well? Look at all the Old Testament prophets and their marvelous pictures of God. But the way Israel knew God in those days was not knowing God in the special, biblical sense. That is, to know God as a friend, to even know God intimately as a husband and a wife know each other. The Bible says, “Adam knew Eve,” his wife (Genesis 4:1). And as a result, they didn’t just learn each other’s names. They had a baby!

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Elsewhere, God says of Israel, “Thee only have I known” (Amos 3:2). He knew all the other nations. But He knew *Israel* in a special way. Something similar happens at the last judgment. When disappointed saints find that they are not acceptable in the Kingdom, they plead, “Lord, Lord. Open unto us.” He says, “Go away. I never knew you” (Matthew 7:21–23). He knew the hairs on their head (Matthew 10:30; Luke 12:7), but He did not know them as friends. And friendship is the very essence of the relationship God wishes to have with His people. If Israel had really *known* God, they would have been better friends. They would have been jealous for His reputation. And they would have been better people themselves, like the prophets in the Old Testament who wrote so well of God.

When we believe Satan’s lies, we don’t trust God and allow Him to heal us. And the ultimate result of that can be found in Romans 6:23: “Sin pays its servants: the wage is death” (*Phillips*). Or in the *Good News Bible*: “For sin pays its wage — death” (GNT). You see, as human beings we cannot make it on our own. Not until God breathed into man the breath of life, did man begin to live (Genesis 2:7). We are not gods; we’re just created beings. God hopes we won’t find that too humiliating. He won’t rub it in. He even treats us as gods in the Psalms (82:6). He even speaks of us as brothers of His Son (Matthew 25:40; Mark 3:34; John 20:17). But we are still created beings. It makes good sense, therefore, to listen very closely to the One who made us. To pretend to be God was Satan’s insane idea. And look what it’s done for him.

How God Wins Us Back to Trust

Millions of angels and men have broken faith with God. They have shown that they cannot be trusted. But has this changed our God? Can God still be trusted? Specifically, can God be trusted to even *want* us to come back? Is God still the kind of God who can be trusted to pay any price to win us back? That is the question that stirred the apostle Paul when he wrote: “What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God’s faithfulness? Not at all!” Romans 3:3–4 (NIV). Some versions say: “By no means” (ESV, NRV). “God forbid” (KJV). “May it never be” (NASB). And we have the whole biblical record of all God has done to set right what has gone wrong.

God even sent His Son to deal with sin. Look at Romans 8:3: “What the Law could not do, because human nature was weak, God did. He condemned sin in human nature by sending his own Son, who came with a nature like man’s sinful nature, to do away with sin” (GNT). Or as the *Jerusalem Bible* puts the same sentence (Romans 8:3): “God dealt with sin by sending his own Son.”

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For there to be lasting peace in God’s universe, trust must somehow be restored. Questions must be answered. Satan’s accusations must be met.

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What does it mean to deal with sin? It depends on what sin is. If sin is distrust and its consequences, forgiveness alone will not heal the damage done. Forgiveness does not do away with sin. For there to be lasting peace in God’s universe, trust must somehow be restored. Questions must be answered. Satan’s accusations must be met. God must be seen to be righteous, and infinitely worthy of our trust. And so Christ came to set things right. That is why He died; a subject we’ll spend a whole chapter considering (Chapter Eight).

Look at Paul’s explanation in Romans 5:1: “Now that we have been put right with God through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (GNT). Notice the phrase “put right” or “set right.” That’s based on the Greek verb that’s usually translated “justified” or “being justified” (Greek: *dikaioô*). I love how the *Good News Bible* translates it, “put right.” We’ll go into this more deeply in a later chapter.

There are at least three ways of looking at what went wrong in God’s universe as a basis for our continuing discussion (see summary at

end of chapter). And the crucial point is that God looks different in each of these three ways. The first of these views is very widely held beyond the bounds of Christianity. The statement of the problem goes something like this: *Because we have broken God's rules, we have offended Him. He is very angry with us. The crucial question then becomes: What can human beings do to appease God's anger so that He can find it in His heart not to destroy us, but rather forgive us and bless us once again?*

There is another view that's widely held, sometimes within the bounds of Christianity. The statement of the problem goes something like this: *We have broken God's rules, and thus we are in serious legal trouble. Law and justice demand that God should destroy us, or (in some versions of this view) even torture us for eternity. The crucial question then becomes: Can anything be done to make it legally possible for God to forgive us, and not destroy us, while still being just in His own eyes and in the eyes of the onlooking universe?*

Then there's a third view that is not so widely held on this planet, but I believe it is the most widely held view throughout the universe. In this view, the statement of the problem goes something like this: *We have sinned. We have allowed ourselves to be deceived by Satan's lies. And so we have turned away from the true God to many substitutes. And the results have been disastrous. Left alone we all would die. The crucial question then becomes: Is there any way that Satan's lies can be corrected? Is there any way that the truth about God and His government can be made crystal clear? Is there any way that unquestionable evidence can be provided, that God is not the kind of person His enemies have made Him out to be? Can some of us rebels be won back to trust, and so be saved and healed?*

Could I ask you which one of these three views you prefer? Which one of these gods do you prefer? Which one would you rather live with for eternity? Or does it really make any difference?

Questions and Answers

Louis Venden: Here's a question that takes us back to the previous chapter and helps set the foundation for everything we are trying to do in this book. "You said that the book of Revelation was especially directed to the Christians living at the time when it was written. Can you explain that a bit more? I have always understood, or been told, that it has special relevance to the present day church instead. What do you think about that?"

Graham Maxwell: It's true, I believe the book of Revelation was

written first for the Christians of that time. They were discouraged, wondering why the Lord had not yet come. There was heresy in the church, opposition to leadership, and persecution. They needed the message of Revelation to point them to a larger view. They needed to know that they were caught up in a great controversy, but that God had already won the war.

We need it too. The book was written just as much for us as for them. We live at a time when we are faced with many of the same problems. And we need the same insight they did. Not so much a message about dates and events to come, interesting and helpful as that might be. Rather, we need the major message of the book of Revelation: *Look a little higher, take a larger view of things. Realize that God has already won the war.* When we understand that message, our assignment and privilege is to go out and tell people that He's won the war, and how He has won it. Supported by the message of Revelation, we can act more like players on a winning team instead of so often being on the defensive.

Lou: Are you saying that the meaning for us now may be even clearer when we understand its impact back then?

Graham: It's the same message, but from our perspective in history, it should mean even more to us. God didn't have a message for them and a schedule of events for us. I believe the consistent message of the book for all readers is to look at the bigger picture. Set everything in the context of the Great Controversy. That perspective makes everything so much more significant. And it is a reading of Revelation that is positive and optimistic.

Lou: I have a question regarding the beginning of the rebellion in heaven. "Did any other angels question God before Lucifer did? If they didn't, why didn't they? Is it possible that another angel will question God again in the future? Since it happened once, why couldn't it go on happening?"

Graham: I don't know of any text that suggests other angels did what Lucifer did. The Bible only tells us a little of what happened. You remember that John said: "If I were to record everything that Jesus said and did, there wouldn't be room in the world for all the books that could be written" (John 21:25). It's enough for us to learn of Lucifer's questioning rebellion and the consequences. Will this ever happen again? What about raising questions reverently? Of course, I think we'll do that for eternity. How else could we learn? God is not afraid of reverent questioning at all. I think He's complimented by it. But the Bible assures us

that the kind of rebellion that arose with Lucifer will never arise again (see Nahum 1:9). Not because our freedom has been taken away, but because a costly basis has been established to provide us the answers we need. Jesus will always be there in His human form to remind us of all the answers God gave at the cross. And we'll remember. And that will guarantee peace for eternity. But it will not take away our freedom.

Lou: Did God give Satan a chance to repent? After all, you've said that questioning God wasn't a problem. God welcomes our questions. How did things go too far?

Graham: Did Satan get a chance to repent? There's no text that says he did. But don't you think that the God we know and trust would give Satan ample time? Has He not always been this way? Isn't God unwilling that any of His children should perish (2 Peter 3:9)? According to Peter, God is so patient that some people will wonder if He's ever going to come (2 Peter 3:10, see also Romans 2:4). So we have a consistent picture of this all through the Bible. God always waits and waits, granting us every opportunity to repent.

In fact, on the authority of the prodigal son story (Luke 15:11–32), I would say that had Satan repented, God would have fully reinstated him into his original position. Remember that when the prodigal came back he said, "If you'll just let me in as a hired servant, I'd be very pleased." And the father said, "We don't have any second class sons in our family. You're either fully home or not." The father even gave him a blank check at the local bank when he gave him that ring. The father was so generous it really bothered the older brother. So I would say that if Satan had repented, the God of the prodigal son story would have taken him back and fully reinstated him.

Lou: In the previous chapter you mentioned Ephesians 3:9–10. There it tells us that "through the church, the manifold wisdom of God might be made manifest in heavenly places." What is the meaning of the word "church" here? Does that mean an official church organization like a denomination?

Graham: The word "church" has many meanings, doesn't it? We talk about church buildings or refer to specific denominations. We may ask, *Does the church permit thus and so?* For many, "church" is the 11 o'clock hour, the worship service. So the word "church" has many meanings. What does it mean here? The original word (*ekklesia*) means "called out," suggesting "those who respond to God's invitation." It's almost like "congregation," an English word that means "gather

together.” Or “synagogue,” from a Greek word for “gather together.”

The “church” in Ephesians is all who have responded to God’s invitation and at least profess that they are His friends. Paul was a member of this church. Jeremiah was a member of this church. We can all be members of this group of individuals who say “yes” to God, who respond to His call. We still need lots of work, lots of discipline, lots of correction, lots of healing. But at the same time, we have the privilege of joining with Him in spreading the good news as to what He is like. And it is through the church, and His treatment of the church, that God has revealed His purposes and plans. The “church” in Ephesians is certainly more than a single denomination.

Lou: Here is a question we discussed in the previous chapter, but perhaps we ought to touch on it again. “If God knew that Lucifer would be such an instigator of trouble upon the human race, why did He create him?” I think this is a question that baffles many.

Graham: As we touched on in the previous chapter, I don’t like to limit God’s foreknowledge. So I like to believe that when God created Lucifer, He knew that Lucifer would cause all the trouble. But God also knew what He would do about it. So as He created this magnificent person, He said, “I know this is going to cost Me, and I’m willing to pay.” And I think that is truly wonderful, that He would go ahead, knowing that Lucifer would one day cause all the trouble.

Does that make God responsible for sin, then? No. God has never created anybody imperfect. Lucifer had no bent to evil whatever. He allowed pride and then sin to rise up in himself. God created him perfect, but He also created him free. And this is important. It means that when we say we love God, it isn’t because we’re programmed that way, it is a free choice. But that freedom means we can also choose to rebel. We can also say to God, “We hate You.” Adam and Eve demonstrated that. When they sinned in the garden it was because they were free to sin.

Lou: That means Satan didn’t go wrong because of some malfunction in the way he was made, like an automobile that has to be recalled. He was perfect. But with that perfect freedom to make choices, all kinds of consequences were possible.

Graham: Yes. But God is in no way responsible. In fact, that leads me to something really wonderful about God. He has paid the price for this rebellion as if it were His fault. He has assumed the responsibility, even though it was not His fault. I think it’s because *freedom* means so much to God, He would rather go this costly way. He would rather not

take some shortcut and program us so we would all behave, like robots. We could have been programmed to line up and say how much we loved Him. It would be like listening to a recording or watching a video with actors pretending to love someone. And that wouldn't please our intelligent God.

Lou: Why do you feel that the tree in the midst of the garden was the only place Satan could tempt Eve? And how was God's commandment not to eat of this tree protective?

Graham: It's true that there's no text that says Satan could only approach Adam and Eve at the tree. But if you had been the Devil, which tree would you have chosen? Wouldn't you have gone to The Tree of Life? But Satan never met them at The Tree of Life. He only met them at the tree where they were not supposed to go. So apparently he was limited to that one tree. And he knew they had been told not to go there. So I've connected two facts together: 1) God only warned them about that particular tree, and 2) that's exactly where Satan met them. So he didn't have free access to the entire garden. That means the tree was put there to protect Adam and Eve. Satan's freedom to tempt was limited to that tree. I think that's the only logical inference.

Lou: This next question ties in a bit with that. "Does evil exist in order to allow human beings to be able to choose between good and bad, to use our own judgment?" That sounds like evil is something good because it gives us a chance to grow. What do you think of that?

Graham: Fortunately, Paul dealt with that in a very potent way. In a sense it is true, the more evil we have been, the more gracious God has been to us. And so Paul says: "Why don't we be a little more evil then, so He'll look more gracious?" Romans 3:8, 6:2. Paul raises the idea twice and then condemns it twice as a terrible thought! Romans 3:7-8, 6:1-2. It is true, the worse we have behaved, the more graciously God has stooped to meet us and love us and treat us so graciously. Well, if the blacker the backdrop the more brilliant God's righteousness appears, why don't we paint Him a blacker backdrop? Paul says that's a terrible thought. In fact, in *Phillips'* translation it says "What a *ghastly* [emphasis supplied] thought."

So I don't think we should suggest that our sinfulness and our evil has helped God. Rather, He has taken an emergency and turned it into something good. He's the only one that looks good in this. Let's not think we are serving Him by being a little more wicked so that He can show how good He is. We've been bad enough without trying.

Lou: All right, here's another question. "If a person is sincere about religious things but sincerely wrong, whose fault is that?" And I suppose implicit behind the question is, "What will happen as a result? Will the person be punished or suffer consequences from that?"

Graham: I like that question and what it implies. I do believe that if one sincerely takes the wrong path, one will sincerely arrive at the wrong destination. That's true.

Lou: So whose fault is it then?

Graham: Keep in mind that if we are truly sincere; if we're *really* willing to listen, God has not left us in the dark. As John says, Christ is the light that enlightens everyone who comes into this world (John 1:9). Paul even says that there are Gentiles who know nothing about the Bible, who know nothing about God's law and instructions. But they do by nature the things that the law requires, and they show that the law has been written on their hearts (Romans 2:13–16). And I love the paragraph in *Desire of Ages* that tells about heathen who worship God ignorantly; the message was never brought to them by human instrumentality. Instead, they've heard the voice of God speaking to them in nature. Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*, 638. They've done what the law requires, which is love. And they're recognized as God's children. God is not going to abandon anyone on this planet who is sincerely and humbly willing to listen. He will not leave them in the dark.

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If one sincerely takes the wrong path, one will sincerely arrive at the wrong destination.

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Now it's a great privilege to be the one who gets there with the good news, but sometimes somebody else gets there first. Think of missionaries who have been shipwrecked as they're about to arrive on an island to somehow "turn those cannibals into Christians." As they're drowning out there by the reef, here come these cannibals paddling their canoe. So the missionaries say farewell to each other; they know what's going to happen shortly. But instead, the cannibals put them in their canoe and take them to the beach and revive them. When they are finally comfortable the missionary says, "Let's assemble these people and give them the truth." And he starts to preach to them about love.

His missionary wife nudges him and says, "Wait a minute. These people risked their lives to rescue us from the reef!" The minister replies,

“But nobody’s preached to them yet.” He forgot Romans 2:13–16. The Spirit of God was there before the missionaries came. God has always approached people “in many and various ways” (Hebrews 1:1). So I would say that if one is really sincere, one will not wind up sincerely wrong. If one is “sincerely wrong,” one has probably been saying “no” to truth for a long time. True sincerity is open to evidence and open to correction. True sincerity is humble. False sincerity is often simply lazy.

Lou: This question also concerns the previous chapter. “Could you explain the text ‘without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin’ (Hebrews 9:22)? Is the word ‘remission’ here used with a different meaning than the common medical interpretation that an illness is not cured or gone, but is simply in a state of inactivity without symptoms? I’d hate to think that Christ’s shed blood only ‘inactivates’ the rebellion, but doesn’t really cure it.”

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*True sincerity is open to evidence and open to correction.
True sincerity is humble. False sincerity is often simply lazy.*

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Graham: That question is a sermon in itself. On the matter of “without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin,” that will be covered in the chapter on why Jesus had to die (Chapter Eight). But I’d like to comment on the second half of the question, the remission of sin. “Remission” in the Bible is not a medical term. If sin were only remitted, we would be in a sorry state and our infections would get into the hereafter. And our rebellions would continue.

The actual word translated in some English Bibles as “remission” means forgiveness. According to Hebrews 9:22, God actually sent His Son to “forgive” sin. The best translation is really “without the shedding of blood there’s no forgiveness.” But God sent His Son to do even more than that, Jesus came to *do away with sin* (Hebrews 9:26, NIV). God is not through with sin until it has been eliminated. But these texts do raise the question, *why is blood necessary?* And that we will treat most seriously in a later chapter.

Lou: I’d like to return to a question we talked a little about in the previous chapter. “If we say that God has already won the war, why are we still here? What is God waiting for? Shouldn’t the war be over?”

Graham: We have a whole chapter on what God is waiting for (Chapter Eighteen). But since it came up here, it would be good to

address it briefly now. When Satan and his followers were cast out of heaven, there was victory of a sort, but not much of one. There were so many questions yet to be resolved. Peace had not been confirmed. Even the loyal angels had their questions. Getting sin out of heaven might seem “the real victory.” But it was no victory for our heavenly Father. It was only when Jesus died that it could be said, “It is finished.” John 19:30.

When Jesus returned to heaven on resurrection Sunday, He found the universe celebrating that He really had won the war. In the book of Revelation, the heavenly throng says over and over again, “You’ve shown Yourself to be merciful and just and good and righteous and holy” (see Revelation 5:12–13, 15:3–4, 19:2). “You have the victory” (see Revelation 3:21, 5:5–6)! So in a real sense the war was won then, in the death and resurrection of Jesus. The angels and the inhabitants of other worlds have paid such close attention to what Jesus revealed in His life, teachings, suffering and death that they got the message. And they couldn’t wait to tell Him on resurrection Sunday, “You’ve won our loyalty. As far as we’re concerned, You have won the war.”

Unfortunately back on this planet we didn’t get the message. Jesus invited three of the disciples to watch some of the evidence in Gethsemane. And the brethren slept through it all (Matthew 26:36–46; Mark 14:32–42; Luke 22:41–46)! He repeatedly invited them to come to the cross, and see the most important answer of all (Matthew 16:21, 17:22, 20:19; Mark 8:31, 9:12, 31, 10:34; Luke 9:22, 17:25, 18:32–33, 24:7). The universe watched. But where were “the brethren,” as He called them? Eleven of them were elsewhere. Only one of them was there. And that’s why John was the disciple who wrote the most significant things about why Jesus had to die.

So God has been mercifully waiting for this one tiny planet of people to make up their minds (2 Peter 3:9). We know there are awesome events to take place here before Jesus comes. And until we are as settled into the truth as the angels are, God will not let the closing events come. He puts them off, and He mercifully waits. That is what God is like. He gives His people all the time they need to become settled into the truth about His character. God waits until His people understand. You can trust a God like that!

Lou: But Graham, doesn’t the Bible speak often about the wrath of God? Can you really trust someone who is angry a lot?

Graham: We will have more to say on that in the chapter on why Jesus had to die (Chapter Eight). For now let me just say that if you take

all sixty-six books of the Bible and look at the references to God's wrath all the way through, you'll find so many places that explain God's wrath as simply God's 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 choices. God's anger is not like our anger. And we will have a lot more to say about that later.

Lou: Could you say a word or two to introduce the chapter which follows? What is the next topic?

Graham: The next topic is "All God Asks Is Trust." The basic point of that chapter is that *God can and will save all who trust Him*. When it comes to salvation there are no limits on the part of God. He can readily heal the damage done. The crucial issue is whether or not we will trust Him enough to stand humbly and teachably in His presence and ask, "What must we do to be saved? What must we do to be well?" The problem is not with our Creator, the problem is with us.

Lou: It seems to me that in this chapter, Graham, you have emphasized that problem. We need to understand the problem before we can fully understand the solution. In a sense, everything hangs upon how we understand the nature of this sin problem. And in the next chapter we will talk more about the solution.

Graham: Very much so. A correct understanding of sin will make a big difference as we continue our conversations about God.

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Statement of the Problem:

There are at least three differing views of what went wrong in God's universe:

- 1) Because we have broken God's rules, *we have offended Him* and He is very angry with us.
- 2) Because we have broken God's rules, *we are in serious legal trouble*. Law and justice demand that God should destroy us or even torture us for eternity.
- 3) Because we have sinned and allowed ourselves to be *deceived by Satan's lies*, we have turned away from the true God to many substitutes. Left alone we all would die.

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Chapter Three

All God Asks Is Trust

In the previous chapter we considered what went wrong in God's universe. If we can understand what went wrong, we are in a better position to understand what it would take to set things right and keep them right for eternity. We will also be better able to understand what *we* need to do (if anything) in order to be set right, and enjoy the "rightness" of the universe once again.

It is apparent, from the biblical description of this controversy in God's family, that there was a breakdown of trust and trustworthiness — even to the point of war in heaven (Revelation 12:7–12). That war spilled down to this planet, where we experience continuing misunderstanding and distrust of God. It is not that we've all become irreligious, but that we've allowed ourselves to be deceived by the adversary. Even many who do worship God, worship a false picture of Him — with all the hazards that follow. We tend to become like the kind of God we worship and admire.

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Many who worship God, worship a false picture of Him — with all the hazards that follow. We tend to become like the kind of God we worship and admire.

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There can be no real and lasting peace in the universe until trust and trustworthiness have been restored. That's the reason for the title of this chapter, "All God Asks Is Trust." All that God asks of the loyal angels is trust. All that God asks of even damaged sinners is trust. Because where there is mutual trust and trustworthiness, there is perfect peace, perfect freedom, perfect security. All is right; all is well.

What matters most is for us to trust God enough to be willing to listen, to stand humbly in His presence and ask, "What must I do to be saved? What must I do to be well? What must I do to be safe?" In the beginning God created the entire universe. He is able and willing to heal all of the damage done by sin. But there is no substitute for trust. All the generous and gracious provisions of the plan of salvation are of no avail if we don't trust God enough to let Him do for us what He's so eager to

do.

All God Asked of a Jailer in Philippi

I think this helps explain Paul's very brief reply to the jailer in Philippi. An earthquake brought down the doors of that jail (Acts 16:25–26). The jailer was afraid that the prisoners had escaped, in which case he himself would have been executed. But when Paul called out to him, he ran in and fell down at the feet of Paul and Silas (Acts 16:27–29). He then brought them out of the jail and earnestly inquired, "What must I do to be saved?" Paul did not reply, "If you have the time, I have twenty lessons for you. As we sit here in the rubble of the jail, I'll lead you through the doctrines of the church." No, all Paul said was: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved" (based on Acts 16:30–31). So we need to clearly understand what Paul meant by that word translated "believe."

We often go to great lengths to explain the difference between belief and faith. Of all the illustrations I've heard to explain the difference, the one that impressed me the most was the story of the man who strung a cable over Niagara Falls. A preacher described how a crowd watched the man crossing over the Falls on the cable, pushing a wheelbarrow in front of him. Upon his return, he turned to the crowd and said, "Do you believe I can do that again?"

A man in the crowd replied, "Yes, I believe you can."

"Then climb into my wheelbarrow."

"Not on your life!" said the spectator.

The preacher telling the story would then say, "You see, he believed he could make it across, but he didn't have faith."

The difference between belief and faith matters in the English language, but there is no such difference between belief and faith in the Bible. There is only one word for both and that word is *pistis*. You see, the original conversation between the jailer and Paul was in Greek. And that's the reason these Bible versions read differently.

Let's look at Acts 16:30–31 in several versions. The first reading is from the *King James Version* (KJV): "'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' And they said, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.'" But in the *New English Bible* (NEB) it reads: "**Put your trust** in the Lord Jesus..." The *Berkeley* version has: "**Have faith** in the Lord Jesus..." [emphases supplied]. All three translations are based on exactly the same Greek word. In English the word *pistis* means belief, faith,

trust, confidence. And the versions vary, just for variety.

Among these options, we're most familiar with the word "faith." As Christians we talk about it a great deal. But what is faith? What do we mean when we say to a person, "Have faith," or, "You should have more faith," or, "We're saved by faith," or, "righteousness by faith"? Faith means so many different things these days that we almost need another word. The most notorious definition of faith is the one given by a small schoolboy. He said, "Faith is believin' what you know ain't so." You see, in some people's minds, if you're prepared to believe what "you know ain't so," that's *real* faith.

Now, most of us wouldn't go that far. But we might say, "Faith is believing something for which you have insufficient evidence," because if you had sufficient evidence, you wouldn't say, "I accept that by faith," you would say, "I know." Does that mean that the more we come to know God, the less faith we'll have? When we actually stand in His presence will we say, "God, I see You now, and that's the end of my faith. I'll never believe in You again, because now I know You"?

What Is Faith Really?

Perhaps the famous verse in Hebrews 11:1 will help us. First, the familiar wording of the *King James* (KJV): "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Does it help to know that faith is a substance? Or that faith is the evidence of things not seen? That would suggest that if you have faith in something, that's evidence that it is really so. But if you have faith that there's a man in the moon does that prove there must be one? That doesn't make sense! But do we sometimes use faith this way? Does Hebrews 11 encourage us to do so? Let's look at those two words, translated "substance" and "evidence."

Let's take the word for "evidence" first. The Greek word is *elengchos*. It's a noun that comes from a verb used for the work of the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit comes, He will convince you. He will convict you. He will settle you into the truth. A better translation than "evidence" would be "conviction." Faith is conviction.

Now let's look at "substance." The Greek word it is based on is *hupostasis*. We get the English word hypostasis from that, although most of us rarely use it. It doesn't help much to know that faith is a hypostasis, does it? But does it help to think of faith as a substance either? Actually, the Greek word *hupostasis* means "that which stands under,"

and that's where the "sub" and the "stance" came from. The English "substance" is from the Latin equivalent of *hupostasis*. That may be very good Latin, but in this case it's not very good English.

Not until the turn of the twentieth century did scholars discover what this word really means. As archeologists were digging in the sands of Egypt, looking for manuscripts primarily, they found some that were title deeds to property, business agreements, covenants; and the title on each of these documents was this very word, *hupostasis*. And it dawned on them that in Hebrews 11 the apostle was saying that faith is an agreement, a covenant. Covenants are all about relationship, what people need to do if they are to trust each other in business. God offers us many things, but first He presents Himself. If we decide that we can trust Him, that we would like to "do business" with Him, that trusting relationship is *faith*.

So how should we translate this word *hupostasis*? Let's look at three different translations: "Faith is *the title-deed* of things hoped for" (*Montgomery*). "Faith means we are *confident* of what we hope for, convinced of what we do not see" (*Moffatt*). "Faith is *being sure of* what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (NIV) [emphases supplied]. Can you see the idea of conviction or certainty coming through? That's the meaning of faith. This is further clarified by the previous context of Hebrews 11:1:

Don't throw away your trust now—it carries with it a rich reward. Patient endurance is what you need if, after doing God's will, you are to receive what he has promised. For yet a little while, He that cometh shall come, and shall not tarry. But my righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrink back, my soul hath no pleasure in him. Surely we are not going to be men who cower back and are lost, but men who maintain their faith for the salvation of their souls!
Hebrews 10:35–39, Phillips.

Faith is our conviction. It's being certain about things that at the moment we cannot see. There is a background to that verse in Hebrews: Habakkuk chapters one and two. There Habakkuk says to God: "Why don't you do something?" Habakkuk 1:2–4. And God says: "I am doing something. But you wouldn't believe it if I told you" (Habakkuk 1:5). And Habakkuk says: "I'm going to wait and see" (Habakkuk 2:1). And God says: "If what I have predicted seems slow, wait for it; it will come.

My righteous one will live in trust” (Habakkuk 2:3–4). That famous verse, “The just shall live by faith” (Habakkuk 2:4), is not discussing forgiveness or justification. The verse is saying that the one who is right with God will trust Him and be willing to wait. That’s the kind of trust and right relationship with God that really counts. And when we come to Paul’s use of the same phrase in Romans 1 (verses 16–17— Chapters Eight and Sixteen of this book), we’ll want to remember that Habakkuk is the background for it.

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Like a physician, God stands ready to heal all the damage done. But He will not force us to be well. If we don’t trust Him enough to listen, to cooperate, and to let Him heal the damage done, there’s no way He can heal us.

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The angels had such trust, at least the loyal ones did. They also had questions! But they said to God, “We trust You enough that we’re willing to wait,” and they waited all the way to Calvary for some of the answers to their questions. They heard the promise to Adam and Eve that God was going to do something, and they were willing to wait because they trusted God. The Bible’s examples of faith as actively trusting God help us to understand “salvation by faith” and “righteousness by faith.” Faith does not save us. God saves us. But God can only save those who trust Him.

Like a physician, God stands ready to heal all the damage done. But He will not force us to be well. If we don’t trust Him enough to listen, to cooperate, and to let Him heal the damage done, there’s no way He can heal us. Physicians cannot heal rebellious patients who stay away because they think the doctor is a quack. Only when there is mutual trust can healing really take place.

Is Trust Really Enough?

Doesn’t it seem too little, however, that God would only ask for trust? Isn’t it also necessary to know Him? To love Him? To obey Him? Don’t we need to repent? To be reborn? To be converted? To be justified? To be sanctified? Don’t we even need to be perfect? The list of expectations gets so long it’s no wonder that it discourages many people from really wanting to have a right relationship with God. But don’t be

scared by that list. Understood in the larger view of what went wrong and what needs to be set right, every one of those items I have mentioned is an integral part of a single, transforming experience that is made available to us all. It was never supposed to be so complicated, or divided into so many different parts.

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We're not saved by faith. Faith does not save us, God saves us. But God can only save those who trust Him.

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Let's take, for example, the expectation "to know God." What's the difference between knowing God and trusting Him? A classic text for this is John 17:3, RSV: "And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." As we noted in the previous chapter, to really *know* someone is to love, trust, and admire them. To know God is to trust Him, to love Him and to admire Him. That word is even used for the intimacy between a husband and his wife. I can hear God saying, "If only My children really trusted Me. If only they really knew Me. If only they really loved Me. If they were only willing to listen, and let Me help them, I could perfectly heal all the damage done. Everything would be right again. And we could keep it right forever." Now that's the whole list, if you want to put it in simple terms. Is there anything He couldn't do for us if we honestly regarded Him that way?

I often hear God saying in the Bible, "How I wish My children could be My friends once again. And they could see Me as being their friend. And then all would be well." Now the Bible describes at least one such friend of God, Moses:

The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend.... And the Lord said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name." Exodus 33:11, 17, NIV.

What an honor to be listed in the Bible as God's friend! And can you see how being a friend is the same as being known? One trusts people who are known and who have behaved in a trustworthy manner. So trust includes being loved and all those other things.

Now surely trust in God, and friendship with God, is no "leap in

the dark,” as some people describe faith. It is not safe to trust someone we do not know. So God doesn't ask us to trust Him as a stranger. “So faith [trust] comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ.” Romans 10:17, RSV. “Faith comes from what is heard” because they didn't have copies of the Bible the way we do. They had to listen as the Scriptures were read. And as they listened they heard the truth. They heard the evidence. And some were won to repentance and to trust, particularly when they heard the truth revealed by the Son of God Himself.

David surely knew what God wanted of His children, so that peace could be restored and everything be set right:

Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. . . . Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. . . . For thou hast no delight in sacrifice; were I to give a burnt offering, thou wouldst not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Psalm 51:6, 10, 16-17, RSV.

This is what God wants, in order to have peace once again in the family. Because that means we are willing to stand humbly in the presence of our God and ask, “What must I do to be well, to be saved?” And He says, “You need a new heart and a right spirit.” And then we say, “I'd be very happy to have one. Please give me one soon.”

Hosea understood what God wanted, to have peace in the universe again: “It is true love that I have wanted, not sacrifice; the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.” Hosea 6:6, *Phillips*. In Hebrew parallelism, the second line of the sentence simply reaffirms or enlarges the point in the first line. The parallelism in verse 6 shows that true knowledge of God and love for God mean the same thing. That's what God wants. Hosea goes on: “But they, like Adam have broken their agreement; again and again they have played me false.” Hosea 6:7, *Phillips*. They cheated. How much security can you have in the family when some of the children are playing false?

Jesus told Nicodemus what had to happen before he would be safe to save: “Jesus answered him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’” John 3:3, RSV. “Born again” means a new heart and a right spirit, exactly what David was say-

ing in the fifty-first Psalm. Jesus didn't say, "Unless you are forgiven," or, "Unless you are justified" (have your legal standing adjusted), you cannot enter the kingdom. He said, "Unless you are changed and become a trustworthy person, a teachable member of My family, you will not be safe to admit into the hereafter."

How can anyone tell they have really been reborn, and have genuine trust and faith? How can anyone know they have been put right with God and all is well? This is a question which was much debated in the early days, and is still debated to this day. In fact, a leader in the early Christian church wrote an entire book to clear it up, a book that has troubled many saints; it's in the Bible, the book of James:

My brothers, what use is it for a man to say he has faith when he does nothing to show it? Can that faith save him? ... You have faith enough to believe that there is one God. Excellent! The devils have faith like that, and it makes them tremble. James 2:14, 19, NEB.

The devils believe God is powerful but there is no friendship between them and God.

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." James 2:21-23, NEB.

According to James, false faith is useless, but a genuine faith is demonstrated by one's actions. Then in the following verse is the puzzling word "counted." If you take the legal view of what's gone wrong in the universe, you can hear the cash registers ringing as you read this verse. But the word "counted" has another meaning besides its use in accounting or math: It can mean "considered," or "reckoned as." Reading it this way God was saying, "Abraham trusts Me, and that's good. That's what I want. That's what it means to be right." Evidence that this is the correct reading is found at the end of the verse: "Elsewhere he is called 'God's friend'" (James 2:23, NEB). When you are God's friend all is right, all is well.

How Much Trust Do I Need?

Now how much “faith” do we have to have? Must we trust completely, or even perfectly, to be right with God? Couldn’t we get away with a little unfaithfulness now and then? Have you husbands ever said, “Wife, how much could I cheat on you and this marriage still survive?” Would that make any sense? What if a friend should say to you, “How much could I lie to you or hide the truth — and this friendship still last?” Frankly, that would make no sense at all.

Does God need to leave a little room for unfaithfulness in our relationship? Is a “perfect relationship” asking too much of us? Does it make sense to even ask the question? When we “cheat” on God, and cheat we have, God remains our constant friend. But we may be destroying our side of the friendship. You see, if what God wants is friendship, a loving, trusting relationship; then what He wants is obviously not a requirement demanded, but an absolutely voluntary experience.

This long debate regarding faith, works and obedience has troubled saints through the years, but it could be so readily resolved if we looked at the biblical word for obedience, which is *hupakoē* (four syllables, one for each vowel). The first part, “*hup*,” means “under.” And the second part, “*akoē*” (three syllables), means “hearing.” The Greek word literally means “listening under.” It describes a *humble willingness to listen*. If we truly love and trust God, we’ll be willing to listen. It wouldn’t make sense for us *not* to listen to One we love, trust and admire.

Now could God’s expectation of our willingness to listen be one hundred percent? Our performance may be weak. We may stumble as we leave our doctor’s office. But a willingness to listen? Is that demanding too much of us? Is it too much to say, “Don’t cheat there. Let that be one hundred percent!” Is it expecting too much of us to ask that we be completely committed to listening humbly to our Friend?

If it should seem that God is too demanding in asking for such a relationship, that He expects too much of us, it surely is encouraging to read about the heroes and heroines of faith celebrated in the same chapter of the same book that tells us what faith is. Look how Hebrews 11 uses the stories of the Old Testament as illustrations of what faith is, and what it is not:

By faith the prostitute Rahab escaped the doom of the unbelievers, because she had given the spies a kindly welcome. Need I say more? Time is too short for me to tell the stories of Gideon, Barak, Samson,

Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets... These also, one and all, are commemorated for their faith. Hebrews 11:31–32, 39, NEB.

Was Rahab's life in perfect harmony with God's will at the time she welcomed the spies (Joshua 2:1–14)? Was Gideon's trust in God perfect when the angel came to him (Judges 6:36–40)? Was Samson's life an ideal you would teach to your children (Judges 13–16)? Was David's life a model of Christian perfection? Yet Hebrews 11:39 (NEB) sums up: "These also, one and all, are commemorated for their faith". Is God too demanding? With all their faults and sins, God holds these people out to us as models of being willing to listen. They were far from perfect, but evidently, at least at some point in their lives, they loved God and trusted He would heal the damage done. And God puts them in Hebrews 11 for our encouragement.

Surely no Bible story is more encouraging than the story of the thief on the cross. What did he do that caused Jesus to respond with those wonderful words in Luke? "And he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingly power.' And he said to him... 'you will be with me in Paradise.'" Luke 23:42–43, RSV. Jesus was hanging on the cross between two thieves (the Greek word tells us they were not just burglars, but violent criminals) who were cursing and swearing, and also mocking Jesus along with the crowds.

Then something happened to one of these thieves. He listened to Jesus say, "John, please look after Mother when I'm gone" (John 19:25–27). Perhaps the thief thought of his own mother, and that really touched him. He had heard Jesus saying, "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34). Then he learned from the placard above Jesus' head that the one saying "Father forgive them" was "the King of the Jews" (Luke 23:38). So the thief thought to himself, "If Jesus really has a kingdom, and rules over it with forgiveness, that's just the kind of kingdom someone like me needs. I'm a thief. I need to be forgiven. I wouldn't be safe in any other kingdom than a kingdom where the king says, 'I forgive you. I forgive you.'" "

So he turned to Jesus and said, "Jesus, if that's the kind of kingdom You're going to reign over, I'd like to live in it. Please, could You remember me?" I suspect he was a little tentative in saying that. He didn't know how Jesus was going to respond. But then he heard the words that confirmed his trust. "Yes, I'd be pleased to remember you." And then

the thief died, with his tithe unpaid, and probably all kinds of unclean things in his stomach. He never made restitution to anyone for his crimes. He was never baptized. He never kept a Sabbath. But he'll be in the Kingdom! The next moment of consciousness after his death will be in the resurrection, and he will come face to face with that same Person in the middle. Jesus will say to him, "You have a lot to learn." And the thief will say, "If You say so, that's all right with me."

If anything should happen to any of us tonight, I would hope that we would die God's trusting friend. Because if we do, we will arise in the next moment of consciousness face to face with God. And we will not be afraid, because we will know the truth about God. We will trust Him, know Him, love Him, and all those other things. We will have been set right. And if He should say to us, "You know, there's a great deal for you to learn," we would say in response, "I'd be pleased to listen, because I trust and admire You. I want to be Your friend."

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Faith implies an attitude toward God of love, trust, and deepest admiration. Anyone who has such faith would be perfectly safe to save. This is why faith is the only requirement for heaven, and for salvation.

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You see, faith is just a word we use to describe a relationship with God as with a person well known. The better He is known the better this relationship may be. Faith implies an attitude toward God of love, trust, and deepest admiration. It means having enough confidence in God — based on the more than adequate evidence revealed — to be willing to believe what He says, to accept what He offers, and to do what He wishes — without reservation — for the rest of eternity. Anyone who has such faith would be perfectly safe to save. This is why faith is the only requirement for heaven, and for salvation.

Questions and Answers

Louis Venden: You have said a great deal about trust in this chapter. I can hear a person saying something like this, "When are we going to get on to the really important things, like justification and sanctification, expiation, propitiation, atonement, substitution, and so forth. Haven't we spent long enough on trust?"

Graham Maxwell: I think we have been talking about justification,

but we've given it another name. We'll even use those familiar names along the way, because they are an important part of our history. And when we talk to our friends for whom those *are* the words, then we should use them if we are going to communicate at all. But I'd rather use the words the Bible uses. And some might respond, "Well, aren't those the words the Bible uses?" No, it's going to be interesting to arrive in the Kingdom and settle all debates about Paul by going up to him and saying, "Give us the last word, Paul. What did you mean by justification?"

He'll say, "Could I hear that one more time?"

"Justification. You know, your favorite word."

"You think so? Actually, I never used it."

"How about sanctification?"

"No."

"Propitiation?"

"Not that one either."

"You mean you used none of those terms? What about expiation?"

Paul never used one of them. Neither did Jesus or anybody else in the Bible. You see, many of our favorite theological words are actually Latin and Greek terms that came from a period when Latin and Greek were the main languages used for theology. Take *Sola Scriptura*, for example. That's pure Latin, meaning "the Bible only." Or think of the word I used in a previous chapter, the Christomonistic principle. That's based on the Greek. *Christos* (Christ) and *monos* (only). Very few people study Latin and Greek these days. So why do we keep using these words? Why not simply say "the Bible only" or "Christ alone"? I would much rather use plain and simple terms to describe these things, but each of these terms has a history and it is good to mention them, so we can see where they fit into the larger picture. But we should keep in mind that Jesus described the whole truth about His Father and how we can be saved without ever using one of those words. Jesus spoke Aramaic, rather than Latin or Greek.

Lou: I wonder if the words become a sort of scholarly shorthand? But the danger of that is we think we understand what we are talking about when we may have loaded the word with meaning that really isn't fair to Scripture.

Graham: That's certainly the hazard. So it's good to go back to how these things were described in the beginning, and we'll try to do that in a later chapter.

Lou: All right. Let's move along to another question. "You've talked about faith meaning trust rather than just 'knowing' something. Aren't there some things that we could legitimately say we only know by faith, such as that statement in Hebrews, 'by faith we know that the world was made'" (Hebrews 11:3)?

Graham: I would want to reply, "By faith in what? What do you mean when you say you know something by faith? Do you have a feeling of conviction inside perhaps?" Where Hebrews says "we know by faith," what would the writer mean? Faith in *something*, to be sure.

How do we know anything about where the world came from? We have to read it in the Scriptures, don't we? So we read the record. By faith in the Scriptures we believe that God created the world as recorded. But that leads us to another question. Can the Bible itself be trusted?

When we say we know these things by faith and they are things described in Scripture, we are not saying, "I know this because I have a warm feeling down in my heart." That warm feeling could come from indigestion! So when you say, "I know something by faith," I would want to know what you are having faith in, and in Hebrews 11 it is faith in the Bible. We will cover this question in some depth in Chapter Five, "The Record of the Evidence." Can the Bible really be trusted? Can you say in the most critical company, "I have found the Bible to be utterly reliable from cover to cover"? I believe you can, and I'll lay that out in Chapter Five.

Lou: What do you say to a person who says, "Look, I just want to take the Bible as it reads! I read in the Bible that 'God's ways are inscrutable. How can anyone know the mind of God?' Romans 11:33. Now why can't I just accept that statement and say, 'Why have conversations about God? How can we even know God? I'll just believe the Bible.'"?"

Graham: Depending on the person who is saying this, one might reply differently. Let's assume this is a very devout person who really accepts the Scriptures. I would want to make the most of that. I would say, "Well, what about these other places in the Bible? Do you accept those too? Or do you just accept this one?"

Lou: What other places?

Graham: Places like Romans 1 (verses 19–20) that say God can be known. In fact, this individual is accepting one verse in Romans and skipping others. If that doesn't work, then I might turn to a place that says, "Give wine to the poor, that they may forget their misery" (based

on Proverbs 31:6–7), and verses like that. Hopefully this individual will realize that you can't simply "take the Bible as it reads." Maxims like "here a little and there a little" (often taken out of context from Isaiah 28:9–13) are not sufficient for accurate understanding of the Bible.

When you say that you accept the Bible, you need to accept it all the way through. And probably that's what the questioner meant in saying, "I accept God's word—if it says it, I believe it." Then I would want to point to these other verses that say that God can be known. After all, if He can't be known, why do we have all this content about Him in Scripture? Why did Christ come to make His Father known? The use or misuse of one little verse can lead us down all kinds of pathways I'm sure the questioner wouldn't want to go.

Lou: So you are saying that the basic attitude of "I want to accept the Bible as it reads," is a good attitude provided it takes into account the Bible as a whole, all sixty-six books, the total message of Scripture.

Graham: Right.

Lou: James 2 (verses 21–22) makes reference to how Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac demonstrates that he was a "man of faith." Couldn't you call it "blind faith" when Abraham set out to obey God's request for him to "take your son and offer him as a sacrifice"? Genesis 22:1–3.

Graham: Remember Abraham's relationship with God. They were two of the best friends in all of history! Abraham knew God well. He had had a long experience with God. When God had asked him to do things before, it had always worked out well and it made sense in the end. So on Mount Moriah there was no *blind* faith on Abraham's part. God asked him to do something that puzzled him a great deal. At the moment he couldn't understand. But he said, "God, if it is You saying it (and I know You so well) I know that this will make sense at some point and You will provide some kind of solution, so I'm on my way."

This is the kind of faith that says, "God, I'm on my way, but may I ask You why?" And as Abraham thought it through, he said to himself, "The One who gave me this son miraculously is able to resurrect him as well (Hebrews 11:19). Or maybe He will provide a substitute at the last minute (Genesis 22:8)." So instead of the sacrifice of Isaac being blind faith, I would say he knew God well enough to go, and to know that God would provide a solution that made sense.

Lou: But there was in that experience an element of uncertainty and pain. Would all this work out in the end? How would it all work out?

Graham: Abraham certainly wondered and questioned. Faith can include that kind of thing. And when we have found God to be trustworthy in the past, we are willing to obey Him when He asks us to do something beyond our present understanding.

Lou: I want to come back to James 2 again. James seems to be saying that faith alone is not enough. Does that mean that we also have to have works? And isn't that getting back on dangerous ground?

Graham: I guess it depends on what we mean by "works." Remember that the word for obedience means "a willingness to listen." *God does not expect perfect performance.* Suppose I have just gone to my physician with an advanced case of arthritis, will he ask me to run the four-minute mile on the way home? Of course not! Instead, he helps me down the steps into my wheelchair. He says, "Walk a little further this week, take your medication, and be sure to come back." What the doctor is really asking of me is "a willingness to listen and cooperate."

I think to picture God as our Physician is the best model we could have. As with the physician, the performance God really desires of us is the *willingness to listen*. I might die the next day, but I'm going to die His trusting patient. And at the resurrection I will arise His trusting patient and all will be well. He knows we are too weak to perform perfectly. He wants us someday to be perfect; not just spiritually, but physically, mentally, socially, all those things. But He knows it is going to take a little time. What He wants right now is a sincere willingness to listen, without reservation. Then the healing is guaranteed. God has the ability to perfectly restore every one of His children. He has never lost a patient, except the patients who are unwilling to listen. But when we are willing to listen, our behavior becomes more and more like God.

Lou: I hear you saying that James gives us a picture of what happens in our lives when we are truly willing to listen. But here's another question. Trust sounds like something we *have* to do. But according to the Bible, doesn't God do it all? Isn't faith itself a gift from God?

Graham: It is certainly described in that way in the Bible. "Faith is a gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8, see also Romans 12:3). This is so important that it is a large part of the next chapter in this book: "God's Way of Restoring Trust." In fact, God gives us nearly everything, I believe. He gives us life. He gives us minds to weigh the evidence. He gives us the evidence. He gives us the freedom. He gives us everything except one important piece, *He does not cast the vote*. If in this great war, God were to manipulate us so we would vote the way He wanted, Satan

would cry foul.

God does not win this great controversy by “stuffing the ballot box” through the gift of faith. If faith is the decisive thing, you have the question, “Why does He put faith in some and not others?” If faith is the decisive thing, there’s no responsibility. A person could say, “I don’t have faith. You know why? God didn’t give me any.” But the decisive thing is that God gives us everything, but *He doesn’t cast the vote*. That’s up to us. That is what freedom is. That’s where responsibility is. And I like it this way. It’s a little scary, but would you want it any other way? As I mentioned, we’ll go a little deeper into these things in the next couple of chapters.

Lou: The question has come up, Graham, how do you decide what translations to use? Are you just picking out the one that says it the way that you want it?

Graham: That’s a very fair question. I have more than a hundred and fifty different English translations and when I prepare a presentation like this, I have versions all over the table and the floor. It’s true that I am looking for what I want, but what do I want? I always begin with the original. I have taught biblical languages for years: Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. What I want is a version that will be as neutral as possible.

In the previous chapter, for example, I mentioned Romans 8:3. Some versions translate it, “God sent His Son as a sacrifice for sin,” or “to atone for sin.” Those are very interpretive. The Greek of Romans 8:3 just says: “He sent His Son concerning sin.” So I chose two versions that expressed the original idea in a neutral way. One was: “He sent His Son to deal with sin.” That’s beautifully neutral. It lets the reader decide *how* He dealt with it. The other version said: “He sent His Son to do away with sin.” If I can’t find a translation that is truly neutral, I use several to show the various possible meanings. In the chapter where we discuss the Bible (Chapter Five: “The Record of the Evidence”), we’ll go into that in more detail.

Lou: All right. But what if I only have one? You say you have a hundred and fifty. I have maybe twenty or thirty, and I don’t think my wife is going to let me buy enough to catch up with you.

Graham: Unless your one translation is one of the really extraordinary ones, like the *New Testament Revised by the Spirits*, or the *New Testament Translated From Numerology*, you should be OK. Any of the mainline versions are very trustworthy, if you read the Bible as a whole. If you make everything depend on a single verse, on the other hand,

what if the comma is in the wrong place? It is safer to put many passages together. But the safest approach of all is in *reading the Bible as a whole*. When you approach things that way, almost every version is dependable.

Lou: Here's a question that can be related to the earlier chapters of this book. What did Jesus mean when He told Nicodemus, "You must be born again" (John 3:4, 9)? A lot of people say things like, "I'm a born-again Christian." What does that mean?

Graham: Nicodemus himself even asked what it meant. Notice that Jesus did *not* say "you must be forgiven" or "you must be justified" or you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. Rather "born again" is more like what David said in the fifty-first Psalm. "Born again" means having a new heart and a new spirit (Psalm 51:10), to be changed from a rebel to someone who can be trusted, to be changed from a stubborn person (who is unwilling to listen) to someone who loves, trusts, and admires God. To experience all of these is like being born all over again. And that's why Jesus used such a dramatic picture.

That's also the meaning of being converted. *You turn around and go the other way* like you sometimes do driving a car. It is a change from being stubborn and rebellious to someone who is humbly willing to listen, love, trust, and admire. Someone who does not want to miss a single word of what God may be saying. One way to describe this kind of change is "being born again." I think that Jesus was chiding Nicodemus for being a little slow to pick up on something that he should have known very well.

Lou: Another individual has written this question: "Do you see the world as a predominantly evil place? If so, how can God's plan be vindicated, if evil seems to triumph over good?" And this individual adds, "I believe that good must triumph over evil without divine intervention before Christ can come again."

Graham: The most important words in this question would be "without divine intervention." If the person who wrote this means it in the absolute sense, it would leave us in a helpless situation. In this conflict we have an adversary who is intervening all he can, manipulating, deceiving and beclouding the intellect. If God had never intervened, we would be in trouble.

But if the questioner wants to say that truth will triumph without God ever manipulating things, I would agree, absolutely. My understanding is that God intervenes in order that truth may be seen clearly,

so that truth may have a chance to win. God will not win because He has intervened with power and force and manipulation. That's the Devil's method. God will win, in a certain sense, without intervention. But He is very much involved in this world in order to protect us from the adversary and give the truth a chance to be seen. God will win because the truth is seen to be true, and we'll agree.

Lou: Moving in a different direction. "If it is true that the plan of salvation and the death of Christ was needed to confirm the faith of the unfallen angels, would it not seem that God needed a place like this earth to send His Son to die in order to answer Satan's charges?"

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God will not win because He has intervened with power and force and manipulation. That's the Devil's method.

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Graham: Must a parent die under the wheels of a truck, pushing his little child out of the way, to prove that he or she loves the child? That is one way such love would be demonstrated, but it doesn't have to be that way. God doesn't need the emergency on this earth to show that He loves His children and is worthy of their trust. But when the emergency arose, look how He behaved. Look at the way He has handled it. God is no more trustworthy after the cross than before. But because of the emergency, God is more clearly *seen* to be trustworthy than He was before. He has taken advantage of an emergency, and I find it very gracious of Him.

Lou: Although the emergency made His heart break, He made something positive out of it.

Graham: Yes, that's right.

Lou: Here's a question related to Martin Luther and his problems with Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation mentioned in a previous chapter. Could you give us some actual references where people could go for themselves? People believe what you said because they trust you, but they would like to have a reference.

Graham: That's fair enough. The prefaces that I read from can be found in a series edited by Jaroslav Pelikan, entitled *Luther's Works*. In Volume 35 Luther says there is no way the Holy Spirit could have inspired the book of Revelation. I've also mentioned that Luther thought the book of James was totally contrary to Saint Paul. But lest we put Luther in an unfair light, you should read the prefaces for your-

self. There he also spoke so reverently of Scripture. He says, for example, “I praise [the epistle of James] and consider it a good book, because it sets up no doctrine of men but vigorously promulgates the law of God.” That statement is needed to balance out the other. The only reason I brought it up was to answer the question whether he was able to see the larger, great controversy view. And there are even glimpses of that.

In the first volume of *Luther’s Works*, the one on Genesis, he says, “The holy fathers have fancied that there once was this war up in Heaven.” He said, “That is a likely idea. It fits in with the statement in Jude that angels fell.” And in another place he said, “You know, it is true that the angels apparently were once able to sin, because some of them fell.” Then he went on to say, “The loyal angels were confirmed, so that they are no longer capable of sinning.” From this evidence it seems to me that he was working with it up to a point, but he never truly followed it through.

Lou: Where will we be going with the next chapter? What is the topic?

Graham: Chapter Four is entitled “God’s Way of Restoring Trust.” God does not seek to restore trust simply by making claims or through spectacular shows of power. Instead He invites our trust on the basis of evidence. And I believe the methods that He has chosen to use are the greatest reasons for trusting Him. That will be the key focus of the next chapter.

Chapter Four

God's Way of Restoring Trust

In the previous chapter we concluded that in order to have peace once again in His universe, all God asks of us is trust. And there *will* be peace again, just as there was before the war that began in heaven (Revelation 12). There will be peace once again because all the members of God's vast family will trust in their heavenly Father and He in turn will be able to safely trust in them. Along with that, the members of God's family will learn to trust each other. Wherever there is mutual trust and trustworthiness, there is perfect peace, perfect freedom, and perfect security.

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Wherever there is mutual trust and trustworthiness, there is perfect peace, perfect freedom, and perfect security.

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Our heavenly Father, however, has been accused of being unworthy of the faith and trust of His children. He has even been accused of being a liar; of being arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe. It might seem incredible that the Infinite One would permit such accusations. But in His far-sighted plan, God has allowed these accusations and charges to spread throughout the universe, including our planet. These accusations have led to the point of war, open rebellion, and revolt. In light of this rebellion the question arises, *How could God ever restore trust in His universe—in His family?*

The Methods God Did NOT Use

Some might imagine God visiting one of our churches, inviting our questions in the Great Controversy. Suppose one of us took courage from the story of how Abraham challenged God (Genesis 18:25) and yet was welcomed as a friend (Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23). So we begin the inquiry with the following question: "God, did You lie to us when You said that sin results in death?" How do you think God would reply?

"Absolutely not! You will die precisely as I said. Any more questions?"

"Well God, like Abraham, I don't want to sound irreverent, but are You the least bit arbitrary?"

“No!”

“Exacting?”

“Certainly not!”

“Vengeful?”

“No!”

“Unforgiving?”

“No!”

“Severe?”

“Certainly not! How dare you ask such questions?”

And at that moment the floor would begin to move beneath our feet, and there would be lightning and thunder and fire, and a great cloud. And God would say, “Any more questions?” If such a scene were to happen would you be satisfied? Would you feel convinced? Can truth be established by the show of power? Satan tries to do that. He has to, because what he says about God isn’t true. In the absence of evidence he has to use other methods. He loves to bring fire down from heaven, as the Bible says (Revelation 13:13-14), or do counterfeit miracles (2 Thessalonians 2:9), to seduce, intimidate, mislead or deceive us.

But since the truth is with our heavenly Father, He never has to stoop to such methods. That is one reason, I believe, that God does not normally reveal Himself to us. Because if He were to show Himself visibly our tendency would be to say, “God, if You’ve said it, we believe it, and that is all there is to it!” Jesus even told His disciples in the Upper Room, “It’s better for you that I go away” (John 16:7). There was the danger that once the disciples recognized that He was God, they would stop thinking things through. They would simply run to Him and accept His answers to their questions on the authority of who He was. It would seem like the right thing to do.

Yet in the Great Controversy God does not ask for that. So even gentle Jesus said: “It is better that I go away, and I’ll send the Holy Spirit, who will come as a still small voice. He’ll come to be a Teacher and a Guide to lead you into the truth. You won’t see Him. He won’t intimidate you. He only works with evidence. Most importantly, He’ll help you understand the Bible” (based on John 16:7–13 and 14:26). God *does* speak to us. He *does* answer our questions. But He does it through what we call His Word. We talk to God in prayer, and He talks to us as we study the Scriptures. That’s why I believe that really thoughtful study of the Scriptures is a form of prayer. That’s conversing with God as with a friend.

Now some people pray a great deal, but never hear God speak back because they never spend much time reading the Bible. But if one reads the Bible and *then* responds to God, there is conversation as one thinks along and says to God, “That’s marvelous, what I’ve just read.” This is conversation with God as with a friend, and that’s the meaning of prayer.

But now, when we pick up the Bible and have this kind of conversation with Him, what do we find there? With respect to the questions in the Great Controversy, do we find denials? Do we find claims? No, we find evidence.

Even when a person has been falsely accused, there’s no way to establish the truth simply by denying the charges. If just denying the charges would have worked, think what God could have done back in eternity. He could have assembled all of the angels, all hundreds of millions of them, and He could have stood before them in all His authority. And He could have said, “I understand that I have been accused of the following. I want you to know it’s absolutely false. I can be trusted. I am not arbitrary. I have not lied to you. And I expect you to believe it. Remember who I am, and don’t forget My power!” And all the angels would bow their heads and say, “We agree.”

But in a setting like that, how do you know if people really *do* agree? So God did not try this. Even when a person has been falsely and unfairly accused of being untrustworthy, it is only by the demonstration of trustworthiness *over a long period of time and under a great variety of circumstances*, particularly difficult ones, that trustworthiness can be re-established and confirmed. And I understand that the sixty-six books of the Bible are precisely the record of just such a demonstration, and every one of those books is an important part.

It’s Not About Power and Force

What methods *did* God use to answer the charges and accusations in heaven? As far as the heavenly angels are concerned, the war has been over for two thousand years. What did they learn that became a sufficient basis for trust in the heavenly Father? For the answers to these questions we go to the Bible and we ask, “God, why didn’t You take charge more vigorously and end the conflict? We would expect that of trustworthy leadership.” And I hear the answer coming back as I go through the sixty-six books of the Bible. If the Great Controversy were over power, God could have settled it in a moment. But the great conflict

is not over who has the most power. If that were true, the Devil would have been converted long ago. He knows that God has power superior to his own: “Do you believe that there is only one God? Good! The demons also believe — and tremble with fear.” James 2:19, GNT. You see, they believe in God’s existence. They believe there’s only one God. They have great faith in His power, in fact it scares them, but that doesn’t move their hearts toward God.

A similar point is made in Revelation 12: “The Devil has come down to you and he is filled with rage, because he knows that he has only a little time left.” Revelation 12:12, GNT. In other words, the Devil is so convinced of his helplessness in the face of God’s power that it makes him angry. The Devil is an Adventist, you know. He knows God is coming soon, and it terrifies him to think of it. So there’s a kind of faith that God is *not* looking for. It is the kind of faith that a show of power might actually produce. It is not enough.

For a dramatic illustration of how power can be misunderstood, look at the stories in Genesis 9 and 11: “God said to Noah and his sons... ‘I promise that never again will all living beings be destroyed by a flood.’” Genesis 9:11, GNT. What a demonstration of God’s power the Flood was! Did it win people? Was everyone so convinced by that display of power that no one ever distrusted Him again? God continued saying to Noah, “As a sign of this everlasting covenant which I am making with you and with all living beings, I am putting my bow in the clouds.” Genesis 9:12–13, GNT. This was a gracious promise on the part of God, but the promise alone, in the context of the Flood, didn’t build trust in the descendants of Noah.

Let’s go now to Genesis 11. “At first, the people of the whole world had only one language... And they said to one another... ‘Now let’s build a city with a tower that reaches the sky.’” Genesis 11:1, 3–4, GNT. Did the inhabitants of Babel believe in God? Did they believe He had the power to drown the whole world in a flood? Did they believe His promise that He would never do it again? Their actions provide the answer. They didn’t build the tower because of disbelief in God, but because they *did* believe in God and it scared them that He has so much power. But instead of leading them to worship God, His use of power in the Flood resulted in even more rebellion on their part. So there is no need to promote God’s power unless someone doesn’t believe He has it. *The Great Controversy is not over power, but over who is telling the truth.* God has been accused of the abuse of power and of a failure to tell

the truth. Such charges cannot be met by force. To resort to force would only worsen the matter, as if to suggest, “I don’t have evidence, so now I must intimidate you with power.” And so, even at the risk of appearing weak, God chose the long, painful, and costly way of teaching, explanation, and demonstration.

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The way Jesus treated people, the things He taught about His Father, and the unique and awful way that He died; these were the clearest demonstration of the truth about God and His government that the universe will ever see or ever need.

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Finally He sent His Son. *The way Jesus treated people, the things He taught about His Father, and the unique and awful way that He died; these were the clearest demonstration of the truth about God and His government that the universe will ever see or ever need.* Sadly though, religion often fails to use God’s methods. Thus it is often religion that most seriously misrepresents our God. Religion through the centuries has resorted to claims and pronouncements, force, persecution, and a great deal of pomp and power — methods God does not use.

The Importance of Evidence

Even within Christianity, many suggest that God expects us to trust Him without evidence. They then call that faith, for, to them, “faith is believing without evidence.” Such blind faith is even called a notable virtue. Then religion goes on to suggest that the use of such methods (that is, to expect our faith and trust without evidence, just based on His claims and authority) is God’s perfect, sovereign right! And it should not be regarded as arbitrary, for He can do whatever He wants to do. And that’s the method He chooses. He expects us to trust Him without evidence and call that faith.

No! I believe with all my heart that God is infinitely powerful. He is the Sovereign. And He can run His universe any way He wishes — and He will, as Romans 9 makes very plain. But as we open up the sixty-six books of the Bible and ask God, “How *do* You run Your universe? Do You ask Your children to believe You without evidence?” I find precisely the opposite. I find Him warning us against believing mere claims.

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The Great Controversy is not over power, but over who is telling the truth.

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Let's look at some examples of these warnings:

If a prophet arises among you, or a dreamer of dreams, and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder which he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, "Let us go after other gods" which you have not known, "and let us serve them," you shall not listen to the word of that prophet or to that dreamer of dreams. Deuteronomy 13:1-3, RSV.

Then look at the extraordinary story told in 1 Kings 13. It's about a young prophet, called the "man of God," who was told by God to deliver a message to the king. After delivering the message, he was not to accept hospitality, and he was to go home by a different route than the one he came. But as the man of God was heading home, an older prophet heard of what had happened between him and the king. And he asked his sons to saddle his donkey, got on it, and chased after the man of God. When he caught up with the younger man, notice what happened next:

Then (the old prophet) said to him, "Come home with me and eat bread." And (the man of God) said, "I may not return with you, or go in with you; neither will I eat bread nor drink water with you in this place; for it was said to me by the word of the Lord, 'You shall neither eat bread nor drink water there, nor return by the way that you came.'" And he said to him, "I also am a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the Lord, saying, 'Bring him back with you into your house that he may eat bread and drink water.'" But he lied to him. 1 Kings 13:15-18, RSV.

The younger prophet believed the older prophet, and he went home and ate with him. And as he proceeded on his way he was met by a lion that slew him. The story warns us that people who make claims that God has spoken through them may be lying to us. And it's God Himself who warns us of that.

You see, God seeks to convince us, not by authority or power, but

on the basis of truth and evidence. The most impressive illustration of that was provided by Jesus Himself on the road to Emmaus. Two disciples were walking along that road, having a conversation about God:

While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What is this conversation which you are holding?" And they stood still, looking sad.... And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.... Later, when he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him. Luke 24:15-17, 27, 30-31, RSV.

Why did He not reveal who He was at the beginning? Then He could say, "What are your questions? You know that I will give you authoritative answers, and I will expect you to believe them." Instead, He did not reveal who He was until He had led them to an intelligent confidence based on the unquestionable evidence of Scripture. It was only then that He revealed who He was. If the Infinite One works like that, how dare we presume to take any shortcuts?

But hasn't God often used a show of power? Among many other occasions, we could list the Flood, the thunder on Mount Sinai, the fire from heaven on Mount Carmel, and the plagues of Egypt. Each time He shows His power, we need to inquire very closely — "Why?" In Egypt, we understand why He showed His power. The ten plagues of Egypt were needed to demonstrate the impotence of those Egyptian gods. In those days, you judged the effectiveness of particular gods by the earthly condition of their worshipers. The Egyptians were in charge at that time and the Israelites were slaves. So obviously, to the ancient mind, the god of the Egyptians was more powerful than the God of the Israelites. Even the Israelites had come to believe it. But each of the plagues demonstrated the impotence of yet another Egyptian deity. For example, how can you revere a frog when you have been stamping on them all day and sweeping them up into stinking piles? One by one, through these plagues, the Egyptians got the message. They began to think that the God of the Israelites must be more powerful than their own. Some of the Egyptians even went out with the Israelites. And the Israelites began to think, "Maybe our God is not so weak after all."

Now that is a very elementary perspective on God. But if you need reassurance of His power He will provide it. In fact, that's the easiest thing for Him to do, to show His power. And as we have seen, even the Devil admits that He has it (James 2:19). Peter also deals with this issue in one of his letters. In 2 Peter 3 he tells his readers about people who think that the Second Coming is delayed because God doesn't have the power to do what He has promised. To counter that view, Peter reminds them that God created the world in the beginning and that He drowned it in a flood. No one should draw the conclusion that God is waiting because He is weak (2 Peter 3:3–10).

It's too bad that God ever has to reassure us of His power. But if we need such reassurance, He will do it. But while it is easy for Him to do, it is also highly dangerous! God has been accused of abusing His superior power. So every time that God uses His power, there is the hazard that we will misunderstand.

The Biblical Record Builds Trust

Does God, then, expect us to trust Him as a powerful stranger? Someone whose power we fear, lest He abuse it? Is that the relationship that He wants? Paul, who wrote so much about faith, especially in Romans, is very clear that God does not expect us to trust Him as a powerful stranger:

For the Scriptures tell us that no one who believes in Christ will ever be disappointed.... Anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. But how shall they ask him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? So how welcome are those who come preaching God's Good News!... Faith comes from listening to this Good News—the Good News about Christ. Romans 10:11, 13–15, 17, The Living Bible.

They didn't have personal copies of the Bible in those days, so for them it was all about listening, whereas today we might say reading about or learning this good news.

Now where do we find this good news if not in the biblical record? But how does one read the Bible in order to learn the truth about God—to discover whether or not He is worthy of our trust? One way is to go through the Bible and collect statements, sometimes known as key

texts, which can be very helpful. But key texts, or statements, are claims about God. And God does not ask us to believe mere claims. God is love. God is this. God is that. Those are claims. But where is the evidence? The evidence is in between the key texts. The evidence is in the stories. And we adults do a very strange thing. We collect the claims, but give the evidence to the children. We hope they will understand how Samson, filled with the Holy Spirit, could kill a thousand men with the jawbone of an ass (Judges 15:14–16)! We ourselves may not know what that means, but we hope the little dears will be able to understand it clearly.

Children are willing to accept statements and claims. “My daddy says it, and I believe it.” But as adults we usually demand evidence. As the children grow up they too become more demanding of evidence. Why do we give the evidence to the children while we ourselves collect the claims? Let’s give the claims to the children, and take the stories back. It’s time that we adults read the stories that the children know so well. The stories are the demonstration of the truth about our God. The key texts, on the other hand, are like summaries of what the stories mean. They really are more like claims. *So to know God better, to determine whether He is worthy of our trust, adults have to read all sixty-six books and ask of every story, teaching, and event, what does this tell me about my God?*

As I mentioned earlier, I have had the privilege of leading people through the sixty-six books more than one hundred times. It takes about a year each time. One book a week. And on the authority of the sixty-six books, I am prepared to say in any company that I believe God is an infinitely powerful, but equally gracious Person who values nothing higher than the freedom, dignity, and individuality of His intelligent creatures. He desires that their love, their faith, their worship, even their willingness to listen and obey, may be freely given. And I believe that is supported by a very great weight of evidence and demonstration.

Of course some may say, “That sounds like too much work, I don’t have the time. Besides, isn’t faith a gift of God anyway? I rather like that shortcut. Let me just go to bed not trusting God but praying, ‘please give me faith,’ and wake up trusting Him with all my heart.” But put in that way it doesn’t make any sense, does it? Now faith is indeed a gift of God. But that doesn’t mean there is some shortcut to faith! We need to understand the gift of faith in the larger context of Scripture. Look at Galatians 5:22, KJV: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-

suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith.” No question about it, faith comes with the Spirit. But how does the Holy Spirit do this? How does He lead us to trust in God? Look at 2 Peter 1:20–21, NEB:

But first note this: no one can interpret any prophecy of Scripture by himself. For it was not through any human whim that men prophesied of old; men they were, but impelled by the Holy Spirit, they spoke the words of God.

Here’s another translation, just to show the variation with essentially the same meaning:

You must understand this in the first place, that no prophecy in Scripture can be understood through one’s own powers, for no prophecy ever originated in the human will, but under the influence of the Holy Spirit men spoke for God (Goodspeed).

The meaning of the word “prophet” is someone who speaks for God, but whether these prophets spoke for their own time or about the future, they couldn’t do it without the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Himself gives an explanation of the work of the Holy Spirit in John, chapters 14–16. The title He uses for the Holy Spirit has been variously translated Comforter, Counselor, Advocate and Helper:

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, who will stay with you forever. He is the Spirit, who reveals the truth about God.... The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and make you remember all that I have told you.... The Helper will come—the Spirit, who reveals the truth about God and who comes from the Father. I will send him to you from the Father, and he will speak about me.... When, however, the Spirit comes, who reveals the truth about God, he will lead you into all the truth. John 14:16–17, 26; 15:26; 16:13, GNT.

It is clear from the above texts that all three members of the Godhead are involved in the same work. Jesus’ unique role in that work is the focus of John 5:39 (GNT), which describes the purpose of Scripture: “You study the Scriptures, because you think that in them you will find eternal life. And these very Scriptures speak about me!” You

see, Christ came to reveal the truth about God. The Holy Spirit comes for the same purpose. The record of Christ's revelation is in the Bible. The Holy Spirit is the One who moved some of our fellow believers to write the record. And the Spirit helps us to understand the record. The Holy Spirit even helps us to pray as we read (Romans 8:26-27).

So if we desire to know God, and learn the answers to the questions in the Great Controversy; if we want to see Christ; if we want to be open to the work of the Holy Spirit; if we want to let Him lead us into truth; there is only one way, and that is to read the Bible. As we read all sixty-six books we will discover the truth of Hebrews 1. God was demonstrating His character in many and various ways over a long period of time and under a great variety of circumstances:

In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son.
Hebrews 1:1-2, RSV.

You don't find claims in there. You find demonstration, over many centuries of time and certainly under a great variety of circumstances. The very length of the sixty-six books speaks well of our God. The Bible itself demonstrates that God is not trying to lead us to trust Him without evidence. If God offered us only claims, the Bible would be just a paragraph long. But instead, the Infinite One has chosen to win His family by being a humble teacher. He stoops to meet us where we are, speaking a language we can understand. He leads us no faster than we are able to follow and runs amazing risks of being misunderstood. A teacher like that can be trusted.

Of course all of this assumes that the Bible itself can be trusted. And there are legitimate questions one can raise about this book. Do we have the right collection of sixty-six books? Have the words of those books been accurately preserved? Have those words been adequately translated into all the versions that we have today? And most of all, can we be confident that we know the meaning of the Bible?

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God stoops to meet us where we are, speaking a language we can understand. He leads us no faster than we are able to follow and runs amazing risks of being misunderstood. A teacher like that can be trusted.

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In the next chapter, we will look at that topic briefly. I've spent some forty years concentrating on that subject, trying to equip myself to use all the tools for determining whether the Bible can be trusted and whether we can confidently understand the meaning. All I can say is I am absolutely convinced. But don't believe it because I say so. God wouldn't want it that way! I can only bear my testimony. I believe that God can indeed be trusted, and not just in some general way. He can be trusted specifically in those areas where He has been accused. He can be trusted never to be arbitrary, vengeful, exacting, unforgiving, or severe. But He doesn't expect us to come to that conclusion without evidence. His existence, His character, the truthfulness of His word, are all established by a great amount of evidence. And it is evidence that appeals to our reason. This is God's way of restoring trust, and a God like that can surely be trusted!

Questions and Answers

Louis Venden: I was struck by "the evidence is in the stories." That's an interesting way to look at the Good Book.

Graham Maxwell: That's why it isn't childish to read the stories. Adults might ask, "Why read Samson anymore?" They don't know what to do with Samson; yet they hope the children do.

Lou: It's strange how we've gotten things turned around. Another statement that you made, Graham, "there's no shortcut to faith," struck me as very important. You've talked repeatedly about trust and faith. But I think many of us still have the feeling that faith involves a kind of blind trust. You need faith when you don't have enough evidence. You just go ahead and believe. I wish you'd comment a bit more about that.

Graham: Well, I wonder who's given that idea such circulation. It seems to me that only the adversary would be pleased with us saying to God, "I trust You, but I really don't have any evidence for doing so." I'd rather say, "God, there's so much evidence, and I'm still studying it. But the more I come to know You, the more I trust You." One reason for the confusion on this issue is the use of different English words; trust is one thing, confidence is another, faith is still another. Yet all three English words translate the same original word in the Bible.

Lou: But still, some very sincere people have talked about faith as a leap in the dark. You go as far as you can on evidence, and then you come to that cliff where you just close your eyes and jump, and hope that you

land safely.

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History is strewn with the wreckage of those who have been leaping in the dark.

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Graham: Well that's the trouble. I think history is strewn with the wreckage of those who have been leaping in the dark. Now God might ask me to do something I momentarily cannot understand, like He did with Abraham. But if I have full confidence in One I know very well, I move forward. I even know He won't be angry if I question Him along the way. I wouldn't call that a leap in the dark.

Many define faith in that way because they think they really *are* in the dark. Even some distinguished theologians believe that God has never really revealed Himself to us. Christ came as the light, yet they feel in the dark. They don't really believe in a personal God who reveals Himself. We need to exercise blind faith because we have no other choice. Now I admire them for taking life so seriously in the dark. But I'm not going to say my faith in God is a leap in the dark. Faith is the most enlightened, intelligent, rational decision we ever make, and one for which we have the most evidence. I hesitate to say this, but I have more evidence for trusting God than I have for trusting even you, my friend. That's true, isn't it?

Lou: Well, I do think that's true. Somewhat related to this is a question regarding Deuteronomy 13 (particularly verses 1–3). That passage warns against signs and wonders. And yet when we look in the gospels and the story of Jesus, aren't the miracles that He performed a basis for belief?

Graham: In the story about the wedding at Cana John says, "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee." John 2:11, RSV. And these signs did say something, to be sure. His mother already trusted Him. She said, "Do whatever He tells you." John 2:5, RSV. I think miracles do get people started on the road to trust sometimes. But they are not the best evidence, because miracles can be counterfeited, as happened in Egypt (Exodus 7:10–12, 20–22; 8:6–7). In some ways a miracle is the poorest type of evidence. But if we're susceptible to that kind of evidence, our God will run the risk, sometimes, of using miracles. Gideon's wet fleece, and then the dry one, for example, doesn't speak well of Gideon, but the whole story *does* speak well of God, who gener-

ously gave him those signs (Judges 6:36–40). God would rather Gideon had weighed the evidence. To summarize, God did not avoid using miracles in Bible times, but they are an elementary first step in developing faith, and a hazardous one.

Lou: So the Deuteronomy 13 passage is pointing out the hazard there.

Graham: Yes. Because at the same time false prophets are performing miracles, they are not telling the truth. When I'm watching television programs where there is a focus on miracles and faith-healing, I listen to hear what they are saying about God. And if they are not telling the truth about God, then never mind those miracles. But I notice that the audience is often being so swayed by the miracles, they are not prepared to open their Bibles and do some hard study of the truth. That's the danger in miracles, they are so dramatic.

Lou: You talked about faith as a gift. I remember the man who was worried about his boy and said to Jesus, "Lord, I believe. Help thou mine unbelief." Mark 9:24, KJV. What does God do to help unbelief in a situation like that?

Graham: The father obviously did believe; he just wished he had more faith. Whether the man understood how God would increase his faith, the text doesn't say. We have to look through the rest of Scripture to fill that out. My understanding is that God strengthens faith by offering evidence, by helping us to think about the evidence, and by protecting us from the adversary who would becloud our minds and deprive us of our freedom to weigh the evidence. Sometimes the Holy Spirit even adds to our understanding directly. I don't mind the Holy Spirit impressing me, God works in many and various ways. It's just when I feel an impression, I want to make sure it's the Holy Spirit, and not what I had for supper.

Lou: I hear you saying God doesn't pop a pill into our mouth. Developing faith is a process that involves our thinking and our understanding.

Graham: We want shortcuts. I think that was the appeal at the tree in the garden, when Eve was told, "Eat this fruit and you will be like God" (Genesis 3:5). It was as if she said, "I thought sanctification was the work of a lifetime. And you can do it with one bite?" A similar approach happens sometimes in evangelism. "Go down to the front, and you will be saved." We are always wanting shortcuts, busy people that we are. Instant salvation is rather attractive. So is instant faith. But things don't

actually work that way.

Lou: Here's a question that takes us back to the great controversy perspective: the war in heaven. "Why doesn't God take more firm control of the universe—even at the expense of a little freedom? Isn't the price of freedom almost too much? With all the pain and the tragedy that happens in our world, couldn't God have done a better job of protecting us from the consequences of freedom?"

Graham: I remember years ago a lady came up after a meeting, and she said, "I'd be willing to give up some of my freedom to have peace and security once again; to be safe. I wish God had not given me quite so much freedom." Like today, to be safe from terrorists on the plane, we're willing to stand in line and go through those electronic devices. We give up some of our freedom in order to be safe. Would we say to God, if we had the chance, "I know You've paid a great price for freedom, but I'd rather not be that free"?

I imagine God might say in return, "Well, I'm sorry. That's one thing that is not negotiable. I will keep My universe free, or your trust and love will mean nothing. Yes, I could save everybody your way, but it would turn My universe into a penitentiary." You see, if God locked us up in solitary confinement so we couldn't hurt each other, He could save everybody. But instead God says, "I refuse to be a prison warden for the rest of eternity. Forgive Me, but I would rather die than give up freedom." And He has already died to show what freedom means to Him.

Lou: Something you said reminds me of another question that I should ask. If God is all-powerful, why isn't He able or willing to save everyone? You've mentioned how this approach might turn the whole universe into a prison house. But isn't there a way God can lovingly save everybody?

Graham: Well, if salvation just meant admitting us into the Kingdom, He could. He has the power to do that. He even has the power to put us all in terrorized subjection, and then have us grumbling for the rest of eternity. What *human* father would want that for his family? No matter how powerful a father is, he cannot enforce love and trust in his family. You cannot terrorize your children into a happy home. It just doesn't work. They may behave as long as you're around because you scare them so, but once they've grown up and gone their own ways, they will do what they wish. So I think people who have families and teachers of children are in a position to understand what God is

trying to do. He is omnipotent, to be sure. But you cannot produce love and trust by force. It simply can't be done; hence the length of the experiment, and the extent of the Scriptures.

Lou: Here's another question: "If Satan was the first creature to rebel, where did the idea of sin originate? Or was there sin before Satan sinned?"

Graham: Well, there's no record of there being any sin before Lucifer. According to the biblical record, the whole diabolical thing was created within the mind of the most magnificent of all God's beings (Isaiah 14:12-14). It wasn't that he lacked intelligence, or that he had a bent toward evil, or that he didn't know God. He lived in the presence of God. He knew what God was like. In fact, I think he knew God so well that he dared entertain these thoughts without fear. He knew how gracious God was. That is what makes his rebellion so diabolical, so utterly rebellious. And of course it's also insane, that a creature would think that he could be equal with God. He even asked his creator to get down on His knees and worship him (Matthew 4:8-9). This whole insane thing was created in the mind of Lucifer himself. But maybe if we could explain sin, we could find some excuse for it, some rationalization.

Lou: When you say "created in the mind of Lucifer;" you don't mean God created it there, do you?

Graham: No, Lucifer did it all by himself. We are quite capable of that too. But there's something good in it. While God is not the author of sin, He has actually created us capable of thinking things like that up. When He made us free, He made us creative like Himself, and what a risk He took in doing that! Evidently freedom means everything to God. So even the terrible thing Lucifer did speaks well of God. In light of that, how could I say to God, "Take some freedom back from me"?

Lou: This same person went on to ask, "Does Satan really think he's going to win in the end? Or does he know he'll lose, and he's just trying to take down as many people as he can?"

Graham: I think that's rather well said. When Hitler realized he had lost the war, he announced that he would take the whole Third Reich down with him. And the world said, "He's mad. He's a maniac." I also believe that when Lucifer realized that he had lost the war—and Revelation says that he knows that he has but a short time left (Revelation 12:12)—he dedicated himself to taking down with him as many as he could.

Lou: The question has come up in connection with Revelation 12

(verses 7–8), where it speaks about Michael and His angels. Someone wanted to know a bit more about Michael. Who was Michael?

Graham: It's good to raise the question; because in the Apocrypha there are a number of suggestions as to who Michael might be. But in the Bible all the references to Michael the archangel point in one direction. For example, it says in Thessalonians that the dead will arise at the voice of the archangel (1 Thessalonians 4:16), but the gospels say they will arise at the voice of the Son of Man (Christ — John 5:28). Jude 1:9, then, not only connects “the” archangel with Michael, it connects the archangel Michael with the resurrection of Moses. This combination of texts ties the archangel, Christ and Michael together as the same person.

But there is more to it than that. The name Michael means “who is like God,” or “the one who is like God.” And the name is only used of Christ in places like Daniel, Revelation and Jude, where the Great Controversy is involved. So when the leader of the loyal side is referred to, He is called “the one who is like God,” Michael. The leader on the other side would like to be like God, but is not (see 2 Thessalonians 2:4 and Revelation 13:4). So I like it that Jesus is called Michael when He is operating in the great controversy setting.

Lou: That's an interesting play on words there. We now have two questions from different individuals about perfection. Let me read through them rather quickly. First: “You said that as trust in God grows, we behave more like God. That is, we move more toward being God-like or being perfect. Can we be perfect in this present world? If not, when can we expect to be perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect? If we can be perfect here, can we be recognized as being perfect, and will everyone have the same degree of perfection?” Let me add this one: “You mentioned that when we get to heaven we might possibly have a lot to learn. Does this mean that while we are sinless, or perfect, we can still make mistakes?” People want to know about perfection.

Graham: Fortunately we will deal with this at some length in Chapter Fourteen, “God Can Completely Heal the Damage Done.” Some may want to read ahead. I think these are important questions, because a misunderstanding of perfection is a heavy burden and puts God in a very bad light. Now I believe God can perfectly heal the damage done by sin. No question about it. And perfection also needs to be understood in terms of maturity and growing up. We will need to be so settled into the truth that we can survive the time of trouble before the End. But as far as mistakes are concerned, a mistake is not a sin. In the

hereafter, you could plant your pomegranate tree too close to where you are living, and the Lord may come by later and say, “You know, you put it too close, didn’t you? You might as well move it.” That is not a sin. Sin is rebelliousness. Sin is distrust. Sin is not “making mistakes.”

Lou: But if God is waiting for us to grow up in Him, won’t He have to wait forever? Because there are always people being converted; is that why time goes on? When are we going to grow up?

Graham: It’s true that there will be conversions right along, and we might wonder how a child in the faith could grow up to this maturity that we talked about. If God is not going to allow the closing events to occur until He has a generation like Job, mature enough in the truth to pass through the “time of trouble,” He might be waiting a long time. But I think we have assumed it takes a very, very long time to grow up from rebirth to maturity. Yet when Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he suggested that they could have been grown up much sooner (Ephesians 4:11–16).

A few years later in Hebrews he said, “By now you should be teachers, but I see you are still babes in the truth” (Hebrews 5:12–13). I think that we should encourage people to believe they can grow up from rebirth to maturity much sooner; and it would be a much more exciting experience. You know, when we’re baptized, many of us think, “I’ve launched myself on sixty-five years of slow sanctification.” Instead, I’d like to think, “Why not grow up as quickly as possible and be settled into the truth?” But when we have an unreachable, forbidding conception of perfection, we think “Well, I’m not going to make it anyway.”

In my understanding, the biblical concept of perfection is when an individual is completely convinced of this truth about God. You don’t need to be sixty-five years old to be convinced, that could happen even at the age of twelve. If Satan came to a convinced twelve-year-old as an angel of light, or even as “Christ,” and said God is arbitrary, vengeful, unforgiving and severe; they would respond, “That’s not true and I will not believe it.” Perfection is being so settled in the truth about God that we cannot be moved. And it needn’t take a long time to happen. I think we have made the distance between the start and the finish line too great. Under the accelerating, energizing events of the close of time, God can produce a generation of grown-up Jobs of all ages in a short period of time.

Lou: It strikes me that when it comes to spiritual growth, we tend too easily to think of performance. But when you have the issues clearly in mind, growth is in terms of trust. And that could happen very quickly

if you were willing to really examine the evidence.

One final question to conclude this chapter: “Was the thief’s trust developed only by the words and circumstances around the cross, or was it the culmination of years of searching and being prepared by the Holy Spirit?” What about the thief on the cross?

Graham: Oh, I like what that implies. We don’t know how much the thief knew about Christ, but he surely must have known some things about Him. Based on the rest of Scripture, you know the Holy Spirit was working on that man. Christ is the Light which enlightens everyone who comes into the world (John 1:9). But when the thief was hanging on the cross, he saw the most incredible evidence of what God is like. Though the man was cursing and swearing, the Holy Spirit was developing tenderness inside and a willingness to listen. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit his attention was pointed to the One in the middle, the One who said, “Look after Mother,” and, “Father forgive.” And that experience is what finally won him.

Lou: In the next chapter we’ll explore whether the evidence of the Bible itself can be trusted.

Chapter Five

The Record of the Evidence

Without the Bible we would know nothing about the heavenly conflict in God's family. Neither would we know about God's infinitely skillful and gracious handling of this conflict, this crisis of distrust, in His family. The Bible is a record of the evidence upon which we base our decision about God, and whether we find Him worthy of our trust. We have been assuming so far that the Bible itself can be trusted. But there are legitimate questions that can and have been raised about that through the years. How do we know that we have the right collection of sixty-six books? How do we know that the words in those books have been accurately transmitted through the ages? How do we know that they have been adequately translated? Can you trust the versions of the Bible? And most important of all, can we have any confidence in our interpretation of these books and these words? When we have read the entire Bible through can we say, "I really *have* seen dependable evidence about my God"?

Inspiration and the Sixty-Six

First of all, let's briefly consider the question: *Do our Bibles have the right collection of sixty-six books?* Some Bibles, particularly those used by our Roman Catholic friends, have many more books than that, and these books together are usually called the Apocrypha. In Catholic Bibles the dozen or so books of the Apocrypha are often not collected in the middle, but scattered throughout the Old Testament. Now what do you do when you are visiting a friend who has a Bible with these extra books and that individual has confidence that his or her Bible is the inspired word of God? Are you going to say, "Well, your version is not inspired but mine is"? Would using 2 Timothy clear up the question of whose Bible is inspired? "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching..." 2 Timothy 3:16, RSV. Does that settle the question? What books are being referred to as "all Scripture"?

The *King James Version* of 2 Timothy 3:16 is familiar to many: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God." But the early editions of that same Bible contained all those extra books that are in the Roman Catholic Bibles. In fact the Apocrypha remained in *King James Version* Bibles until 1827. And the reason it was left out in 1827 was that the British

and Foreign Bible Society decided that it didn't have the funds to continue circulating those Apocryphal books along with the sixty-six books of the Protestant Bible. So quoting 2 Timothy 3:16 in the KJV won't settle the question.

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The Bible is a record of the evidence upon which we base our decision about God, and whether we find Him worthy of our trust.

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Luther was the first translator to gather these extra books together and put them in the middle, between the Old and New Testaments. His influential German Bible version had much to do with the rise of the Reformation. As a Roman Catholic translating from the original, he had to decide whether or not to include the extra books that were scattered throughout his Old Testament. So he gathered them together and put them in the middle with the following notice: "These books are interesting and useful to read, but not for doctrine." Then when he turned his attention to the New Testament, you may remember, he came to four books that he couldn't fit in there too well either. He didn't call them Apocryphal, but saw in them less authority because they "didn't teach Christ." So he put Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation at the end, where they remain to this day in German Bibles.

If you are in a Roman Catholic home, of course, your Catholic friend may say, "Well, my Bible has that verse (2 Timothy 3:16): 'All Scripture is inspired of God,' and since this is my Scripture that verse proves the inspiration of the Apocrypha." Before you answer, it is important to know that the Greek of 2 Timothy can be translated another way, and I believe the context dictates that it be so translated. Look at how the *New English Bible* puts it: "*Every inspired Scripture* [emphasis supplied] has its use for teaching the truth..." 2 Timothy 3:16, NEB. That means there is such a thing as "uninspired scripture." You see, it is very likely that Timothy's Bible was the Greek Old Testament, which contained these extra books. And that's why Paul had to say to Timothy, "Timothy, you have many books in your possession, but only that scripture which is inspired of God is profitable."

Notice the total context of what Paul wrote to that young pastor:

But for your part, stand by the truths you have learned and are

assured of. Remember from whom you learned them; remember that from early childhood you have been familiar with the sacred writings, which have power to make you wise and lead you to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Every inspired scripture has its use for teaching the truth and refuting error, or for reformation of manners and discipline in right living, so that the man who belongs to God may be efficient and equipped for good work of every kind. 2 Timothy 3:14–17, NEB.

How We Got the Sixty-Six

Now to orthodox Jews, the ones who had the Bible first, the Scriptures consisted of only the thirty-nine books that make up the Christian Old Testament many of us are familiar with. Sometimes the thirty-nine were combined together and counted as twenty-four or twenty-two. It all began with Moses and the first five. When Moses came down Mount Sinai, carrying the Ten Commandments, his face was shining so brightly they couldn't even look at him (Exodus 34:29). It's no wonder that when he said, "I am giving you some dependable messages from the Lord," there was every reason to take those messages seriously. So they built up a collection of the first five books. These became known as *The Law* or *The Law of Moses*. These five became a standard or rule among the Israelites, like a miniature canon.

Later on other prophets wrote books, and they were all measured by the first standard: *The Law of Moses*. By and by a prophetic collection developed and we had *The Law and The Prophets*. And then other books came along known as *The Writings*, or *The Psalms*. These were compared with *The Prophets* and with *The Law* until finally there were thirty-nine books, divided into three canons: *The Law*, *The Prophets* and *The Writings*; or *The Law*, *the Prophets*, and *the Psalms*, (since Psalms was the first book in the third canon).

The New Testament consistently recognized these three canons without any question as to their dependability. Look at what Jesus told His disciples: "Everything written about me in *the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms* [emphasis supplied] must be fulfilled." Luke 24:44, RSV. There are times in the New Testament when writers shortened The Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms down to just The Law and The Prophets. Sometimes they shorten it clear down to simply "The Law." So sometimes in the New Testament "The Law" means the whole Old Testament.

Look at some examples of these. First of all, in Matthew 5 “the law and the prophets” means the whole Old Testament:

*Think not that I have come to abolish **the law and the prophets**; I've not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from **the law** until all is accomplished [emphases supplied].* Matthew 5:17–18, RSV.

Sometimes we make the mistake of assuming that “the law” in verse 18 must be the Ten Commandments. But Jesus is actually talking about the whole Old Testament under the name of “The Law.” Another illustration of that is the reference in John 10: “Jesus answered them, ‘Is it not written in your law, “I said, you are gods?”’” John 10:34, RSV. Jesus was quoting Psalm 82:6 here, but He called the Psalms “your law.” And He goes on to declare His confidence in the Old Testament: “Jesus answered... ‘We know that what the scripture says is true forever.’” John 10:35, GNT. It seems to me that Christ’s confidence in the Old Testament should be of great significance to a Christian.

You can see these three canons of Scripture; The Law, The Prophets and The Writings; developing already in Old Testament times:

*When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? **To the law and to the testimony!** If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn [emphasis supplied].* Isaiah 8:19–20, NIV.

“The law and the testimony” is another way of referring to the five books of Moses and to the prophets. Bit by bit, the canon of the Old Testament was developing. Each book was tested. Does it measure up to the rule? “They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to *the law* or to *the words* that the Lord Almighty had sent by his Spirit *through the earlier prophets* [emphases supplied].” Zechariah 7:12, NIV. Eventually the New Testament was measured by the same canons and the same rules.

Note the books that are in these three canons. The Law includes Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The Prophets include Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea,

Joel, Amos, and all the twelve so-called Minor Prophets up to Malachi. And then The Writings, or The Psalms, include the Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles. Yes, to our surprise, Daniel was included by the Jews in The Writings rather than The Prophets.

You add to these thirty-nine the twenty-seven in the New Testament canon and you have the sixty-six books of the Protestant Bible. But these are not the only books that have ever claimed to be biblical. There may be more such books outside the Bible than inside it. Many of them were written during the time between the Testaments, and some bear a striking resemblance to the books that are in the biblical canons. About a dozen of them were taken so seriously by the Jews outside of Palestine, that they found their place in the Greek Old Testament. The *Septuagint* (as the Greek Old Testament was called), became the Bible most widely used by early Christians. And that's how those extra books (called the Apocrypha) found a fixed place in the Latin Bible and in Roman Catholic Bibles today. The Old Testament Apocryphal books are: I and II Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Additions to Esther (usually woven into biblical Esther), Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus (different from Ecclesiastes), Baruch, Susanna, Song of the Three Children, Bel and the Dragon (these last three are often included in Catholic versions of Daniel), Prayer of Manasseh, and I and II Maccabees.

Although these books are found in Catholic Bibles, the ancient Jews did not recognize them as inspired Scripture. They called them "hidden," suggesting they were not genuine. And many Christians have agreed with the Jews, including many Catholic theologians and biblical scholars. Even the church father Jerome did not want to include them in his revision of the Latin Bible (the *Vulgate*). But the people were so accustomed to them, they insisted they be left there. When Luther gathered them in the middle and took the position on them that he did, the Catholic Church felt that it had to respond. So at the Council of Trent in 1546, the books of the Apocrypha were pronounced sacred and canonical. That's why they are in such Catholic Bibles as the *Jerusalem* and the *New American*.

How should we decide which books belong and which books do not? I think it helps a great deal to know that there were many other "hidden" books whose sources were unknown and whose teaching was even more questionable. The collection of these is called the Old

Testament “Pseudepigrapha,” which is based on the Greek words for “falsely inscribed.” These books were not only rejected as Scripture by the early Christians but also by our Roman Catholic friends to this day. Some of the best known of these are the Testament of Adam, the Book of Jubilees, Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, Testament of Job, the Book of Enoch, the Sibylline Oracles, the Assumption of Moses, the Ascension of Isaiah, the Psalms of Solomon, the Apocalypse of Zephaniah, and the Story of Ahikar.

One can go even further. There is a whole collection of books called the New Testament Apocrypha. These include books like the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Truth, the Acts of John, the Acts of Paul, the Acts of Paul and Thecla, the Acts of Peter, the Acts of Barnabas, the Apocalypse of Peter, the Apocalypse of Paul, the Epistle to the Laodiceans, 3 Corinthians, and so forth. These books were written in the early centuries of the church and expand on the life and teachings of Jesus and the apostles.

How should one decide which books belong and which books do not? I think it helps a great deal to know the origin of these books. The opinion of centuries of believers, who were much closer to the writing of these books than we are, is of consequence. But nothing compares with reading them all. I have done it several times. It takes a long weekend without any interruption. I read all the way through the Old Testament and then the Old Testament Apocrypha and the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and the New Testament, and the New Testament Apocrypha. And when you arrive at the Revelation of Peter, you haven't forgotten Maccabees and Enoch and Romans and Genesis. They are still in your mind. Based on that experience, I think the sixty-six books of the Protestant Bible are in a class all by themselves.

There are some Apocryphal books that seem more acceptable than others. But as you go into even the book of Maccabees, it teaches that “it's a good thing to pray for the dead, that they may be relieved of their sins (2 Maccabees 12:43–45).” If it's true that our prayers to God can change the status of somebody who died a rebel, it would cancel out much of what the Bible says about God. “The giving of alms atones for sin (Sirach 3:30).” Do you see what model of sin that implies? There are many hard to believe stories in the New Testament Apocrypha: stories of magic and mystery. How Peter made a camel go through the eye of a needle. The story of John and the bedbugs. The story of how Peter prayed that Simon Magus would fall down over the city of Rome. And

when it happened, Simon broke his leg in three places. You should see these stories. But when you read them all together, I agree with Catholic Jerome, Protestant Luther and the great Bible Societies, that the sixty-six are the only ones that really measure up.

Do We Have the Right Words?

That brings us to the question, “Do we have the right words?” That’s a huge subject. There are people who devote all their lives to this question. First of all, I am sure you are aware that the Bible was not written in English, but in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Not only that, ancient written Hebrew provided only the consonants. Although they were not written out, the vowels were understood by the original readers. Scholars have worked ever since to provide the appropriate vowels to the Hebrew words of the Bible. The Greek, on the other hand, was all in capital letters and there was no separation between the words. Can you imagine reading that? For example, how would you read the phrase: GODISNOWHERE. Are you going to read it as an atheist might? “God is nowhere.” Or are you going to say as a believer might? “God is now here.” No wonder the saints have argued and accused each other over the meaning of the Bible. But it’s often much more innocent than that. How easily one could make a mistake.

All the original copies of the Bible have disappeared. There are thousands of hand-written copies, though, that have come down to us through the years. And no two of them are the same, which could distress a person who doesn’t know better. But there is a bright side to this. When you look at thousands of these manuscripts, and note what the differences are like, you would be moved to say that no other ancient document has been preserved with such care and accuracy as the books of the Bible. Let me quote the one-time curator of the British Museum, who spent a lifetime studying such matters, “You can pick the Bible up with confidence and say, for all practical purposes, we have the word of God.”

Can We Trust the Translations?

But what about all the translations? There are about two thousand languages on earth, and there are at least parts of the Bible in almost every one of those languages. And hundreds of translations in English! The story behind each of them is long and colorful. Beginning in 1382, the “Morning Star of the Reformation,” Wycliffe, directed the translation of a magnificent Bible, all written out by hand. In 1525 along came

Tyndale, who provided the first printed English New Testament. Ninety percent of Tyndale's work is in our *King James Version*. In his Bible he was inclined to include some notes that were rather inflammatory, such as opposite the story of the golden calf: "Yea, but the Pope's bull slayeth more than Aaron's calf." This was hardly designed to win him friends and it may have cost him his life. Tyndale was arrested, strangled, and burned to death at the stake for daring to translate the Bible into such readable English.

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In Tyndale's day they burned the translator. In modern times, they burn the translation.

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In 1599 the great Geneva Bible was produced by the Calvinists who fled from England to the Continent. It is also called the "Breeches Bible," because it says that "Adam and Eve took fig leaves and sewed unto themselves breeches." And then in 1611 came the great *King James Version*. It was published with no notes, because the notes in preceding Bibles had stirred up so much trouble. And then there are all the revisions of the *King James: The English Revised*, *The American Revised*, *The Revised Standard*, *The New American Standard Bible*, and even *The New King James Version*.

Around the beginning of the Twentieth Century, the modern speech Bibles began to appear. I think of Moffatt's great work, and Weymouth's, and Goodspeed. The *Goodspeed New Testament* is still one of the very best, finished in 1923. But some were opposed to using modern speech in Bibles. In fact, some have even thought that the *King James* was too vulgar. A Boston man named Dickinson (in 1833), for that reason, redid the *King James Version*. For example, when Elizabeth and Mary met together during their pregnancies, it says in the *King James*, "the babe leapt in her [Elizabeth's] womb" (Luke 1:41). And Mr. Dickinson thought that was very crude. So in his Bible he changed it to, "the embryo was joyfully agitated." The whole Bible reads like that, all the way through.

And then there are versions that were produced by women: Mrs. Montgomery in 1925 and Helen Spurrell in 1885. There have also been many magnificent Roman Catholic translations—the *Knox*, the *Kleist and Lilly*, the *Jerusalem*, the *New American*, the *Spencer*, the *Alberhouse*, and the *Rheims-Douay*, the one that started it all. There are

also great Jewish translations. I recall the quality translation of Genesis 2:7 in one of them: “God breathed into man the breath of life and man became a living being.” A footnote to that excellent translation says that the Hebrew word for “soul” means “the whole person, even the blood in his veins.”

There are also joint Protestant–Catholic Bibles, for example, the *Revised Standard Version–RC* (Roman Catholic.) There is even a joint Protestant, Catholic and Jewish Bible — the biggest one ever to come out — *The Anchor Bible*. In addition to these, there are translations that are especially helpful for study, *The New Testament from Twenty-six Translations*, for example. There are also smaller collections of translations, some with four columns and some with two.

Some translations are extremely readable, like *Phillips*. I think his work is so magnificent. Then there is the *Good News Bible*, or *Today’s English Version*, by the American Bible Society. The *New English Bible* was England’s desperate attempt to save the British Isles for Christianity. That explains why they made that one so different and so readable.

And then there are the paraphrases, like *The Living Bible*. It is very rewarding to read, even though its author said it is only a paraphrase. Included in this category of paraphrases are the *Cotton Patch New Testament*, *Letters to the Saints in Atlanta, Georgia*, and *God Is For Real, Man*. The last one is the ultimate limit, trying to make the Bible readable to the gangs that roamed the streets of New York at that time. Would you support a translator who would do that? The 23rd Psalm in that translation turns out to be, “The Lord is my probation officer,” because the intended readers had never seen sheep or a shepherd on the streets of New York. I have unlimited respect for the people who have been willing to do all this work. It takes a lifetime to produce some of these translations. I even have room for the *Reader’s Digest Bible*, though it leaves out some of my favorite sections. It is only meant to be an appetizer.

The Bible has never been so available, and has never been so readable. Fear of versions has been lessening. People aren’t burning new translations, the way someone did when the *Revised Standard Version* first appeared. The address of that public burning was appropriately Furnace Street, Akron, Ohio. The right attitude towards versions, I think, is in the original Preface to the *King James Bible*. I wish it were still there. You see, nobody wanted the *King James* when it first came

out. It wasn't just the size, people were upset that the words were changed. So the men who prepared this great Bible say in the introduction, "Hath the Kingdom of God become words and syllables? Why should we be in bondage to them when we may be free?"

"In many and various ways" (Hebrews 1:1-3) God has spoken to us through the years. And in many and various ways those words have been translated into English and most of the other languages on this earth. How else could the gospel go to all the world? How could people find out about our God? So there is no substitute for taking the Bible (in the versions of your choice) and sitting down together to read and study. Never has the evidence contained in the Bible been so readily available. And having all this evidence so readily available, let's read it. Can we confidently come to the conclusion that we understand the meaning? That the evidence is really there? That the Bible can be trusted? And, as some of us who have spent a lot of time reading these versions believe; the Author who is behind the Bible can be trusted because there is trustworthy evidence in the record.

Questions and Answers

Louis Venden: No one has wanted to burn a new version in quite some time, as far as I know. Although I do know someone who wanted to burn the *Reader's Digest Bible*.

Graham Maxwell: Well, that's an improvement, in any case. In Tyndale's day they burned the translator. In modern times, they burn the translation. Now they cremate people with words as they talk about them in the press.

Lou: In a way Graham, I can understand the frustration of a person who says, "Wouldn't it be better to get rid of all these versions? It's so confusing. Why are there so many?" I go down to the religious book store and I say, "I would like to buy a Bible." But it's not that simple any more. The sales person responds, "Well now, what version do you want?" How do you respond to the confusion that is created by all these versions?

Graham: It's a pity that such a blessing is perceived as confusion. I think a lot depends on how much one knows about the source of the Bible. If it had been written originally in our own language, maybe one version would be enough. But when you look at the Greek and the Hebrew and the Aramaic, you realize that the same phrase can be translated in different ways. Like, "Be ye therefore perfect," in Matthew 5:48.

Now is that a command, or is it a promise? You cannot tell from the Greek. It is very difficult to bring that ambiguity over into English. This is where Goodspeed shows himself such a master. His English translation of Matthew 5:48 is, “You are to be perfect.” That can be read as either a command or a promise. But most versions would say it either one way or the other. So in view of the difficulty of bringing ambiguity over into English, I don’t want to limit myself to a single version that would give me only one possibility. I want to have all the possibilities that are available.

Lou: I noticed you spoke of Goodspeed, I’ve sometimes thought that was your favorite. But then I’ve heard you say, “Well, today this one is my favorite, but tomorrow it may not be.” Of all these translations, which one is the most trustworthy and reliable?

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In view of the difficulty of bringing ambiguity over into English, I don’t want to limit myself to a single Bible version, I want to have all the possibilities that are available.

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Graham: It’s simply incredible that the *Goodspeed* translation has held up so well over the decades. By the way, Goodspeed did the New Testament and he did the Apocrypha. He did not do the Old. In the “Chicago Bible,” a group of others under Dr. Smith did the Old. That’s why it’s sometimes called the *Smith-Goodspeed Bible*. Which is my favorite? Which is the best? It all depends on what you use it for. When I get home at night, if I want to put my feet up and read something inspiring, it’s still difficult to beat *Phillips*. Absolutely marvelous! But if I am doing serious preparation for teaching, I’ll have the original out in front of me but also several versions. One of them would be the *Revised Standard Version*. Though it was burned in 1952, it has proven to be one of the most precise, conservative, and safe English translations ever.

Lou: Do you think that a group translation, a committee translation, is a little more reliable than one by an individual?

Graham: That’s a very useful question. Group translations may be a little more dull. For example, when the *Revised Standard Version* was being prepared, they always had to have a two-thirds vote before they would arrive at a decision. Often, Goodspeed was on the committee and so was Moffatt. Sometimes they would disagree with the two-thirds vote. So when it was all over, Goodspeed wrote a book, *Problems of New*

Testament Translation, to list the one hundred or so places where he was voted down. And it's very exciting reading. So if the translator is an individual, there is a little more freedom. And in spots an individual translation may even be more correct, because the group had to arrive at a compromise in order to get the two-thirds vote. You know, textbooks written by committees aren't as exciting as books written by an individual.

Lou: Maybe we all need to learn Hebrew and Greek. Is that the best answer to the translation problem; to read it in the original for ourselves?

Graham: I like to say to medical, dental and nursing students that I hope they won't spend as much time studying Hebrew and Aramaic and Greek as I have. We live in an age of specialization. When I have a pain somewhere, I don't want their expertise in the biblical languages. I want their help for my specific problem. So let them study their specialty and let me study mine. I'll go to them when I need their help, and they're welcome to phone me when they need my help on the biblical languages. Thanks to the existence of these wonderful translations, however, it isn't necessary for most people to study the languages. But there ought to be somebody in the community whom you could phone when a technical problem arises.

Lou: You are saying, then, that the multiplicity of versions is a real strength.

Graham: That's where the safety is. I wouldn't want just one translation. Sometimes I have almost my whole collection of 150 out on the floor.

Lou: I have heard the question raised: Isn't it true that the translator's theological positions are often reflected in their translations? For example, aren't the Ten Commandments translated differently in the Roman Catholic Bible? Aren't they numbered differently? Don't they read differently?

Graham: On the contrary, Catholic translations are very precise. Some of the best translations are of Roman Catholic origin, although they don't always use the most understandable English. Nevertheless, over time, Catholic translations have become clearer and clearer. They are frankly some of the very best. *The Jerusalem Bible* is very readable. So is the *New American Bible*.

To show you how candid and dependable the Catholic versions are, let me refer to the *Kleist and Lilly* translation. In Romans 6:3-6, where

there is a reference to being buried in baptism, there is a footnote by these two Jesuit scholars at the bottom. “Paul is obviously alluding here to the early Christian custom of baptism by immersion. The descent into the water is suggestive of descent into the grave. The ascent from the water is suggestive of resurrection to newness of life.” I can’t think of a better note than that.

Coming back to your original question, the Ten Commandments read exactly the same in Catholic Bibles. They do count them differently, as you know. The Sabbath commandment is number three. So if you were to ask a Catholic regarding the Church’s position on the fourth commandment, you’d be surprised by the response. But they are not the only ones. Luther and some others have counted the Sabbath as number three and split the tenth commandment into two; nine and ten. But that doesn’t affect the message of the biblical text.

Lou: Graham, you referred earlier to paraphrases and to *The Living Bible*. There has been considerable controversy over them. Is a paraphrase a real Bible? Are they trustworthy?

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*I like to relax when I’m in someone else’s home and say,
“Which Bible do you have there? Let’s use yours.”*

.....

Graham: Well, in the first place, there is no way to translate without paraphrasing. So there is some paraphrasing in every single translation, unless the translator goes word for word literal, as in a Greek/English transliteration, for example. But such translations tend to be quite lame with the words out of proper English order. Have you ever tried to translate French into English word for word? It doesn’t make much sense. So all translations are somewhat paraphrased. That means a re-phrasing of the original text.

Are paraphrases trustworthy? It depends on how far you go. The author of *The Living Bible*, for example (Kenneth Taylor), departed a long way from the original text. In fact, sometimes he expanded a sentence into a whole paragraph! There’s no way you could reproduce the original languages from *The Living Bible*. You almost could with *Goodspeed*. That’s what is so amazing. Goodspeed wrote in a readable American idiom, but without multiplying words. On the other hand, with Taylor’s paraphrases (*The Living Bible*), when he’s right, he’s clearly and brilliantly right. And when he’s wrong, in my opinion, he’s very clearly wrong.

The best thing about it is — he’s clear.

Lou: But sometimes clearly wrong.

Graham: Well, let me show you a time he gets it right, and I’ll skip the wrong one. Psalm 120:1, KJV: “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help.” That’s beautiful. It’s like being in Loma Linda, and looking across the valley to the snow-covered mountains. Very inspiring. But in the Bible, the Psalmist was referring to the fertility cults at the top of the hill. According to Hosea, the leaders of Israel went up into those mountains to sacrifice with the cult prostitutes (Hosea 4:13–14). They were going up to those groves and engaging in immorality. And so the 120th Psalm actually says in the Hebrew: “Shall I lift up mine eyes unto the hills? Never. My help comes from the Lord” (Psalm 120:1–2). So Dr. Taylor paraphrases: “Shall I look to the mountain gods for help? Never. I will look to the God who created the mountains.” I say he is brilliantly right on this text, though it is a rather free paraphrase. I wouldn’t be afraid to use *The Living Bible*, but in the interests of precision, I would want to have some of these others alongside.

Lou: When I go to a religious bookstore and ask for a Bible, I notice Bibles that are advertised as helping me with a lot of explanatory notes. What about that kind of thing? Can that be useful?

Graham: Some are helpful and some are not. The notes certainly aren’t inspired. The headings aren’t either. That’s true even when the heading in the Song of Solomon says, “Christ’s Love for the Church.” That’s an old tradition, but it’s not inspired. For another example, there’s an extraordinary note in one printing of *The Matthew’s Bible* (around 1549) to Peter’s comment that wives should obey their husbands in all things (1 Peter 3:1). In the margin of this Bible, which has lots of helpful notes, it says, “Yet it is the duty of the husband to beat the fear of the Lord into his wife, that she may learn to obey.” Comments like this leave me in favor of having the text pure and unadulterated, so I can make up my own mind. There are also many Bibles with helpful margins, so long as you realize they do not come with the same inspiration, and you read them carefully.

Lou: Does your church, the Seventh-day Adventist church, have an official version?

Graham: I think some have rather wished so. But it speaks well of our worldwide outlook that we don’t limit ourselves to an official version. We wish to share the picture of God with every person under heaven, in all the languages of earth. So how can we have one official transla-

tion? There's only one thing that could be official, and that's the original: The Hebrew, the Aramaic, and the Greek, from which all translations ultimately come. But we're prepared to go to the world using any version, any translation. And that's why I like to relax when I'm in someone else's home and say, "Which Bible do you have there? Let's use yours."

Lou: That leads to another question. If I heard you rightly, we do not have any of the original words that the prophet Isaiah wrote, for example. We have copies of an earlier copy. And in these manuscripts there are a number of variations. In other words, a particular manuscript may add a word, leave one out, or use a completely different word. Are there any Christian beliefs, such as the picture of God, that are affected by these variations?

Graham: It's very interesting to look through all of them and see how relatively few issues there are and then look at some of the most colorful ones. Since you mentioned it, let me pick an illustration that affects the number one Christian belief, the picture of God. John 5:3-4, in the *King James Bible*, describes a large crowd of sick people gathered at the pool of Bethesda. It had five porches, and every once in a while the water would move. Now what caused the water to move?

The way the story is told in the KJV, God would look out over the parapets of heaven, see the crowd there, call over His angels and say, "It's worth going down again. Go down and stir up the water. And remember, first one in is healed." And this went on for years and years and years. Can you imagine an angel saying to God, "God, we've been watching a man there struggling for thirty-three years to get in, and we angels are so sorry for him; could we bend the rule this once and heal him? Because there's no way he's going to get in." And God says, "You know I never change. First one in is healed."

I never did like that story. And I was so relieved to start learning Greek in 1938 and discover that the idea that an angel stirred the water is a legend that crept in later on. The older manuscripts simply say, "the water moved," without any explanation. Superstitious readers probably assumed that an angel did it. More likely, it was drainage from the temple area, a spring, or an intermittent underground stream. In any case, that legend eventually crept into the text.

Look in the early manuscripts and you have a magnificent story there. The real truth was that on a Saturday afternoon God walked by. And the paralyzed man looked up and saw the kindest face he had ever

seen. And the kind face said, “Would you like to be well?” And he said, “I surely would.” And that kind face did not berate the man for squandering his health in youthful self-indulgence. He simply said, “Then pick up your little mat and go home, and you will be well.” That’s the real picture of God.

Lou: So the angel story actually appears in a manuscript?

Graham: Quite a few, but later on.

Lou: Does that mean our more recent versions, which have taken manuscript study quite seriously, would be more reliable?

Graham: They tend to be based on the early manuscripts, which we didn’t know about at the time the *King James* was translated. But there isn’t a long list of these strange variations. I picked out a more colorful one. There are very few. And we could get along without every one of them. One that might seem helpful is the Trinity text in 1 John 5:7–8 (KJV) that has no support at all in the Greek manuscripts. But I never did think it was the best way to support the Trinity anyway. You can do that from the Gospel of John and elsewhere much better. So we don’t lose anything by going back and comparing all these hundreds and thousands of manuscripts. By looking at the evidence as a whole, there is less danger of distortion.

Lou: You mentioned the apocryphal books of the Old Testament, and others related to the New Testament. I’m under the impression that in the New Testament there are some quotations from the Old Testament Apocrypha. What about that?

Graham: Well, there are some interesting similarities. Whether they’re quotations or not is debatable. In Jude it mentions that Michael the Archangel was going down to resurrect Moses, and he and Satan argued about it (Jude 1:9). That story is told in some detail in *The Assumption of Moses*, which is a pseudepigraphical book from the time between the testaments. Of course, if the story were true, then the two accounts could be based on a common source. A second similarity would be the reference, also in Jude, where it says, “Enoch, the seventh from Adam, predicted the Lord would come with ten thousand of His saints” (based on Jude 1:14). That is in the pseudepigraphical book of *Enoch*. Of course, if Enoch said that stunning thing before the Flood, the “Lord is coming with ten thousand of His saints,” that would have been told over many a back fence. And eventually those memorable words found their place in both the apocryphal books and also in the book of Jude.

Lou: So you are saying that if something is in the Apocrypha, that

does not make it automatically wrong.

Graham: Right! There is a long list of things in the Apocrypha which are quite evidently true. John was cast into a cauldron of boiling oil and survived, Peter was crucified upside down, and Isaiah was sawed in half in a hollow log. The latter is from *The Martyrdom of Isaiah*. Newspapers have some truth in them too, from time to time.

Lou: I was interested that you have read all the ancient books related to the Bible and you see a distinction between the sixty-six books in the biblical canon and all of these pseudepigraphical and apocryphal books.

Graham: An interesting example is the apocryphal story of Jesus playing with one of His friends. The boy either threw a stone, as one manuscript says, or he bumped Jesus, according to another, and Jesus in anger turned to curse His playmate and the playmate died. And the parents of the dead boy came to Joseph and Mary and said, "Please, remove yourselves from this community. We do not want this violent child living among us." They were talking about Jesus! I could tell you dozens more stories like that from the New Testament Apocrypha.

Lou: Here's another question, shifting gears a bit. "You spoke about sanctification. What is this? If we sincerely accept Jesus as our Savior, how can we ever be lost? Once we are saved, aren't we always saved?"

Graham: The question is based on a rather legal understanding of what went wrong. But if what went wrong is that God's creatures began to distrust, became rebellious and left God, as it were, we not only need to be set right, but we want to be kept right. We want to be kept in that relationship of love and trust and admiration and willingness to listen. But I could be set right and kept right for a while, and still be free to leave. And that's how I understand what Paul said, when he wrote, "I discipline myself very closely, lest having preached to others, I myself should be disqualified" (1 Corinthians 9:27). The very essence of the truth about God is that He values nothing higher than our freedom. It tells me that a million years down the line, I'll still be free to go.

Lou: An eleven year old wrote in, "Why are there so many views of who God is?" Could you cover all that in about thirty seconds?

Graham: There *are* so many views of God. You couldn't list them in thirty seconds. I think they arise from many different sources. One is from reading the Bible selectively, here a little and there a little, rather than taking it as a whole. Another reason is that we might bring our

view of God into our reading of the text. And there is also the influence of the adversary behind the scenes. But I think among people who really want to know God, the greatest source of diversity is that we each have our favorite texts about God. I have my text. You have your text. If we take the Bible as a whole, however, there is a greater possibility that we might come into the kind of unity that Paul talks about in Ephesians (Ephesians 4:13, KJV), a “unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.” And that’s our goal in this book.

Which brings me to the topic of the next chapter. “If we have a reliable record of the evidence, can we be confident that we correctly understand the meaning?” That topic is looking more and more important as we carry on these conversations about God.

Chapter Six

Evaluating the Evidence

We have learned from our study of the Bible that all God asks of us is trust. If we would only trust in Him enough, He could readily heal the damage sin has done. That is all He asked before the war began. That's all He asks now of those who have been damaged and caught up in this war. All He will ever ask of us in the future is trust. Where there is mutual trust and trustworthiness, no cheating, there is perfect security, perfect freedom, perfect peace. And this is what God desires the most. But is that conclusion based on the right interpretation of the Bible? Have we rightly weighed and understood the biblical evidence?

Others have read the biblical evidence and drawn different conclusions. Many of these are sincere followers of God, yet they perceive Him as arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe. Many of them earnestly seek to win others to that kind of God. But if that is the kind of person God is, then He is not worthy of our trust, nor is He safe to trust. Sadly, this picture of God sounds a lot like the accusations Satan has made against God from the beginning of the conflict.

In responding to the accusations against Him, God is not willing to issue mere claims or denials. Anybody could do that. But when a person has been falsely accused of being untrustworthy, it does no good to deny it or to simply claim to be trustworthy. So God has answered the charges against Him with the evidence of demonstration. Only by the demonstration of trustworthiness over a sufficiently long period of time, and under a great variety of circumstances, can trust be re-established and confirmed. The Bible is a record of just such a demonstration.

The best approach, then, is to pick up our Bibles and read the evidence, all of it. But when we pick up our Bibles, there are questions that naturally arise. We considered three of them in the previous chapter. How do we know we have the right books? How do we know we have the words accurately preserved through all the centuries? And how do we know they have been accurately translated from the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek? We have shown that there is more than enough evidence for answering those questions. We can confidently say that for all practical purposes we have the books of the Bible as originally written. And the safest approach for interpreting the Bible books is to read them as a whole. When you approach things that way, almost every version is

dependable.

Finding the Correct Meaning

In this chapter, there is another question that deserves to be considered. Even if we have the right books and the right words, and even if we have those words adequately translated, what about the meaning? The Bible was written in other languages, for other peoples in other cultures. So how can we, living in different parts of the world, this far down through the centuries, feel confident that we have really found the correct meaning? The only way, I believe, is to pick up the Bible, read it through, and see what we can learn about God. I am so grateful for the more than one hundred times I've gone through all sixty-six books in company with others. Each time we do it there are certain questions that arise. Some of them are simple ones that are quite readily resolved. I thought we might look at some of those first.

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The best loved English version in all history has been the *King James Version*. But reading through that Bible, what does one do with a passage like Habakkuk 2:7: "Thou shalt be for booties unto them." What does that mean? Can you see booties hanging from the rear view mirror in a car? Is that what that is? Or what about Job 41:18: "By his neesings a light doth shine..." Have you seen any neesings lately? Now the old English word booties meant loot, or plunder. Neesings meant sneezings. Then Exodus 28:11 speaks of "ouches of gold." That would seem like something the dentist should be concerned about. And yet it actually meant settings in jewelry. Luke 17:9 says: "I trow not." Have you trowed lately? That actually means "I think not."

These are not errors in the *King James*. It is just that with the passage of time, about a thousand words in that Bible have changed their meaning; in fact sometimes the meaning is completely reversed. But there are easy remedies for the student of Scripture. Whole books have been written on the archaic words in the *King James Version*. Another option is to look these words up in a Bible dictionary or a commentary.

There is even the revision called the *New King James*. The meanings given in the paragraph above were taken from that modernized version of the *King James*. Another option is to compare the KJV with any other modern version and the meaning of most of these unfamiliar words would become clear.

A slightly more significant change in the meaning of a word is in Romans 1:13, KJV: "Often times I purposed to come unto you, (but was *let* [emphasis supplied] hitherto,)..." Well, if Paul was let, why didn't he go? "Let" in those days did not mean to permit; it meant to prevent or hinder. This is still the word often used in the game of tennis. If you've served and your ball has hit the net and dropped into the appropriate service box on the other side, it is not a "net ball," it is supposed to be a "let ball." At Wimbledon it is always a "let ball," which means a ball that was hindered or prevented from proceeding on to the server's goal. In Romans 1:13, Paul intended to visit Rome, but he was hindered from doing so.

An even more significant illustration of meaning change is in 1 Thessalonians 4:15, KJV: "We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not *prevent* [emphasis supplied] them which are asleep." Paul surely wasn't saying that when the Lord comes and the dead rise, we who are alive won't want the dead to go up first. If that were true, we wouldn't be very safe to save, doing that to those former saints now rising! But it has no such meaning. The old English word "prevent" actually means "to precede, to go before." *Now* the passage makes sense. "Prevent" in those days did not mean prevent, it meant to precede.

The early Christians were grieving that some of their loved ones had died before the Lord returned. They had been under the impression that they would live to see Him come. What would you tell a dying Christian who said in disappointment, "I had hoped I would live to see the Lord come"? There's a beautiful message in 1 Thessalonians 4, where Paul says, "Look, the dead are at no disadvantage. We who are alive and remain shall not precede those who have fallen asleep." Who will rise first? The dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up with them to meet the Lord in the air. This is a great paragraph to read at funerals. But it has to be translated right. Not that it is an error. It's just that the key word has changed meaning through the years. The passage is a great message of comfort when it is properly translated into modern speech.

Another puzzling passage, which sometimes gives rise to strange theology, is in John 20:17, KJV. Mary sees Jesus on resurrection Sunday and falls at His feet to worship Him. And Jesus says, "Touch Me not." Now why couldn't she touch Him? Jesus explains: "I am not yet ascended to My Father." Does that mean that if Mary had touched Jesus, He would not have been able to go up to heaven, and the whole plan of salvation would have come to nothing? Was her restraint that morning as important as the crucifixion? That is impossible. That would really violate common sense. So one needs to look more carefully. In the original language, there are two ways of saying "don't do" something. One is, "don't begin to do it." The other is, "don't go on doing it." In this text Jesus was saying: "Don't go on holding Me. Don't cling to Me." The modern versions all have this correctly. Then it is a perfectly gracious message. There is nothing arbitrary about it at all.

Another important one is John 2:4. Perhaps you remember the wedding at Cana, when they ran out of wine and Mary said to Jesus, "They need some wine" (John 2:3). Did He turn to His mother and say, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" Let's say you have a son who is not responding too politely when his mother asks for help doing the dishes. So you think, "Well, at worship we'll read about how polite Jesus always was to His mother. Why don't we read the Gospel of John for worship?" If you do that, John 1 will be all right. But then you will come to John 2 and Cana. You are reading, hoping that your son will listen and see how polite Jesus always was. And then Jesus says to His mother, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" And your son says, "That is what I will do next time Mother asks me to dry the dishes. I'll say, 'Woman, what have I to do with thee?'" Then you'll wish you had started reading some other Gospel!

You know that can't be the case. God is love and love is never rude. You know that Jesus wasn't rude. Once again we need to get back into the language, the culture, and the idiom of the day. "Woman" can mean wife or mother or whatever the circumstances called for. What Jesus said was the equivalent of "mother," not just "woman." "Mother, how is it you bring that problem to Me? I have never performed a miracle before. My hour has not yet come." I once heard a Jewish scholar say, "One thing is for sure, Jesus spoke politely to His mother in the idiom of the day." In the *Phillips* translation, it says: "Mother, why do you bring that problem to Me?"

What About the More Difficult Questions?

There are many other questions that arise. The ones we have just brought up have been easy to handle. If you have access to a modern version, none of them will be a problem. But a more serious question arises. Why do there seem to be so few theological statements in the Bible? You can go pages and pages without a statement about God. Why doesn't the Bible read: "God is love, God never changes, God can be trusted"? If it did, many of us would be willing to believe it. But those are just claims, and the Bible itself warns against accepting mere claims. We need evidence. We need demonstration. Which leads to the next question that often arises.

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Why is there so much historical detail in the Bible? So much of it seems of such little importance. But if God's way of revealing Himself is demonstration, it is involving Himself in human affairs and saying, "Watch the way I handle situations. That's the way to find out what I'm like."

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Why is there so much historical detail in the Bible? So much of it seems of such little importance. But if God's way of revealing Himself is demonstration, it is involving Himself in human affairs and saying, "Watch the way I handle situations. That's the way to find out what I'm like." If we did not have the historical details, we would not be in a position to recreate those original settings and understand why God would thunder one time and speak so softly another time.

Think of Sinai, for example. God comes down to speak to His people on that mountain, and He thunders. There is lightning, and there's an earthquake. The people are terrified. God says to Moses: "Build a fence around the mountain. Don't let those people come too close. If anyone comes near the fence, he is to be stoned. If anyone breaks through the fence, I'll burst forth upon him and consume him" (based on Exodus 19). And the people stood there so terrified that they said to Moses, "Don't let God speak to us, lest we die" (Exodus 20:19). Now we sing, "Nearer, Still Nearer" and "Speak to Me, Lord," but we are not at the foot of Mount Sinai. Was that some other God? Or was that the Son of God speaking to the people in that manner on Mount Sinai?

Well, we have to recreate the historical setting. How were they

behaving at the foot of the mountain? They were grumbling, and complaining, and irreverent. And the only way God could get their attention, and hold it long enough to share some truth about Himself, was to run the risk of terrifying them. Even so, forty days later, when the thunders had died away, they were dancing drunk and irreverent around the golden calf. Evidently God had to raise His voice that loud because of the circumstances prevailing at the time.

An illustration of God's preferred way of persuading us — not with denials, not with claims, but with evidence — is provided by the story of John the Baptist. John risked his life to present his cousin Jesus to the people. And how gracious he had been: "He must increase, but I must decrease." John 3:30. Now John was in prison. Jesus taught that you really ought to visit people in prison (Matthew 25:39–40); but Jesus never came to see His cousin. And eventually John sent emissaries to Christ. "Are you really the One or not? Should we be looking for another?" Matthew 11:3. That is a sad inquiry. Jesus could have responded to him, "I am indeed the One and I expect you to believe it!" But that could have been the Devil masquerading as Christ. Instead, He invited John's two disciples to spend the day with Him. When the day was over, the two men went back to the prison to see John.

"Did He answer my question?"

"No!"

"But what did you see? What did you hear?"

And in the text it's recorded:

Jesus gave them this reply. "Go and tell John what you hear and what you see — that blind men are recovering their sight, cripples are walking, lepers being healed, the deaf hearing, the dead being raised to life and the good news is being given to those in need. And happy is the man who never loses his faith in me." Matthew 11:4–6, Phillips.

And when the men arrived back at the prison and told this to John, John may have remembered passages like Isaiah 35:6 and Isaiah 61:1. And he knew, "He is the One." Jesus did not answer with a claim, He offered evidence. This is God's way of revealing Himself, and it is the only dependable way.

Why Spend Time on the Old Testament?

We go back to the beginning of our Bibles; to Genesis, Exodus,

Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. And questions inevitably arise, “Why so much? Why so many details? And why so many varied pictures of God?” Then we remember Hebrews 1:

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times, and in various ways [emphases supplied], but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son... The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being...
Hebrews 1:1–3, NIV.

But that raises another question. If we have the Son, why should we spend so much time in the Old Testament? Why not read the Gospels? How clear the picture is there! “Blessed are the poor in spirit” (Matthew 5:3). “Pray for your enemies” (Matthew 5:44). How gracious that whole message is. Then you see the way Jesus treated sinners. How forgiving! Is there anything arbitrary, exacting, or severe in the record of the Gospels? Look at how Jesus treated Judas. He washed the feet of His betrayer the night before He died (John 13). Look at how Jesus seemed to cover people’s sins as much as He possibly could. He didn’t even expose the men who brought that woman taken in adultery (John 8:1–11). And when Jairus’ daughter was raised and the crowd rushed out of the room to celebrate, who was it that called after them and said: “This little girl is hungry. Get her something to eat” (Mark 5:43; Luke 8:55). The Bible even says that the Son of God cried at the funeral of one of His friends (John 11:35).

None of this sounds like the Devil’s picture of God. In the Gospels, Jesus is clearly not the kind of person Satan has made God out to be. Then why don’t we just settle for the magnificent record in the Gospels? However, as one reads on through the Gospels, one cannot help noticing Jesus’ own use of the Old Testament: “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life”. John 5:39, NIV. That’s almost a form of bibliolatry, worshiping the Bible as if there were some magical power in the book. “No,” Jesus said, “these are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.” John 5:39–40, NIV. He speaks of the Old Testament Scriptures as bearing witness to the truth about Him. Why would we want to waste them? And note also how He used the Old Testament in Luke: “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.” Luke 24:27,

NIV.

To really follow Christ's example, then, is to use the Old Testament. Where do you think He found His picture of God? How did He know God so well? He grew up with the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament. We would be very wasteful not to use them too. So back again we go to the Old Testament, remembering that 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us that "all Scripture inspired of God is profitable."

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*To follow Christ's example is to use the Old Testament.
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Scripture starts with the lovely picture in Eden, but at the end of the first week, God says to our first parents, "In the day you eat thereof, you will die" (Genesis 2:17). And right there is the problem. Did God mean, "If you disobey Me, I'll kill you"? That *does* sound arbitrary and severe. Moreover, the original pair were cast out of Eden on their first offense (Genesis 3). What if all children were thrown out of their homes the first time they disobeyed? We would have a lot of homeless children in the world. Are we more forgiving than God?

We read about the Flood, when God drowned not just sinful men, but women and children, babies, and all of their pets (Genesis 6:13, 17; 7:4, and especially 7:21-23). Then we go on to Sodom and Gomorrah, that awful burning of human beings (Genesis 19:24-25). And then the story of Lot's wife (Genesis 19:26). How many of you women, leaving the home where you had reared your children, wouldn't want to take at least one little peek over your shoulder? Yet look what happened to Lot's wife. And look at all the fighting in the Old Testament. And then you find God saying, "When you fight, don't just kill the soldiers. Go into the villages afterwards. Break into the homes. Kill the women. Kill the children. Kill the babies. Kill the pets. Leave alive nothing that breathes" (1 Samuel 15:3). That same day King Saul decided not to kill everybody (1 Samuel 15:8-9). And God was not pleased (1 Samuel 15:18-19, 23-24).

Most of us would say that doesn't sound like the New Testament. How could Jesus get the kind of picture He had of His Father from these stories? And there are more of them, like the stoning of Achan (Joshua 7). The worst part of that story is not so much whether Achan and his

family deserved to be stoned, but that God asked His own people to do the stoning (Joshua 7:12–13, 24–25). And then there’s “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” (Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20; Deuteronomy 19:21; Matthew 5:38), and, “The gluttonous child is to be stoned” (Deuteronomy 21:20–21), and, “The illegitimate child is to be banished from the camp for ten generations” (Deuteronomy 23:2).

Jesus and the Old Testament

No wonder many people don’t know what to do with the Old Testament. No wonder even one of Jesus’ own disciples didn’t. Philip said to Jesus: “Tell us about the Father and we will be satisfied.” John 14:8. What Philip seems to be saying is: “We aren’t asking about You. We worship You as the Son of God. And to our great surprise we are not afraid of You. What we want to know about is the Father. We want to know about the One who drowned all but eight in the Flood (Genesis 7:21–23) and said, ‘If you disobey Me, I will kill you.’ We want to know about the God who killed the firstborn in Egypt (Exodus 11:4–6) and the 185,000 Assyrians (2 Kings 19:35). The God who killed Uzzah when he touched the Ark (2 Samuel 6:3–8) and turned Lot’s wife into a pillar of salt (Genesis 19:26). The One who swallowed up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Numbers 16:1–35), and burned up Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1–3; Numbers 3:2–4), and sent the she bears against the boys who mocked Elisha (2 Kings 2:23–24).” And so on down the list. “Jesus, could the Father possibly be like You?”

Jesus replied: “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9, NIV). Since the account in John 14–16 is quite condensed, Jesus could well have continued at this point, “And Philip, as for those difficult stories in the Old Testament, don’t misunderstand them to mean that the Father is less gracious and less approachable than you have found Me to be. It so happens that I am the One who led Israel in the wilderness (1 Corinthians 10:4). The command to stone Achan was Mine. Philip, why don’t you ask Me *why*? I’d love to tell you. I would almost put off the crucifixion if you disciples would only ask Me.” But according to the record, they never asked Him.

Jesus went on to say something extraordinary to them: “I... will tell you plainly about my Father.” John 16:25, NIV. Then in John 16:26, He spoke words which most Christians have not yet incorporated into the good news. Jesus said: “I do not promise to *intercede* with the Father for you, for the Father loves you himself...[emphasis supplied]” John

16:26–27, *Goodspeed*. These may be the most astonishing words in the Bible; we will spend much time on them later.

What a shame they didn't ask Him what He meant by these words (John 14:9; 16:25–27). Instead, they wanted to argue about the positions they would hold in the Kingdom. Since they didn't ask, then it's really left to us to ask. "Jesus, why did You order the stoning of Achan? How could You, gentle Jesus, do that? And Jesus, why did You set up the whole priestly system of intercession and mediatorial work, when You said there is no need for anyone to intercede with the Father, for the Father Himself loves us?" I wish they would have asked Him these questions, because then the biblical record would hold the most incredible information from the Lord Himself. Well, we had better ask now. If we ask, what important answers may come as we ask of every story, teaching, and event in the Bible, "What does this tell us about God?"

Fortunately, some Pharisees asked Jesus a difficult question which gives us some idea as to what He might have said on those other occasions. When they asked Jesus about divorce, they said, "Jesus, You know the texts that say we may divorce our wives. Moses gave us permission. What is Your view on the subject?" Matthew 19:7. And Jesus explained why He had given Moses directions as to how the people could (if they wished) divorce their wives:

The Pharisees asked him, "Why, then, did Moses give the law for a man to hand his wife a divorce notice and send her away?" Jesus answered, "Moses gave you permission to divorce your wives because you are so hard to teach. But it was not like that at the time of creation." Matthew 19:7–8, GNT.

You see, in Moses' day when you tired of your wife, you simply sent her home (Deuteronomy 24:1–3). You didn't even have to give her camel's fare to get there. All you had to say was, "Out! I have a new wife moving in this afternoon." Through Moses God said, "If you're going to do it, do it in a more humane manner." But God's real feeling is expressed in Malachi: "I hate divorce." Malachi 2:16, RSV. Most people do.

Jesus' reaction to the Pharisees is the key to so many other places in the Bible where God seems to recommend something strange or wrong. God is not contradicting Himself in those places; He's *meeting people where they are*. The Matthew 19 passage illustrates a funda-

mental principle of interpretation, which we will use throughout the rest of our conversations, the principle of context. It was the context, the setting, that determined the meaning of a passage when it was originally written. To the extent that we can recreate and recover that original context, we are in a position to recover the original meaning.

Reading Out of Context

There are plenty of challenging texts in the Bible, when they are read out of context. When Paul says, "It's all right to marry if you must, but I wish you could be as I am (1 Corinthians 7:8-9)," does he mean that married people are second class saints? No, put that statement in its context. Similarly, why did Paul say, "I won't allow a woman to speak in church" (1 Corinthians 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:12)? And why does the Old Testament say, "You cannot boil a kid in its mother's milk" (Exodus 23:19; 34:26; Deuteronomy 14:21)? And then you turn to Judges and read about Samson, filled with the Spirit, killing a thousand men with the jawbone of an ass (Judges 15:15-17). You read about that fat king and the dagger that was thrust into him (Judges 3:15-28). And the dreadful story of the Levite and his concubine (Judges 19:1-30).

One of the worst illustrations of reading the Bible out of context is a book called *The Bible Unmasked*. A man who's avowed purpose was to destroy confidence in the Bible and in God, collected every unpleasant story of immorality and cruelty in the Bible and laid them end to end with the preface, "Would you mothers let your children read this sort of thing?" When I mentioned this book in one of my classes, a student came back with the best answer to this I have ever heard. "If you took the medical book and cut out all the pictures of disease and all the symptoms of disease and printed them all by themselves, it would be a useless, repulsive publication. The only justification for printing those things is that they are always presented in the setting of the remedy."

The Bible is very candid in its depiction and description of sin. But it always presents sin in the setting of the remedy. Otherwise the Bible would not be fit to read. But that's why we must read it as a whole. For example, did you know that there are two books in the Bible that don't even mention God? Not once. But if you take those two books, Esther and Song of Solomon, and put them in the larger setting of the Bible as a whole, they say wonderful things about our God. You see, to be fair with the evidence, we must read it as a whole. After going through the Bible more than a hundred times, this is a summary of my firmest conviction.

tions about its purpose:

The great purpose of the Bible is to reveal the truth about our heavenly Father, that we may be won back to Him in love and trust. This truth, this everlasting good news, is to be found in every one of the sixty-six books. But to discover this truth we must learn more than just what happened to Samson and Delilah, to David and Bathsheba, to Gideon and his fleece. The all-important question is, what do these stories tell us about God?

If one does not ask this question, much of the content of Scripture may seem unrelated to the plan of salvation, even perplexing, sometimes even contradictory. But when one learns to view the Bible as a whole, there emerges a consistent picture of an all-wise and gracious God who seems willing to go to any length to keep in touch with His people, to stoop down and reach them where they are, to speak a language they can understand. And the further one reads on book by book, the more one is moved with love and admiration for a God who would be willing to run such a risk, to pay such a price, in order to keep open the lines of communication between Himself and His wayward children.

God will save all who trust Him. But He has not asked us to trust Him as a stranger. The Bible — all of it — is a record of God's revelation and a demonstration of infinite trustworthiness.

This statement of principle will continue to guide the rest of our twenty conversations about God. We want to look at all of the biblical evidence in this way.

Questions and Answers

Louis Venden: It seems that you are asking us to do a lot of thinking and studying. There's a bumper sticker around which says, "God said it. I believe it. That settles it for me." That sounds refreshingly simple. Why wouldn't that be the appropriate way to go?

Graham Maxwell: The difficulty is that people pick the passages from the Bible that they want to label in that way, and they don't read all the others. For example: "Take the tithe and buy strong drink with it, and rejoice before the Lord" (Deuteronomy 14:24–26). God said it. Do you believe it? Or take another passage, "Give wine to the poor, that they may forget their misery" (Proverbs 31:6–7). Does that settle it for

you? “God has said it. I believe it.” But you really can’t do that. On the surface, it sounds like an expression of humility and teachableness, which would be very commendable. But no one can really follow that if they read *everything* God says. Because when you read the Bible as a whole, you discover the hazard of plucking pieces out like that.

Lou: So you are pushing us at the point of meaning. We just cannot simply jump around here and there and think we understand what it means. If we are serious about God’s Word, we need to be serious about the context.

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God will save all who trust Him. But He has not asked us to trust Him as a stranger. The Bible—all of it—is a record of God’s revelation and a demonstration of infinite trustworthiness.

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Graham: The Bible says, “All Scripture is inspired of God” (2 Timothy 3:16). So if the saying on that bumper sticker includes the whole Bible, then I’m comfortable with it.

Lou: Would you suggest a better bumper sticker, perhaps?

Graham: How about this: “Thank You for the evidence. Thank You for making it so clear. And thank You most of all for what it cost.” It would take a big bumper, wouldn’t it?

Lou: We have quite a backlog of questions. “Using the model of the Larger View, how does one fit together the apparently violent God of the Old Testament, the friendly God of the New Testament, and the destructive God of Revelation at the end of this earth?” Put that all together.

Graham: Ah, that’s very well stated. That assumes, of course, that God is always severe and violent in the Old Testament. Yet some of the most gentle and moving statements about God are in the Old Testament. For example, in the parable of the vineyard, “What more can I do for you than I have done?” Isaiah 5:4. “The Lord is my Shepherd” (Psalm 23:1). So the Old Testament is not entirely violent, nor is the New Testament entirely gentle. When Ananias and Sapphira cheated with their offering, they died right on the church floor (Acts 5:5, 10). So I actually find a consistency running through all the Bible, and the real question would be, why is there a varied picture running from Genesis to Revelation, culminating in the third angel’s message, which is so violent (Revelation 14:9–

11)?

I wouldn't know how to handle it, except by taking it as a whole and finding *the same God dealing with a great variety of people*. When we are irreverent, there may be she bears, thunder and lightning, or an earthquake. And yet I see the same gentle One behind it all, grieving when those people had to be treated that way. But what else could He do?

I don't think a quick answer like this would ever satisfy someone who has raised the question so thoughtfully. The best response would be to sit down together and go through all the sixty-six books. It takes a little time, but there are no shortcuts to this. And it would be wise to keep that larger question in mind as one reads every book in the sixty-six.

Lou: This one ties in with that as well. "Satan held that God was not able to be just and merciful at the same time. Today He offers us mercy, but will He not kill us finally? Are we not to be consumed in His fire? If we are, how then do we call Him a God of love? Why did Jesus have to die? Was not God's mercy sufficient?" That's another one of those full message questions.

Graham: Yes. These are the really important questions, the kind that have to be answered for the universe to be secure. That's why we see that theme running all through Scripture, culminating in the death of Jesus. And that's why we have a whole chapter in this book on the most costly and convincing evidence. There was no other way to answer those questions than for God to come in human form and die as He did. So the great controversy view doesn't make light of the death of Christ. It makes it infinitely more significant. Because there is no other way to answer those questions, and we will deal with those at length in Chapter Eight.

Lou: This next question is similar. "If God's character is love (1 John 4:8) and God loves us so much (John 3:16), why was pain and death so prevalent in the Old and New Testaments? And is it God who will actually destroy man in the end? Or is it sin and Satan that causes destruction? If God does destroy, then is that contrary to His own Word?"

Graham: I too couldn't live without an answer to those questions, and one should work on them. But I'm glad the Bible does not settle for just claims. It has actually cost a great deal to answer those questions.

Now on the violence in the Old Testament, we know we're all

caught up in the consequences of this war. We also bring a lot of this on ourselves, to be sure. God sometimes disciplines those He loves. And the Devil is also at work. There are many causes of trouble and difficulty. We plan to look at them all. But I don't expect a neat answer to a question like that.

The biggest question, however, may be, "Will God destroy us in the end?" If all God asks of us is love and trust, and if we don't give it to Him, is He going to destroy us in the end? This would be like God saying, "You either love Me, or I'll destroy you." And if that's the way He is, I cannot trust Him. I do not care to live with Him. I do not believe He's that way; but it cost the death of Christ to prove it. So to answer that question we have to watch Jesus die. Did the Father destroy His Son? The cross is the central answer to all of this, and we will look deeply into that answer in Chapter Eight.

Lou: Let's shift gears to a question about the Flood, which is still in a similar vein: "On the subject of the Flood, it is apparent that God didn't do things right the first time. So He had to send a Flood and start all over again. What would you do with that?"

Graham: That question makes a lot of sense, since the text says: "It repented the Lord that he had made man..." Genesis 6:6, KJV. Or as some versions say: "He was sorry that he had made man" (RSV). As you go through the sixty-six, you run into several places where God is pictured as if He were not too aware of what is going on and certainly not having as much foreknowledge as we think. For example, when He comes to the Garden of Eden, He says, "Where are you?" And Adam says, "We're over here." Did God then say, "Oh, thank you. I didn't know"? Genesis 3:10-11. Another time He came to Abraham (before the burning of Sodom and Gomorrah) and said, "Abraham, I've come down to check out the reports I've received, to see if they are correct or not" (Genesis 18:21). Now we've all assumed that God is getting very good reporting. But in this case, He acted as if He didn't to make a point. God meets people where they are.

There are many places in the Bible like that, where God talks in very human language. And so in this case with the Flood it grieved God that he had made man (Genesis 6:6, NIV). My understanding would be that He foreknew all of this, and He had now come to the time when there were only eight people left on this planet with whom He could communicate. And the answers to the questions in the Great Controversy had not yet been given. So God, as it were, turns to the uni-

verse and says, "I'm really going to test your faith in Me. The next thing you see will stun you." And He drowned all but eight to preserve the one remaining point of contact He had with the human race. It was the only way He could go on unfolding His plan.

I'm sure the Devil cried, "Foul! I told you He's that kind of a God. You either love Him or He'll drown you. He'll burn you, have you stoned, or swallow you up." The risk God took with the Flood suggests just how important it was to do what He did. The risk was that great. Had He not done that, everything would have ended at that time. And the answers to the great questions had not yet been given. The Flood has to be put in the total setting of the universe with the angels watching. God ran a great risk of being misunderstood at that time. But I believe it was all in His plan.

Lou: You say that everything would have ended at that point. Do you mean that the whole human race was so evil that it would self-destruct?

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I think the Old Testament is magnificently clear, but only when it is read as a whole. I find no break between the Old and the New, except that in the New, Christ is here in human form to confirm everything that has been described and anticipated in the Old.

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Graham: Well those eight that got on the boat weren't that good, you remember. Ham wasn't too virtuous, and his father hadn't taken the temperance pledge yet. Those eight weren't saved because they were good. I believe they were saved because they got on the boat. But we can't compare that with the salvation at the end. It's not quite the same. The Flood was an emergency measure. At the end, God knows who is *safe to save*.

Lou: Was there not enough evidence in Old Testament times for people to recognize God's true character, or did they have to wait for the New Testament in order to understand?

Graham: Oh, I like that question very much. When you read all the way through, the picture of God in the Old Testament is the same as in the New. It's the same God, the same Spirit communicating, the same Christ leading them in the wilderness. What impresses me in the Old Testament is how well people *did* know Him. God's best friends in the

Bible are in the Old Testament. The man that Paul uses to suggest what God wants most in us was Abraham, from the Old Testament (Romans 4; Galatians 3). Moses is called a friend of God (Exodus 33:11). And look at Job, Hosea, Amos, Jeremiah, and Isaiah. Apparently the message in the Old Testament is clear enough for some people, at least, to get it. In fact, Jesus grew up with the Old Testament and learned the truth about His Father from it. So I think the Old Testament is magnificently clear, but only when it is read as a whole. I find no break between the Old and the New, except that in the New, Christ is here in human form to confirm everything that has been described and anticipated in the Old. Even His Sermon on the Mount is already in the Old Testament (see Exodus 20:17 and Psalm 51 as examples). So the Bible is a complete package, all sixty-six books.

Lou: Let's take two or three questions that are slightly different. "You spoke about sanctification. What is this? If we sincerely accept Jesus as our Savior, how can we ever be lost? Once we are saved, aren't we always saved?"

Graham: "Sanctification" is, of course, one of those heavy Latin terms. I prefer to use "set right" and "keep right," rather than "justify" and "sanctify." We can understand those words. Putting it in that way, one can be set right with God, and one can be kept right for quite a while, but one is still free to leave. And Lucifer proved that by leaving. He was right with God before he left. There was no rebellion in heaven at the beginning. And so, a million years into eternity, we may have been right with God for a long time, but we are still free to go.

The once saved, always saved idea belongs to a very legal model. I've been paid up, and I'm still paid up, and I have a right to be there. I'd rather say that I'm only safe to have around if I'm willing to listen, to trust God, and to accept instruction. And I'll always be free to turn into a rebel. That makes it even more wonderful that God's children will choose to remain loyal. Then their loyalty means something. Their expression of love to God means something. They haven't been reprogrammed. They haven't been turned into robots. The price that God has had to pay to settle the questions indicates how absolutely opposed He is to programming us and making it impossible for us to go some other way. God took quite a risk, but evidently freedom means that much to God.

Lou: Graham, here are a couple of questions that are somewhat related. "If God is a God of love and acceptance, why then did He

demand animal sacrifices? Couldn't the children of Israel just have asked for forgiveness rather than going through that sacrificial ceremony?" And let me tie that together with another one. Someone writes about their daughters who are now eighteen and twenty-two. They have been vegetarians since they were young because they love animals too much to have them killed for their benefit. But they run into trouble when they go to the Old Testament, because there you have the sacrifices for God's benefit. "We know it has something to do with the sacrifice of Jesus, but why does God have to be appeased by poor little animals dying?"

Graham: There's a lot implied in there. But who is the One who sees the little sparrow fall (Matthew 10:29)? I mean, if it upsets these daughters, how do you think it upsets the Lord? And yet He gave that whole sanctuary system. It must have been important for Him to do it. These questions are important enough that we have a whole chapter on what I call "God's Emergency Measures" (Chapter Eleven). Things like the sanctuary and the Flood were serious emergency measures because there was a serious emergency on this earth. We see God pointing to a larger picture in the prophets. "I don't really want your sacrifices apart from the meaning. I hate them" (based on Amos 5:21-22 and Hosea 6:6).

Think of all the blood and all the suffering! God loves the animals. And yet to make a very important point, He asked Adam and Eve to kill that first lamb. So we need to consider carefully the meaning of these sacrifices. Because if we just learn about them and don't think of the meaning, we are as ceremonial as the people in the Old Testament who missed the point. So we must ask all the way through, how could God do something which He Himself did not like? And yet it needed to be done, and we will revisit that in future chapters.

One more thing, I heard the word "appease" in one of those questions. Were these sacrifices to appease God in some way, to make Him more favorable toward us? One could get that impression from the word "propitiation" in some translations of Romans 3:25. The word "propitiation" suggests appeasement, a gift offered to change a god's mind. But that's not the word that's there in the original. That's a regrettable translation. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19). Nobody had to win Him to our side. So the implications of that are well worth some serious study, and in the chapters on God's Emergency Measures (Chapter Eleven) and on why Jesus had to die (Chapter Eight), we will have an opportunity to deal with those

thoroughly.

Lou: Here's a question that speaks poignantly to where many of us hurt and wonder. "'The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life' (Romans 6:23). I have a cousin, age thirty years, who has a malignant brain tumor; and he is awaiting death. There is nothing medically that can be done for him. Everyone tells him, 'God's will be done.' Now the question is, does God will for one to die? I don't think so. I believe that sin has contaminated the world and as a result we have disease and death. So please elaborate on this concept, and what's more, what do you say to such a person? How do you talk about God's will?"

Graham: That's too sad for a snap answer. I think at times like that we draw from everything we've learned and experienced about God through the years. We need to fall back on the things we are sure of. One thing I am sure of, God wants us to be well. He created us perfect. Disorder, disease — these are not of His doing. These are all part of being caught up in the consequences of this revolt. But we also know that God could heal, that's true. And if He doesn't seem to be healing at this time, we might wonder why. And it's OK to wonder why. There is abundant evidence in Scripture that God is not offended when we ask why, not for a moment!

But why is God willing for this person to die? Is He a destructive God? An experience like this really tests the kind of person we believe our God to be. But even when things are not too clear, if one has learned that prayer is conversation with God as with a friend, then those who are wondering feel perfectly free to kneel down and really talk to God about this. We can say, "God, this is not clear. It looks as if You are like this, but that's the Devil's picture of You." Or, "It looks as if You are like that. You couldn't be, could You? Or are You?" God would not be offended by such questions. He honors our questions. There is great peace that comes from realizing we have a God toward whom we can direct such questions, even in times of great agony. Whatever it takes, learn the good news about God. And there's one more thing I am sure of, if the Lord were visible in your moment of suffering, how sympathetic He would be! More than anything else He would want to clear up the impression that He is the cause of that suffering.

Lou: Here's a related question: "Can you give a reason why a loving God would allow a good Christian woman to be murdered? She was a good help in her small church. The last Sabbath of her life they had a consecration service at the church. She dedicated herself anew to God, and

she was murdered that afternoon at her house. She was the treasurer, and she had money at her house, and apparently that was the reason that someone broke in and she was killed. The reason I know about this is that she was my sister.”

Graham: Again, happy is the person who knows God very well at a time like this. It doesn't mean that we would know the specific answer to the situation. I don't think Job ever found out why those awful things happened to him. All he knew was that his theologian friends were wrong. They came to Job and said, “You cannot be asking God about this.” Job was crying to God with intense feeling and saying, “God, how can You do this to me? I've been Your good friend all this time, and now You won't even speak to me (Job 13:22, 24). You won't explain this.” And his friends kept repeating their legalistic explanations, none of which were helpful. Finally Job said, “I wish you brethren would be quiet. I appreciate your coming, but you're not helping me at all. If only I could talk to God, I'm sure I could clear this up” (Job 16:2; 31:35). Eventually the boldness of his inquiries reached such a level that those three men were worried that God would surely zap him on the spot for daring to inquire. Instead, God broke in and said, “Job, you have said of Me what is right” (based on Job 42:7).

So if a person is wrestling with a tragedy like this, we may not find out why. I'm sure we won't find out the answer to every unfair thing that happens on this planet during this emergency. But some things we know for sure; the kind of person God is, and His willingness to receive our questions. He welcomes us to lodge our inquiries with feeling, and hopefully we will trust Him enough to wait for the answer. And I'd like to think that that sister was such a saint you don't need to worry about her. She will arise in the resurrection and say, “What am I doing here?” She will have no complaints. She'll be looking for her sister.

In the next chapter we will deal with the whole question of authority, which is really the essence of the Great Controversy. God is infinite in authority and power, but He would never think of intimidating or overwhelming us.

Chapter Seven

The Question of Authority

The Great Controversy is not over who has the greater power, God or the adversary. Satan has never accused God of lacking physical power. In fact, the book of James says that whenever Satan thinks of the power of the One who created the whole vast universe, he trembles with fear (James 2:19). And he knows he has but a short time (Revelation 12:12). Satan has not accused God of being weak, he has accused Him of abusing His divine power and failing to tell the truth. Specifically, as we have reviewed several times, God has been accused of being arbitrary in His use of power; of being exacting and vengeful, unforgiving, and severe. If those charges were true, then surely it would not be safe to trust in God. Who would want to spend eternity with such a Deity?

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And yet one-third of the brilliant angels, intelligent as they are, have agreed that Satan is right. They agree that God has indeed abused His power and is not worthy of their trust or ours. For thousands of years they have worked to convince us of the rightness of their charges. Just as God has sought to demonstrate that He is not the kind of person His enemies have made Him out to be, so Satan in many and various ways has sought to twist and pervert the truth in support of his cause. Most diabolically, I believe, Satan has used the teachings of religion and even of Christianity to support his case. He has even perverted the meaning of the cross in support of his accusation that God demands our obedience under threat of painful execution.

“Love Me or I’ll kill you,” is his satanic perversion of God’s warning in the beginning: “Children, I don’t want you to die. If you go your own rebellious, disorderly way, you will die.” Consider the extensive damage caused by Satan’s devilish caricature of God’s words in the Garden of Eden. If God has really said, “Love Me or I’ll torture you for eternity in sulfurous flames,” how could there be any real love? How

could there be any real trust? I wonder how many millions have been turned against God by that perversion of the truth. Or worse, I wonder how many people have found it possible to accept that picture of God and still try to serve Him. They offer Him the obedience that springs from fear, and then suffer the destructive consequences of forced submission.

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The good news, of course, is that God is not the kind of person His enemies have made Him out to be. The whole Bible presents a refutation of Satan's charges, not based on mere claims, but rather on the evidence of demonstration.

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The good news, of course, is that God is *not* the kind of person His enemies have made Him out to be. The whole Bible presents a refutation of these charges, not based on mere claims, but rather on the evidence of demonstration. The whole Bible demonstrates God's way of exercising authority and power. I think that is very good news which leads us to repentance and to trust. Understanding the way God runs His universe will keep it secure and free and at peace for the rest of eternity.

The Importance of the Topic

Some of us believe that this understanding of how God exercises His authority and power is the most important of all Christian beliefs. Every other Christian doctrine derives its importance, and even its meaning, from this essential truth about our God. To some of us, the most important information we have to share with our fellow human beings around this planet is the truth about the way God runs His universe and what He wants of His children. We need to share this more urgently than ever before as we face the closing events of human history. Before Christ returns, the Bible describes a time of confusion and deception such as the world has never seen.

This time of confusion will lead up to Satan's final attempt to win the whole world to worship and trust *him*. Revelation 13 says that when Satan's campaign is over, the whole world *will* be worshipping him, except those few who have not been deceived (Revelation 13:8). So it should not surprise us, if we are as near the End as we believe we are, that we find ourselves surrounded on all sides by conflicting claims to religious authority. Certainly the development of modern media has

made us more aware of this than ever before. As we see and listen to all these conflicting claims, notice how often they are supported by position, power, miracles, or claims of special communications from the Lord.

How Satan would enjoy it if he could turn God's friends on this planet against their heavenly Father! Or even more seriously, how he would love to deceive God's professing, commandment-keeping people. Such a deception within the "remnant" itself would be the most destructive of all. No wonder Paul said in Ephesians that we should grow up and not be so easily swayed to and fro by every wind of doctrine (Ephesians 4:14). Then in Hebrews he says we should grow up and have our faculties trained to distinguish between good and evil, right and wrong (Hebrews 5:14). But the crucial question is: How do we train our faculties by practice, so as not to be deceived by conflicting claims to religious authority, particularly the claims of the adversary? And at the same time, how can we become more sensitive to the voice of true authority?

How God Makes His Case

The question here is about authority. When we know how God exercises His authority and power, we will be better able to recognize Satan's counterfeit. What does God want of us? Has He ever said to His children, "You either love Me or I'll have to kill you"? Did He ever say that? What about Satan's charges that God is arbitrary, vengeful, and severe? Has God convincingly answered those accusations? How do we know if we are being told the truth? How does God seek to convince us of the rightness of His cause? In comparison, how does Satan seek to convince us of the rightness of his cause? Which method do we prefer? Which method do we find more convincing and more trustworthy? Under whose government would we rather live?

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How do we settle these questions? Should we pick up our Bibles and begin to read God's claims about Himself? You won't find encouragement for that in the Bible. God Himself warns us, with many scriptural examples, not to accept mere claims. In Deuteronomy 13 and 1 Kings 13 there were prophets who claimed to be prophets but who were lying. There were people who performed miracles, but at the same time

they were not telling the truth. There are many other warnings in the Bible—remember the four hundred and fifty lying prophets of King Ahab (1 Kings 18:19, 22), and the lying prophets in the days of Jeremiah (particularly chapters 26–29). God has been very candid in warning us, “*Don’t accept mere claims.*” What we need is evidence and demonstration.

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Satan cannot use the method of open investigation and inquiry. He would lose his case if he did. He doesn’t dare invite our questions, for the truth is not with him.

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So when God was accused of being unworthy of the trust of His family, He humbly took His case into court. This is amazing! He’s the Infinite One. Yet He invites His children to investigate and to discover to their own satisfaction whether God is worthy of their trust. Imagine the Infinite One submitting His character and government to the scrutiny of His own creatures! Does that say something to us about God? Paul says in Romans: “God, may You win Your case when You take it into court” (based on Romans 3:4).

Has God already won His case? Of course He has, throughout the rest of the universe. It is only down here that some of us are not too sure. God didn’t win His case by bribing the judge, or by intimidating the jury, or by hiding some of the evidence. He proved to the satisfaction of the whole onlooking universe that the truth, the evidence, was on His side. What evidence did He offer? The most costly and convincing evidence the universe will ever see or ever need. That will be the subject of our next chapter.

How Satan Makes His Case

Satan, on the other hand, cannot use the method of open investigation and inquiry. He would lose his case if he did. He doesn’t dare invite our questions, for the truth is not with him. And so, throughout history, he has used religion to silence inquiry. And then, diabolically, he calls that willingness to believe without inquiry *faith*. Instead of evidence and truth, he substitutes force, fear, and ignorance. On top of that he piles miracles, excitement, feelings, pomp, majesty, ceremony, and mystery. And then on top of all that he piles claim upon claim. In light of all these things, we must be on guard lest we be deceived. Let’s not

underestimate his cunning. He deceived one-third of the brilliant angels.

Of course, if we read the sixty-six books through, we will realize how often we have been warned to beware of such things. Jesus Himself warns specifically of Satan's methods, in the familiar words of Matthew:

If anyone says to you then, "Look, here is Christ!" or "There He is!" don't believe it. False Christs and false prophets are going to appear and will produce great signs and wonders to mislead, if it were possible, even God's own people! Matthew 24:23–24, Phillips.

Also, a little earlier in the same chapter Jesus says:

Watch out, and do not let anyone fool you. Many men, claiming to speak for me, will come and say, "I am the Messiah!" and they will fool many people. Matthew 24:4–5, GNT.

The most unusual Bible in my whole collection is *The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, as Revised and Corrected by the Spirits*. It is the Spiritists' Bible. It came out in 1861. It thoroughly rewrites the New Testament in support of Spiritism. In the Introduction, it claims that Jesus came down from heaven, medium that He was, and the apostles came down with Him, and they corrected all the errors in the New Testament. And then it says, "Dear Reader, trust in God, who made all things after the counsel of His own will. The Holy Spirits feel much interest in this work, and the spirits who corrected it desire that the world will receive this correction as coming from them, directed by God Himself, which is true. Signed, Jesus, the Christ." A diabolical fraud! But look at the claim. Anybody can make claims.

In the book of Revelation John warns concerning the use of miracles to deceive:

This second beast performed great miracles; it made fire come down out of heaven to earth in the sight of everyone. And it deceived all the people living on earth by means of the miracles which it was allowed to perform. Revelation 13:13–14, GNT.

Speaking of that last period of human history, Paul gives the same type of warning in 2 Thessalonians:

The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 2 Thessalonians 2:9–10, NIV.

They refuse the very thing God designed to protect them from deception. But most seriously of all, Paul warns that professed messengers of God will also be engaged in this work of deception:

God's messengers? They are counterfeits of the real thing, dishonest practitioners masquerading as the messengers of Christ. Nor do their tactics surprise me when I consider how Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is only to be expected that his angels will have the appearance of ministers of righteousness.... 2 Corinthians 11:13–15, Phillips.

Paul's reference to Satan suggests that the Devil is still pretending to be Lucifer, the bearer of light and truth. This reminds us of Christ's most serious words, spoken to a group of Sabbath-keeping, tithe-paying Bible teachers in His day. These Bible teachers had just denounced Jesus' picture of His Father as satanic (John 8:48). Think of it! Very devout Sabbath-keepers, tithe-payers and Bible teachers were telling Christ He had a devil. And He turned to them, with tears in His voice, I'm sure, and uttered those extraordinary words:

The father whose sons you are is the devil, and you are bent on carrying out the wishes of your father. He proved himself a murderer at the very beginning, and did not loyally stand by the truth; in fact, there is no spark of truth in him. Whenever he gives utterance to his falsehood, then he gives expression to his real character; for he is a liar and the father of lies. I, on the contrary, speak the truth, and therefore you do not believe me. John 8:44–45, Kleist and Lilly.

Paul mentions forged letters being circulated, pretending to be from him and causing early Christians much distress:

We ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or

alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us.... Don't let anyone deceive you in any way.... 2
Thessalonians 2:1-3, NIV.

From that time on Paul signed his epistles with greater care.

John also warns of false teachers who will arise, claiming to have the Holy Spirit, and yet their claim is a fraud:

My dear friends, do not believe all who claim to have the Spirit, but test them to find out if the spirit they have comes from God. For many false prophets have gone out everywhere. 1 John 4:1-2, GNT.

Claims alone are no proof of the Spirit. Paul surely agrees that we should test everything before believing: “Test everything. Hold on to the good.” 1 Thessalonians 5:21, NIV. God is not afraid to be tested. That’s what is so believable about God. The reason He is not afraid to be examined is that the truth and evidence are on His side.

The Authority of Jesus Christ

Because truth and evidence were on Christ’s side, He spoke with great authority: “When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority....” Matthew 7:28-29, NIV. Luke adds: “His message had authority.” Luke 4:32, NIV. Where did Jesus’ authority come from? How can we recognize the voice of true authority?

Did Jesus base His authority on His claims? No, He is the One who inspired the warning against accepting mere claims (1 John 4:1-2). When John inquired if He really was the Messiah, Jesus didn’t just say, “Yes, I am.” He offered evidence to John (Matthew 11:4-6). Did He base His authority on miracles or a show of power? No, it was Jesus who inspired the warning, “Don’t trust miracles if they are not associated with the truth” (based on Deuteronomy 13:1-3). In fact, He even turned the crowds away when they were following Him because of the miraculous food and the miraculous healings (Matthew 14:22; Mark 6:45; John 6:15). How Jesus must have been tempted to use His power when He was winning so few! He knew the people were expecting a Messiah who would come with great physical power to drive off their enemies and establish an earthly kingdom. But He wouldn’t do it. It would have misrepresented the truth about God’s way of exercising His authority.

Did Jesus base His authority on His loud voice and bombastic manner, as is so customary of many evangelists today? Just read the Gospels. The people marveled at the gracious words that came from His lips. “Blessed are the humble in spirit. . . . Blessed are the meek.” Matthew 5:3, 5. You simply cannot shout those words. People who shout don’t teach things like that. Christ’s manner of speaking must have been as music to His audiences.

Was His authority based on a dazzling display of who He really was? He really *was* the Son of God, the Creator of the Universe, worshiped by all the angels. Yet on the road to Emmaus, He didn’t reveal who He was until He had led them through the Scriptures and until their decision was based on evidence, not on His authority as a person (Luke 24:13–35). Note the marvelous understanding of the Emmaus road experience in the following:

Jesus did not first reveal himself in his true character to them, and then open the Scriptures to their minds; . . .

He maintained his disguise till he had interpreted the Scriptures, and had led them to an intelligent faith in his life, his character, his mission to earth, and his death and resurrection. He wished the truth to take firm root in their minds, *not because it was supported by his personal testimony* [emphasis supplied], but because the typical law, and the prophets of the Old Testament, agreeing with the facts of his life and death, presented unquestionable evidence of that truth. When the object of his labors with the two disciples was gained, he revealed himself to them. . . . Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 3, 214.

You see, Jesus spoke with authority because He always told the truth. And some of those who heard Him also perceived it to be true. To them He spoke with *great* authority. But He did not speak to everyone with authority. Some said He had a devil, because of the way He presented His Father (John 8:48). But Jesus spoke with authority to everyone who recognized that His words were in full harmony with the truth revealed in God’s Word. And when John the Baptist received the report of what Jesus was saying and doing, I suspect he said, “That fits Isaiah perfectly. Yes, He is the One” (based on Luke 7:22, cf. Isaiah 35:6; 61:1–3).

The ultimate authority, then, is the truth. It is God’s only means

of persuasion, the only safe basis for our trust. In many and various ways, God has revealed the truth to us and then has invited our questions and our examination of Him. *For three and a half years God lived among us to demonstrate His way of using and exercising authority and power.* As a result, many people despised Him as weak, just as the Old Testament had predicted they would (Isaiah 53:2-4). They were looking for someone who would lead them mightily against their enemies. They wanted miracles. They wanted free food and free healing. They didn't want the kind of person the real Messiah proved to be. Nor did they like His picture of the Father.

Some people, however, respected Him. They recognized gentle Jesus as the *supreme* authority. I think that's why Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Matthew 5:5. Because, you see, *only the meek, only the gentle, would be safe to admit to the Kingdom*, the kind of kingdom that will be governed the way Jesus exercised His authority and power during those three and a half years.

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For three and a half years God lived among us to demonstrate His way of using and exercising authority and power.

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Or do you think He will act differently in the hereafter? It's true, He thundered many times in the Old Testament, but those were all emergency measures. For three and a half precious years, He finally got to run His kingdom on this planet the way He will do it in eternity. It didn't work, did it? Well, it worked for a few. It worked with the meek. They loved it. And the poor people heard Him gladly. But most people did not appreciate this kind of government.

Which raises the question – which kind of government do we prefer? Under which kind of government do we feel most secure; a powerful tyranny, or the gentle exercise of authority and power that Jesus demonstrated for three and a half years? Obviously, it would be unsafe to admit people into eternity who do not respect the authority of truth spoken softly in love. Blessed indeed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5).

I prefer a God who is infinitely powerful, to be sure, but an equally gracious person who values nothing higher than the freedom, dignity, and individuality of His intelligent creatures. With that kind of God, our

love, our trust, our worship, and our willingness to listen and obey, may be freely given. It would be a pleasure to live with a God like that. That is the quality of life in the hereafter that has been reserved for us. We can throw it away if we wish, or we can be convinced by the evidence that this is the kind of person our God really is. We can find Him worthy of our trust. Personally, I am convinced that God has more than amply demonstrated that He is precisely the kind of a God He claims to be.

Questions and Answers

Louis Venden: Earlier you mentioned how God's response to the Great Controversy was *not* a great show of power or force; you said He took His case into court. I wonder if you might explain just a bit more what you meant by the word "court."

Graham Maxwell: It is an absolutely magnificent verse in Romans 3:4. Sometimes it's translated: "You [God] must be shown to be right when you speak; you must win your case when you are being tried" (TEV). And the verse is so crucial in understanding why Jesus had to die, that in the next chapter we will look at that verse in a number of versions. Now I deliberately chose the translation that I used. The closest to the meaning of the verse is the translation by Goodspeed, although I modify that slightly. "God, may You win Your case when You take it into court" just rings a bell with me; it fits there. What court is this? It is the court of the universe.

Lou: Oh, that does answer what I was wondering. By "court" you mean the entire universe. Could we say that we are included in that court, too?

Graham: Very much. And I would want to use many passages in Scripture that speak of God taking His case into court. Look at the gathering in Daniel 7, when a hundred million angels are watching. Or in Job 1 and 2, where God conducts a conversation with the adversary about His friend, Job. There are many references to this in Scripture.

Lou: Our subject in this chapter raises many questions that have come up in the past, and I would like to press some of these. You talk about God establishing the authority of truth and trust and love, but didn't God, in fact, use force and power? Isn't the Old Testament record filled with incidents that would support the idea that God was putting on a show to intimidate us?

Graham: There's no question! That's what always astounds people who have never read the sixty-six books through before. Innumerable

times God is pictured as showing His physical force and power. I don't think He ever did it to win anybody. In fact, I don't think He *ever* won anybody that way. He often did it simply to get their attention. Or at the time of the Flood, He did it in order to maintain His contact with the human race. But if it puzzles *us*, how it must delight the adversary to have this information to use! I think the Devil is puzzled that God would hand him so much evidence in support of his accusations.

Lou: Let's look at a specific instance. Here is Saul of Tarsus (Paul) on his way to Damascus, and you've already referred to how he misunderstood Jesus. But here he is on the way. And Acts says that a great light flashed from heaven and he fell to the ground (Acts 9:3-4). That's a very impressive use of force or power. Didn't it win Saul?

Graham: No, it just floored him. But it got his attention. And I would judge, with a man like Saul, nothing less would have gotten his attention, as he was quite a firebrand. Already he was quite tormented within because of the behavior of Stephen. When Stephen said, "Lay this not to their charge (Acts 7:60)," he must have remembered the report that when that Heretic died on the cross He said, "Father, forgive them (Luke 23:34)." And Saul knew his Old Testament well; he knew that this was ideal, God-like behavior (Exodus 34:6-7).

In order to stifle the prickings of his conscience, he went out to conduct another "evangelistic" effort. So God floored him on the Damascus road, and got his attention. But then notice what God did once He had his attention (Acts 9:4-6, 10-19). He just said, "Saul, you're having trouble with your conscience, aren't you?"

And Saul said, "Yes, I really am."

"Then why don't you give in?"

"I give in. What do You want me to do?"

And Christ didn't say, "I want you to do the following, and be sure you do it or else." No, the Lord said, "Your way is to overwhelm people. Mine is for you to go and talk to Ananias, one of your peers. That's all I'm going to say." And from then on, Saul/Paul never pressured anybody. He said, "If you disagree with me, well—let everyone be fully persuaded in his own mind" (based on Romans 14:5).

Before the incident on the Damascus road, Paul put Christians in prison or had them stoned (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-2). Afterward he realized that persuasion can only really come when, in the highest sense of freedom, you yourself become convinced; and he adopted that method. Now he truly knew God. He didn't change his diet, his Sabbath, his dress, his

Bible, or even the name of his God. He changed his picture of God. But he wouldn't have done it if God had not hit him with a two-by-four on the Damascus road.

Lou: So the show of force on the Damascus road was to get Saul's attention. It fulfilled a function.

Graham: Well, we know from experience with children, you sometimes have to do this.

Lou: But what about some other instances in the Old Testament? Let's go back to Mount Carmel and Elijah. What about the fire that comes down, burns up the sacrifice and even the stones, and licks up the water in the trench (1 Kings 18:38-39). That's pretty dramatic.

Graham: Now that's a classic case because it's so dramatic, the fire consuming everything. I remember as a boy thinking of the stones burning and the water being lapped up. It's significant, though, that when all the excitement dies down, Elijah himself is depressed (1 Kings 19:4). The impact of dramatic events doesn't last long, it doesn't have staying power. And so Elijah ran away and hid in a cave. Then his spirits rose again when he felt the earthquake, and he heard the wind, and he saw the fire, and he thought God was approaching. So it's very significant that the Bible says God was not in the wind, He was not in the earthquake, and He was not in the fire. After these things came the sound of a small silence, "the still small voice" (1 Kings 19:11-12). And Elijah was informed that that was the sound of God approaching. God is willing to use dramatic means when the circumstances call for it. But when He has a friend, there is no more wind, earthquake, and fire. Just the still, small voice of truth. And I'm impressed that soon after that Elijah was ready to be translated to heaven.

Lou: Does that same principle provide answers for some of the other stories that people have raised questions about?

Graham: There are stories like that seemingly without number. If this picture didn't fit consistently, I wouldn't find it very believable.

Lou: Well, what about the plagues of Egypt then? Think of the tension there! Isn't judgment involved?

Graham: Yes, among other things. When God speaks or acts He is usually saying several things at once with great skill. The Israelites themselves were tempted not to trust God, because in those days you measured your god by success on the battlefield or by personal and national prosperity. What kind of a god would be the god of a people in captivity? Meanwhile, the Egyptians thought their gods were stronger,

because they had tyrannized the Israelites and their God. So the plagues came. Certainly it encouraged the Israelites to believe that maybe God could do something for them after all. As for the Egyptians, many of the plagues were directed toward their deities. So Exodus itself says that God was judging the gods of Egypt (Exodus 12:12). Through the plagues He was demonstrating the weakness of the gods there. So God encouraged the beginning of Israel's trust with a show of power. We often need to be convinced that He's infinitely powerful before we will be willing to listen to Him and follow Him, even when He speaks in a still, small voice. But why does God take so long to move from the thunder to the silence? Because some people prefer thunder all their lives.

Lou: People are asking about Uzzah, the one who was so anxious to support the Ark when it was starting to fall off the cart. And he dies at that point (2 Samuel 6:2-7). So God wasn't doing it to get his attention! His life was over.

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Why does God take so long to move from the thunder to the silence? Because some people prefer thunder.

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Graham: That's right, Uzzah's dead. And where Uzzah will be in the hereafter is between him and God. Some like to think perhaps he repented at that moment. We don't know and we don't need to know. But it's quite a story when you put it in its total setting. Why was the Ark on the cart in the first place? Because the sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, had been such poor representatives of the truth. They were even assaulting women who came to worship in the temple (1 Samuel 2:22-25). They were that wicked. So then when Israel was drawn into battle, they thought, "Let's take that magic box with us" (1 Samuel 4:3-4). They had no reverence for God, but they thought the magic box might help. So they took it into battle and they lost it. And in due course of time the Ark wound up in front of Dagon the fish god.

God then worked with these heathen Philistines the same way He worked with the Egyptians. In the morning, when the priests went in to conduct their worship of Dagon the fish god, they found him toppled off his pedestal in front of the Ark (1 Samuel 5:3). Well, they didn't dare tell anybody, so they propped him up and then said their prayers: "Oh almighty one, bless us this day." The next day when they came in, Dagon had not only fallen off the pedestal, but he had broken into several pieces

(1 Samuel 5:4). So they hastily glued him together, put him back on the pedestal, and prayed, “Almighty one, look after us this day.”

I can imagine some small child saying, “How come we’re praying to the almighty one whom we’ve just glued together?” And so they consulted the theologians of the day. It’s all detailed in 1 Samuel 5. And the theologians said, “We advise that you send that box back, and we suggest you put some gifts in it. Remember what the God of this box did to the Egyptians and remember how Pharaoh hardened his own heart?” 1 Samuel 6:1–7. They’ve got it right there, “Pharaoh hardened his own heart.” These heathen theologians did better than some of us today.

Well, as the story proceeded, it was on the cart coming home, and Uzzah lived in a family that knew better than to treat the Ark with such disrespect (2 Samuel 6:2–7). It was an act of irreverence, like how they lost the Ark in the first place. Where there is no reverence, there is no listening to God. Where there is no listening, there is no help and all is lost. So when we’re our most irreverent, God runs the risk of being the most dramatic, to see if He can inspire a little respect. And the Devil, I’m sure, mocked Him for doing it.

Now David was very angry when Uzzah died. He was so angry that he left the Ark right next door in the house of Obed-Edom (2 Samuel 6:8–10). Three months later he got reports that the presence of the Ark was blessing the household of Obed-Edom (2 Samuel 6:11–12). And David said, “We need that blessing up here at headquarters.” So they brought the Ark up with much carefulness, sacrificing a great many offerings along the way (2 Samuel 6:13–14). No doubt they understood those sacrifices as a bit like fire insurance. David didn’t know God as well as he did later on. So you see in the Bible ongoing growth in the knowledge of God, and behind that growth is a very patient God who sometimes used dramatic means to win us all the way back to trust. That’s the reason we study all sixty-six books of the Bible, by the way, so we can get the full picture of how God dealt with His people.

Lou: One more incident out of the Old Testament, the story of Elisha and the young men that came out and ridiculed him, then were attacked by two “she bears” (2 Kings 2:23–24). Once again, it looks like a pretty spectacular show.

Graham: The first thing we need to do is establish the irreverence of the day. You read back a little further, and the king of Israel was consulting Baalzebub, the god of flies (2 Kings 1:16). Moreover, these boys knew that Elijah had been translated to heaven. Yet they were so unim-

pressed that when Elisha came by, evidently a little short of hair, they said, “Hey baldy, why don’t you go up too?” The irreverence in Israel was so serious that God almost lost contact with His people there. But He didn’t send a flood this time, instead He sent two she bears. Word of this went out among the Israelites, and reverence picked up — but so did fear. *It is very difficult for God to relieve us of our fear and still maintain our reverence and respect.* That’s a most delicate goal to accomplish.

Lou: All right, you’ve covered a number of God’s spectacular interventions in the Old Testament, but what about Jesus’ public ministry in the New Testament? When He turned water into wine at the wedding of Cana (John 2:1–11), didn’t that catch a lot of attention? Wasn’t that a use of miracles to establish authority?

Graham: Such methods do have some usefulness at the beginning. I wouldn’t deny Jesus the right to use whatever method He wishes to get attention. But what counts is the way the miracle is conducted and what follows after the miracle. After the miracle got their attention, they observed and tested Him. As a result, some rejected Him and some accepted Him.

Actually, turning water into wine is not that unusual in the Bible. Do you remember how Moses turned bitter water sweet in the wilderness (Exodus 15:23–25)? And didn’t Elisha do something similar (2 Kings 2:19–22)? That’s not so remarkable. To me what’s more remarkable is that Jesus was attending a wedding, and He wanted it to be happy. He was very pleased to be there and to help them. He is the One who thought up marriage in the first place. I love it that His first miracle was at a wedding.

Lou: What about the feeding of the five thousand? Actually, the story about feeding the five thousand is recorded in all four of the Gospels (Matthew 14:21; Mark 6:44; Luke 9:14; John 6:10). So it certainly made a powerful impact on the gospel writers and on the people. On one occasion, at least, weren’t they ready to crown Him king in response to the miracle (John 6:15)?

Graham: That’s right! Now this illustrates the point superbly. Jesus realized that huge crowds were following Him for the miracles, and that’s all. So right after these miracles He told them something very serious, “Unless you really accept Me and My teachings you will not be saved” (based on John 6:50–63). And they all left Him. All they wanted was free food and free healing.

Then He turned to the twelve and said, “Do you also wish to go?” John 6:67, RSV. In the Greek there is a way of asking a question that includes the answer within the question, yes or no. So the way it’s worded in the Greek Jesus said, “You don’t want to go too, do you?” And they said, “No; to whom else should we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). They weren’t entirely convinced; there was so much they didn’t understand. But at least they chose to stay. Jesus must have wondered at that point whether it had been worth coming to earth. Only when He performed miracles did He get a crowd, and He did not wish to get a crowd that way. Doesn’t it say something though, that when He won a following by miracles, He turned them away. Miracles are no basis for authority.

Lou: What about the raising of Lazarus (John 11:39–44)? He was dead for four days! Wasn’t that outstanding evidence of Jesus’ authority? Wouldn’t you believe just on the basis of that performance?

Graham: Some call that His crowning miracle. Yet it’s significant that Elijah had resurrected the dead before (1 Kings 17:17–24). So even that was certainly not unique. What matters, I think, is the total situation within which Jesus raised Lazarus. For example, He had just been crying a short while before (John 11:35). And they said: “Behold, how He loved him” (John 11:36). Actually, the very gentleness of Jesus was the kind of thing that disappointed many of His followers. But then moments later He demonstrated that He could resurrect the dead. And the theologians knew exactly what this implied. That’s why it says, “From then on, they plotted to murder Him.” John 11:53. They realized that step by step He was demonstrating beyond question that He was not only infinitely powerful but equally gracious, the One who fitted the Old Testament description.

More than that, He had the wisdom to wait until the fourth day (John 11:17), and they must have realized it. Likely they had questioned His resurrection of Jairus’ daughter before (Mark 5:22, 35–43; Luke 8:41–42, 49–56). Some of them believed that the spirit hovered nearby for three days after death, in case of resuscitation. For this reason, He waited until the fourth day, until the most skeptical person in His audience would admit that Lazarus was really dead. And then, when He said, “Roll away the stone,” He wanted to hear them say, “Don’t roll it away, he stinks” (John 11:39). Because then they would all admit that he really was dead. “Now,” He said, “come forth.” John 11:43–44. They had no answer for that. And when you’ve run out of evidence, you turn to vio-

lence. And they tried to kill Him.

Lou: So the raising of Lazarus did not serve to convince them, it actually turned them against Him all the more. In fact, it sealed His doom.

Graham: Yes. But to some of us, the idea that God could one minute be crying and the next minute resurrecting the dead; that sounds good.

Lou: So the chief priests went about to even plot Lazarus' death (John 12:9–11).

Graham: That's right; to get rid of the evidence. Lazarus was going around explaining his death and resurrection. They didn't like that testimony.

Lou: You spoke of the charge that God is arbitrary, harsh, severe and so forth. The question has come in, "If you're talking about arbitrary, isn't something like the Fourth Commandment arbitrary?"

Graham: Well, it is often so described, and it is felt to make a beautiful test of our obedience. But if that is all the Sabbath is, it won't be much of a blessing. Jesus said: "I gave it to you as a gift; you weren't made for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27–28). The best answer for every question, in my book, is to go back to Genesis and read all sixty-six. If you start with Genesis and read through, you will find all the meanings of the Sabbath. The Sabbath reminds us of all that was revealed about God during creation week: The message of freedom, and how He shares His creative power with us (Exodus 20:11). And then it was given to remind us of the Exodus (Deuteronomy 5:15), another monument to freedom. The Sabbath also came after crucifixion day. So the Sabbath reminds us of all the answers given on crucifixion Friday (Luke 23:54–56). And then Hebrews says the Sabbath is a type of the rest to come (Hebrews 4:9–11). I don't know of any commandment that has more reasons behind it. Therefore I will not call it arbitrary. That idea comes from "here a little and there a little," you see. When we take the Bible as a whole, we discover that God has never asked us to do anything arbitrary. The Sabbath command is actually the most meaningful and significant of the ten.

Lou: All right. Maybe the fourth does have a great deal of meaning if you look at the whole record, all sixty-six books. But what about the first commandment: "Thou shalt have no other gods (Exodus 20:3)"? That sounds a little peevish, wanting to be the only one.

Graham: Yes. How about number two also? "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me, and I am a jealous God. I don't like it when you have other gods" (based on Exodus 20:4–6). Well again, if you take the

whole Bible and you are convinced of the kind of person God is, I am glad He says what He does. If He were not in support of freedom and the quality of life that He has revealed, then it would be arbitrary of Him to be the only one. But God is really saying, “Being the kind of God I am, wishing nothing but the best for you, and valuing nothing more than your freedom, I don’t want you to go after Dagon or Molech. Molech would require your babies to be burned alive in his hollow hands. And there are those crocodile and frog gods in Egypt. And also Ashtoreth and Baal — don’t go after them. In fact, if you go after something abominable, you will become abominable yourself. But if you make *Me* your God, you will become ever more free, and ever more intelligent. So don’t hurt yourself.”

Lou: You’re saying it’s a request, a plea. It is said out of love.

Graham: Right. But that only makes sense if God is not arbitrary, if He is the kind of person we believe Him to be. He is really saying, “Don’t lose your freedom, and every other good thing you have, by going after these degraded deities. Stay with Me. When I say that I am jealous; I mean that I am jealous for you. I don’t want you to be hurt.” I like that.

Lou: We would not want our children to have anything that would hurt them.

Graham: Isn’t that kind of jealousy all right? I always felt my parents were jealous for my reputation. I derived great comfort from that. My mother wouldn’t tell on me for anything. And so we have a God who is jealous for His children, and that’s marvelous.

Lou: I want to shift gears just a little bit. Here is a question that arises, perhaps, out of a bit of frustration: “If scholars and theologians still disagree about God, what chance do I have to figure all this out?”

Graham: Yes. I’d encourage this person to read the Gospels again. They’re not that complicated. I think theologians have made it complicated. It impresses me that “the common people heard Him gladly” (Mark 12:37). I think we’re the ones that have made the Bible appear to be difficult.

Lou: I once received letters from an individual who talked about the impression of the Holy Spirit, about how the Spirit came on him and he wrote and wrote. That leads me to a question that someone else has raised: “If I pray for the Holy Spirit to guide and then I have this deep conviction, isn’t that enough?”

Graham: It might seem to be. Fortunately the Bible warns us about

that and offers protection, some safeguards. This warm feeling of conviction within could come from prejudice, it could come from indigestion, it could come from all kinds of things. The Spirit will not lead you away from what He has already inspired. So we should always judge the work of the Holy Spirit by the revelations He has previously inspired.

Lou: But what difference does it make what kind of person I believe God to be? What does it matter as long as I submit to His authority? Why not just say, "God has said it; I believe it; that's it"?

Graham: Well, that reminds me of what we said about Saul of Tarsus. Saul's conception of God had driven the way he did evangelism before his experience on the Damascus road. In God's name he imprisoned people and he had them stoned to death. But when he got the true picture of God so dramatically, Saul proceeded from the thunders of Sinai to the still, small voice at the mouth of the cave in a few minutes. He really grew up in a hurry. Paul changed his picture of God and it changed his whole method of evangelism.

Lou: So you're saying that one's picture of God inevitably affects everything.

Graham: Everything: The way we worship, the way we witness to others, the way we behave.

Lou: Someone has written this: "Our Great Dane is gentle, faithful, patient, trusting, of lovely disposition. What does this dog's wonderful quality of character say about the human lack of achievements along these lines?"

Graham: Oh, I rather like that question. I think we can learn a lot from nature. Even the posture of a Great Dane is magnificent compared to our slouching! There are so many ways in which the animals are an example to us. But when it comes to faithfulness, think of a dog that weighs more than most of us, having enormous strength, yet being safe to have around in the house all the time! I wouldn't want to be just a dog, but I think it's wonderful that mere creatures can show these wonderful qualities, and I think it speaks well of God.

Lou: A final question: "Why did Jesus have to die? Wasn't God's mercy sufficient by itself?" Isn't that the topic of Chapter Eight?

Graham: The answer to that question is really the climax of everything. Everything points to the cross. And fortunately, that's where all Christians agree. We may have many different theological opinions, but almost all Christians agree we ought to go to the foot of the cross. We ought to watch the way Jesus died. We ought to listen to His cry and ask

the question, “Is death the result of sin? Is it torture and execution at the hands of our gracious God?” We’ll continue with that in the next chapter.

Chapter Eight

The Most Costly and Convincing Evidence

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! So why *did* Jesus have to die? Why was there no other way?

While there are many texts that could be included in examining this topic, I have tried to limit myself to the ones that help to explain why Jesus had to die. The cross is “the most costly and convincing evidence” because the unique and awful way in which Jesus suffered and died reveals something about God and His government that had to be clarified before trust and peace could be restored in the universe.

Our God has been accused of being unworthy of the trust of His created beings, of being arbitrary, vengeful, and severe. He has particularly been accused of lying to His children, of lying about death being the result of sin. It does no good for God to simply deny such charges or to claim that He is speaking the truth. It is only by the demonstration of trustworthiness over a long period of time and under a great variety of difficult circumstances that trust can be re-established and confirmed. And 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. Romans 8:3.

The Problem of Sin

In Chapter Two we considered the fact that sin, as the Bible describes it, 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 to our heavenly Father, with all the damaging consequences that result. 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.

Let us consider again what has gone wrong, because understanding what went wrong helps us understand the methods God has used to set things right. It particularly helps us to understand *why* Jesus had to die. As I’ve already mentioned, our God has been accused, specifically, of being arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving and severe. God sent His

Son to reveal the truth about these matters. Why was it not enough for Jesus simply to come and live among us the way He did? Why was it not enough simply to tell us the truth about His Father and then demonstrate it by His gracious treatment of the worst of sinners? Couldn't He just show by His life that God, indeed, is not the kind of person His enemies have made Him out to be?

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Sin is a breakdown of trust or trustworthiness. Sin means a stubborn and suspicious unwillingness to listen to our heavenly Father, with all the damaging consequences that result.

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The way Jesus lived and the way He treated people is, of course, vital evidence. We will address that topic in detail in Chapter Thirteen, "How God Treats His Erring Children." But remember that the most serious charge leveled against God is that He has lied to us. That He lied when He said that sin results in death. Genesis 2:17. 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!" And think of the baleful effect which this perversion of the truth about our God has had on the human race. Think how it has poisoned people's attitude toward God and their practice of religion. How could this satanic view of God win the wide acceptance that it has?

For thousands of years, parents have sacrificed even their own children to win the favor of their offended gods. Even in the Christian world it is believed by many that if it were not for Christ's appeasement of His Father's wrath (sometimes called propitiation), we would have been destroyed long ago. Similarly, it is often believed that 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 perversion? Does it fit the picture of God in all sixty-six books? Does anything need to be done to persuade God to love His children? The testimony of all sixty-six books is that God has always loved even His most wayward child. That is summed up in John 3:16: "God so loved the world...." God loves not just His good children, but all His children, both good and bad.

Those serious words to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden were no threat. Those words were a gracious warning. Sin actually *does* result

in death. Sin so changes the sinner that the natural consequence of this condition is death. Cut off by his own rebellious choice from the source of life, the sinner will die. Out of harmony with God by his own rebellious rejection, the sinner is so changed that even the life-giving glory of God becomes a consuming fire. How can this best be clarified? Not by claims, but by evidence and demonstration.

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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.

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One way to answer this charge would have been for God 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. And surely then there would have been no question about the truthfulness of God’s warning. Why didn’t God make those relatively easy choices? He could have saved all the painful history since that time.

Keep in mind, however, that the beings in the universe had never seen death before. So had they watched Satan and his followers die, there was the hazard that they would assume God was executing His own children who did not please Him. Then there would be the danger that the angels would serve God from fear, and the obedience that springs from fear produces the character of a rebel. And rebelliousness is the essence of sin. For this reason God did not take that relatively easy way. He did not want the obedience and “love” that springs from fear. That kind of obedience has dire consequences and is totally unacceptable to a God who is as gracious as we know Him to be. Instead of taking what may have seemed the easy way, God chose to send His Son in human form. He died the death that is the natural result of sin. And the universe was able to see how God would be involved in the death of the “wicked.”

The Book of Romans and Why Jesus Had to Die

Of all the sixty-six books in the Bible, it is Paul in Romans, perhaps, who gives the clearest explanation as to why Jesus died. First of all he recognizes the truth of God’s warning in the Garden of Eden. In Romans 6, Paul agrees with the record in Genesis: “Sin *pays* its servants: the

wage is death.” Romans 6:23, *Phillips*. Death is the natural consequence of sin. But Satan denied this. We also recall Satan’s charge that God lied about wanting what was best for Adam and Eve: “But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it [The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil] your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God. . . .’” Genesis 3:4–5, RSV. Notice the additional charge that God is selfishly withholding something that would be for their best good.

Now who is telling us the truth? God, or the great former light bearer, 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!” That would only encourage the Devil to say, “No, I am telling the truth. God is lying.” As we have emphasized, matters like this cannot be settled by claims or denials. God’s way was to take His case into court: “That you may be shown to be right in what you say, and win your case when you go into court.” Romans 3:4, *Goodspeed*.

The Heavenly Council in Job

The Bible often speaks of such courts or councils of the heavenly family. And if you wonder how many attend such meetings, look in the book of Daniel where it says more than a hundred million beings are present as the court meets (Daniel 7:10). The heavenly council is also described in the first two chapters of Job. There we have a powerful example of how God resolves questions, particularly when the charges of Satan are leveled against Him and His friends before the heavenly court. In the council scene of Job, Satan accuses God of manipulating Job’s faithfulness, and he accuses Job of being unworthy of God’s trust. Did God say on that occasion, “That’s a lie, Satan, this man is perfect”? No, instead He said, “You’ve raised a serious question. The only way to answer it is to show you.”

We find that demonstration in 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 still trust God in the face of seeming abandonment? The book ends with God saying, “Thank you, Job, you’ve said of Me what is right” (based on Job 42:7). 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. But He does not

merely deny the accusation. He says, “Let Me show you the falsity of these accusations and the truth about Myself, and you decide.” Imagine the humility of the Infinite One submitting His character and government to the scrutiny and investigation of mere creatures. But that’s God’s way, and it is the only way to really establish love and trust while maintaining the fullest sense of freedom.

Romans 3 and “Propitiation”

Paul tells us that when the fullness of time came (Galatians 4:4), God showed His Son publicly dying as a means of reconciliation, as an answer to questions, to be grasped by faith. The death of Christ was to demonstrate God’s own righteousness. For in His divine forbearance He had seemingly overlooked men’s former sins. The death of Christ was to show that God Himself is righteous and therefore can set right those who have faith in His Son. What I have just said is based on Romans 3, although I used some different English words:

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. Romans 3:25–26, KJV.

Now there is a difficult word in there, “propitiation.” Propitiation in English generally means appeasement, and that is a most regrettable translation. Propitiation is what you husbands may offer your wives when you promised to be home on your anniversary 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 flowers and 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. You are trying to propitiate the righteous wrath of your deeply disappointed wife. That’s propitiation; that’s appeasement.

In Romans 3:25–26, the word translated “propitiation” is *hilastêrion*. In the Old Testament, that is generally the Greek word used for the “mercy seat” on the Ark of the Covenant. Actually, the Bible does not mention the idea of “mercy seat;” Luther made that up. When Luther looked at the Hebrew word used for the cover of the Ark, he found that

it means a “covering.” So he translated the covering “mercy seat” or in the old German, “Gnadstuhl” (now written “Gnadenstuhl”).

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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.

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Luther first did this in 1524. Then in 1525 Luther’s friend Tyndale brought that translation over into English and several versions followed him. So that’s where “mercy seat” came from. The cover of the Ark was never called the mercy seat until the early Sixteenth Century. But considering some of the options, it was not a bad choice. It’s just a pity that our *King James Version* uses mercy seat in Exodus (Exodus 25:17–22; 26:34, etc.) and also in Hebrews 9:5, but does not use mercy seat in Romans 3:25–26. Instead, it uses propitiation. I think mercy seat would have been much closer to Paul’s intention. For the Greek word *hilastêrion* means literally “a place or means of reconciliation;” a place where unity and at-one-ment take place. And so I ventured my own translation of this passage:

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. 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. Romans 3:25–26, Maxwell.

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. So when Paul talks in the above text about God apparently overlooking men’s former sins, it means that people hadn’t died as God had warned in the Garden of Eden. So one purpose of the cross is to show that God had not lied about sin leading to death. He sent His Son to answer those kinds of questions.

The Cross and the Wrath of God

So in imagination let’s go to the cross and watch Jesus die. First of all, did He really die? The soldiers were surprised to find He was already

dead. Crucifixion was usually a very 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? That's what we find in 2 Corinthians: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin." 2 Corinthians 5:21, RSV. So Jesus died the death of a sinner. And 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?

Well, it all depends on the meaning of wrath. What does the Bible mean when it talks about God's wrath? One of the clearest explanations is in Romans 1. The entire chapter is worth reading, but let's at least look at the following four verses:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth....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.... Romans 1:18, 24, 26, 28, RSV.

The "truth" Paul is talking about in Romans 1:18 is the truth about God. 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. God's wrath is leaving them to the inevitable and awful consequences of their own rebellious choices. Is that what happened to Jesus on the cross? Was Jesus given up? Paul goes on to say: "...Jesus our Lord, who was *put to death* ["given up" — emphasis supplied] for our trespasses." Romans 4:24–25, RSV.

There is nothing in the Greek, actually, that says He was "put to death." The Greek word translated "put to death" is actually *paredothê*, exactly the same word translated "gave them up" in Romans 1:24, 26, and 28. Translators ought to leave them the same to show that Jesus died under the wrath of His Father. But the real meaning of God's wrath is His turning away, leaving sinners to the inevitable and awful consequences of sin. And this concept was not new with Paul. It's all through the Old Testament, most dramatically in Hosea 11: "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*.

Did Jesus understand that this was the experience He was passing

through? Did Jesus know He was being given up as Hosea and Paul describe it? What did Jesus cry just before He died? Did He say, “My God, My God, why are You beating Me up? Why are You torturing Me? Why are You killing Me?” No! “Why have You forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34). In other words, “Why have You given Me up?” Jesus knew.

Three Questions Regarding the Character of God

This part of Jesus’ journey began in Gethsemane. In order to fully appreciate what happened in Gethsemane and on the cross, we need to step back and view a larger picture. There are three fundamental questions that were raised by Satan’s rebellion and the great controversy over the character and government of God. God could have answered these questions with assertions and arbitrary shows of force. But God values freedom so much, that the only way to answer these questions is through demonstration over a long period of time and in a wide variety of circumstances. At the heart of these “circumstances” is the cross.

The three questions about God’s character and the answers God provided are summarized in the following:

(1) *Can we trust God to tell the truth about sin and death?* If God does not tell the truth, then we can’t trust Him. So He did 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.” At that time an adversary asserted that God was lying and drew a third of the brilliant angels to his side. Then in the garden (Eden) God warned Adam and Eve that to eat of The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil would cause their death. But the same adversary told Eve that God had lied (Genesis 3:4–5). These charges against God led to a crisis in heaven and also on earth. Who should we believe?

In the Word of God and His dealings in history, God has provided abundant evidence that what He says can be trusted. But is sin really the cause of death, as God has claimed? In another garden (Gethsemane), Jesus began to demonstrate with finality the truth that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). As the full reality of sin was placed on Jesus (Romans 8:3; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24), He fell to the ground dying, a consequence of human sin. Already in Gethsemane, Jesus clearly demonstrated that sin leads to death, and that God was telling the truth about sin and death.

(2) *What is God's role in the death of the sinner? Does justice demand that God torture His children to death for refusing to love Him?* The experience of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane also demonstrated that God was not killing His Son. As we have said, in Gethsemane Jesus began to feel His unity with His Father breaking up. He began to feel the awesome loneliness of being given up (Romans 1:24, 26, 28). Had Jesus died in the Garden of Gethsemane, could anyone say that the Father had killed the Son? To the contrary, God sent an angel to sustain Him (Luke 22:43). As Jesus Himself had stated earlier, "No one takes My life from Me. I lay it down of My own accord. I have the power to lay it down and I have the power to take it up" (based on John 10:18).

The angels knew who Jesus was. They knew that He was God. And if Jesus had died in the Garden of Gethsemane, it would not have been because His Father had killed Him. Instead, the Father was crying, "How can I give you up?" (Hosea 11:8), and both of Them suffered together. And so two questions were answered in Gethsemane. Is death the result of sin? Indeed it is. Is it because God kills His wayward children? No, He did not lay a hand on His Son.

Many, nevertheless, believe that justice requires God to torture His children to death. No idea has turned more millions against God. This belief has been refuted, however, not in words, but in actions. It was not God killing His Son in Gethsemane, Jesus was laying His own life down (John 10:18). The angels knew that it was God who was going through this, and it gave them the answer they needed. Yes, death is the result of sin, but it is not torture and execution at the hands of our gracious God.

There was a third question, however, that also needed to be answered. Gethsemane by itself would not have been enough, the answer to the third question required the cross.

(3) *Why is it so important to understand that God does not execute His sinful children?* The simple answer: Because obedience that springs from fear produces the character of a rebel.

At the cross Jesus again answered the first two questions. It was sin that killed Him, not the Father. Why is it so important to answer those questions? Because if God kills and tortures those who refuse to obey Him, even His followers will not serve Him out of love and trust, they will serve Him only out of fear. For example, if a man said to a woman, "Love me or I'll torture you to death," she would either run for her life or submit out of fear. Either way, the result would not be a relationship of love and trust, it would be a relationship of force and fear. And what

follows from that is even worse. Obedience that springs from fear produces the heart of a rebel.

This was clearly demonstrated at the cross, where Jesus not only died, but was also tortured and crucified. By whom? By the Father? Or by allies of the most devout group of Sabbath-keeping, tithe-paying, health-reforming, Bible-quoting “adventists” the world has ever known? Before the religious leaders offered Him up to torture and death, they even said He had a devil (John 8:48). They obeyed God out of fear because they did not really know God:

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. John 19:31, GNT.

The religious leaders who crucified Jesus were serving God out of fear. And the obedience that springs from fear produces the character of a rebel. This is underscored by a statement of Ellen White: “A sullen submission to the will of the Father will develop the character of a rebel. The service is looked upon by such a one in the light of drudgery. It is not rendered cheerfully and in the love of God.” Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him*, 120. Such a one would disobey if he or she dared. Rebelliousness is only suppressed by fear, waiting to burst forth at any time in bitterness or even violence against those portraying the true picture of God.

The Importance of Our Picture of God

The picture one has of God is so important. You see, the religious leaders nailed their Savior to the cross and then rushed home to keep that Sabbath especially holy. They rushed home 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. With the death of Christ, the three questions were fully answered. Does sin result in death? Indeed, it does! But is it torture and execution at the hands of our gracious God? Indeed, it is not! What is so dangerous about misunderstanding this and serving God from fear? The service of fear produces the character of a rebel. Fear turns people who are dedicated to obedience into harsh rebels, and they unwittingly become God’s worst enemies

(John 16:2)!

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Correctly understood, the message of the cross is final defeat for the adversary. No wonder Satan has worked so hard to obscure, misrepresent, and even pervert the meaning of the cross.

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Jesus did not die to win over His Father. Paul is clear about this: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself...” 2 Corinthians 5:19, RSV. Nowhere does the Bible suggest that God had to be reconciled to us. Never once! Instead, God paid the price to reconcile us to Himself! Jesus did not die to pay a mere legal penalty. He died to reveal the truth about God and the falsity of Satan’s charges. And even the angels had to learn this: “...and through him to reconcile to himself *all things, whether on earth or in heaven*, [emphasis supplied] making peace by the blood of his cross.” Colossians 1:20, RSV.

John 12:32 agrees with this: “When I am lifted up from the earth I will draw everyone to me” (GNT). The “everyone” here is not limited to the human race, it is everyone in the whole family of the universe. These texts remind us to look at the cross 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, misrepresent, and even pervert the meaning of the cross.

The Cross is Good News

The cross, nevertheless, is great good news to some of us. Yes, it is true that sinners will die, but that doesn’t mean we need to be afraid of God. In fact, Jesus died to prove there is no reason to be afraid. And those who receive this powerful message will be won to repentance and to trust. Paul was so proud of this good news:

For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its 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. 1 Corinthians

1:17–18, RSV.

The gospel is the powerful good news about the cross, which is the clearest revelation of the truth about God and His government. Now compare 1 Corinthians 1 with Romans 1, where you find that very famous verse about righteousness by faith:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith....For in it the righteousness of God is revealed. Romans 1:16–17, RSV.

Paul explains here that the gospel (good news) is powerful for those who trust in God, and that power is in the revelation of God's righteousness. The good news is that God is not the unrighteous kind of person His enemies have made Him out to be. Even in the Old Testament, before the clarity of the cross, it's wonderful to see that God had good friends who trusted Him to always do the right thing. They were proud to know Him and proud to speak about Him to others:

“Let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,” declares the Lord. Jeremiah 9:24, NIV.

Jeremiah was able to repeat those words with feeling long before the cross. But now such confidence in God has been confirmed by the way Jesus suffered and died. And 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.

Questions and Answers

Louis Venden: If I hear you correctly, Graham, you're saying that Jesus died primarily to say something about God, to make the truth about God clear to us. But what about the moving appeals that some of us remember from childhood? That Jesus died for *you*? That Jesus died for *me*? It was even in the songs we sang. Isn't it a wonderful thought that if I had been the only one who had responded, Jesus would still have come and gone through it all just for me! How do you bring that together?

Graham Maxwell: I still believe in that, and I think God would want us to rejoice in that. I think it's understandable that as beginners, perhaps, we tend to be preoccupied with our own salvation and what God has done for me, and you, and those we love. But as one learns to read the Bible as a whole and get this larger view of the whole cosmic conflict, one realizes that the all important thing is greater than what happens to me personally. It is the settling of these issues in the Great Controversy. What counts is the establishing of the truth about God that confirms the peace of the universe for all eternity.

Lou: Are you saying, then, that I need to "get over" this? Is it childish for me to feel so moved about Jesus dying for me?

Graham: Fortunately, what God says about Himself is what makes it worthwhile being saved. Until God has established the fact that He is not the kind of person His enemies have made Him out to be, there will be no security. We'll be saved, but in a universe full of conflict. So first this must be settled. And, fortunately, that settlement includes you and me as well. It's not one or the other. The good news about what Jesus has done for me comes in this larger setting. The way He has sought to win you and me is also the way in which He has won the war. It's the same task, the same mission.

Lou: I think that's helpful. But there are many words and terms associated with the cross that I didn't hear in your presentation this evening. For instance, I was just reading a book on the substitutionary atonement, the idea that Jesus died in my place. Another idea is that Jesus died to satisfy the demands of the law, to "satisfy justice." You haven't used that kind of language. And what about paying the price of sin? And there's this emphasis upon the blood, right in Scripture. What about that kind of language, which is familiar to all of us. What do you do with that?

Graham: The Bible is full of that kind of language. Let's take the word "blood" first. Sometimes we, with all reverence, act as if the blood has some magical power. We sing, "There's power in the blood." We even sing, "There's power in the Word," and almost treat the Bible as if it had magical power. I remember Jesus' words, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life" (John 5:39). But there's no life in the Book as such. It is just ink on paper or words on a screen. The Book has power because it witnesses to the truth about the One who has the power. Only God saves. The Bible doesn't save.

I would very reverently want to say the same thing about the blood. Blood simply represents the death of Christ. It represents His life given in death. Apart from the meaning of His death, the blood has no power. But the blood has great power in its meaning. When we come to understand why Jesus had to die, that's going to secure the universe against apostasy and defection for eternity. In that context I can sing, "There's power in the blood." But as I am singing, in my mind I'm saying, "It's the meaning that counts."

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Lou: All right. So you can still use the words.

Graham: Indeed. It's very biblical to use the words.

Lou: So then "power in the blood" is a shorthand way of saying, "There is power in the death of Christ. The meaning of His death has the power to change my life." It's much more than just the image of being washed in blood.

Graham: That's right. I remember when I was baptized up at Pacific Union College, the choir stood out there and sang, *a capella*, "There is a fountain filled with blood," and you could probably sing the rest of it.

Lou: "Drawn from Emanuel's veins." I love that song.

Graham: That's right. I like it. I've sung it many times myself. But the older I get, the more I think of the meaning of it. In fact, sometimes when we're singing it, I have to stop and think about it. There's no power in just repeating the words. But there's power in the meaning; why Jesus had to die, how the cross is the most costly and convincing evidence, and how the cross will provide security throughout eternity. I'm definitely not going to make light of the blood. But it's a symbol. We have to ask what the meaning behind that is.

The same is true with "paying the price." That can be interpreted in various ways. Some have wondered if maybe God paid a price to the Devil to buy us back, for example. But no, I just think it's a way of saying, "This is what it cost to do away with sin. This is what it cost to handle the breakdown of trust and trustworthiness." For example, Roger

Bannister was the first man to run a mile in under four minutes, but he paid a heavy price to do that. He often fell to the ground unconscious as he crossed a finish line. He left just enough energy to make it to the finish, he had nothing left. But the price he paid to run a four-minute mile was not paid to anybody else. That language is a metaphor of all the effort it took to break the four-minute mile record. Similarly, Jesus did die to pay the price of sin, but let's not over-read the metaphor. As always, we must allow the rest of Scripture to guide us as to the meaning we should read into those words.

Lou: So some of the illustrations that we have used can give the wrong impression.

Graham: All illustrations are hazardous, so the Bible way is to give us many illustrations. One illustration can cover the shortcomings of another.

Lou: But what about such metaphors as the "satisfying of justice" and "the demands of the law"?

Graham: He died to satisfy the demands of the law. But that raises the question, what does the law demand? Paul says, "Love is the fulfilling of the law" (Romans 13:10). Jesus (Matthew 22:37-39) and Moses (Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Leviticus 19:18) said the same. So the law would seem to demand our love, but love can't be demanded. If love has to be commanded, it's not real love. So what does the law say? Does it say, "You have to love God and love each other, or you will be executed in the most painful way known to our heavenly Father"?

Some of our good Christian friends live under the awful weight of believing that God has said, "You either love and obey Me, or you will be tortured in sulfurous flames for eternity." That such good folk can still love God is a real tribute to them, but it is not a tribute to God. Because they truly love Jesus and are faithful, I believe they will be in the Kingdom. But what an awful burden to live under! Yet I think Jesus will love to introduce such people to the Father. He'll say, "Would you like to meet the Father?" And they'll say, "Well, if You will go with us." And He'll respond, "There's no need, but I'll go with you anyway." What a marvelous surprise it will be to millions of these people to meet the Father in the Kingdom and discover that He is just as loving and gracious as the Son. We will cover this topic in the next chapter, "There Is No Need to Be Afraid of God."

Speaking about "the demands of law" belongs to a very legal conception of what has gone wrong in the universe, which we discussed in

Chapter Two. In that view, what has gone wrong is that we have “broken the rules,” and the law demands that God execute us for breaking the rules. Or to put it another way, Jesus died so that somehow God could justly forgive us even though we have broken the rules. I’m not sure we have been able to make too much sense out of that. But it goes along with the other one, “satisfying justice.” Whose justice? I have friends who say, “If God does not give (Idi Amin, Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden, etc.) several days in the fire, I will not regard Him as a just God.” They have a strong feeling about the satisfaction of justice. I think they really mean it, and I respect them for that. But I would also love to relieve them of that burden. If I want to know why Jesus died, I should go to the cross, see how the Father is involved, and then fit what I see back into Scripture. I don’t see God simply fulfilling the requirements of a legal model.

Lou: Could you say something about the idea of “substitutionary”?

Graham: It’s true that He died in our stead. He died as a substitution. After all, either He dies or we die. However, that’s where the comparison ends, because if God let you and me and all other sinners die, all it would have proved is the truthfulness of His warning, “If you sin, you will die.” And God could say to the universe, “Was I right? I said sinners would die, and look, they’re dead.” But the universe would not have had answers to questions two and three. When Jesus died, however, there was no doubt in the minds of the universe that God was not killing His Son. They were clear about that. And they also saw clearly the horrible consequences of a punitive picture of God. The death of Christ answers all three questions (see earlier section of this chapter entitled “Three Questions Regarding the Character of God”). It’s more than just us or Him. His death is infinitely more significant than ours. But had He not died, we would have been left to reap the consequences and we all would have died. So in that sense, yes, He died in our stead. But beyond that there’s no comparison. His death is infinitely more significant than the death of every sinful man or angel who has ever lived. The death of angels and men would not have answered the questions.

Lou: What you’re saying, then, is that the “satisfaction” idea doesn’t encompass everything that’s involved in the atonement, does it?

Graham: Oh, I think it makes it much too small. I think it puts God in a very bad light. And on top of that, it doesn’t answer the questions of the Great Controversy. Many folk who prefer other understandings

of the plan of salvation do not realize there has been a universe-wide great controversy over the character and government of God from the beginning. As I mentioned in Chapter One, even Luther, hero of the Christian world that he is, could not conceive of these larger issues because he didn't appreciate the book of Revelation. Not many, through the years, have seen the sixty-sixth book picture of a universe-wide controversy over the character and government of God. And so they have seen the death of Christ as primarily a plan just to save you and me, for which we are very grateful. It's just that the larger view of things makes the cross much more significant.

Lou: I guess it comes back to this. What one understands the problem to be has everything to do with what the answer to that problem is. Here's an important question. "Are you suggesting that how Jesus died is the way the wicked will die at the end of the thousand years, that God will give them up as He gave up His Son?"

Graham: As far as the giving up is concerned, I believe that's the meaning of the third angel's message. He will "pour out His wrath without mixture." Revelation 14:10. This is the last time God's wrath is expressed and, as a result, all the wicked will die.

Lou: Is that God becoming furious then?

Graham: My understanding would be that if we should look up and see Christ looking at the death of the wicked, He would be crying, "Why will you die? How can I give you up? How can I let you go?" Hosea 11:8. But we still would die.

Lou: Does that mean you share the view that God doesn't kill anyone? Is that what you are saying, that God never has and never will?

Graham: Well, I honor anybody who wants to put God in a good light, but I think some have gone too far, and that raises its own problems. It seems clear to me that many, many times in the Scriptures God has put His children to sleep. Take the firstborn in Egypt. They didn't die because they were bad. They died because they were the firstborn (Exodus 11:4-6; 12:29-30). Someone suggested that the Devil does God's killing for Him. But the Devil is not that cooperative, you can be sure. No, the firstborn in Egypt died because the angel of the Lord put them to sleep. And it's possible some of them may arise in the resurrection of the righteous. Who is to say they were all bad boys? In the Flood (Genesis 6-7), with the 185,000 Assyrians (2 Kings 19:35), and on many other occasions, I see God Himself putting His own children to sleep. But as Jesus said, it's only sleep. He resurrects them too. Those boys in

Egypt who went to bed that night, they are awake the next morning, as far as they are aware, without any consciousness of the time between.

Lou: But now you are making a distinction that is biblical, that is, a distinction between the first and second death. What about the death of Jesus? Did He die the first or the second death?

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The first death is the death we all die if we live long enough.

It is a death that is followed by a resurrection, whether righteous or unrighteous. It is the consequence of living in a world of sin. The second death is the one the Bible warns us of, the death from which there is no resurrection.

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Graham: The first death is the death we all die if we live long enough. It is a death that is followed by a resurrection, whether righteous or unrighteous. It is the consequence of living in a world of sin. Even relative saints like Isaiah and Elisha died. The second death is the one the Bible warns us of, the death from which there is no resurrection.

Which death did Jesus die? Had He died of crucifixion alone, He would have died the first death. But He died to demonstrate that awful second death. How come, then, did He rise on Sunday, if there is no resurrection after the second death? I don't think Jesus came to show that in the second death you die and stay dead forever. How could you demonstrate that anyway? We would have to live forever to see it. There's no way you could really answer that. Rather, He came to demonstrate how His Father is involved in that death. And even before He was dead, He said, "It is finished" (John 19:30). Then on resurrection Sunday He went up to heaven to see if the heavenly council agreed. And He heard them say, "Yes, it's finished. You've cleared up all our questions." So I think He answered all the questions that needed to be answered in the only way that they could be answered, and we don't need to ask more of the cross.

One more point. If Jesus died to pay the legal penalty, and the legal penalty is the second death, you have a real problem. The crucial feature of the second death is that you never rise again. So if the cross is all about a legal system, if He died to pay the legal penalty, then He should still be in the grave. In that case, since He went up to heaven on Easter Sunday, none of us is paid up and we are in serious legal trouble.

Lou: So the resurrection is one of the most significant reasons why

the strictly legal model would not be adequate.

Graham: When He went to heaven, the angels didn't say, "Wait a minute. You are supposed to stay dead for eternity to pay the price for sin. Hurry back to earth, we won't tell anybody we saw You out of the grave." Instead they said, "It's more than enough. You could have come up on Friday!"

Lou: All right. Here's another question: "If death is not the *penalty* for sin, how can we understand the text that says, 'Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin' (Hebrews 9:22)? Why then does Jesus say to His Father, 'My blood, My blood,' when our name comes up for review?"

Graham: In Hebrews, "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin," is a reference to the Old Testament ceremonial system, where blood was constantly shed and appropriately applied. But one has to read on in Hebrews: "You see, the purpose was to be a constant reminder of sin" (Hebrews 10:3). Hebrews is clear that all that blood did not lead to forgiveness of sin (Hebrews 10:4), and it didn't handle the problem of distrust. The many sacrifices were all pointing forward to the day when Christ would come to do it once and for all (Hebrews 10:10–14). Without His death there would be no answer. What is the use of being forgiven if you are going to live in a chaotic universe of continual war and distrust?

Lou: What about the words of Jesus, "My blood, My blood"?

Graham: Jesus is saying, "Remember why I died. Remember the meaning. Remember the answers that I gave. Remember how I made it possible and safe to forgive and heal sinners and let them into the Kingdom."

Lou: But the implication here, if I heard you correctly, is that Jesus isn't trying to talk the Father into feeling differently.

Graham: We'll take a look at that in the next chapter. We will note Jesus saying, "There is no need for Me to plead with the Father, for the Father Himself loves you" (John 16:25–27).

Lou: The Bible says things like "vengeance is Mine" (Romans 12:19). It also speaks about the wrath of God and the destruction of the wicked (Revelation 14:9–11). What do you say about those kinds of expressions when speaking about our Lord?

Graham: Those questions will fit very well into the next chapter, "There Is No Need to Be Afraid of God." But let's take up the idea of "vengeance" briefly right here. In a couple of places the Bible says,

“Vengeance is Mine; I will repay” (Deuteronomy 32:35; Romans 12:19). In Romans 12 Paul is saying, “Leave room for the wrath of God. Don’t avenge yourself. Let Him do it” (Romans 12:19). God is saying to us, “Look, let Me take vengeance on My children because I love them all. But if I take vengeance on this enemy of yours, it might win him. Would you mind?” And you might hesitate, “Wait a minute. I’m not going to let You take vengeance if vengeance means You are going to win my enemy over.” You see, the beauty of that is God saying, “Let Me discipline My own children. I might win some of them.” No wonder many of us don’t really want God to do the avenging. When He does, there’s the hazard that I might turn up in the Kingdom and meet my worst enemy there, because God has won him through the discipline of “vengeance.”

Lou: That means God is using the word “vengeance” in a quite different way than we might be capable of doing on our own.

Graham: I see God saying, “Let Me give your enemy what I think he needs.” And for us, that is hazardous. God might win your enemy and you’ll end up neighbors in heaven.

Lou: Someone else writes: “It is wonderful to know that God is a merciful, kind, loving, fair and just God. John 17:3 says, ‘This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the Father, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou has sent.’ Now here’s my question: How can a person *really* know Him and be sure that he knows Him?”

Graham: That’s beautiful. First of all you have to know *about* Him. If that doesn’t happen, how would you know Whom you are knowing? Then you need to understand the biblical meaning of the word “know,” as we have discussed before. It’s even used for the relationship between a husband and his wife. Adam knew Eve his wife, and they didn’t just become acquainted; they had a baby (Genesis 4:1). In the biblical sense, to know God is to love Him, to become friends. By way of contrast, when God says, “Go away; I never knew you” (Matthew 7:21–23), He means, “We never were friends.” So to claim that one knows God means that one really loves and admires God for His wise and gracious ways. It means that one would really like to be regarded as God’s friend, and also to speak and act like a friend of God. When you know God, I think it will show. It will show in the friendly feelings we have toward God. It will show in the jealousy we have for God’s reputation. We will want Him to be seen as He really is.

Lou: Last question. “I have always been concerned about people who wake up in the wrong resurrection and are truly surprised to find

themselves there. They had worked in God's name or Jesus' name and had done many wonderful works (Matthew 7:21–23). If I were to die tonight, how would I know which resurrection I would come up in?"

Graham: It seems to me that the people described in Matthew 7 were involved in legalism. They were serving God for the wrong reason. From our perspective today, these would be individuals who are surprised to find they are lost because they think of all the tithe they have paid, and all the Sabbaths they have endured when they could have gone to the ball game. But they have never been God's friends. So He says, "Go away; I never knew you." Friendship is the very essence of the relationship God desires to have with His children.

One more thing. Friends are not afraid of each other, so the next chapter is entitled, "There Is No Need to Be Afraid of God."

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The Three Questions and Answers Simplified

1. Does sin result in (eternal) death?

Gethsemane and the cross prove that it does.

2. Is that death torture and execution at the hands of our gracious God?

Gethsemane and the cross prove that it is not!

3. What is so dangerous about misunderstanding that death and serving God out of fear?

The behavior of the religious leaders at the cross demonstrates that service based on fear produces the character of a rebel.

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Chapter Nine

There Is No Need to Be Afraid of God

If God were the kind of person His enemies have made Him out to be; arbitrary, vengeful and severe; there could be no real freedom, and our worship and obedience would be driven by our fears. Sadly, millions have been turned away from God by Satan's perversion of the truth. But Jesus came to bring the truth about God that sets us free, truth that makes it possible for mere mortals to be His friends.

To be afraid of God is to misunderstand, even to deny, the truths that He paid such a price to reveal. Though God is infinite in majesty and power, He values nothing higher than the freedom of His intelligent creatures. He desires that their love, their worship, their trust, their willingness to listen, may be freely given. God not only prefers it that way, He knows that if our love and trust are not freely given, there would be no genuine freedom in His family. And God would rather die (on the cross) than preside over a universe that is not free.

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Though God is infinite in majesty and power, He values nothing higher than the freedom of His intelligent creatures.

He desires that their love, their worship, their trust, their willingness to listen, may be freely given.

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Besides, God also knows that the obedience that springs from fear will actually turn His children into rebels. As we have seen (Chapter Eight), He has demonstrated this truth at great cost. Rebelliousness is the very essence of sin. God sent His Son to do away with sin (Romans 8:3). But in order to do away with rebelliousness and distrust, He must first do away with fear. It is fear that has turned so many away from God. It is fear that has inspired rebelliousness even in the hearts of those who seek to obey Him, but do not know Him well. God went to the cross in Christ to make it eternally clear that there is no need for His children to be afraid of Him. While He is infinite in power, He is also infinitely gracious. Surely such a God is worthy of our love, our reverence, our worship, and our willingness to listen and obey.

What Fear Does to Freedom

If God really were the kind of person His enemies have made Him out to be; arbitrary, vengeful and severe; there would be no freedom under His government. Any professions of love and trust on our part would be compromised by our fears. How could God be satisfied with expressions of love from children who are afraid? Would you parents be satisfied with such expressions of love from your own children? When you consider Satan's perversion of the truth in this matter, it's no wonder millions of people have turned away from God.

Satan has crafted a picture of God that has made God look even more cruel than old King Nebuchadnezzar and his burning fiery furnace. In the book of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar built a very large idol and ordered the nation's leaders (Daniel 3:2) to bow down at a given signal and worship his god. Anyone who refused to worship the image was to be thrown into the burning fiery furnace. Readers of the story recoil in horror at how Daniel's three friends; Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego; got caught up in such cruel tyranny. In the words of Nebuchadnezzar, "You either submit to my god or I will throw you into the burning fiery furnace" (based on Daniel 3:14-15).

Many, somehow, find it possible to accept a God who is described as doing the very same thing as Nebuchadnezzar. They see God saying to us, "On your knees, worship Me, or I'll throw you into a burning fiery furnace." Actually, this portrayal of God makes Him even worse than Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar was willing to settle for a simple act of submission: "On your knees!" God asks for much more; our love and our trust. He is caricatured as saying, "If you will not love and trust Me, I will throw you into a burning fiery furnace. And I won't burn you as briefly as Nebuchadnezzar did. I will burn you forever and ever." Does that picture of God make sense? Is it acceptable? I love Ellen G. White's words on this. "Such thoughts destroy human reason" (based on *Early Writings*, 219 and *Life Sketches*, 153).

Of course, gentle Jesus would never say such a thing, would He? So is it the Father who is the fearsome One who would issue such a threat? And if the Father is the fearsome member of the Trinity, is that why the Son came to die? Was it to assuage, appease and propitiate the wrath of the offended member of the Trinity? Is this why Jesus had to go up quickly on resurrection Sunday — to intercede with the fearsome member of the Trinity? Could the Father never find it in His own heart to forgive His rebellious children unless He were begged to do so by the most sympathetic member of the Three? I hope no one reading this chap-

ter believes any of this! But can you see the impact our understanding of the death of the wicked has on our picture of God? It also impacts our understanding of the plan of salvation. That's the reason for this chapter, to explain that there is really no need to be afraid of God.

There's More Than One Kind of Fear

What, then, does the Bible mean when it says that we are supposed to "fear" God and be His "God-fearing" people? You can even find that word in the first of the Three Angels' Messages: "Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come." Revelation 14:7, RSV. Not only does this verse tell us to fear God, it even gives us a good reason to fear Him, the Last Judgment. So before we go any further, we need to understand the biblical meaning of the word "fear." If you will forgive the Greek, it's pronounced *phobos*, from which we get the English word "phobia." But the biblical word doesn't always mean terror. Sometimes it means respect or reverence: "Blessed is everyone that feareth the Lord. Happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee." Psalm 128:1-2, KJV. Surely the Psalmist isn't saying, "Happy is everyone who is scared of God."

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Where there is no respect there is no reverence, and very little learning can take place.

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So the biblical word "fear" has another meaning. Blessed is everyone who reveres and respects the Lord. You will be happy if you do, and it will be well with you. For example: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Proverbs 9:10, KJV. Does that mean that being terrified of God is the beginning of wisdom and learning? No, there again the context determines the meaning of the word. So the translation in the *Good News Bible* is to be preferred: "To be wise you must first have reverence for the Lord."

Where there is no respect there is no reverence, and very little learning can take place. Think of the lengths to which God has gone through the centuries to gain people's respect and to hold it long enough to tell them more truth about Himself. Perhaps the most famous example is the one provided at Mount Sinai. God came down to speak to His people. Did they all line up quietly to listen? No. They were noisy. They were complaining. They were fussing about the food and the water.

There was no respect for God. So God could not speak to them softly that day. Instead, there was thunder and lightning, fire, smoke, and an earthquake. And God said to Moses: “Put a fence around that mountain. Don’t let the people come too close to Me” (based on Exodus 19:12–13). Today we sing “Nearer, Still Nearer,” but on that day no one wanted to get close:

The people were afraid and trembled; and they stood far off, and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will hear, but let not God speak to us, lest we die.” And Moses said to the people, “Do not fear; for God has come to prove you, and that the fear of him may be before your eyes, that you may not sin.” Exodus 20:18–20, RSV.

Notice the use of the word “fear” with both meanings in the same sentence. “Do not fear,” at the beginning of the sentence, means the same thing as “there’s no need to be afraid.” But further on, “that the fear of Him may be before you,” uses the word with the meaning of “reverence.” So the very same Hebrew word can carry different meanings in the very same sentence. Notice also that Moses could stand in the middle of the earthquake and the fire and say that there is no need to be afraid. Why? Because he knew God, and he knew why God was raising His voice on that occasion.

Why God Raises His Voice

We might ask, “Why didn’t God speak more softly?” We know that He prefers to. That’s what He does when talking to His friends, as in the still, small voice with Elijah at the mouth of the cave (1 Kings 19:12). But when people are hard of hearing, God will raise His voice. And how grateful we should be that He is willing to raise His voice when we need it! Now did He speak too loudly at Mount Sinai? Did He terrify them *too* much? I would say not. Forty days after the fire, the earthquake, the lightning and the thunder died away, they were dancing drunk around a golden calf in a fertility cult ritual (Exodus 32:1–20).

Surely those of us who have taught little ones, or have children of our own, know how difficult it is to gain proper respect so that learning might occur without fear. What a delicate thing it is to accomplish both! Whenever God raised His voice, He got reverence, but there would also be some terror. When He talked softly, they would despise Him, as later generations despised gentle Jesus. So God has had to go back and forth

on this throughout history.

Imagine that you are a grade school teacher with forty years of experience. In all those years, you have never raised your voice to your little pupils. It is the last day of fall quarter, and there is a rap on the door. The principal says, "The building is on fire. Please line up the pupils and get them out the door." So you step back into the room with your usual dignity and in your usual quiet voice, you say, "Students, the building is on fire. Please line up and we will go out that door." But it is the last day before Christmas vacation, it is the period after recess, and there is a tumult in the room. The little ones don't see you standing there.

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*When people are hard of hearing, God will raise His voice.
And how grateful we should be that He is willing to raise
His voice when we need it!*

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Would you say at this point, "Well, I am not going to sully my reputation by shouting for the first time in forty years. I have given them a chance. Let me just go home and save myself." Or would you, dignified you, be willing to shout to the students for the first time? What if, to your horror, they still don't notice you? Would you be willing to climb up on the desk, throw the chalk and some erasers, until in terror the children finally see you? Then, once they have slipped into their seats and you have slipped into yours, you say, "Children, don't go home and tell your mothers I am angry with you. I am not angry with you. I love you and I don't want you to be hurt. But the school building is on fire. So in this quiet moment while I have your attention, would you quickly line up the way we've practiced and go out that door?"

Now which approach shows greater love? Would it be *not* terrifying them briefly? Would it be *not* raising your voice? Or would it be better to run the risk of being feared? Wouldn't it be better to be obeyed for the wrong reason momentarily? It seems to me that God has taken that risk over and over in Scripture. We should be prepared to say, "Thank You God, for raising Your voice so many times. It must mean that You *really* love us."

Facing the Judgment

The first angel of Revelation 14 suggests a most serious reason why

we might become afraid. He says that the hour of God's judgment has come (Revelation 14:7). Those are awesome words that strike many people with fear. How thoroughly will we be judged? How much does God know about us? Hebrews 4 suggests that He knows a lot: "There is nothing that can be hid from God; everything in all creation is exposed and lies open before his eyes. And it is to him that we must all give an account of ourselves." Hebrews 4:13, GNT. Put that together with the words of Solomon: "God is going to judge everything we do, whether good or bad, even things done in secret." Ecclesiastes 12:14, GNT.

How can you face judgment at the hands of Someone so well informed and be unafraid? Well, unafraid of what and unafraid of whom? The same John who warned us in Revelation 14:7 that the hour of God's judgment has come, is the one who explains how it is possible to face the judgment without fear. In one of his letters, John uses the word "fear" with the meaning of "terror in the face of the judgment." But notice what he does with that terror:

God is love, and whoever lives in love lives in union with God and God lives in union with him. Love is made perfect in us in order that we may have courage on the Judgment Day. . . . There is no fear in love; perfect love drives out all fear. So then, love has not been made perfect in anyone who is afraid, because fear has to do with punishment. 1 John 4:16-18, GNT.

John's point is crystal clear. If we really know the truth about God, there is no need to be afraid, even of the final judgment. And why is that? Is it only because God has given all judgment to the Son? Notice John 5: "The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son." John 5:22, RSV. Many find that comforting, because they feel they are much more likely to receive merciful treatment at the hand of the Son than of the Father. But is that true? I've heard some say with real gratitude, "I have no fear of the judgment because I know I have a Friend in court."

And I ask, "Who is that Friend?"

Then comes the warm response, "Why, Jesus, of course."

"You mean the Father is no Friend of yours?"

"Oh, I didn't mean that."

"Then what did you mean when you said that you were happy to have a Friend in court and Jesus is your Friend? Is the Father no Friend?"

What of the Holy Spirit?"

Some derive comfort from the thought, as they consider the final judgment at the hands of One who knows us in such detail, that Jesus will be there interceding with the Father in our behalf. Does that mean that the more Jesus pleads with the Father, the more likely we are to receive merciful treatment? Think what that implies about the Father! Is the Father less loving and less forgiving than the Son? Do we think that He is exacting, unforgiving, and severe? Are we even willing, in expressing our doctrines, to support Satan's charges against our God?

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Whether we are judged by Father, Son, or Holy Spirit, we have no need to be afraid of God.

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Remember Jesus' words to Philip: "If you had known me, you would have known my Father also....He who has seen me has seen the Father." John 14:7, 9, RSV. If you really knew this to be true, you would never say, "I am grateful that Jesus is my Friend in court, rather than the Father." You couldn't say that, could you? Remember Jesus' words in John 16:26-27: "I need make no promise to plead to the Father for you, for the Father himself loves you" (*Phillips*). Or as Goodspeed's translation puts the same text: "There is no need for me to intercede with the Father for you." According to Jesus Himself, the Son does not love us more than the Father, or understand us better than the Father. Neither is the Son more sympathetic than the Father. *If we have seen the Son, we have seen the Father.*

According to Romans 8, all three members of the Godhead are for us; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. If all of Them are for us, then who is the one who is against us? Against whose charges do we need to be defended (Romans 8:26-39)? You see, whether we are judged by Father, Son, or Holy Spirit, we have no need to be afraid of God. But that is not the only reason to be unafraid. When we understand *how* the judgment is conducted and *what* determines whether we are saved or lost, we will have even further evidence that we don't need to be afraid.

How God Judges at the End

The Bible makes it plain that there is nothing arbitrary about the judgment. There is no arbitrary standard by which we are measured. There are no arbitrary decisions made. The choice is actually ours: "And

this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light.” John 3:19, RSV. You see, if we have turned down the truth, we have not been won to trust and we don’t have a willingness to listen. Because of this, God has not been able to help us and to heal us. We don’t have a new heart and a right spirit (Ezekiel 36:26). We are not the kind of people who would be safe to admit to the hereafter. There is absolutely nothing arbitrary about that.

If any one hears my sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him. . . . He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day.
John 12:47–48, RSV.

The sayings of Jesus are the truth and light that He brought to this earth. While all judgment has been given to Him (John 5:22), there is another sense in which He does not judge at all (John 8:15). You see, in the end we are not judged by Jesus or God, we are judged by the truth. It is a matter of Them simply diagnosing our condition. It is a consequence. It is a result. There is nothing arbitrary about it at all. And then what God does to those who have turned down the truth (which means He has not been able to heal them) is not arbitrary either. For what does God do to those who reject the priceless truth about Him? What else can He do in a free universe but sadly give them up? As we noticed in the previous chapter: “Because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie. . . . God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct.” Romans 1:25, 28, RSV. God sadly gives people up to the consequences of what they have chosen to do. In the end-time judgment, God simply recognizes the choices we have made, diagnoses our condition, and announces the results.

One day God will look at His people, some who have rejoiced in the truth and some who have turned it down. On that day He will say these awesome words, “Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy.” Revelation 22:11, NIV. Just go on doing what you are doing. Go on being what you are. There is nothing arbitrary about that. There is no need to fear God for that reason. We have made our choice and we are reaping the results, both good and bad.

How Sinners Die the Second Death

Having said this, doesn't the Bible warn us that sinners will experience God's wrath and be burned forever? How about Revelation 14? "He also shall drink of the wine of God's wrath...and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone...for ever and ever." Revelation 14:10-11, RSV. At first glance, that sounds like the fiery furnace of Nebuchadnezzar all over again. Fortunately, the preceding sixty-five books of Scripture have prepared us to understand this awesome language. As we saw in the last chapter (based on Romans 1:24-28 and Hosea 11:7-8), God's wrath is simply His turning away in loving disappointment from those who do not want Him anyway. This turning away leaves them to the inevitable and awful consequence of their own rebellious choices. And as He lets them go, He cries, "How can I give you up? How can I let you go?" Hosea 11:7-8.

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God's wrath is simply His turning away in loving disappointment from those who do not want Him anyway.

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Revelation 14:10, however, uses the word "forever." How long is forever? Jude may be helpful. "Sodom and Gomorrah...serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire." Jude 1:7, RSV. That's another way of saying "forever fire," but that fire went out millennia ago. So "forever" in biblical terms need not last forever in today's terms. Also in Exodus 21:6, there is a reference to the servant who would serve his master "forever," but that "forever" might only last until the next jubilee or, at most, as long as this life shall last. So we need to understand the biblical meaning of forever. It offers no support for the eternally burning fires of hell.

What about the fire itself? Many times in the Bible God's glory, the brilliance that surrounds His divine person, is described as having the appearance of fire: "Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain..." Exodus 24:17, RSV. It wasn't devouring fire. It looked like it. There are many other places in Scripture where we find the glory that surrounds God is life-giving glory. Adam and Eve could live in its presence. Lucifer used to, as he walked among the stones of fire (Ezekiel 28:14). It is energizing, life-giving glory. It is only because we are, by our own choice, out of harmony with God that what should be life-giving is destructive. God longs to

heal us and doesn't want to lose a single one.

Someday, every one of us will come face-to-face with God, whether we are saved or lost, at either the second or the third coming, on either side of the Millennium. Do you think we will be afraid? What if we should be among the lost on that day? We would look up and see Christ there in His human form. Will He be angry with us? Or will He be crying, "Why will you die? How can I give you up? How can I let you go?" Hosea 11:7-8. Like a physician, God is there, eager and ready to heal. But He cannot force us to be well. If we do not trust Him, if we are not willing to listen, He cannot heal the damage done. What else can God do if we have come to the place where we have persistently refused to listen, or even rejected His offers? If we have refused to trust, we have refused to let Him help us. What else can He do but sadly give us up? It will happen in the same way that He gave up His Son on the cross, and we will die. Even in the death of the wicked there is no need to be afraid of God. The choice is still ours.

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It is the truth about God that makes it possible to die unafraid. And every dying patient deserves to know that.

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One reason many people are afraid to die is because they are afraid of God. They know that when they die they will come face-to-face with some Great Power. It is an awesome thing to meet God. Is it really possible to die unafraid of God? According to the Bible, yes. The mission of Jesus is to "free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." Hebrews 2:15, NIV. I believe that the fear of death is actually the fear of God, the fear of the judgment. Is it possible to know God well enough that one can die unafraid? "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." John 8:32, GNT. It is the truth about God that makes it possible to die unafraid. And every dying patient deserves to know that. People who know the truth about God can die unafraid, knowing that in their next moment of consciousness they will be in the presence of the kind of God we so much admire.

Just before Jesus Himself went out to die, He tried to sum up the ideal quality of the relationship God desires to have with His children. He said, "God wishes to deal with you as His friends."

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. John 15:15, RSV.

Jesus here contrasts servants with friends. The servant does not know what his master is doing. The master gives orders and the servant accepts and follows them without understanding why. But Jesus and His Father want us to know and to understand Them as Friends. God has had a few such friends through the years. One of the most notable was Moses: “Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.” Exodus 33:11, RSV.

God welcomes just the kind of conversations about Him that we are having in this book. In fact, He would welcome us to have the same kind of conversation directly with Him! And in my imagination, I can see Him seated in a chair across from us. We know that He is the Infinite One whose words hung the whole vast universe in space. We know that He is the One who is worshiped with awe by all the brilliant angels. Yet as He sits there across from us, He values nothing higher than our freedom. He invites our inquiries. He does not want us to be afraid. Surely such a God deserves our deepest reverence, awe, wonder, and worship. Surely, He deserves to be believed when He says, “There is no need to be afraid.”

Questions and Answers

Louis Venden: I love the way you put that, to imagine our heavenly Father sitting down and talking with us. It certainly is beautiful.

Graham Maxwell: If we believe that Jesus is God, He did exactly that all those years He was on earth. And if we have seen Him, we have seen the Father (John 14:9). Do we really believe the implications of that? Or do we think that when we get to heaven, even Jesus will be different? No more quiet chats by the River of Life?

Lou: Why is it so hard for us to really grasp this and to experience it?

Graham: Well, I can think of at least two reasons. One is our own natural limitations. It seems almost unbelievable. The other reason is that there is an adversary who is determined that we not recognize this. He wants us to have a different picture of God. That’s been his whole campaign, and he’s won so many believers that it doesn’t seem fair. His

evangelism, “bad news-ism,” has been so very successful.

Lou: I have a number of questions that relate to the previous chapter, but also tie in to this one. The first is concerned with wrath and punishment. “Do you think the concept of wrath and punishment has a useful purpose? Can it help us to remember the importance of remaining in harmony with God’s truthfulness and trustworthiness?”

Graham: God has obviously used such language many, many times. Wrath and punishment have been useful to Him. But it’s sad that He had to settle for that. When Israel was noisy and irreverent, God had to strike a little fear into their hearts. And in the midst of their terror was a measure of reverence and respect. But when our reverence is based on fear only, the moment the thunder dies away the reverence evaporates. Jesus really demonstrated this in His lament over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41–44; Matthew 23:37). There was no thunder, no lightning, and no earthquake. He simply wept quietly over the city. And many despised Him for it. I do love it, though, that the children were never afraid of Him. They would sit in His lap and according to one description they would “reach up and kiss that pensive face.” Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, 11.

Lou: Is it wrath and punishment that you are speaking about when you talk about emergency measures? Or is it the picture of a teacher standing on the desk throwing the chalk and the erasers to get our attention?

Graham: Both would be emergency measures; they are not God’s regular way of doing things. There is a whole chapter on God’s emergency measures coming (Chapter Eleven).

Lou: This same questioner went on to ask, “Do you feel comfortable so extensively re-reading passages like Revelation 14:10 in the third angel’s message?”

Graham: It’s significant that the last great message from the angels to this earth is about the destruction of the wicked. That’s very strong language. It’s God’s last message of warning just before the End. Things must be really desperate for Him to raise His voice that loud. It would be like a father walking with his son up in the mountains, and the son is getting closer and closer to the cliff. At first the father says, “Son, stop right where you are.” But he doesn’t hear. He raises his voice, but the wind is blowing it away. So finally the father at the top of his lungs shouts to the boy, “Stop where you are!!” A nearby group may say to themselves, “Listen to that heartless father, bellowing at his poor little boy.” When they get closer and learn the whole situation they say, “Forgive us; we

misunderstood.” I think many of us may owe God an apology. I’m glad He’s raised His voice. We needed it.

Lou: So Revelation 14:10 is warning us how dangerous the cliff is.

Graham: This is the strongest language in all of Scripture. But I like the fact that the one who wrote Revelation 14:10 is the same person who wrote, “There is no fear in love. Perfect love casts out all fear” (1 John 4:18). So we can understand that God is love and still understand the need for earthquake, wind and fire.

Lou: Someone has raised a question about hell. “Where did the idea of hell come from? It seems to be so prevalent throughout Christianity.”

Graham: One of the first Christian documents that describes hell is the (*Ethiopic*) *Apocalypse of Peter* which is in what some call the *Christian Apocrypha* or the *New Testament Apocrypha*. This document precedes Dante’s *Inferno* by many centuries. It’s a very detailed description of the fate of the wicked. If your prevailing sin was lying, you might be hung by your tongue over a hot flame. If some other organ of the body was your instrument in sin, you might be similarly tortured. It’s very detailed (based on (*Ethiopic*) *Apocalypse of Peter* 20–33).

The real origin of the belief in hell, however, is Satan’s lie in the Garden of Eden: “You will not surely die.” Genesis 3:4. You see, if human beings are all immortal, but not all are going to be saved, then some are going to be immortally lost. That would mean they *have* to go somewhere else. Everyone either goes to heaven or to some other place, such as a place of sulfurous flames. In that scenario God would have no choice, since the soul is immortal anyway. I believe that a combination of the immortality of the soul, and Satan’s caricature of a vengeful God, has produced the doctrine of hell. And there is no teaching that has turned more people against God than the doctrine of eternal torment in hell.

Lou: “Could the word ‘wrath’ have been translated differently in the Bible? Could there have been a better word than ‘wrath’ used?”

Graham: That’s an interesting question. It brings up the limitations of human language. The Greek word for wrath is *orge*, which *did* mean wrath, even fury. In revealing Himself to us, God is limited to our human language with all the hazards that pertain to that. So we have to study the Bible in its entire context to fully understand. But that raises the question: “Why would God use the word ‘wrath’ at all, if He does not wish to be understood as angry?” It would seem that He has been willing to leave the impression that He is angry with us.

I would explain that in terms of a father’s conversation with his lit-

tle girl. He has tried everything under the sun to persuade her not to help herself to cookies at three in the afternoon, and none of it has worked. So he finally puts this little youngster in front of him. And she is looking completely cute and innocent, even in the midst of iniquity. And he says, “Look, if you do that one more time, Daddy’s going to be *very, very* cross with you.” She’s too young to know what “cross” means. She can’t look it up in the dictionary. But she knows what “cross” means by the look on his face and the tone of his voice. It makes the father feel like a bully. Here’s this little, tiny child with pigtails, and he’s saying, “Daddy will be very, very cross with you.”

A little later, when he thinks he has impressed her adequately; he finds her tiptoeing around the corner, reaching up, and taking another cookie. And it’s so cute, he wishes he had his camera ready. But then he realizes this is the time for some stern discipline. So he puts this helpless little girl in front of him. She puts her hands behind her and assumes that cute little posture that little girls can. And the big brute says, “Daddy told you that if you did that one more time, he’d be very, very cross.” For that to work you have to look cross and sound cross. You’ve got to go through with this thing for her sake.

When it comes to the Bible, I think it’s a matter of communication. God is dealing with children. The whole human race has acted like immature children. So He has to say, “Do that one more time and I will be furious with you! And how I wish I didn’t have to say that.” So our own human experience helps us to understand the Scriptures. Parents and teachers are in the best position to read the Bible sympathetically, it seems to me.

Lou: You remind me of a friend of mine who asked his little girl as he took off his belt, “You know what’s going to happen now?” And she chuckled and said, “Your trousers are going to fall down.” He couldn’t keep a straight face, so he had to leave the room for a bit because he was trying to make the message stick.

Another question. “Why don’t Bible translators use ‘reverence’ instead of ‘fear’? It seems like that would help.”

Graham: Well, that would involve interpretation, and this enters into the whole philosophy of translation. Should a version render the original literally? None of them does all the time. Such a version would be quite unreadable. So the question is, how much shall we interpret? There’s always a certain amount of hesitation about that. When a man like Dr. Taylor (author of *The Living Bible*) does a sincere job of paraphras-

ing, he gets into trouble for doing it. People feel he has interpreted too much. There is always a tension between precisely representing the original and making it clear in the English. So the *Revised Standard Version*, which is very conservative, simply reads “fear” and leaves it up to the reader to determine from the context whether it’s terror or reverence. That’s why I like using more than one version.

Lou: Jesus is love personified. In Luke 11:37–52 He was invited to dine in the home of a Pharisee. He seemed comfortable in accepting the invitation. No doubt it seemed like a good opportunity to show His love for the Pharisees. But was it still love when He pronounced woes on the Pharisees and the lawyers just before dinner?

Graham: I wish we had a video of the look on His face and the sound of His voice. I am sure there were tears in His voice when He said what He did, because He was addressing His own children. And it’s very clear in Scripture that God does not want anyone to be lost. But when people’s behavior was gross and unacceptable, He was honest with them, like a good physician. You would like the doctor to tell you the truth and to do whatever needs to be done. And so He gave them the unvarnished truth for their own sakes. This is the One who gave His life for them a little while later. So there’s a time for denunciation, but it had better be done with tears in the voice.

Lou: What if Jesus suddenly appeared at your home? Would you be afraid?

Graham: I’ve often wondered about that. I think the blood pressure would rise and the pulse would quicken, and I’d hope my vascular system could handle it. But I would be saying to myself, “There is no need to be afraid.” But to have such an awesome Person come in, you’d be bound to react, wouldn’t you? I love the way that John “fell at His feet as though dead” (Revelation 1:17). But Jesus immediately says to him, “Get up, and don’t be scared.” Over and over in the Bible, when Ezekiel and others have fallen at His feet, He says, “Get up, don’t be scared” (Exodus 20:20; Judges 6:22–23; Ezekiel 2:1; Daniel 10:5–19; Luke 1:11–13, 26–30; 5:8–10). He doesn’t want us on the ground, and He doesn’t want us to be scared.

Lou: Well now Graham, what if the Father, God the Father, appeared at your home instead? Would you feel any different?

Graham: That would be a beautiful test case! If I should be more afraid of the Father than the Son, then I’m not living up to what I’ve been saying tonight. I guess I’d be saying to myself, “If you’ve seen Me,

you've seen the Father" and "God is just as loving as His Son." I hope when that day comes, I will fully behave the way I believe. There is no need to be more afraid of the Father than of the Son.

I love to picture people arriving in the hereafter and meeting Jesus first. And He says to them, "Would you like to meet the Father?"

"Well, if *You* go with us, we'd be willing to go."

Then Jesus might say, "Are you still a little scared?"

"Well, we're embarrassed to say so, but yes."

"Then I'll go with you." And then they'll go in with the Son to see the Father, and find out the Father's face is just as kind as that of the Son.

You see, some folk have died a friend of the Son but still a little afraid of the Father. But they're safe to save nevertheless. They're willing to listen. I think there will be many happy surprises in the hereafter, when people discover that the Father is just as gentle as the Son.

Lou: And at the heart of it is the good news of this chapter; "There Is No Need to Be Afraid of God." Now here's a challenging question for you. "You know of course, Dr. Maxwell, that you are labeled a proponent of the 'Moral Influence Theory' of the atonement." I don't know whether they mean that as a compliment or as a criticism. "What is the difference between the 'Moral Influence Theory' and 'the larger view'?" Would you explain the difference?

Graham: Well, a lot depends on what people mean by the "Moral Influence Theory." As I have asked people through the years what they mean by that, I don't often get the same answer twice, thus I'm not entirely sure what the questioner is asking. But I can still say something about it. The classic view of the Moral Influence Theory goes back to a man by the name of Peter Abelard in the Eleventh Century. He taught the point of view that Christ lived and died, not to make it possible for God to forgive us, but to demonstrate His love and so to win us back. The whole emphasis was on love. Now there are some who feel that this great controversy view that we represent is also simply to emphasize God's love. But it's actually so much more than that.

So I would suggest that to call this larger, great controversy view the Moral Influence Theory is utterly erroneous and inadequate. Because in the larger, great controversy view, we recognize the issues before the universe, the questions about our God: Is it true that sin results in death? Is it torture and execution at the hands of a gracious God? Is it true that the obedience that springs from fear produces the character of a rebel?

Theologians like Peter Abelard never, ever dealt with those issues. The great controversy view is far larger than any other. But there are those who sometimes caricature, perhaps, our understanding of the plan of salvation as the Moral Influence Theory. These critics generally do not acknowledge a great controversy over the character and government of God. And more than that, they believe that what went wrong in the universe is a legal problem. In their view, we're in legal trouble with God and He is legally bound to destroy us in His righteous justice. Fortunately for us, in that view, Jesus died to make it legally possible for God to forgive.

I believe instead that what went wrong in the universe was a breakdown of trust and trustworthiness. That meant trust and trustworthiness needed to be restored. Christ had to come to answer all these questions, not with words only, but with painful, costly demonstration. This is a far larger view and should not rightfully be called the Moral Influence Theory.

There is another aspect of this that is very significant. Is sin only a legal problem, or does sin affect you morally? Do you not only need to be forgiven, but also have a new heart and a right spirit? There is a moral aspect in the great controversy view.

Lou: I am hearing you say that the “larger view” includes aspects of the Moral Influence Theory, but that it takes in so much more.

Graham: It takes in so much more. That's why I prefer to say “the larger view.”

Lou: I have heard the expression, “The Demonstrative Theory,” or “The demonstrative view of the atonement.” How do you feel about that label?

Graham: Well, I'm worried about any single label. Things are too readily and easily classified, so I'm always looking for synonyms. That's why we have used “the larger view” quite a little in this book. There's truth in the language of “demonstrative theory.” When a person has been accused of being untrustworthy, denials will not take care of it. Only by demonstration of trustworthiness can trust be restored. The fact that demonstration implies evidence — I like that. But I'd rather not simply call it “the demonstrative view” because some folk who use that term also have a rather narrow understanding of the issues at stake in the Great Controversy.

Lou: All right, another question. “You mentioned that Jesus' death was the result of sin. Was His death not also the wages of sin? If

Jesus died the second death (the wages of sin), how could He be raised from the second death, out from which there is no resurrection?"

Graham: In this one question are represented two understandings of what went wrong in the universe. Are we in legal trouble, or are we in *real* trouble? The word "results" suggests real trouble. That calls for healing more than just an adjustment of our legal standing. But we could use "wages" either way and "results" either way. So we need to keep going back to our understanding of what went wrong in God's universe. *Our understanding of what went wrong helps us understand what it takes to set it right and keep it right.*

Now if Jesus had died the second death legally, and if the second death meant you never rise again, He should still be in the tomb. Since that didn't happen, the angels of heaven must not have been looking at His death as a legal payment. They were looking for answers, and when they got them, they were satisfied.

Lou: This question ties right into that. "Did Jesus die the first death or the second death for us?"

Graham: The first death is the death from which there *is* a resurrection. Thousands of people have been crucified. If Jesus had only been crucified, it would have been the first death. But He died the awful death of being given up. God's wrath was poured out on Him, God giving Him up like He will give up rebels in the end. He was made to be sin though He knew no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). But everything that happened on the cross was answering the questions. "Does sin result in death?" Yes. "Is it torture at the hand of God?" No. "Who did torture Him?" Those who served God from fear did it. And once these questions were answered, why stay in the tomb? He did stay over Sabbath to add still more significance to the seventh day, but He didn't even wait for the sun to rise on Sunday morning. He went right up to heaven to hear the universe tell Him that they understood. So the problem of the resurrection really only comes when a person is locked into a legal model. "It couldn't be the second death because then He couldn't have come back from the dead." But that is not a problem for the "great controversy" perspective.

Lou: All right, I think you've really clarified that. The same person also wanted to ask, "How does God forgive sins, and what is involved in receiving the remission of our sins?"

Graham: The word for "remission" really means *forgiveness*. It does not mean suppressing a problem for a little while, like the medical term. What's involved in God forgiving? I believe God is forgiveness personi-

fied. Think of the prodigal son story. What had to be done for the father to receive his son back—dirty, diseased and malnourished as he was? When the boy came home he found his father had forgiven him long before. In fact, it was only when he found out that his father had forgiven him that he really repented. With God it's not, "If I repent, He'll forgive me." Rather, it's when I find how forgiving He is, *that* leads me to repentance.

Lou: Here's a question related to the previous chapter: "Are you suggesting that God has angels who go against the law and kill, such as His angel of death? Does God have a 'death squad'?"

Graham: It comes back to the meaning of the word, "Thou shalt not *kill*." The word translated "kill" in both the Hebrew and the Greek is actually "murder." "Thou shall not commit murder." And that's why Jesus could say, "If you hate your brother, you've broken that commandment already. He who hates his brother is a murderer." Matthew 5:21–22, ESV. There is no commandment that simply says, "You should not kill." There is a commandment, "You shall not murder." The same angels that put many of God's children to sleep will also raise them in the resurrection.

Lou: So they're not "breaking God's law."

Graham: They're not breaking the sixth commandment. And in the end, when the wicked die, it's not a violation of God's commandment either.

Lou: Couldn't God have forgiven us without Jesus having to die?

Graham: He could have forgiven us to be sure; in fact, He did. But the questions were out there. And those questions were so potentially destructive that, until the questions were answered, the seeds of distrust and sin and rebellion would remain in the universe. I believe that even if Lucifer had repented and come back, Jesus would have needed to answer the questions. Once the questions were asked, you could count on God to answer them, no matter what it cost, and He did.

Lou: Someone wrote: "There's a lot of meaning in why we should keep the Sabbath, but it's the specifying of the day that seems arbitrary. Why should we keep the seventh day when most of the Christian world keeps the first? Why couldn't we keep the first day the same way we keep the seventh? What difference does it make?"

Graham: That is the topic of the next chapter. When people misrepresent God as arbitrary, they often have the Sabbath commandment in mind. So I bring it in as a test case. I believe the Sabbath is actually a

remedy for this misunderstanding. It is a reminder of the evidence that God is not arbitrary.

Chapter Ten

The Reminder of the Evidence

God values nothing higher than our freedom. But if that is the case, why has He placed in the heart of the “royal law of liberty” (based on James 2:8, 12) a command to remember the Sabbath? As Paul explained, God’s laws were given to help us, to protect us in our ignorance and immaturity, to lead us back to trust (Galatians 3:23–25). So the title of this chapter was chosen to suggest that the Sabbath is another of God’s provisions to help us during this crisis of distrust.

Unfortunately, the Sabbath has been widely misunderstood in a way that supports Satan’s charges that God is arbitrary, exacting, and severe. Even among devout observers of the seventh day, the Sabbath has often been misrepresented, as was the case on that very sad Friday when Jesus was crucified. But if we put the Sabbath in the setting of all sixty-six Bible books and in the larger setting of the great controversy over the character and government of God, I believe that all arbitrariness evaporates.

The best known biblical statement about the Sabbath is in Exodus 20, right in the middle of the Ten Commandments. The commandment runs from verse 8 to verse 11, but we will emphasize two portions of the passage:

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. . . . For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it. Exodus 20:8, 11, RSV.

As already mentioned, James called the Ten Commandments (the Decalogue) the “royal law of liberty.” James 1:25; 2:12. Not the “royal law of subjugation, surrender, and bondage,” but the “royal law of freedom.” Yet a first reading of this particular commandment could seem somewhat arbitrary, couldn’t it? Is God laying upon His children an arbitrary requirement, just to show His authority and test their willingness to obey? But the message of all sixty-six books, and certainly of these conversations about God, is that there is no arbitrariness in our God. Rather, He paid a high price to deny any trace of arbitrariness! We’ll come back to this larger theme in the later chapters entitled

“God’s Law Is no Threat to Our Freedom” (Chapter Twelve) and “God’s Emergency Measures” (Chapter Eleven).

God’s laws were not given to be a burden or to restrict us. God values nothing higher than our freedom. When you go through all the sixty-six books and you come to the last one, the book of Revelation, you note that God is still asking us to remember Him as our Creator. The first angel of Revelation 14 says: “Honor God and give him glory, for his time has come to sit in judgment. Worship the Creator of heaven and earth, the Creator of the sea and the springs.” Revelation 14:7, NAB, 1970. Note how this excellent Catholic translation renders the opening phrase “honor God” instead of “fear God.”

The Sabbath and Creation

Now when we read that first angel’s message to “worship the Creator of heaven and earth, the Creator of the sea and the springs,” we are reminded that the first mention of the Sabbath comes in the Bible at the end of creation week. Think back in imagination to the very dramatic events of that first week of this earth’s history. The war had begun already in heaven. Satan had already leveled his charges and his accusations. One-third of the angels had already agreed with him that God is not worthy of our love and our trust.

Right in the middle of that devastating crisis, God invites His family to watch Him as He creates yet another world — this time, ours. How easily He could have created our world with a snap of His fingers, in just an instant of time. But in the dramatic and significant setting of the Great Controversy, He chose instead to do it in six twenty-four hour days. On the first day, all He said was, “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3). That’s all. And then on days two, three, four, and five, God in unhurried majesty and drama unfolded His plans for our earth. By the sixth day, what a beautiful place this was! Where now were Satan’s charges that God was selfish?

The most unselfish of God’s gifts in creation was freedom. He created us in His own image with power to think and to do. He created us free to either love and trust Him, or hate Him and spit in His face, because both positive and negative outcomes have, in fact, occurred. He created us able to reject Him! God even allowed Satan to approach our first parents at The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. And He didn’t hide that tree in some dark corner of the garden; He put it right in the middle near The Tree of Life, so that Adam and Eve would see it

all the time. “In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” Genesis 2:9, NIV.

Now the God we know could be trusted not to allow our first, inexperienced parents to be tested more than they were able to resist. You know He would not do that. And so Satan was only allowed to approach them at The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Adam and Eve were warned not to risk a confrontation with their wily foe. In that warning God was already demonstrating the meaning of that famous key text: “But God keeps his promise, and he will not allow you to be tested beyond your power to remain firm.” 1 Corinthians 10:13, GNT. Paul could have said instead, “God can be trusted . . .,” that’s what God keeping His promises is all about.

You see, that tree was not put there as an arbitrary test of obedience. That tree was put there to help them, to protect them. What becomes evident in light of the sixty-six is that The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was not placed there before sin, but after sin. The war had already begun in heaven. The Enemy was already on the loose. If the tree had been placed in the garden before sin, it would have been an arbitrary test. But coming after sin, it was there to help them and protect them like every other one of God’s gracious laws. Then God stunned the universe by sharing with us some of His own marvelous creative power. God so designed it that when a man and a woman come together in love, they are able to create little people in their own image.

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Isn’t it interesting to watch our children and our grandchildren? They look so much like us. They behave like us, at our best points and at our worst points. They truly reflect our image and God designed it to be this way: “Have many children, so that your descendants will live all over the earth and bring it under their control.” Genesis 1:28, GNT. That was His original plan. The Song of Solomon right in the middle of the Bible reminds us that this whole thing was God’s idea. That we should be male and female and feel the way we do about each other, and say the things we do to each other, and come together in love, and create

little people in our own image. He thought that all up Himself.

He could have created us to look like E.T. or maybe little green people with antennae. And babies could have come in test tubes. But that is not the way that God designed it. That worries some people. Others marvel: "What kind of a God must He be to think it up this way?" And then to put a whole book in the middle of the Bible that confuses some people and delights others? Think what The Song of Solomon says about our God; reminding us of the original creation week and of the Sabbath that came at the end of it. The universe watched all this, the universe that had heard the charges against God. And when creation was over they said, "That's very good (Genesis 1:31)." Love and admiration for God must have known no bounds. Where now were Satan's charges that God does not respect the freedom of His creatures? Or that He's very selfish in His use of authority and power?

The conclusion of this part of the creation story is in Genesis 2:

On the sixth day God completed all the work he had been doing, and on the seventh day he ceased from all his work. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on that day he ceased from all the work he had set himself to do. Genesis 2:2-3, NEB.

When the text tells us that God "rested," it does not mean that He was tired. It was more like an attorney saying, "I have presented all my evidence. I now 'rest' my case." God ceased from all His work. Can you imagine how the universe spent the next twenty-four hours as they celebrated with God the first seventh-day Sabbath?

Now this Sabbath was not Adam and Eve's seventh day. It was their second day. And if the Sabbath were designed to give us a rest every seventh day since our creation, we should be observing Thursday. The first Sabbath was God's day of celebration. He called on His family throughout the universe to join with Him in reflecting on the significance of what had been done. They were invited to reflect on the answers He had given to Satan's charges, the falsity of Satan's accusations, and the truth about freedom, love, and generosity on the part of our gracious heavenly Father.

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The Sabbath was given after sin, not before.

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You see, the Sabbath was given after sin, not before. If it was given

before, we might think of it as an arbitrary test of our obedience. But it was given after sin, because we needed it. It must have seemed to the universe looking on that the Great Controversy had been won that Friday night. But no event of creation week had answered Satan's most serious charge, the charge that God had lied to His children when He warned that the consequence of sin is death. Nothing during creation week, eloquent as it was, spoke to that issue.

The Sabbath and the Cross

God waited thousands of years to answer that question. Finally, in the fullness of time, God sacrificed Himself in the Son, to demonstrate the truthfulness of His word. He did not ask us to prove the truthfulness of His word. He could have, by leaving us to die. Instead, He Himself came and died that awful death. And Jesus knew why He was dying. He saw it all in the larger context of the Great Controversy. He knew about Satan's charges. So as He died He said, "It is finished" (John 19:30). Just as God, at the end of creation week, said, "I've finished the work of creation" (Genesis 2:2-3).

When Jesus died on the cross, then, He was saying, "We finished it all." The most important answer to the most devastating accusation had been given at infinite cost. But what exactly *was* finished? Jesus said earlier: "I have finished the work which You have given Me to do." John 17:4, NKJV. His work was to reveal the character of God to angels and to men (John 1:18; 12:31-32; 14:6-9; 15:10). On Friday evening, when Jesus died at the end of crucifixion week, all the major questions in the Great Controversy had been answered and all of Satan's charges against God had been met. And how significant it is that the next day was the seventh-day Sabbath. Jesus could have gone to heaven on Friday to hear the universe tell Him that it was more than enough; everything was clear. Instead He waited over the Sabbath hours.

Can you imagine what the universe was doing during those Sabbath hours? Surely the whole universe paused to reflect on the significance of what they had seen. They joined with the Father in celebrating the costly victory that had been won, and in thanking Him for the costly evidence that had been presented. Because of the cross, they knew that the universe was secure for eternity. As I understand it, this is the Sabbath God asks us to remember. We need to pause and be reminded of those truths in which the angels rejoice. This is certainly no mere test of

our obedience. Caught up in the Great Controversy as we are, we need the message of the seventh day. The Sabbath was made for us, we weren't made for the Sabbath. Surely that is what Jesus meant when He said: "The Sabbath was made for the good of man..." Mark 2:27, GNT. So were all of God's laws!

The Sabbath in All Sixty-Six

As you read through the sixty-six books, the meaning of the Sabbath is repeated and enlarged. For example, at Sinai, in the Ten Commandments, the Sabbath is connected with creation (Exodus 20:11). Then when you read on, John and Paul make it plain that the One who created us was none other than Jesus Christ. John wrote: "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made." John 1:3, NIV. Combine that with Paul's comment in Colossians:

For by him all things were created; things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. Colossians 1:16, NIV.

Think of the significance of that. The One who came to save us is the One who made us in the beginning. And who would know better how to heal the damage done by sin? The gentle Jesus who walked so softly among men and then died the way He did on Calvary, is not some weak, ordinary person. He is the supreme all-powerful Creator of the whole vast universe. That's the One who died on Calvary. Nor did God send some subordinate heavenly person; not even the leader of His angels. The Creator Himself came, the One who is equal with God, for He actually *is* God (John 1:1).

Every time we observe the seventh-day Sabbath we are publicly acknowledging to God, to our friends and to ourselves, that we have faith in Jesus as our Saviour, our Creator and our God. What kind of person is our God? The reply comes every Sabbath. God the Father is just as gracious as the Son. If Christ is Creator God, and we want to know what our God is like, all we have to do is look at Christ. In pointing to Jesus and creation, every Sabbath also reminds us what the Father is like.

There are other ways in which the Sabbath helps strengthen our faith. God Himself speaks in Exodus 31: "Keep the Sabbath, my day of

rest, because it is a sign between you and me for all time to come, to show that I, the Lord, have made you my own people.” Exodus 31:13, GNT. And in Ezekiel 20 He says: “Make the Sabbath a holy day, so that it will be a sign of the covenant we made, and will remind you that I am the Lord your God.” Ezekiel 20:20, GNT. He also says: “I made the keeping of the Sabbath a sign of the agreement between us, to remind them that I, the Lord, make them holy.” Ezekiel 20:12, GNT.

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The Sabbath is about God. He created us free in the beginning. But when we lost our freedom, He used His creative power to set us free again. The Sabbath is always connected with freedom.

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Note that the Sabbath is a reminder of a very important truth about the Lord our God and His relationship with His people. His people are an unholy, sinful bunch! Yet God is saying to them, “I have not abandoned you. I am still working to save and heal you. I still regard you as My people.” Salvation is not merely forgiveness, but also the healing of the damage done by sin, making us holy people. Some of us, therefore, keep the seventh-day Sabbath to show that only the Creator can heal the damage done. Only the One who made us in the beginning could restore us to what we used to be. He has the creative power, and it requires creative power. Surely it’s no less a miracle to take damaged merchandise and restore it than to create it perfectly in the beginning! That is why David prayed: “Create in me a clean heart, O God.” Psalm 51:10, KJV. The very same creative power is necessary now to make us trustworthy, holy children of God. Now, we cannot do this by ourselves. Some try by self-discipline and restraint. But it is only by faith and trust in our Creator that all the damage done by sin can be perfectly restored.

There are other aspects of the Sabbath mentioned in the Bible. When Moses repeated the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy, he gave a different reason for keeping the Sabbath than the one he gave in Exodus.

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God brought you out with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, and for that reason the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. Deuteronomy 5:15, NEB.

Now that's no contradiction or lapse of memory on the part of the elderly leader. The Sabbath is about God. He created us free in the beginning. But when we lost our freedom, He used His creative power to set us free again. Note that the Sabbath is always connected with freedom.

There is another aspect of the Sabbath mentioned in Hebrews 4. The Sabbath there is described as a type and a foretaste of the rest to come. The apostle says that when Israel entered Canaan, they physically entered the Promised Land. They did not, however, enter God's rest, because they didn't trust Him. "There remains, therefore, a sabbath-like rest to the people of God" (based on Hebrews 4:9). That is, if we have been led to *really* trust God, we begin to enter into that sabbath-like rest now. But certainly in the earth made new, we will know completely what that sabbath-like rest is all about. "So there must still be a promised Sabbath of Rest for God's people." Hebrews 4:9, *Goodspeed*. But look at the way *The Jerusalem Bible* puts it: "There must still be, therefore, a place of rest reserved for God's people, the seventh-day rest."

The True Meaning of the Sabbath

You see, the Sabbath has answered many of the basic questions of thoughtful people through the years. Questions such as: Where have we come from? Why are we here? Where do we go in the future? And above all, what kind of a person is our God, and what does He want of His children? The Sabbath all through the years has answered those four questions. Where have we come from? We were made in the image of God at Creation. Why are we here? How do we attain to the greatest good in life? Our whole purpose in the present is restoration from the damage done by sin, through faith in God. The Sabbath encourages us to rest from the futile striving to heal ourselves. Instead, we are encouraged to actively discover all the good things that come to those who trust God. And where do we go in the future? The Sabbath has always pointed forward to the Second Coming and the earth made new. And what about our God? Every Sabbath we are reminded that God is just like Christ our Creator, for Christ is God. Is there any information Satan would like to hide more than this? No surprise, then, that Satan seeks to confuse the meaning of the Sabbath. Notice Moffatt's rendering of that Ezekiel 20:12 text: "I gave them my Sabbath to mark the tie between me and them, to teach them that it is I, the Eternal, who sets them apart." Most of the world has broken that tie. The last message of God to the world is the

restoration of that tie. It's a message of love and trust.

Keeping the Sabbath is not legalism, it is not God saying, "If you don't keep this day, I will kill you." Rather, whenever we preach Christ as our Creator, our Saviour, and the One who is coming again, whenever we preach that God is like His Son, we are preaching the message of the seventh day. According to the sixty-sixth book, the world will be divided into two sides at the very end, the dragon and the remnant. Revelation 12:17, KJV. Revelation 13 speaks of Satan's final campaign, and that the whole world will be worshiping him, except the few described in Revelation 14: "This calls for endurance on the part of God's people, those who obey God's commandments and are faithful to Jesus." Revelation 14:12, GNT. In that day, the intelligent, wholehearted observance of the seventh-day Sabbath will represent this very faithfulness and loyalty to Jesus. There will be a group who still worship Jesus as their Creator and their God.

Notice that the Sabbath is really not about us. It is about God. I like to think that is why we put it in our name: Seventh-day Adventist. We didn't put it in there to say something good about us, but to say that we have taken a position about God. I believe a real Seventh-day Adventist is a Christian who accepts and believes all that the Sabbath has to say about our God. I wish it always meant that.

Someday God will recreate our world and give it to His trusting saints. We know that the world as we know it has to be purified by fire: "The elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." 2 Peter 3:10, KJV. A burned up earth would be no place to live, so after that there will be a re-creation: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away." Revelation 21:1, RSV. And Isaiah adds: "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth." Isaiah 65:17, NIV.

How do you think God will create our world the next time? He, of course, could do it in an instant, as He could have during creation week. But patient Teacher that He is, is it possible that He might do it in days one, two, three, four, five, and six again? Just to say something to saints that have questions about that simple Genesis account. I can see Him doing it like that and smiling the whole week. But there will be one difference between the creation and the re-creation. There will be no need to create another Adam and Eve. He will just open the pearly gates and welcome His children home.

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God designed the Sabbath to be a day of freedom, peace, love and trust. But most of all, it is a day to remember and be with our God.

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Isaiah describes how in the new earth we will be delighted to meet and worship our God: “Month by month at the new moon, week by week on the sabbath, all mankind shall come to bow down before me, says the Lord.” Isaiah 66:23, NEB. If on the first Sabbath in the new earth God should say, “Children, would you like to join with Me in celebrating? I’d like to keep this first Sabbath as the most special one we have ever had.” Would you say, “Oh, no! There we go—back under the law again. Why do You need to put an arbitrary test of our obedience upon us? Haven’t we proven that we can be trusted? How could You talk about the Sabbath still?”

Would you say that to God? Think of all there would be to remember. Can you imagine the first twenty-four hour Sabbath in the new earth? What a celebration! And if at the end of that first happy Sabbath, God would say, “I have enjoyed this so much, I would like to do this again every week from here on,” would you say, “Well, one is surely enough. Do we have to do it again and again?” No, Isaiah says it will be our delight to meet and celebrate with God.

Summing up. Is Sabbath-keeping arbitrary legalism? It can be. And it *was* on that sad Friday nearly two thousand years ago. But as God designed it, it is supposed to be a monument to freedom. It is supposed to remind us of the evidence, that infinitely costly evidence, that God is not the kind of person His enemies have made Him out to be. He is not arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving and severe. He gave us the Sabbath to remind us of that everlasting truth. He designed it to be a day of freedom, peace, love, and trust. But most of all, it is a day to remember and be with our God.

Questions and Answers

Louis Venden: You’ve laid a great deal of emphasis upon the fact that you don’t see the Sabbath as arbitrary, something imposed as a kind of test. And you’ve certainly provided a great deal of meaning to the Sabbath. But I’ve heard people raise this question, “All of that may be true, but if so, why couldn’t one keep the Sabbath on another day? Does it really matter? Everyone agrees that nine of the commandments are important because if you really love God and your fellow human beings,

that's the way you're going to act. But why the *seventh* day in particular?"

Graham Maxwell: The word "arbitrary" suggests that there is no reason, that God ordered it just because He wanted to, just to show His authority. I would say if it really were arbitrary, it could be any day. But it's the seventh day because it's so loaded with reasons. Did any of you men ever try this on your wife? "It doesn't matter when we celebrate our anniversary this year, why don't we have it some other day?" I don't think she'd go for it.

On top of that, the Bible adds meaning after meaning and reason after reason for the seventh day, which makes it less and less arbitrary. It seems to me that no other of God's commands is associated with so many meanings. It is the least arbitrary of them all. What bothers me most about considering it as arbitrary is the thought that if it *is* arbitrary, the only reason why we keep it is to prove that we are God's good people. We are the only ones who obey. Whereas I understand the purpose of the Sabbath is to say something about *Him*. But those who keep the Sabbath as meeting an arbitrary requirement are simply saying to the world, "Look, there aren't many in the world who are good, but *we keep the seventh day*." The seventh day is *not* to say something about us. It is to say something about God. So that is an important difference.

Lou: So the meaning inherent in the seventh day makes that the Sabbath day?

Graham: Yes, because He chose to create the world the way He did. Now He *did* make a decision to do it slowly, but I think to do it slowly is not arbitrary. The universe was watching. The charges *had* to be met. And God in His own good time, and in that very dramatic way, unfolded His plans for our world. And every day was saying more of the truth about Him, and the falsity of Satan's charges. That was a dramatic week!

Lou: I can hear one of our friends asking, "In the light of all this, do I *have* to keep the Sabbath to be saved? If I don't keep the Sabbath, am I going to be lost?"

Graham: Ah, that reflects on our discussion earlier of what sin is (Chapter Two). If you think of sin as just breaking the rules, then one might follow that line of thought: *If I break that rule, I'll be lost*. It all depends whether there is a distrust and a rebelliousness involved in a failure to keep the Sabbath. I think, rather, the Sabbath was made to be a great benefit to us. If I don't observe it, I lose. If I don't take my medicine, I lose. God offers it to us. There are some who have never heard of

it. I don't think the thief on the cross ever kept one. But in the legal model, if you violate that rule like any other, then you're out, because sin is a breaking of the rules. But in my view, *sin is internal distrust, rebelliousness and unwillingness to listen*. If the gift God has given us inspires a hostility within you, a rebelliousness within you, an unwillingness to listen, that would be a serious thing. Because that's where the problem began.

Lou: Here's another question: "In Colossians 2 doesn't Paul say that the Sabbath has been nailed to the cross? And in light of that, doesn't Paul say that no one should judge you regarding what you eat or drink, or religious festivals or even a Sabbath day?" Colossians 2:16. What about Colossians 2?

Graham: That question is important enough for a whole chapter, but I'll try to deal with the basics in a paragraph or two. I think first we need to note just what it was that was nailed to the cross. The *King James Version* says it was "the handwriting of ordinances" (Colossians 2:14). Many take that to be the law. But the first key word is literally "hand writing" (Greek: *cheirographon*), a word compound combining "hand" and "writing." The second is "requirements" (Greek: *dogmasin*). The phrase "handwritten document of requirements" is a technical term for a legal obligation. The "document" contains the legal sentence that stood against us because of our rebellion and sin. That is what was nailed to the cross.

When people read this text to suggest that the Sabbath was nailed to the cross, that reading creates a serious difficulty. You see, whatever the "handwritten document of requirements" is, the text says it was "contrary to us" (Colossians 2:14, KJV — Greek: *hupenantion*) or "hostile to us." Colossians 2:14, NASB. In other words, Jesus took it out of the way because it was bad for us. But nowhere in the Bible is the Sabbath pictured as against us, or bad for us. Rather, it was given to help us. Did Jesus say, "The Sabbath was made for you, but in a short while I'm going to nail it to the cross because it's been against you"? No, the Sabbath was made "for our sake" (Mark 2:27, Greek: *dia ton anthrōpon*). So some interpreters have been nailing the wrong thing to the cross! Rather, when Jesus died He took care of the sin problem. He took care of the sentence against us, or whatever word you want to use there. And I think when Paul says, "Don't let anyone judge you with respect to the Sabbath, either" (Colossians 2:16), he was saying, "You're right. Don't go around condemning people who disagree with you about the

Sabbath.”

Paul did not want us to condemn anybody for anything. That’s not our business. His message was the same in Colossians 2 as in Romans 14: “One man esteems one day as better than another, while another man esteems all days alike. Let every one be fully convinced in his own mind.” Romans 14:5, RSV. “Why do you pass judgment on your brother?” Romans 14:10, RSV. I include the seventh-day Sabbath in that. We are in *no* position *ever* to criticize or condemn anyone who disagrees over this matter of the Sabbath. Paul says, “Each of us shall give account of himself to God.” Romans 14:12, RSV.

So going back to Colossians, something that was *against* us was nailed to the cross. And once we understand how God has handled this problem of distrust and rebellion in the universe, we won’t go around condemning other people. But in my own heart I’m very much persuaded that the Sabbath is for me. I wouldn’t want to waste it. I hope I can make it look good to other people so they won’t waste it either. We should present it as a gift, not as an obligation.

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The essence of legalism is preoccupation with one’s legal standing with God.

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Lou: Graham, some of our friends of other faiths see keeping of the Sabbath as legalistic. When you’re concerned about sundowns and what is appropriate to do on the Sabbath, aren’t you back into a kind of bondage, where you’re so careful about these things? Isn’t that legalism?

Graham: That word “legalism” needs to be defined, and in Chapter Twelve we’ll have more to say about it. But to me, the essence of legalism is preoccupation with one’s legal standing with God. Many of the same people who think Sabbath keepers are legalistic are themselves utterly concerned with their legal standing before God. They thank God that His Son came and paid the penalty so that they could be in good legal standing. It seems to me that if you have a legal model, you’re a legalist, whether or not you observe the Sabbath. But in the Larger View, you’re saying, “God, I don’t want to miss out on a thing You have given me.” The Sabbath is a gift that points us to so many of God’s acts of blessing. We keep the Sabbath as a blessing, not as a burden.

Lou: It makes so much difference whether a person is keeping the Sabbath as a requirement or keeping it as a celebration of the glorious

things that the Sabbath stands for.

Graham: Yes, it's supposed to be all about freedom. If, in the middle of church, people do not feel free, maybe they should walk out, take a breath of fresh air and decide whether they want to come back in or not. Nobody should be sitting in church because they have to. Everybody should be in church because they feel good about it.

Lou: You might lose your audience! What if some children hear about that comment and decide not to go to church anymore?

Graham: Well, that's a different story. It makes me think of the next chapter, "God's Emergency Measures." You can't expect little children to understand these things. For example, they won't brush their teeth because it's good to brush their teeth. They brush their teeth because Mommy says so. They don't want to upset Mommy. She might take "emergency measures." Our little children might not gladly follow us to church. But while you want to preserve their freedom, you also want to teach them responsibility. So when it is time to go to church you say, "Billy, we're leaving, and you're coming, too." So there are children who sit in the pews under some duress. But you hope they'll sit there long enough to hear the pastor tell them that God values nothing higher than their freedom, and you hope that one day they'll choose to continue these things on their own.

Lou: They not only need the pastor to tell them, they need their parents to show them. One more thing. When we talk about the seventh day, we're talking about thousands of years, and the question has been asked, "How do you know what day is the seventh day? Could we be mistaken?"

Graham: Nothing has meant more to devout Jews than the seventh-day Sabbath. Jews can certainly look back to when the manna fell, double on Friday and none on Saturday. When that happened, everyone *knew* that was the seventh day — by God's direction. And no devout Jew has lost track of the weekly Sabbath since that time. I would say that's not debatable. We definitely know.

Lou: Jesus didn't seem confused about it when He was here, either, and even the idea of Sunday as a day of resurrection would confirm the consistency of the weekly cycle.

Now the Sabbath commandment says, "Thou shalt not do any work, thou nor thy manservant..." and so forth (Exodus 20:10). Is the Sabbath a day to just sit in a rocking chair in total idleness? What is the meaning of the phrase, "Thou shalt not do any work"?

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It almost seems hazardous that God would say about the Sabbath, “In it thou shalt not do any work,” yet not tell us what work is.

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Graham: It almost seems hazardous that God would say, “In it thou shalt not do any work,” yet not tell us what work is. I take that as a compliment. God says, “The day is yours. I have suggested its many meanings. If you don’t want to keep it, I won’t make you keep it. Just to sit there under duress and do nothing all day is not keeping the Sabbath. It’s supposed to be a delight.” And so God leaves it up to us to decide what work is. But many devout people through the years have consulted their theologians to determine what work is. In fact, I have a very large volume which describes Sabbath work. This book, called the *Mishnah*, says, “There are forty kinds of work save one.” That means there are thirty-nine categories of work listed.

Each of the thirty-nine categories is broken down into many sub-categories. How far may you walk on the Sabbath? May you carry a pencil on the Sabbath? How many letters can you write on the Sabbath? I don’t mean epistles, I mean letters of the alphabet, all spelled out. The beauty of that system seems to be, you always know whether you’re keeping the Sabbath or not. But those many rules actually leave you fearful that you may have broken the Sabbath. That is why Jesus said, “You have placed burdens on people that are too heavy to bear.” The God of the Sabbath intended it to remind us of Him. But just how to do that is left up to us, and I like that.

Lou: A “Dear Abby” column once responded to a girl who wrote in saying she was going to marry a Seventh-day Adventist, and she wondered what that might mean. Abby suggested that she ought to talk to the man’s pastor and find out. But then another person wrote in and said, “I know about Seventh-day Adventists. If you marry a Seventh-day Adventist, there are a whole lot of things you won’t be able to do.” Among these, the person suggested that the girl and her husband would never have marital relations on the Sabbath. Some think Isaiah 58 says you shouldn’t do anything that’s your own pleasure on the Sabbath. Is God wanting us to be unhappy on the Sabbath?

Graham: When I heard about that column, I did a little research on the meaning of Isaiah 58:13. It really reads, “If you restrain your foot on

the Sabbath from doing your business on My holy day, if you call the Sabbath delightful, and Yahweh's holy day honorable, if you honor it by refraining from business, from pursuing gain and from excessive talk, then you will delight in Yahweh, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth." Isaiah 58:13-14, *The Anchor Bible*.

Many other versions agree that the word "pleasure" is better translated "business." You are invited on the Sabbath to enjoy yourself all you like, but don't do your own *business* on that day. Don't pursue your own interests on that day. It even says, "Value My holy day and honor it by not traveling, working or talking idly on that day." Or as *The Jerusalem Bible* puts it, "Abstaining from travel, from doing business and from gossip." But the main point is, "Call the Sabbath a delight." We're supposed to enjoy the day, rather than pursue our own business or our own worldly gain on that day.

Lou: How can you command someone to "call the Sabbath a delight"?

Graham: We know from experience you can't do that. When your girls were growing up, did you ever say to one of them, "Now look, don't make any more faces. I want you to eat your spinach"?

"Yes, Daddy."

"Yes, but I want you to enjoy it."

"Yes, Daddy."

"I want you to tell me how delicious it is."

"Daddy, I'd be fibbing if I did, and I'd be breaking one of the commandments."

There's no way you can order somebody to enjoy something. But consider the things that God desires the most: Love? You can't command it. Trust? You can't command it. The enjoyment of the Sabbath? You can't command it. It's an invitation. We either do it or we don't, and if we really observe the day, we do it in the highest sense of freedom and it is truly a delight.

Lou: Here is a somewhat unrelated question. "The Larger View," this person writes, "seems very intricate, very subtle and needing a lot of study. Does this imply that a simpler view is still necessary for the masses of people who do not have the time or the knowledge to understand the Larger View?" And here's a related question, "What is the truth about God? I hear it must be simple, and yet it seems almost too complicated to encompass. Please help me understand."

How would you respond to these?

Graham: Ah, those are very fair questions. I think that the number one characteristic of the Larger View is its simplicity, it's actually not complicated. It might, however, require a good deal of study. There is no shortcut to this. But the more one studies, the less complicated it becomes. When you apply the very best scholarship available to you, and you do a thorough job on the sixty-six books, you come up with this view about our God. All He asks of us is trust; not trust in a stranger, or trust in mere claims, but trust on the basis of demonstration. I don't think anything could be simpler than that.

But I see validity to the question. Paul on Mars Hill delivered a magnificent address (Acts 17:22-31). He quoted the philosophers. He quoted the poets. He used long words (Acts 17:22). He even won a few of them that way (Acts 17:34). But in 1 Corinthians he says, "I'll never preach like that again, magnificent as it was. This one thing I'll do from here on: I will preach the message about Christ and Him crucified" (based on 1 Corinthians 2:1-2). So Paul, with all his scholarship, eventually focused in on the all-important thing. When he preached Christ and Him crucified, he was preaching a larger view about the One who died for angels as well as men. So his focus on the cross led him to a bigger picture than he had before. The thief on the cross knew enough to be saved, but I wouldn't want to settle for that myself. So I'm going to keep on investigating. But if my discourses become more complicated, I'm moving in the wrong direction. I like the implication of these questions. It ought to be clear. It ought to be simple. But there are no shortcuts to that kind of clarity and simplicity.

Lou: Here's a question that really touched my heart. This person wrote, "How are we, who have been raised as Seventh-day Adventist Christians, and have been taught to fear God and His judgments, able to change to a love relationship? I am afraid of God! How do I dispel this fear?"

Graham: The One who would love to hear that question the most would be God Himself. If you came face to face with God and said, "God, I hesitate to tell You this, but I'm scared," I wonder what He would do. Would He say, "I appreciate that"? Or would He say, "I think maybe I'd better not talk to you any longer, you're so scared. I'll send for My Son."

In practical terms, the solution is to become convinced from Scripture that the One who came down to earth is fully God. We're not afraid of Jesus. Yet the One who was with us is no less than God! The

Sabbath reminds us that Jesus is the Almighty Creator. When we know Him, we can truly accept the “testimony of Jesus.” The ultimate testimony of Jesus is, “Do you want to know what My Father is like? If you’ve seen Me, you’ve seen the Father” (John 14:9). We find it hard to believe that. It takes a little time. We need to read it over and over until we’re fully convinced. The enemy is opposed to our knowing this, so he will throw up every roadblock he can to keep us from believing this incredible truth.

Lou: In the next chapter we’re going to talk about “God’s Emergency Measures.” Those are the actions of God in the Bible that have raised a lot of questions.

Graham: Yes, because these measures can be misunderstood as supporting Satan’s charges. But when I think about God’s use of these emergency measures, it speaks very well of Him. He took a number of risks when He chose to run things the way that He has. We’ll get into all that in the next chapter.

Chapter Eleven

God's Emergency Measures

In this chapter we consider the extraordinary lengths to which God has been willing to go to hold His family together, as He demonstrates the truth about His character and government, and seeks to bring the whole conflict to a successful end. At infinite cost, God has sought to convince the universe that His government will forever be one of peace and freedom based on mutual and well-founded trust. But when Satan plunged the family into a 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. In the end, as we have been discussing, God will settle for nothing less than peace and freedom, established upon mutual trust, based on all the evidence that He has provided for us through the years.

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Satan plunged the family into a crisis of rebellion and distrust. Emergency measures maintain a semblance of order and respect until the basis for real peace and freedom can be clarified and confirmed.

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The emergency itself, of course, is the breakdown of this trust and trustworthiness that we have discussed in previous chapters. Our stubborn and suspicious unwillingness to listen has made it hard for God to heal the damage done by sin. The damaging consequences of this breakdown of trust in the family are very clearly portrayed throughout Scripture and history. And we can see them as well in society all around us.

Establishing a Willingness to Listen

God proposes to set right and to keep right all that has gone wrong. This requires first that He win us back to trust and a willingness to listen. Once that has happened, He can heal the damage done. Forgiveness alone would not repair all the damage that has been caused by this breakdown of trust and trustworthiness. It also would not secure the universe and keep it safe for all eternity. Heaven will not be peopled with pardoned criminals, but rather with trusting and trustworthy saints who

have new hearts and right spirits (Psalm 51:10; Ezekiel 36:26–27).

Granting all that, what if we are not willing to listen to God's generous offer? What about those who have been so influenced by Satan's lies that they have turned away to other gods, or to no gods at all? Or, much more seriously, what about those who seek to worship the true God, but worship Him as arbitrary, vengeful, and severe? And then how about all the people who live between those two extremes? How can God reach all of them?

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If it is true that God values nothing higher than our freedom, why has He made so much use of law?

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It is no wonder that in the biblical record we see God in many and various ways (Hebrews 1:1) trying to reach us where we are in this emergency. He speaks a language that we can understand, leading us no faster than we are able to follow (John 16:12). He runs grave risks of being misunderstood as He has sought to gain our attention and hold it long enough to tell us the truth about Himself. When we have been hard of hearing, God has raised His voice, as on Sinai (Exodus 19:16–21). When we were irreverent, He shook the ground beneath our feet (Exodus 19:18) or even sent she bears (2 Kings 2:24), as in the days of Elisha. He also brought fire from heaven down on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:38–39).

So many of the stories in the Bible illustrate God's willingness to be misunderstood, just to lead us to that reverence that is the beginning of wisdom. When Israel was tempted to take sin lightly, the One who sees the sparrow fall (based on Matthew 6:26) instituted that whole system of sacrifices that required the death of thousands of His creatures. When we were tempted to accept Satan's lie that sin does not lead to death (Genesis 3:4), God sent His Son to die that death and so demonstrate the truth.

The whole Bible is full of these emergency measures. In fact, I find it difficult to decide which texts to use as illustrations of the lengths to which God is willing to go. Fortunately, we have included some already in previous chapters. In fact, one could say that the whole Bible is an emergency measure. Since there are so many of these emergency measures, I thought it might be best to consider two of the most important ones, ones that are often seriously misunderstood.

God's Emergency Use of Law

The first one is God's emergency use of law. Keep in mind, trust and love cannot be commanded or produced by force. But if it is true that God values nothing higher than our freedom, why has He made so much use of law? If all God asks is trust and love, why did He give us the Decalogue, which seems to demand our love and obedience under threat of execution? If He doesn't wish to be seen as arbitrary, exacting, and severe, why has He surrounded us with innumerable rules?

Paul understood all about trust and freedom. He emphasized them so much that he was accused of doing away with God's law. "No," he said, "I intend no such thing. Faith does not abolish law. Faith establishes the law, by putting it in its proper perspective" (based on Romans 3:31). But what is the right perspective from which to view God's use of law? "Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions,..." Galatians 3:19, RSV.

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The loyal angels didn't need a law to do what was right.

They did what was right because it was right.

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Paul goes on to explain why the law was added. In *King James* language he said, "The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ." Galatians 3:25. The Greek word behind "schoolmaster" is *paidagogos*. Some of you can hear pedagogue in that, or the pedagogical method. But that word actually was the name given to a trusted slave whose duty it was to take the children to school, to make sure they got there and stayed there. Then it was his duty to bring them home. He was not the teacher. He was the guardian; he was the protector. Now can you see the reason for the translation in the next passage?

So the Law has been our attendant on our way to Christ, so that we might be made upright through faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer in the charge of the attendant. Galatians 3:24-25, Goodspeed.

Compare that with the *New International Version* of the same text: "So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law."

Now which law is Paul talking about? Which law was added,

because of transgression, to lead us to Christ? Was it the ceremonial law? Was it the moral law? Was it all law? Would you dare include the Ten Commandments? Perhaps it would help to consider how God gave the Ten Commandments. One day He gathered His misbehaving children together at the foot of Sinai. He announced, "I want all the murdering to stop, and all the hating to stop. I want all the stealing, cheating, lying, and immorality to stop. I want you to stop going after other gods." What an emergency it must have been, that He had to ask His children to stop doing all those things! You recognize, of course, the Decalogue (Exodus 20:3–17). It was added because of transgressions (Galatians 3:19).

Have you ever had to do this in your home? What if some of your fathers had to say during morning worship, "Now Billy, let us see if we all can make this a very good day in our family. When you are at school today, do you promise not to murder any of your friends?"

"Yes, Daddy, if you insist."

"And Mary, do you promise not to steal any more while you are in school?"

"Well yes, Daddy, if you insist."

Then you turn to your wife and say, "And when I am at work, please do not commit adultery again. Do you promise, Wife?"

"Well yes, if you insist."

If you were to do this some morning, be sure not to leave your window open, or the neighbors will assume that terrible things are happening in your home. Imagine how the Devil must have mocked God for having to say to His children, "Please, I want all this to stop!" The law was *added* because of sin (Galatians 3:19). There was no need before sin entered the universe to say such things to the loyal angels. They didn't need a law to do what was right. They did what was right *because* it was right. It was on that awesome day when sin entered the universe that God first had to speak of law. Here on earth, as well, the law was added because of sin. And along with law, God had to say that sin, rebelliousness, and lawlessness result in death.

There are many dangers, however, in the use of law. Once law has been expressed, people will assume that doing right means merely obeying the rules. Or that sin is merely disobeying the rules. Or that the penalty for breaking the rules is execution by the Rule-giver. Or that if God forgives you He won't have to execute you. Or that He can forgive you because Someone else paid the legal penalty. But what if you turn down the offer? Will you then be painfully destroyed, perhaps even more

painfully because of your ingratitude? That is the kind of understanding that can lead to the *obedience that springs from fear*.

But if one sees the bigger picture of all sixty-six books, you see that what God really wants is not mere obedience to the rules: He wants us to *do what is right because it is right*. He wants the obedience that springs from love and trust, and that is offered in the highest sense of freedom. In that view, what will happen if I choose to go my own rebellious way? He will sadly let me go, as He let His Son go. I will die, and He will cry. But there is no need to be afraid. God wishes that to be understood for all eternity.

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Law was added as an emergency measure because we needed it.

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But why then the law? It was added to protect us until we had better understanding and better motivation. So we can thank God for the rules He gave us. Some are very stern. We needed them. They were emergency measures. “Does this mean that by this faith we do away with the Law? No, not at all; instead, we uphold the Law.” Romans 3:31, GNT. Thank God for the law because we needed it, particularly those of us who are misbehaving members of the family: “We know that the law is good if a man uses it properly. We also know that law is made not for good men but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful.” 1 Timothy 1:8–9, NIV. Note the same verse in the *Phillips* translation: “We also know that the law is not really meant for the good man, but for the man who has neither principles nor self-control.”

If you have principles and self-control, you are led by the Holy Spirit, and you don't need to be told to love God and to love each other. That is God's ideal. Now the same understanding is true of the whole sacrificial system, which was certainly not against us (as was the “hand-writing of requirements” in Colossians 2:14). It was to teach us things we needed to know. The sacrifices were especially given to remind us of how serious sin and its consequences are. “But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin year after year. For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins.” Hebrews 10:3–4, RSV.

The remedy was yet to come. But in the meantime the sacrifices reminded us of the seriousness of sin. Misunderstood, however, these very same sacrifices and ceremonies turned many people away from God.

Think of what happened on crucifixion Friday, which also happened to be Passover weekend. The people who celebrated that Passover, and kept that special Sabbath, did not know the One who was represented in them. They did not understand the meaning of the ceremonies or understand God's plan. Most of all they did not know God Himself, and nailed Him to the cross.

This was in spite of the fact that many Old Testament prophets had tried to make the meaning of the sacrifices clear, Jeremiah in particular:

For on the day that I brought your fathers out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to them, nor give them command regarding burnt-offering or sacrifice; but this command I gave them, "Listen to My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people." Jeremiah 7:22-23, Smith/Goodspeed.

Jeremiah looked forward to the day when everything would be restored, and the ceremonies that God had added because of sin would have served their purpose. "In those days . . . men shall speak no more of the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord; they shall not think of it, nor remember it, nor resort to it; it will be needed no more." Jeremiah 3:16, RSV.

I do hope the Lord keeps the Ark of the Covenant in the heavenly museum. I would like to go look at it. It might remind us of the emergency measures God was willing to use in the past. But what was the purpose of all those ceremonies, and rituals and sacrifices? Jeremiah 31 tells us what God has always wanted:

I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, . . . Jeremiah 31:33-34, RSV.

All God has ever wanted was to bring the family together again. This would happen when God's law was written on their hearts and minds. And how eloquently Hosea not only taught this, but demonstrated it: "It is true love that I have wanted, not sacrifice; the knowledge of God rather than burnt-offerings." Hosea 6:6, *Phillips*. Look how well that has been put in the *Good News Bible*: "I would rather have My people know Me than have them burn offerings to Me." Hosea 6:6,

GNT. To know God means to love Him, to trust Him, to be willing to listen. That is all God has ever wanted or ever will want for all eternity. All these emergency measures are designed to lead us back to that.

God's Emergency Use of Mediation and Intercession

There is a second emergency measure that has been seriously misunderstood. If God really is so gracious, and if He is love personified, why does the Bible picture the need for mediation and intercession — for someone to stand between us and the anger of an offended God? I believe that Satan would love to have us misunderstand this. For nothing can really distort the picture of God more than a misunderstanding of this most gracious of His provisions. Satan would love for us to believe that were it not for Christ's constant intercession on our behalf, the Father could never find it in His own heart to forgive and to heal.

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Satan would love for us to believe that were it not for Christ's constant intercession on our behalf, the Father could never find it in His own heart to forgive and to heal.

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Is God, after all, unforgiving and severe? We know that isn't true, yet priestly intercession runs all through the Scriptures, especially the intercession and mediation of our Lord. Could priestly intercession also be an emergency measure tailored to meet our needs until we come to know God better, until we realize there is no need for anyone to stand between us and our God? We have had an enemy between, no question, the damage has been devastating. But do we need a friend between? And if so, why?

God came down onto Mount Sinai to speak to His people, remember? There was such irreverence that God had to show His might and power, and the people were terrified. They turned to Moses and said, "Don't let God speak to us lest we die. You speak to Him first and then you speak to us" (based on Exodus 20:19). They begged for an intercessor, for someone in between, though God wanted to speak directly to them. "They said to Moses, 'If you speak to us, we will listen; but we are afraid that if God speaks to us, we will die.' Moses replied, 'Don't be afraid';..." Exodus 20:19–20, GNT.

Now actually, God had *already* been speaking to them and they had *not* died. They had noticed this, but they just didn't want to run

the risk any further. Look at what the people said in Deuteronomy:

And [Israel] said, "Today we have seen that it is possible for a man to continue to live, even though God has spoken to him. But why should we risk death again? That terrible fire will destroy us. We are sure to die if we hear the Lord our God speak again....Go back, Moses, and listen to everything that the Lord our God says. Then return and tell us what He said to you. We will listen and obey."
Deuteronomy 5:24–25, and 27, GNT.

You see, the people pled for a mediator. They pled for a *friend* between them and God. **They** needed him. God didn't need someone in between. But Moses was such a friend. Was there anyone between Moses and God? Look at Numbers 12:

If any man among you is a prophet I make myself known to him in a vision, I speak to him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses; he is at home in my house; I speak with him face to face, plainly and not in riddles. Numbers 12:6–8, Jerusalem.

Compare that with Exodus 33: "Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend." Exodus 33:11, RSV. There was no one between. Years later, Jesus tried to encourage the disciples to believe that He wanted to speak to them as friends, the way He used to talk to Moses:

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. John 15:15, RSV.

When friends speak together, they speak plainly, face to face. Among friends there is explanation. There is understanding desired and achieved. It is quite apparent that Jesus didn't want blind, do as you're told, obedience. He wanted the understanding cooperation of friends. He wanted His disciples to obey because they agreed. He wanted them to admire God for His wise and gracious ways. That is the obedience of a free person. That is intelligent obedience, as the Bible describes it.

When we are friends, no one needs to come in between. When

friends are talking together, no one needs to intervene, intercede or protect one friend from another. The disciples could see no need at all for anyone to come between them and Christ. On that they were clear. They weren't afraid of Him. But they were not so sure about the Father. That is what led them to say, "Tell us more about the Father (based on John 14:8)." That is, tell us more about the One who requires all the sacrifices and the priestly intercession. "Jesus, could that God, the Father, be like You?" And you remember Christ's stunning reply: "If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father" (based on John 14:9).

As to this whole matter of intercession, Jesus is the One who gave us that whole system because we needed it. But the time came, in the upper room, for Jesus to plainly tell them that there really is *no need for this*:

I have been speaking to you in parables—but the time is coming to give up parables and tell you plainly about the Father. When that day comes, you will make your requests to him [emphasis supplied] in my name, for I need make no promise to plead to the Father for you, for the Father himself loves you, . . . John 16:25–27, Phillips.

Goodspeed translated the last part, "There is no need for Me to intercede with the Father for you, for the Father loves you Himself."

Think of the implications of this passage! There was no one standing between God and His friend Abraham. There was no one between God and His friend Moses. And for three and a half years there was no one between God and the disciples. And no one stood between God and Judas as the Creator knelt and washed His betrayer's dirty feet. Even though Judas had passed the point of no return, there still was no need for anyone to stand between him and his God.

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"There is no need for Me to intercede with the Father for you, for the Father loves you Himself" (John 16:26–27, Goodspeed).

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For those who are still afraid of God, it is good to know we have a friend between. God has made provision for your forgiveness, and He has provided a Friend to stand between you and our just and holy God. And who is that Friend anyway? "Thomas answered him [Jesus], 'My

Lord and my God!’” John 20:28, RSV. So I say the following with all deference; if you still need a Friend other than the Father, it means you still need emergency measures.

But in the larger, great controversy view of all sixty-six books, there is far better news for us than intercession from a mediator. There is no need to be afraid of God the Father. The Father is forgiveness personified. There is no need for anyone to stand between Him and His most wayward child. And, in any case, the Friend who came to win us back to God is none other than God Himself. This reality says so much about the quality of life in the hereafter. We are truly free to be friends with God now, and we will truly be friends of God in eternity.

Questions and Answers

Louis Venden: This matter of emergency measures is a very interesting idea, and it sparked a really good question: “Why does an omniscient, omnipresent, omnibenevolent God allow Himself to get into a situation where emergency measures are needed? Why didn’t God plan better?” The impression this question leaves is that something happened that God wasn’t counting on. How would you answer that?

Graham Maxwell: I think that’s why several times in the Bible we have to have things like the wheels within the wheels in Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:16). That picture suggests that God is calmly in control amidst all the complexities of human affairs. Books like Daniel and Revelation suggest that God foresaw all these complexities. He was not surprised, but in human terms an emergency has developed for which God has made adequate provision. That He would allow the emergency to occur, when He has the power to run the universe any way He wants, speaks very well of Him and speaks volumes about the value of freedom to our God. That He would allow the emergency says that an even higher value was at stake in the way God responded to rebellion in the universe.

Lou: But with the phrase “emergency measures,” are we saying that God is meeting a difficult situation in a way that runs the risk that we might misunderstand Him? Or that the Devil might use it to confuse us about God’s character?

Graham: Satan has very much used these things against God. That’s why Jesus said, “I haven’t come to destroy the law and the prophets” [the Old Testament], “I have come to explain” (Matthew 5:17). For example, He set out to explain the Old Testament rule about “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” (Matthew 5:38, cf. Leviticus

24:20). That's an emergency measure. I suspect they didn't like Jesus' explanation very much (Matthew 5:39–48). He also gave an explanation of the divorce rule in Deuteronomy 24:1–3 (Matthew 19:3–10), and they didn't like that explanation either. Remember even His own disciples said, "You're taking away our only escape clause in the marriage ceremony! If that's the case, it would be better not to marry" (Matthew 19:10). And He responded to them, "Not everybody can take this" (Matthew 19:11–12). So Jesus *did* come to explain — because these things could be misunderstood. On the other hand, there were Old Testament prophets that *didn't* misunderstand. That's what's so impressive.

Lou: You've been speaking about an emergency and a time period of emergency. The question is this, "Has the emergency ended yet? When will it end? Are we still living in the emergency?"

Graham: If one thinks of the emergency as a legal problem, maybe it all ended at the cross. But look around us, we're still in the emergency. I would say the emergency is not over until God's last emergency measure is no longer needed. I would think of the last emergency measure as the veiling of His life-giving glory, lest we be consumed. That's what Christ did when He came. "He veiled the dazzling splendor of His divinity that human beings might come to know God without being consumed." Ellen G. White, *Ministry of Healing*, 419. That's an emergency measure. So not until the end of the Millennium, when everything is done and no one will misunderstand, will God unveil His life-giving glory. Then the last emergency measure will be over, and everything will come to a natural conclusion. That doesn't mean the cross is somehow inadequate. You can't add to the cross. The provision is totally adequate. But we're still in the emergency period.

Lou: I want to go back to this matter of the law as an emergency measure. If I heard you correctly, you were saying that both the ceremonial law and the Ten Commandments were emergency measures. Now I can hear some Seventh-day Adventists saying, "Is that really the Adventist position? Haven't we made a distinction in Galatians 3 and said, 'Well, the ceremonial law was added, but the Ten Commandment Law is a transcript of God's character; therefore, it's eternal?'" How would you respond to that?

Graham: I'm including them all in the context of Galatians 3. But when one raises the question, "Is this the Seventh-day Adventist view?" then one has a right to say, "Who is authorized to say what the Adventist view is?" I would nominate the most influential person who

ever helped shape this movement, and that would be Ellen White. When she was asked, “What law was added?” she responded, “both the ceremonial law and the moral code of Ten Commandments” (based on Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, vol. 1, 233). So I feel in very good company when I take the same position.

Lou: It seems to me that you illustrated that very well when you spoke about the home and dealing with children and so on. It’s hard to imagine God having to say to the angels, “Now, angels, please don’t murder!” A commandment like that was an emergency measure in a sadly broken world.

Graham: While that is true, there is an aspect of the commandments which is universal. In the next chapter, where we talk about what the law requires, there will be an opportunity to show how the principles in the law are eternal. And I certainly hope they are, or this won’t be a safe universe to live in. While the giving of the law on Mount Sinai was an emergency measure, the principles of the law are also a transcript of God’s character.

Lou: Are there any other emergency measures that are still in use?

Graham: Yes, I think the fire and brimstone of the third angel’s message (Revelation 14:9–11) is an emergency measure! That’s hardly “still, small voice” language. And then there is the Sabbath. We need this still. It speaks eloquently to us and reminds us of the truth.

Lou: That ties in with another question I wanted to ask. If the Ten Commandments were added, as you have suggested, then will there come a day when the fourth commandment, the Sabbath, won’t need to be kept anymore?

Graham: If it were merely a legal requirement or a test of obedience, that could be true. But I can see Isaiah’s point that for eternity we will keep Sabbath to celebrate the end of the emergency (Isaiah 66:22–23). We will keep it as a perpetual reminder of the price that was paid and the evidence that was demonstrated to establish peace and freedom in the family. Because the Sabbath is so eloquent with meaning rather than arbitrary, that’s the reason why it would be so widely observed for all eternity.

Lou: Someone raised this question: “Was there no Sabbath before creation week? If the commandments are a transcript of God’s character, there must have been a Sabbath before the creation of our world. And is not the Sabbath going to be carried into the new earth and eternity (Isaiah 66:22–23)? Will not all creation keep the same day, the seventh

day, the Sabbath day?” We’ve already touched on that — but please say a word more about it.

Graham: Well, I’m not an astronomer, but I do know that it would be a great difficulty even within our own solar system for this to happen. Our planets are different sizes and rotate at different speeds. Doesn’t Venus rotate about once every year? On Venus we would be keeping Sabbath every seventh year!

Lou: So it wouldn’t be very practical to get them all coordinated.

Graham: I am impressed that the Sabbath was made for humankind. And it serves particularly well for us in the emergency. What God has for His children elsewhere in the universe, we are not told. But Jesus Himself said, “It was made for you” (Mark 2:27). So it was particularly tailored to this planet of ours.

Lou: That in a way answers the next question: “Do you think the Sabbath is observed on the other planets, or did God create it for this earth because He knew that man would not be able to speak to Him face to face after sin?” Didn’t you mention that the Sabbath was intended to help us during the emergency?

Graham: Oh, very much so. I really see the Sabbath as an emergency measure that will turn into a great celebration. So it really is a foretaste of the hereafter (Hebrews 4:9). The beauty would be to begin the celebration now. The Sabbath, rightly understood, is not only a reminder of the truth about God, but a foretaste of the Sabbath-like security and trust that we will have in knowing Him throughout eternity.

Lou: You emphasized that the Sabbath was a matter of celebration, not just an arbitrary test that God imposed. So someone asked this question: “If it’s not a test, then why in Revelation does it mean so much to be a commandment-keeper? If you can’t command enjoyment of the Sabbath, why is it made clear that if you don’t enjoy it, you’re going to die?”

Graham: If you have a legal approach to the Sabbath you would be worried every sundown Saturday evening, “Did I enjoy Sabbath? What if the sermon was really heavy?” No, you’ve got to sit there and say, “I’m enjoying myself. I’m enjoying myself. If I don’t I’m breaking this day.” That kind of response doesn’t make sense. It just destroys human reason. No. In the next chapter we will explore what it means to keep the commandments. I believe the Ten Commandments describe the way trustworthy people will live together. And if I don’t want to be that

kind of a person, it will be a serious thing, and God will have to let me go. So it's not arbitrary. It's no more arbitrary, really, than breathing and eating. In a way, eating is a test of obedience. But He won't punish you if you don't eat. You'll just get in very bad shape, and if you abstain from food forever, you will die. So I don't *have* to follow these rules, but if I don't, I'll be a different kind of a person, and eventually I will just ruin myself, and I would not be safe to save.

Lou: That's a good way to put it. That means the commandments are a statement of the way God made things to work.

Graham: And the commandments express the best way to run the universe and keep it free. I hope He'll never run it any other way. Mutual love and trust, as described in the Ten Commandments, is the only way to have a really secure, safe, and free universe.

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The Ten Commandments express the best way to run the universe and keep it free.

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Lou: Someone has asked a practical question: "I want to know how to keep the Sabbath. Several people go out to eat after church is over. I understand that they may be going out to eat because they don't want their wives to cook. Is that wrong because they are making people work for them on the Sabbath, or does that just mean that we are judging them? I'm confused."

Graham: That question reminds me of what Paul said, "Let everyone be fully persuaded in his own mind," and, "Who are you to judge another? Each one of us shall give account of himself to God" (based on Romans 14:5, 10). This day is ours, you know. It was given to us. Sure, it's the Lord's Day, it's a day to remember the Lord, but it's His gift to us for our best good. If I don't observe it in the best way possible, I just lose, that's all. So that I must decide for myself. We have no business deciding for other people. We've no business criticizing. Before the Damascus road, Paul would have said, "Shame on you for doing something like that. I'll haul you into prison and maybe have you stoned." But after the Damascus road he said, "Let everyone be fully convinced in his own mind" (Romans 14:5).

I also think, though, that Sabbath-keeping not only says something to ourselves and to God; it also says something to the community, the people looking on. The way we keep Sabbath can speak well or otherwise

of our God, and I think we need to weigh that. What do people think about when they watch us Sabbath keepers try to keep the seventh day holy? The last two hours before sundown the saints are all trying to get home on time, so in the grocery store everybody's pressing to the front with their baskets full. On any other day in the week a Sabbath-keeper might courteously let somebody with less in the basket go ahead, but you can't afford to be courteous on a Friday afternoon. You're going to keep Sabbath, even if you've got to break the other nine commandments to do so!

A store clerk in Loma Linda once told my wife, "We are very puzzled. Just as it begins to get dark on Friday afternoon, there is a tremendous increase in business here. In the parking lot people are rushing to and fro. We even have to put on extra clerks for a while. And then just as we're settling into the rush, all of a sudden most of them disappear. And the store can't plan on the rush each Friday because it seems to come at a different time." She knows the people are religious and wonders why. If we gave her an explanation, would we say, "You know why we hurry like that? Because if we don't get home before the sun goes down, you can't imagine what our God would do to us." If some of us said what we were thinking, we would not be speaking very well of God. And by the way, if we *do* see somebody hurrying on Friday afternoon, we have no business judging their reasons. The beauty of this whole thing is, in the larger view of things, you do not feel moved to condemn other people. God doesn't condemn. He just says, "I'm so sorry; you lose."

Lou: You mentioned in the previous chapter how important motive is. For example, with health care work, one person might do Sabbath work in a hospital because they can "get away with it," another might see it as following in the steps of Christ.

Graham: You can't read other people's motives on this.

Lou: One of our questioners writes, "God sent she bears against the children who ridiculed Elisha (2 Kings 2:24). Just how does God come out looking good in that strange incident?"

Graham: Superficially He certainly doesn't. He ran the risk of not looking very good in that situation. And the Devil would certainly like us to misunderstand. But if one reads the whole setting, in those days even the king of Israel was consulting Baalzebub, the god of flies (2 Kings 1:16). There was very little reverence toward God. Elijah had just been translated to heaven. And these irreverent youths, following the exam-

ple of their king, were mocking Elisha, “Hey Baldy, why don’t you go up too?” 2 Kings 2:23. When people are that irreverent, God has virtually lost communication with them. It’s that serious. But if we need she bears, we’ll get she bears.

Lou: Here’s a question along a little different line: “In reading about the sacrificial system, I get the impression that it was very messy, throwing blood on the mercy seat, throwing blood on Aaron and the other priests. Who cleaned the mercy seat off? Who cleaned the garments of Aaron and the other priests?”

Graham: Regarding how it was cleaned, there are many references to cleansing, water, scouring of pots, washing of garments. During the reign of Hezekiah there was even a complete housecleaning of the whole temple (2 Chronicles 29:15–19). The most important implication of the question, however, is the observation that the sacrificial system was messy. But if the system looks messy to us, how do you suppose it looked to God? The One who sees the little sparrow fall asked them to kill lambs. So yes, it was messy. It was painful. But God knew they needed it. It had to be that dramatic.

I think God hoped that they would always feel as sick as Adam must have felt when he killed that first lamb. He must have turned to God and said, “I can’t do it. It’s making me sick.” And I imagine God replying, “I hope it always makes you sick.” But it came to the place where people could kill God’s animals with hardly a thought. It was almost like a circus as they cut them up and burned them. The more, the better. Then God would bless them. So like other emergency measures, the sacrificial system was also misunderstood.

Lou: Could you comment on the role of the family and marriage in God’s overall plan for us? Also, is there special significance to our planet in having male and female, the two sexes?

Graham: Yes, I think God deliberately designed things this way; the sexes, the family, sharing with us the power to create little people in our own image. This whole process teaches us how difficult it is to bring children up safely and yet set them free. How can we keep them from hurting themselves when they’re little? Anyone who has had children, anyone who has been a teacher of little children, ought to be able to read the Bible very sympathetically. I think God gave marriage and the family as a very eloquent demonstration. Right there in Eden the family, the sexes, and the Sabbath became emergency measures. Some emergency measures can be very pleasant, you know.

Lou: Here's another question: "Why would God choose circumcision as an emergency measure?"

Graham: I think it's somewhat related to the previous question. If you don't acknowledge that God is the Creator, then the mystery of life and reproduction may become the object of your worship. And that's what happened with the fertility cults. One of the prevailing weaknesses of the Israelites was the temptation to go up into the mountains, and participate with the cult prostitutes. So an explanation that appeals to me is that God gave them circumcision to hold them back from such participation.

Suppose a young Israelite has followed his eyes up into the mountains and he's there with a cult prostitute. At the last moment she looks down and says, "I see you are a Jew." And the young man says, "I can't do this," and hurries home. I could see God doing something like that. Because that part of their bodies was very much involved in their greatest sins (Numbers 25:1-18), I think God chose something that would remind them of their identity.

Lou: Questions arise in regard to the second part of this chapter, your presentation on intercession. You've talked about intercession and a mediator as an emergency measure. Does that mean that we don't need an advocate? First John says, "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." 1 John 2:1, KJV. Are you saying that we don't need an advocate?

Graham: As I mentioned, if one is still afraid of God, the Bible says we have an advocate with the Father. However, once we know we don't need someone to intercede with the Father, do we still need an advocate? What counts is who is really against us. We need an advocate standing beside the Father because Satan is against us. He is the accuser of the brethren day and night before God (Revelation 12:10). In Zechariah 3, who is accusing Joshua the High Priest? Who is defending? In Job 1 and 2, who is accusing? Who is defending? Since we have an enemy, we need an advocate. We need someone to represent us. To God? No. He's our Friend as much as the Son and the Holy Spirit.

A further reason we need an advocate is that our future neighbors and friends, the inhabitants of the universe, might not be too sure about us. And God doesn't ask them to accept His list of candidates blindly. He doesn't run His universe that way. So He allows Satan to accuse, and He has Jesus explain. If Jesus can defend them, He does. If He can't, He won't. In this role of advocate and intercessor Jesus is defending His

loyal children, some of whom are just babes in the truth. If they trust Him like the thief on the cross, Jesus can say, “Yes, he has a terrible record as the Devil has pointed out, but he has a new heart and a right spirit. I commend him as safe to save, even to live next door to.” And his guardian angel heaves a big sigh of relief.

Lou: So this advocate is not protecting us from God’s wrath.

Graham: No. So often, we’ve got the wrong enemy. The Father’s not our foe. “If God is for us, who can be against us?” Romans 8:31.

Lou: Speaking of Romans 8, in verse 26 it says that the Spirit makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered and sighs too deep for words. What about this text? How are both Jesus and the Spirit intercessors?

Graham: Well, we know the Spirit isn’t interceding with the Father. Jesus said there is no need. And the Spirit certainly isn’t interceding with the Son. So in the context of Romans 8 it says, “We do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit helps us to pray” (Romans 8:26–27). I also believe His intercession is exercised in teaching us the truth about ourselves (see texts like John 3:20–21 and Romans 2:15), and about our God (John 16:13)—that God is our Friend. He helps us approach the Father in prayer. The intercession of the Spirit is helping us to see the truth and to tell the truth about ourselves. In a later chapter (Chapter Fifteen — “Talking to God As a Friend”) we will discuss the work of the Spirit in helping us talk to God.

Lou: You have talked about John 16:26 as a misunderstood or ignored text: “I say not unto you that I will pray the Father for you.” But there are so many texts about intercession and there’s this one that seems clear *the other way*, we don’t need an intercessor. You talked about the principle of understanding texts in the light of the whole Bible. But what if I said, “Look, let’s take all of these texts that talk about intercession and understand this one in the light of all the other texts”?

Graham: Yes. We so often say that if it’s a difficult verse, it should be understood in the light of all the clear ones. What makes this different is that Jesus labeled John 16:26 “plain and clear.” He didn’t say it was difficult. So we shouldn’t need the others to explain it.

I will accept the Son of God’s evaluation of His own statement. It is one of the only ones in the whole Bible designated as “plain and clear.” And I will understand all the other verses in the Bible in the light of this one. However, one should never leave the others out. We must build a model of understanding based on everything in the Bible. We must be

able to put that precious verse in, and all the others, too.

Lou: Why does it tell us to pray in Jesus' name? Does that mean God is too holy to approach and we need Jesus to kind of run interference, perhaps not against His anger, but in relationship to His holiness?

Graham: You said two things there of consequence. Sometimes we hear, "The Father is too holy to look on sin, so the Son came." Are we implying the Son is not as holy as the Father? Forbid the thought! The Son is just as holy as the Father. I believe that to pray in Jesus' name is a grateful recognition that if the Son had not come to reveal the truth, we wouldn't know the Father. We wouldn't know He is just as approachable as the Son. We wouldn't be "bold to approach the throne of grace with confidence," as Hebrews 4:16 says. We would be afraid to do it. So we pray in Jesus' name, saying, "Thank You for the whole costly revelation and demonstration." By the way, "amen" is not simply a signal that the prayer is over. It implies, "I mean everything I've said, dear God. I really mean it!"

Lou: In Hebrews there are statements about how Jesus "was made like unto His brethren" (Hebrews 2:17), and He Himself has suffered being tempted (Hebrews 4:15), and that we can "come boldly" (Hebrews 4:16) because He has been tempted. Are you saying that these really aren't important statements?

Graham: I think they are very important, but they certainly don't mean that God had to come to this earth to learn how to be sympathetic. He came to show how sympathetic He already is. I do believe that Jesus learned as He was growing up (Hebrews 5:6). He learned from Scripture as we do, and He became convinced of the truth about His Father. And in this way He did grow up and became the marvelous person that He was. But He was no more friendly and understanding than His Father. He came to say, "This is what My Father is like" (John 14:9). But He also came to reveal that you can get all this from the Old Testament. That was the Bible He grew up with. How could He go out and say, "This is what My Father is like"? He got it from reading Jeremiah, and Isaiah, and Hosea, and Amos, and all those other places. The Old Testament is that clear.

The next chapter is an extension of this one, "God's Law Is No Threat to Our Freedom." The law has often been seen, by Christians of all denominations, as barring freedom in some way. So we will need to take some time on that topic.

Chapter Twelve

God's Law Is No Threat to Our Freedom

Is there anything more precious to intelligent human beings than freedom? Freedom from tyranny, freedom from fear, freedom to do the things we want to do? The good news is that God values nothing higher than our freedom. But not all His children have believed this. In fact, Satan persuaded one-third of the brilliant angels that this is not true about our God; that He is instead arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe. And how God has had to work in Scripture and history to make it clear that He is not the kind of person His enemies have made Him out to be!

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Love and trust, the things that God desires the most, cannot be commanded or produced by force. Nor can they be made an obligation, something that we owe to God because He's been so good to us.

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We have seen that war broke out in heaven, the war that we call the Great Controversy. This war has continued and extended to this planet. This is not primarily a war in the military sense, it is a “war of words,” between Satan’s lies and the truth about God. For thousands of years now, God has sought to reveal the truth about this matter; not in claims, but with the evidence of demonstration. Yet many people in this world still believe Satan’s lies. Even among very devout religious people—even among Christians, who of all people should know better—many still believe Satan’s lies. And so the war continues.

Jesus, Paul and Moses all agree that love is the fulfillment of God’s law. But love and trust, the things that God desires the most, cannot be commanded or produced by force. Nor can they be made an obligation, something that we owe to God because He’s been so good to us. God wants more than this, and so should we! Our heavenly Father values nothing higher than the freedom of His family, and Jesus suffered and died to prove it. But if real freedom requires mutual love and trust based on evidence, why does God seem to command our love in the Decalogue?

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What kind of friendship is it that demands obedience?

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In the previous chapter we considered some of the emergency measures God has used to hold the family together while He continues demonstrating the truth. Perhaps the most notable of these emergency measures has been His use of law. And most notable among God's laws have been the Ten Commandments. But to many, God's extensive use of law seems opposed to freedom. It has indeed been seriously misunderstood. Confusion arises even from Jesus' words to His disciples on this subject. For example, in the Gospel of John Jesus said: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." John 14:15, RSV. And He also said: "You are my friends if you do what I command you." John 15:14, RSV. What kind of friendship is it that demands obedience? How do you combine "keep My commandments" with "you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free"? John 8:32, 36.

Misunderstandings of Law

Some have explained these texts to mean that we are free so long as we do exactly what we are told. Have you parents ever tried that with your children? "Now children, we want freedom in our home. We can have freedom so long as you do exactly what you are told. Do I make myself clear?" If your children are afraid of you enough, they will say, "You have made yourself clear." But inside they may have serious reservations. It seems such a contradiction. Of course, everything depends upon how we understand what it is that God has actually asked us to do, and how we understand the reason why He had to ask us in the first place. I believe that all of God's laws, particularly the Ten Commandments, were given for our best good. They were actually given to preserve freedom rather than to infringe upon it.

Law, and the use of law, however, have been seriously misunderstood throughout the Great Controversy. The most notable example of such misunderstanding occurred about 1500 years after Sinai, when the Son of God lived among a people to whom He had entrusted the Ten Commandments. Of all people, they should have understood that the Ten Commandments were an emergency measure. After all, when the Ten Commandments were originally given, Moses was there to explain that there was no need to be afraid of God or of His commandments (Exodus 20:20). But when Jesus came, He found a group of people who were totally preoccupied with God's laws and with obedience to their every detail.

Jesus never had to forbid the making of graven images when He came. The Jews had learned their lesson in the discipline of Babylonian captivity, and they never sank into ordinary idolatry again. He never had to tell them which day was the Sabbath (John 5:10, 16, 18; 19:31). They regarded it as their highest duty to obey every one of the Ten Commandments. He never had to urge them to pay tithe. Matthew records that they used to tithe even the tiniest things; the seeds of mint, anise, and cumin (Matthew 23:23). Nor did Jesus have to tell them they should obey the laws of hygiene. He commented on the fact that they would even strain gnats out of their goat's milk lest they should eat a forbidden insect (Matthew 23:24). Nor did He ever have to tell them to search the Scriptures. They did it all the time — though they did it for the wrong reason (John 5:39). Nor did He ever have to tell them to be careful in their association with unbelievers. In fact, when they came in from the marketplace, they used to wash themselves in certain special, ceremonial ways, lest they be contaminated by association with the Gentiles (Mark 7:4; John 2:6). You see, they all could say, like the rich young ruler: "All these things we have obeyed from our youth up" (Matthew 19:20; Luke 18:21).

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All of God's laws, particularly the Ten Commandments, were given for our best good. They were actually given to preserve freedom rather than to infringe upon it.

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You would think that Jesus would be pleased in the face of such rigorous obedience and willingness to do precisely what they were told. You would also think they would recognize and welcome Him when He came. But all heaven watched the incredible scene of those who claimed to love God's law denouncing the Lawgiver as a lawbreaker. It must have puzzled the angels a great deal. Jesus told them that while they were working hard to obey, they were obeying for the wrong reason (Matthew 5:20 and 23:28 in context). Because they were obeying for the wrong reason, they were really not obeying at all. You can imagine how offensive this idea was to them. In fact, He went even further. He suggested that if they had truly known the God who had given the law, they would have kept the law for an entirely different reason. That would have made it possible for them to be both obedient and free at the same time (John 5:39–40; 8:32, 36).

The Old Testament prophets had dealt with this centuries before. Just to mention two, Amos and Isaiah had chided the people for their very reluctant Sabbath keeping. Amos recorded their words, “Oh, when will the Sabbath be past that we may buy and sell and get gain?” Amos 8:5. Isaiah deplores their mechanical, unthinking obedience, particularly on the Sabbath:

The Lord said, “These people claim to worship me, but their words are meaningless and their hearts are somewhere else. Their religion is nothing but human rules and traditions, which they have simply memorized.” Isaiah 29:13, GNT.

Or, as one translation has it: “Their worship of me is but the commandments of men learned by rote.” Isaiah 29:13, RSV. And rote, unthinking worship is an insult to our intelligent God.

The Teaching and Example of Jesus

So Jesus set out to tell the truth about His Father and the kind of obedience that is really pleasing to Him. He often did so at great risk on the Sabbath. You would think it was all innocent and good. He simply healed people and helped them on the Sabbath. But those gloomy legalists were shocked and they denounced Him for disobeying the law. Think of it! The Lawgiver was being denounced as a lawbreaker! “No,” Jesus responded, “I am not come to destroy the law and the prophets” (which meant not just the Ten Commandments, but the whole Old Testament), “I have not come to destroy them, I have come to fulfill them” (based on Matthew 5:17). In other words, He had come to explain their deeper meaning in both word and action.

By teaching and example, especially on the Sabbath, Jesus set out to correct these misunderstandings of God’s law and to explain what it was all about. He said the law was given *for* you. Especially was the Sabbath given for you, to be an advantage, not a restriction. He said this as He defended the right of the disciples to pluck some ears of grain, rub them in their hands, and eat them (Mark 2:23). “The Sabbath was made for you—you weren’t made for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). Jesus was telling them, in essence, “The Sabbath that you work so hard to keep and which has become such a burden to you, was given to help you, not to be a restriction and certainly not to be a mere test of obedience. If only you knew the truth about God and His laws, you would find that

His yoke is easy, and His burden is light.” Look at those famous words in Matthew:

Come to me, all of you who toil and are burdened, and I will let you rest. Let my yoke be put upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble-minded, and your hearts will find rest, for the yoke I offer you is a kindly one, and the load I ask you to bear is light.
Matthew 11:28–30, Goodspeed.

Jesus came gently and humbly to them, even though He was God Himself. You would think the people would be relieved to hear all this right from headquarters. Instead, they accused the Son of God of blasphemously misrepresenting His Father. They even said that it was the Devil who made Him talk about God and His laws like this! John 8:48. And so they condemned Him as lawless and crucified Him as a heretic.

The Experience and Teaching of Saul/Paul

A little while later Saul of Tarsus took up the cause of those who had denounced Jesus as a heretic and who had denounced His picture of God as false and satanic. Saul did this because he too obeyed God for the wrong reason. He worshiped a tyrannical God who would be pleased to see people persecuted, imprisoned, and even stoned to death — to force them to obey. That was the kind of God he worshiped. And he conducted his evangelism in the name of that God. It was Saul’s picture of God that moved him to use so much force. And he had many texts (or so he thought) to support it.

It was on the Damascus road that he finally saw the light, and the truth set him free (John 8:32). What a difference! He didn’t change his Bible or even the name of his God. He didn’t change the day he worshiped, or his diet, or his dress. What did he change that day? All Saul changed was his picture of God. And who has spoken more eloquently about freedom and faith and grace than the Saul who became Paul? Even further, he presented Christ as the end of legalism (based on Romans 10:4). We’re not under law, we’re under grace, because we worship a gracious God! Romans 6:14.

Paul went on to say, “Don’t misunderstand me in my new emphasis, do you think my emphasis on love, trust, and freedom abolishes the law?” Faith does not abolish the law. Faith establishes the law by putting it in its proper perspective (based on Romans 3:31). In other words, when you

really trust God, you love and admire Him for His wise and gracious ways. You are perfectly willing to listen to everything God has to say, and to give careful heed to all of His instructions. It's only wise and sensible to do so, once you're convinced God is that kind of a person.

Why Then the Law?

Why does a God who desires His children to enjoy dignity and freedom make so much use of law? Paul explains this in Galatians 3, as we noted in the previous chapter. Law was added as an emergency measure because we needed it (based on Galatians 3:19). The law was added to be our guardian, to guide us back to a right relationship with God (Galatians 3:25). A right relationship with God means we will do what is right *because it is right* and not because we are being ordered to. The Greek word for "guardian" is *paidagogos*, which means "leader of children." The law was designed for people who behave like children. As rebellious, disorderly and immature sinners, we have needed the guidance and protection of God's laws. Behind all those regulations, we can see a very gracious God who has used all these emergency measures for our best good. There is nothing arbitrary about them. They make very good sense and they deserve to be *intelligently* obeyed.

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*What God really wants is not mere obedience to the rules;
He wants us to do what is right because it is right.*

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This is even more apparent when we look precisely at what our God has asked us to do, particularly in the Ten Commandments. But more than that, we must understand *why* we needed to be instructed by these emergency measures:

We know, of course, that the Law is good in itself and has a legitimate function. Yet we also know that the Law is not really meant for the good man, but for the man who has neither principles nor self-control. 1 Timothy 1:8-9, Phillips.

If you have self-control, you don't need to be ordered to behave. But the law does not give us self-control. Rather, it is an emergency measure because we lack self-control. We need it until we can recover self-control and love and trust. Then we are able to use our freedom in the right way.

This is what Paul explained to the Galatian believers, who were prone to misunderstanding God's use of law. Galatians 5:13–23 as a whole is a magnificent passage, but we will focus on Paul's understanding of God's use of law:

You, my brothers, were called to be free....The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself...." But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law....But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Galatians 5:13–14, 18, 22–23, NIV.

"Faithfulness" means that we can be trusted, and "self-control" is the real meaning of the word "temperance" in the *King James Version*. Some people would prefer that God command and control them for the rest of eternity. That seems humble and safe, but it is also telling God that we don't want the freedom that He has paid such a high price to protect. In light of the cross, how can we hand our freedom back and say, "No, I don't want self-control. I want **You** to control me"? But God offers something marvelously better, "When you are fully under the influence of My Holy Spirit, I won't control you. You will have recovered the dignity and joy of self-control." Then we really will have freedom once again.

Love Is the Fulfilling of the Law

This idea that "love is the fulfilling of the law" (based on Galatians 5:14 and Romans 13:10) was certainly not new with Paul. Jesus had said the same thing to the inquiring lawyer (Matthew 22:35–40). But the first person to say it was actually Moses. Jesus and Paul were both quoting Moses, the man who was instrumental in giving the Commandments in the first place: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." Deuteronomy 6:5, NIV. That is one half of it. Notice the other half in Leviticus: "Do not hate your brother in your heart.... But love your neighbor as yourself." Leviticus 19:17–18, NIV. Jesus quoted that directly from Moses (Matthew 22:37). But you cannot really command things like love, can you? You cannot command "not hating your brother in your heart" either (based on Matthew 5:21–22; 1 John 2:11; 3:15; 4:20). But when people are misbehaving, you may say it that way as an emergency measure. But that is all it is. It doesn't provide the lasting motivation that God desires.

Even love is not always clearly understood. The love that fulfills the law “is patient and kind...is not jealous or boastful...is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right.” 1 Corinthians 13:4–6, RSV. Imagine living in a community where everyone lives as described in the Ten Commandments, where everybody loves God and loves everybody else! It would mean that no one is ever rude, arrogant, or impatient. No one insists on having his own way. Can you imagine living in such a community? Would you be free in that environment?

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In eternity we will live in a place where people not only never do wrong, they will never even want to.

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Look at the details of the Decalogue (Exodus 20:13–16). No one ever steals. No one ever kills. No one ever hates. No one ever lies. Everyone can be trusted. And even more than that, look at number ten (Exodus 20:17). People not only never do anything wrong — no one even *wants* to. That’s the meaning of the coveting commandment, number ten, the one that bothered Paul so much at first (Romans 7:7–11). He thought God was interfering too much when He got in that deep. But that is the mindset that *really* guarantees our freedom, as Paul eventually learned (Galatians 5:22–23). In eternity we will live in a place where people not only never do wrong, they will never even want to. That means they have really been healed.

Even more than that, imagine living in a community where everyone loves and reveres the same God (Exodus 20:3). Every member of God’s family will admire the God who values nothing higher than the freedom of His children and who has paid such a high price to prove it. They will worship a God who asks for nothing more than mutual love and trust. The unity of love and trust will be based on the fact that we all love and worship the same God. When you have a group of people who live like that, you have real freedom, real peace, and real security. Seen in that light, the Decalogue is a guarantee of freedom. For God says, “I will always run My universe this way. I’d rather die than change it.”

Some of us say, “God, please, do not change it. Please, always run Your universe in harmony with the principles of the Ten Commandments, or we won’t be really safe and free.” But there will be one major difference in eternity. When the emergency is over, there will

be no need for God to tell us to love each other and to be decent neighbors. The Spirit of Truth will have convinced us that it is only right and sensible to behave like that. That's the meaning of the law being written in our hearts, where we do our thinking (Jeremiah 31:31–34; Hebrews 8:8–12). That means we have thought this through. We agree with God. That's the best way to live. That's the best way to run the universe. It is right, and that means that our self-control has been restored.

Law, Freedom and the Sabbath

There's just one commandment that doesn't seem to fit in to this picture. Can the seventh-day Sabbath be regarded as a guarantee of freedom? Isn't the Sabbath a restriction of our freedom? That was a key point in Chapter Ten of this book, entitled "The Reminder of the Evidence." If the Sabbath is an arbitrary test of our obedience, it doesn't fit in to this good news we have been talking about. But, in fact, the purpose of the Sabbath is to remind us of the freedom given to us in the Garden of Eden, to remind us how God set His people free from Egyptian bondage, and how Jesus died on crucifixion Friday. The Sabbath sets us free more than any other commandment, by telling us there is no need to be afraid of God. Understood in this way, keeping the seventh-day Sabbath *does* fit in to the larger picture, for we need to be reminded of these truths that are the basis of our freedom.

God gave the Sabbath to help us, not to test our obedience. Look at Isaiah's understanding of the Sabbath:

If you cease to tread the Sabbath underfoot, and keep my holy day free from your own affairs, if you call the Sabbath a day of joy and the Lord's holy day a day to be honoured, if you honour it by not plying your trade, not seeking your own interest or attending to your own affairs, then you shall find your joy in the Lord. Isaiah 58:13–14, NEB.

Joy is one of the gifts of the Spirit of Truth. And what is the truth that makes the Sabbath a day of joy? It is the truth about our God. God invites and urges us to take time to listen, to remember, and to consider all the truths about God that the Sabbath represents. Then we will find the joy that comes from knowing this truth about our God. That's the kind of joy we will have for the rest of eternity. That is how the Sabbath fits in to the larger picture.

The “Why” of Obedience

If you were ever asked to explain why you obey God (assuming that you do), what answer would you give? *First*, would you say, “I do what I do as a believer because God has told me to, and He has the power to reward and destroy”? Is that why you don’t lie and murder? It is good you don’t do those things, and such obedience might be all right for a beginner or for a little child, but it makes God’s laws seem so arbitrary. It implies that they make no sense in themselves. That kind of obedience does not speak well of God’s character and government.

Second, would it be better to say, “I do what I do as a believer, because God has told me to, and I love Him and want to please Him”? Is that why you don’t steal or commit adultery? You don’t see anything wrong or harmful in these things, it’s just that God doesn’t like it when you do that. He has been so good to you, surely you owe it to Him to do the things He has asked you to do, whether or not they make sense. It might be an improvement on obeying out of fear or the desire for a reward, but it still smacks of arbitrariness. It still does not speak well of God, though the second motivation is often thought to be the antidote to the first one.

Third, what would you think of saying this instead? “I do what I do because more and more I am finding it to be right and sensible to do so. I would want to do it even if He didn’t tell me to. I admire and revere the One who advised and even commanded me in the days of my ignorance and immaturity. Being still somewhat ignorant and immature, I am willing to trust and obey the One whose counsel has always proved to be very sensible, even when He tells me to do something beyond my present understanding.” That attitude accepts that God is not arbitrary. Everything He has asked us to do makes such good sense, we would want to do it anyway. If you can say that, then truly God’s law is not a threat to your freedom, and you will thank Him for it.

In this context, we should look at the book of James. James is thought by some to be the legalist among the New Testament writers. But look at what he says in James 2:

If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right....Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom. James 2:8, 12, NIV.

Even Luther didn't understand James in that way. But James knew that true obedience is no threat to our freedom.

I am adding a quote from Ellen G. White, whom some of us regard as a real friend of God. This is one of her many descriptions of real obedience:

The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation, merely because he is required to do so, will never enter into the joy of obedience. In fact, he does not obey. . . . True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. The essence of all righteousness is loyalty to our Redeemer. This will lead us to do right because it is right — because right doing is pleasing to God. Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 97–98.

I believe that someday we will be able to stand in the presence of God and say, "God, we would do all these things from here on, whether You asked us to or not — because we agree with You that they are sensible and they are right." And God could say, "That is good. At last you're free. You have learned the truth, and the truth will set you free and keep you free."

Questions and Answers

Louis Venden: That was a beautiful statement at the end, and it touches me deeply. But it seems to me that the very title of this chapter implies that there are many sincere individuals who have seen God's law as a threat to our freedom. Many Christians feel that God's law is something from which they want to be free. For example, I've heard people quote Romans 10:4: "Christ is the end of the law." Doesn't that verse imply freedom from the law? What does that text mean?

Graham Maxwell: I don't think God wants us to stop loving, or to be disorderly and live in chaos, do you? The text needs to be analyzed, first for the words and then for the context. First of all, the word "end." One rare but possible meaning is "purpose;" Christ is the goal or purpose of the law. But I doubt that's the meaning in the context. I do think it means termination, all right. Law here does not have an article in front of it, so it is not referring to any particular law. Paul, all the way through the book of Romans, is contrasting the obedience that springs from love and trust with the obedience that springs from law. And the obedience

that springs from law is often the obedience that comes from fear, and that can turn us into rebels even as we obey. So when Paul comes to Romans 10:4, the meaning is “Christ is the termination of law as a way of being saved.” Christ is the end of legalism. *Phillips* has a marvelous rendering of that. “Christ means the end of the struggle for righteousness by works of law, that everyone who has faith in God may be saved.” That’s beautifully done.

Lou: But along with a text like Romans 10:4, I think of the one in Romans 6 which I could hear someone asking about. It says, “We are not under the law, but under grace” (based on Romans 6:14). Isn’t that further evidence that freedom is not under the law but under grace?

Graham: Again, that depends on the meaning of being “under the law.” People often explain that as meaning we’re not under the “condemnation” of the law. For Paul, I think, it has to do with our relationship with God. We’re not under law, we’re under grace. We are not dealing with a legalistic God. We are dealing with a God who is graciousness personified. So Paul is saying, “If you realize that you are dealing with a gracious God, it helps you get rid of sin.” Because when you’re dealing with God in a legalistic manner, it actually provokes the very sin you are trying to avoid.

You may remember that in Romans 7 Paul describes this very thing. He says, “There was a day when I looked at the law and it provoked me to sin. Especially commandment number ten irritated me (based on Romans 7:7–11), until I realized God’s gracious purpose in giving it to us. Now I delight in the law” (based on Romans 7:22 and 8:2). So one really cannot understand law until one understands God’s gracious purpose, which means one has to know what He’s like. And that’s Paul’s message. We do not deal with a God of legalism, but a God of graciousness. It makes all the difference in the world. It places the law in its proper context.

Lou: This reminds me of Paul’s statement in Romans 14:5. Speaking in the context of the Sabbath he says, “Let everyone be persuaded in his own mind.” Isn’t that just leaving it up to personal choice? What should we really make of this?

Graham: I wouldn’t want to leave the impression that you’re not free to make up your own mind on any of the other commandments. It seems to me that if we have not made up our own minds freely about God, then our worship is worthless. “Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind” is the way God approaches us about everything He

asks us to do. It isn't just with respect to the Sabbath. When it comes to love, trust, obedience, you name it, we are free to make up our own minds. That's why He says, "Don't go around condemning other people." God does not condemn them. Everyone is free to make up their own mind.

Lou: But God isn't saying that all roads lead to the same place or that it doesn't matter what choice you make, is He?

Graham: No, He isn't. The choice you make is very important, but it must still be yours. God is not going to force you to do what is right or what is best for you. Now before Paul knew God was gracious, before the Damascus road, he would say, "I *know* some of you are wrong, and I'm on my way to put you into prison and have you stoned." But when he wrote Romans, there was no more of that! He had learned that we are not under the law but under grace (Romans 6:14).

Lou: In the opening part of this chapter, you seem convinced that we need to be attentive to all ten of the commandments. But isn't a person who is concerned about the law, who thinks a lot about the Ten Commandments, a legalist? Isn't that the meaning of legalism? A person who thinks about the law? Shouldn't we be thinking about Jesus rather than about the law?

Graham: When people put it that way, it implies that a loving person is a legalist, since love is the fulfilling of the law. And that doesn't make sense. So I think we need to consider the real meaning of legalism. I believe that the essence of legalism is preoccupation with our legal standing before a legalistic God. Many Christians are preoccupied with their legal standing, because they don't really know God. Like the father of the prodigal son, God is not thinking of our legal standing, He's very preoccupied with our welfare and whether or not we will come home. So *the essence of legalism is preoccupation with one's legal standing with God.*

Lou: Are you saying a person could believe and accept Christ's sacrifice in such a way that they would in effect be a legalist?

Graham: We should say this very carefully, but I really believe it's true. If you believe Jesus died primarily to adjust our legal standing with a God who is preoccupied with our legal standing, you are a legalist. And this means that you no longer take the blood of bulls and goats to God to adjust your legal standing (Hebrews 9:12-14), you now take Him the blood of His Son and say, "Will this adjust my legal standing?" And in that perspective God would say, "That's good; now you've brought

Me the right blood.” To me, this is legalism.

Lou: So you’re saying that if our purpose in approaching God is to meet a legal requirement, it becomes a matter of legalism.

Graham: I would call that the Devil’s sad perversion. He has actually taken the death of Christ, which is a monument to freedom, and turned it into a ceremony that adjusts our legal standing. In other words, those who misunderstood the ceremonies in Old Testament times, but then became Christians, applied the same misunderstanding to the cross and to the blood of Christ. It’s just that now they had better blood and more persuasiveness with the Father to adjust their legal standing. To me, it sounds terrible to say that. It supports the Devil’s charges that God is arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe. You see, all legalism is based on the concept that God has to execute those who disobey Him. Therefore, it follows that forgiveness will somehow take care of that. And that’s what produces legalism.

Lou: I want to come back to a basic question that I’ve heard again and again, “Must one obey God’s law to be saved?” You said the law is not a threat to our freedom. But on the other hand, don’t I *have* to obey it?

Graham: Maybe the safest way to approach that in a brief time is to consider the word “obedience.” The biblical word means “to listen humbly.” As Micah said, “All God asks of us is that we walk humbly before our God” (based on Micah 6:8). The thief on the cross didn’t have much time to live up to the many, many laws that had been used as God’s emergency measures, but he certainly was humbly and gratefully willing to listen to the One in the middle (Luke 23:39–43). And he died willing to listen; sincerely, honestly, willing to listen. He will arise in the same frame of mind. He has much to learn, but he’ll be a good disciple. That means he will be willing to listen, to accept instruction, and to accept correction. Given enough time, he would learn that *to obey God’s law is to be loving*.

Lou: In that case, do I *have* to be loving to be saved?

Graham: Jesus said to Nicodemus, “Unless you are born of the Spirit, you will not be saved” (based on John 3:5). And the man who is born of the Spirit, whose fruit is love and truth (Galatians 5:22–23), will now have truth in the inner man (Ephesians 3:16). He will have a new heart and a right spirit (Ezekiel 36:26–27). Yes, I would say that unless one has at least the beginning of this experience of love and trustworthiness, he or she will not be saved. And that’s from 1 John. “Hereby we

know if we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren” (based on 1 John 3:14). I mean, unless we see the beginning of a new regard for each other, we do not have the first symptom of salvation.

Lou: So, are you saying that I *have* to do this? I’m trying to find out. Is there something I *have* to do to be saved?

Graham: We’ll cover that in a later chapter, the one on the matter of perfection (Chapter Fourteen). Do I *have* to be perfect? I would say perfection is not something God demands of us; it is something He offers to us. He says, “I offer you a new heart. I offer you a right spirit. I offer you healing. Do you want it?” If I don’t want it, I’m not savable. In fact the word “save” in the Greek also means “to heal.” If I say I don’t want to be healed, I don’t want to have a loving heart and truth in the inner man, then I don’t want to be saved either. In any case, to put the Ten Commandments on the wall in a mechanical sort of a way is to miss the whole point.

Lou: Let me try it another way. Our subject in this chapter has to do with a threat to our freedom. Now based on what you’ve said, let me ask respectfully, “Am I really free if I have to love and obey; if, as you put it, I need to listen? How can I think I am really free?”

Graham: Well, let’s put it this way. If we lived in a society where we didn’t love each other and we couldn’t be trusted, there would be no freedom. There can’t be freedom without trust. There can’t be freedom in a disorderly, chaotic, lawless society. It’s interesting how one can phrase these things in such a way that it sounds like a burden, like a restriction on our freedom.

But what is God asking us to do, anyway? I would say He is asking us to love each other, to be trustworthy, to be safe, to be free. Who would want to turn that down? You say, “Do I *have* to be free? Do I *have* to be saved? Do I *have* to be healthy? Do I *have* to be well?” God says, “No. I can’t command it, but I can offer it to you.” And some of us say, “I’d like that very much.”

Lou: Jesus said, “Come to Me all you who labor and I will give you rest.” But then He talks about learning and obedience. Then He says, “My yoke is easy” (based on Matthew 11:28–30). Is this really easy? Is it really light (Matthew 11:30)?

Graham: In comparison with the many rules and regulations the Pharisees had, many of which made no sense, it was very light. And yet Jesus said to them, “You have omitted the weightier matters in the law”

(Matthew 23:23). So in another sense, it's heavy. Isn't love weighty and heavy in its importance? So there is a sense in which obedience is not light.

I think what makes God's commandments light is that they make such good sense. They call for our intelligent obedience, and when I obey something intelligently, I *want* to do it. It makes sense. It's dumb not to. And when I want to do it, the burden is gone. The text in Matthew actually calls for complete commitment, but when I want to do it, the "burden" is light (Matthew 11:28-30).

Lou: When we try to describe the kind of world we would like to live in, we end up describing the world God has created us for.

Graham: Exactly.

Lou: What is the truth? You've been talking about the truth that sets us free. Just remind us again, what is that truth?

Graham: In the legal model the truth is, "We've been forgiven and we won't have to go to hell." But I think the truth that sets us free is the truth about God, about the kind of person that He is.

Lou: Does forgiving a person set that person free?

Graham: There is a sense in which that's true, but forgiveness by itself doesn't necessarily change the heart. Heaven will not be filled with forgiven crooks.

Lou: But we're still crooks.

Graham: We're still crooks. So unless the heart is changed, there will be no real freedom. This again brings up the difference between the legal model and the healing/trust model. Supposing you had to keep rat poison in your house, and you have a young son. And if he touches it and then eats it, he could be very sick, he might even die. So you say, "Son, don't touch that rat poison. I'm going to put it on the highest shelf, the high and locked cupboard." A little later you hear a crash in the garage and you run out, and there's your son lying on the floor. He's taken the rat poison and he's dying. Would it do any good at that point to say, "Son, I forgive you, I forgive you!" He would die forgiven, but it wouldn't keep him from dying. Nor would it do any good to say, "Son, I don't want you to die, so let me drink the rat poison for you." Then you both would die. The boy doesn't need forgiveness. He needs an antidote. He needs healing.

Sin is like that poison. God has said, "You really don't take Me seriously, do you? Sin is like a poison and will lead to your death. Let Me take the poison and show you." Jesus dies, and we discover that the poi-

son of sin is real. Nobody's killing us. Sin is really a poison, and we are dying. And when we realize the truthfulness of God's warning, we will take Him seriously from then on.

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In the legal model the truth is, "We've been forgiven and we won't have to go to hell." But I think the truth that sets us free is the truth about God, about the kind of person that He is.

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The beauty is that God was then able to take His life back and come out living. He had made His point. There was no legal requirement in that. There was an awesome truth to be revealed. There was nothing arbitrary about it. God does not want us to poison ourselves. We need healing. We need to heed the warning. "The result of sin is death, don't do this thing." That's the healing model, not the legalistic model.

Lou: We've been dealing with questions that have come up in a general way. I'd like to move now to several specific questions: "Growing up as an Adventist, I always thought the Sabbath would be one of the big issues at the end of time. Is the Sabbath something we should hold onto as a belief? Is it strong enough to die for, or is it a temporary emergency measure just for the present?"

Graham: That is a very good question. Certainly the Great Controversy is not over which day we worship. It's over a commitment; it's over a great truth. And the meaning of the Sabbath speaks of that truth, and that makes it an important issue. Those who meaningfully observe the Sabbath in the last days will be publicly declaring that they worship Christ as their God, and that the Father is just as gracious as the Son. Apart from the meaning of the Sabbath, there's not a very good answer to that question. But in the light of its meaning, the Sabbath could be a central issue of enormous consequence. And because of its meaning, the Sabbath could be continued through eternity, because of all there would be to remember in the hereafter. It is a monument to freedom.

Lou: The next question is a sample out of many similar questions: "If God's purpose is to restore a love relationship with His children, how could asking them to kill an animal do this? In my opinion, this would only tend to make people cruel and harden their hearts, rather than create a loving, sympathetic spirit. It would seem to me that it

would reflect the cruel spirit of Satan rather than a loving, gracious God.” This question has to do with God’s emergency measures in Old Testament times. What about that?

Graham: Unfortunately, the sacrifices *have* had that effect. Many people offered a sacrifice in hopes that God would love the smell, forgive them, and bless them. And it became a rather satanic thing. God must have hated this emergency measure and hated that it had to be that dramatic. It was certainly dramatic for Adam when he killed the first lamb in order to be convinced that sin is serious; that it leads to death. I wonder how hard he hit that lamb, and what did he hit it with? Not hard enough to kill it, perhaps, just to hurt it. And he hit it harder. Then blood appeared. He had never seen that before. And Adam turns to God and says, “God, I’m not sure I can go on with this. It’s making me sick.” And God says, “I hope it always makes you sick, every time.”

But people became so accustomed to doing it that the historian Josephus described it as almost like a circus, cutting the animals up and brandishing them as they placed them on the altar to be burned. They were serious about the ritual, but had forgotten the meaning. God chose something that was rather awesome, and sometimes rather horrible, in order to sufficiently impress His people.

Lou: But with all of these risks, why would God go ahead, recognizing that this could happen? Wasn’t there a better way?

Graham: Sometimes we wish the whole Bible would have been written differently and been a littler clearer. I would say the All Wise One used the very best approach possible, and there were always *some* who did not misunderstand. Some have said, “If You’re the One who sees the little sparrow fall, and You asked us to kill these animals, it must have been necessary to impress us sufficiently.” And the sacrifices were also a foretaste of the Innocent One who would come and die later on.

Lou: Related to the previous chapter on the emergency measures, a questioner writes, “I was disappointed that you used Galatians 3:19–25 as referring to the Ten Commandments, whereas I think Paul was concerned about the doctrine of circumcision. The entire book of Galatians was an endeavor to change the church’s view of the ‘ceremonial’ law. See Acts 15 and so on. Isn’t it true that the sacrificial system is the added law? Doesn’t Colossians 2:14–16 talk about a law that was to be blotted out?”

Graham: One could readily come to that conclusion, but I think one would pay a price in taking that view and not including all law. One

might be tempted to say that a legalist is a person who still follows the ceremonial laws, as the Pharisees did, “There’s no way you could be legalistic about the Ten Commandments.” Yet the most damaging legalism over the centuries has been with respect to the Ten. Certainly the *most* damaging legalism has been with respect to the fourth of the Ten Commandments. So I believe Paul’s point is about all law. All law was an emergency measure to bring us back to faith and a right relationship with God. That’s the point. So if you leave out the Ten in Galatians 3, you are suggesting that there is no way you can be legalistic about the Ten Commandments.

Lou: A few more questions. “If the universe was satisfied when Christ died, then why are we still here?”

Graham: Ah, that’s a great question. We will answer that in detail in Chapter Eighteen. “What is God Waiting For?” is a question we ought to keep in mind throughout these conversations. Why did He wait so long to send His Son? Why is He waiting so long to send Him back the second time?

Lou: Here’s an intriguing question: “Would we lose our freedom if God always rewarded the righteous? If righteousness always paid off, why rebel?”

Graham: That might explain why God does what He does sometimes, as with Job in Scripture. It’s true. If every time I did what was right God rewarded me, that would be quite a motivation, wouldn’t it? Then I would do what I do because God has told me to, and He has the power to reward and destroy, as in the first of the three reasons for obedience we talked about earlier in the chapter. That would produce a certain kind of obedience. But isn’t it far more impressive if, like Job, we’re not rewarded right away and we love God anyway? God’s friend Job was able to say, “Though God slay me, yet will I trust Him” (based on Job 13:15).

Lou: That reminds me of the third type of obedience you talked about earlier. If God commands me to do something beyond my present understanding, I can trust Him even when it appears that righteousness is not rewarded.

Two questions: “What is the difference between killing and murdering? Is it because it damages yourself when you hate your brother?” And another person says, “I am confused. ‘Thou shalt not kill’ is a commandment, and yet God told His people to kill.” Can you touch on these very quickly?

Graham: In both Hebrew and Greek the sixth commandment speaks of murder. “Thou shalt not murder.” Many modern versions are so translated. What’s so bad about murdering is what happens inside. As Jesus said, “He who hates his brother has already done the damage. He is a murderer” (based on Matthew 5:21–24). On the other hand, God has never said, “Go and murder people.” He did instruct His people to kill in battle. But He didn’t want them to. It’s very clear. He said, “Let My angel do it. Let Me put My children to sleep.” He never wanted them to kill at all (see Exodus 23:23–30). That too was an emergency measure. But at the end of the Millennium God doesn’t violate that law either. Do you think He hates His children as they die? Of course not. He doesn’t even kill them. He watches them die and He cries. God has never violated His Ten Commandments. Never.

Lou: Our next chapter in this series of conversations will be number thirteen, “How God Treats His Erring Children.”

Graham: For me, that topic is the most convincing evidence of all that God is not arbitrary, exacting, vengeful and severe, and it is evidence in demonstration, not in words. It is about how He treats us when we sin.

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The Why of Obedience

- 1) Because God told me so and He has the power to reward or destroy.
- 2) Because God told me so and I love Him and want to please Him.
- 3) Because experience has shown me that what God wants is the right and sensible thing to do. I want to do it even when I don’t fully understand.

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Chapter Thirteen

How God Treats His Erring Children

What do you think it will be like, someday, to stand in the presence of the Infinite One and realize that He knows everything about us — and I do mean *everything*? Even if we are among the saved, will we be comfortable to spend eternity with Someone who knows us so well? Our answer to these questions depends on the kind of person we believe our God to be. In this chapter we will again consider the most convincing evidence that God is not the kind of person His enemies have made Him out to be; arbitrary, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe. The evidence of how He treats His erring and troubled children points to a God who is infinitely powerful, but equally gracious.

Face to Face with God

One day we all will stand before God, whether we are saved or lost. Forbid the thought, but if anyone should die before finishing this chapter, the next moment of consciousness for that person would be face to face with God. The Bible states this clearly in many places; this is one of the most vivid:

Then I saw a great white throne and him who sat upon it. . . . And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. . . . And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done. Revelation 20:11–12, RSV.

Even if we are among the saved, will it be comfortable to spend eternity with Someone who knows us so well? Even though we have been forgiven, we all have been sinners. Paul is very clear about this in Romans 3: “There is not even one who is righteous. . . . For all have sinned, and all fall short of God’s glorious ideal.” Romans 3:10, 23, TCNT. So even though we are saved and forgiven, will God haunt us with the memory of our sinful past? As I’ve already mentioned, the answer depends upon the kind of person we believe our God to be. All through Scripture God has spoken to this question, not in claims and promises alone, but with evidence and with demonstration. And surely the most convincing demonstration was provided by the way Jesus treated even the worst of sinners.

The Woman Taken in Adultery

In the person of Jesus, God was present among us in human form, face to face with sinners. One of the best known of these sinners was the poor woman taken in adultery. But she wasn't the only sinner in that story. There were also the pious, but heartless accusers who brought her to Christ in an attempt to trap Him into contradicting the Old Testament (John 8:5-6). This was not the first time they had sought to entrap Him like this. But each time they had done it before, He had met them with His customary skill and grace and the whole occasion had turned against them. This time, to be sure that they could convince the crowds in the temple (John 8:2), they made sure they had convincing evidence. So when they brought the woman to Jesus they said they had caught her "in the very act." John 8:4, NRSV.

It is immediately apparent from the story what kind of people these were. According to the Old Testament rules, they should have brought the man as well (Leviticus 20:10). There is no way they could claim they hadn't observed the man involved, because they had said, "We caught her in the very act," which would be difficult to do without observing her partner as well. So their dishonesty was immediately apparent. After they put this poor woman in front of a large crowd in the temple (John 8:2), they said to Jesus, "You know the texts in the Old Testament. You know what the Bible says should be done to this woman. Do You agree? Should she be stoned, or not?" (paraphrase of John 8:5). And the whole crowd watched to see what Jesus would say.

Jesus chose to say nothing. Instead He bent over and wrote with His finger in the dust on the ground. A few footprints, a few puffs of air, and the record would be gone. It doesn't say in the Bible that He wrote their sins, but judging by their reaction, that is what He must have written upon the ground (based on John 8:6-7). As they looked over His shoulder and saw their lives delineated in the dust, they left one by one from the oldest to the youngest. Before they left, though, Jesus turned to them as He was writing these things down and said, "I suggest that the one of you who has never sinned throw the first stone at her" (John 8:7). Then He bent down and went on writing. When they were all gone (John 8:8-9), He turned to the woman who was left there and said, "Where are your accusers?" She looked up and said, "I don't know. They are gone." Then He spoke those incredible words to a woman that had committed a really reprehensible act. He said, "I don't condemn you either. Just go home and be a better woman from now on"

(based on John 8:10–11).

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

The Woman Who Anointed Jesus' Feet

Think of the story of Simon, the leper healed by Jesus (Luke 7:36–50). He invited Jesus to a dinner at his house. During the feast, a woman anointed Jesus' feet with expensive perfume. If this scene is the same one recorded in John 12:1–8, that woman was Mary of Bethany, sister of Martha and Lazarus. Some scholars understand that this is also the same woman who was taken in adultery in John 8:3–11.

In the account of Luke 7, the woman tried to keep her actions private, but forgot that the fragrance would fill the air. So the act became public. Simon said (to himself), "If Jesus were a prophet, He would know what kind of woman this is that is touching Him. He would know what kind of sinful life she lives" (based on Luke 7:39). Jesus spoke up and said, "Simon, I have something to say to you." "Speak on," he said (Luke 7:40). And Jesus told the story of the two debtors (Luke 7:41–43). Simon realized that Jesus knew his innermost thoughts—which meant that Jesus knew what a sinner **he** had been! Simon held his breath to see if Jesus would expose him before the crowd. Surely, self-righteous Simon deserved to be exposed. Yet Jesus handled it privately. He maintained Simon's dignity and his reputation with his associates. He did not expose him. At the same time, He graciously accepted Mary's impulsive act. Think what these stories tell us about our God.

The Paralytic at the Pool of Bethesda

Jesus had a similar encounter with the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda. The paralytic had been trying for thirty-eight years to find

healing in the water of the pool. One Sabbath afternoon he looked up, and the kindest face he had ever seen looked back at him and said, “Would you like to be well?” John 5:6. Jesus didn’t lecture the man on the youthful self-indulgence that may have caused his illness in the first place. He simply said, “Would you like to be well? If so, get up, put your mat under your arm and go home” (based on John 5:8). Later, Jesus met him and said, “I suggest you stop sinning, lest something worse befall you” (based on John 5:14). Jesus always worked in that order — first He made people comfortable, then He healed them. Especially when dealing with sinners who might be despising themselves, He first helped them recover their dignity and self-respect. How can you ask a person to act with dignity when you have deprived him of his self-respect? God always restores this first. Later He says to stop sinning, lest something worse happen to you.

The Disciples in the Upper Room

Perhaps the crowning revelation of the character of God came in the upper room the night before Jesus was crucified. If you look in Luke’s account, Jesus said to the twelve, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover supper with you. But the one who is to betray Me is sitting with Me at the table” (based on Luke 22:15, 21–22). They began to argue with each other as to which one of them would do this terrible thing. But they also were arguing as to which one of them should be thought of as the most important (Luke 22:23–24). Can you imagine their arguing about who was the greatest at the same time they were debating which one of them was going to betray Him?

How did the Son of God treat them? Did He chide them for their childish behavior? Or scold them for their unwillingness to wash each other’s feet? Instead, the whole universe watched as their Creator, the One they worshiped, arose, got a basin and a towel, got down on His knees, and washed a dozen pairs of dirty feet (John 13:4–12). He even washed the feet of His betrayer, Judas. Think what it says about God that He would treat them in this way.

What moved the disciples was not so much that their teacher and leader washed their feet. What moved them was that **God** washed their feet. Imagine their experience as they looked down on His head bent over the basin and felt His strong carpenter hands on their feet. Then to have Him look up and say, “You don’t think My Father would do this, do you? But He would. If you’ve seen Me, you’ve seen the Father. If

you are comfortable with Me, you will be just as comfortable with My Father” (based on John 14:7–9).

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

When Jesus told the disciples that one of them would betray Him, did He expose that person before the others? No, it says in the biblical record that when Judas left to do what he had determined to do, they thought Jesus had asked him to go buy provisions for the feast, or perhaps even to make an offering to the poor:

Jesus said to him, “Do quickly what you have to do.” No one at the table understood what he meant by this. Some supposed that, as Judas was in charge of the common purse, Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the festival, or to make some gift to the poor.
John 13:27–29, NEB.

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

The Disciples in Gethsemane and the Courtyard

Later that evening, Peter, James and John went with Jesus into the inner part of the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus went there to pass through the awful experience of separation from His Father. This would answer a couple of questions, “Does sin result in death?” Yes, but what kind of death? “Is it torture and execution at the hands of our gracious God?” No, He suffered there alone, apparently abandoned by the Father (for more on these questions, see the section “Three Questions Regarding the Character of God” in Chapter Eight). Three times He came over to where the disciples were dozing, wanting their companionship and comfort. In the end, did He scold them for not helping Him? No, He made an excuse for them. He said, “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak (Matthew 26:41). I understand, you three. You were just too

tired.”

Think what they missed! What if the three of them had knelt around Christ, and put their hands on His shoulder while He went through that experience. Imagine Jesus running into those three from time to time in the Kingdom and saying, “Peter, James, and John, I’ll never forget how you knelt with Me in Gethsemane when I needed you so much.” What a memory they would have had for the rest of eternity! But they slept through it all. And Jesus didn’t scold them.

The same Peter had earlier made a bold speech in the upper room, “Though all the others would desert You, I will give my life for You” (based on Mark 14:29, 31). Yet a few hours later Peter was cursing and swearing to prove that he didn’t even know this Christ (Matthew 26:74). Then the cock crowed, just as Jesus had said it would, and Peter wondered if Jesus had noticed. And though Jesus was on trial for His life, and had already suffered much, He was more concerned about His erring disciple in the courtyard than He was about Himself. Luke says that Jesus turned and looked straight at Peter (Luke 22:61–62). Peter may well have expected to see indignation and disapproval on Christ’s face. He certainly would have deserved it. But while he saw sorrow and disappointment to be sure, he also saw pity. It was the face of the One who had washed his dirty feet the night before. When Peter saw that look on Jesus’ face, he ran out of the courtyard and wept bitterly.

Consider the account as written by three of the gospel writers: Matthew, Mark and Luke; beginning with Mark: “And Jesus said to them, ‘You will all fall away. . . .’ Peter said to him, ‘Even though they all fall away, I will not. . . . If I must die with you, I will not deny you.’” Mark 14:27, 29, 31, RSV. Then Matthew adds:

A maid came up to him, and said, “You also were with Jesus the Galilean.” But he denied it before them all, saying, “I do not know what you mean. . . . I do not know the man. . . .” Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, “I do not know the man.” Matthew 26:69–70, 72, 74, RSV.

Then Luke adds:

The Lord turned around and looked straight at Peter, and Peter remembered that the Lord had said to him, “Before the rooster crows tonight, you will say three times that you do not know me.” Peter went

out and wept bitterly. Luke 22:61–62, GNT.

Later, Judas came in to the same courtyard. He threw down the thirty pieces of silver and confessed that he had betrayed innocent blood (Matthew 27:3–4). No doubt he, too, looked at Jesus. Do you think he saw a different look on Jesus' face? Did he see anger there? Was there rejection? He deserved it. But no, Judas was also one of Jesus' children, and He was about to lose him. Jesus looked at Judas just as He had looked at Peter. There was the same sorrow, the same disappointment, the same pity. Again, it was the face of the One who had just the night before knelt down and washed Judas' dirty feet. Overcome with it all, Judas ran out and committed suicide (Matthew 27:5).

What a wonderful ending it would have been if Judas had been touched by that look on Jesus' face, just as Peter had been. How much better would it have been if he had found where Peter was weeping and the two of them together had become new men. What a happy ending to the story that would have been! But all heaven watched a different story unfold.

Imagine also how Peter must have felt all that Sabbath. During the previous twenty-four hours he had made a fool of himself repeatedly. Twice he had made impetuous statements in the upper room. Then twice he had disgraced himself in the Garden of Gethsemane. Then came the cowardly behavior in the courtyard, denying that he even knew Christ. Now Christ was dead, and there was no way he could make it up to Him, no way he could make it right.

Jesus and Mary

It's no wonder that when he heard the tomb was empty, Peter was the first one down there on Sunday morning. But it wasn't Peter — it was Mary who had the privilege of seeing Jesus first and taking the good news to the disciples. Why do you suppose it would be Mary, of all people? The same Mary who was known for living an immoral life? Mary, out of whom Christ had cast seven devils? Would *we* have elected her for that high honor? But **God** chose Mary.

Later on, when Mary recognized Jesus and fell at His feet to worship Him, didn't Jesus say something like, "Don't touch Me! Don't touch Me, Mary! If you touch Me, I can't go to heaven"? What would that kind of comment say about our God? No, in the language of the day, this is what He actually said:

“Do not detain me [emphasis supplied], for I have not yet ascended to my Father. But go to my brethren and tell them that I am going up to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”
John 20:17, *Noli*.

Jesus would have spoken these words kindly and graciously. Greetings took a little time in those days. He was literally saying to Mary, “Do not detain Me, Mary, do not go on holding Me or clinging to Me.” Notice also in the text Jesus calling the disciples “brethren,” His brothers. These were the very men who had let Him down when He had needed them so much in Gethsemane. Not only this, when the angels confirmed Jesus’ command to go and tell the disciples, they added something that must have overwhelmed Peter when he heard it. They said: “Now go and give this message to His disciples, including Peter: ‘He [Jesus] is going to Galilee ahead of you.’” Mark 16:7, GNT. How very God-like of the angels to add, “especially tell Peter.” The angels admire and worship God for the incredibly gracious way in which He has handled sinners in His family. How much those angels must have enjoyed adding the words, “And especially tell Peter.”

There are many more examples we could add. But if we trust Him, isn’t this the kind of God with whom we would *want* to spend eternity? We would be spending eternity with Someone who has an infinite memory, yet we would have no need to be afraid of that memory. For God is forgiveness personified. He has promised not only to forgive us, but to treat us as if we had never sinned. Think of all the verses that say this. For example, “Thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back.” Isaiah 38:17, RSV. Or, “You will trample our sins underfoot and send them to the bottom of the sea!” Micah 7:19, GNT.

There is no pretense or forgetfulness in this. God knows what kind of sinners we all have been. The angels have watched our every deed. These things are not forgotten. Yet we are treated as if we had always been God’s loyal children. But this doesn’t mean that God has gone soft on sin. Think what it has cost Him to answer the questions and meet the emergencies that sin has caused in His family.

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God has promised not only to forgive us, but to treat us as if we had never sinned.

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On some serious occasions it was necessary for Jesus, gentle Jesus, to call sin by its right name and denounce it in the strongest terms. One of these was the time when those pretentiously pious Bible teachers, trusted so much by the people, denounced Jesus' picture of His Father as satanic (John 8:45-52). They were saying that the Son of God's description of His own Father was heretical, unbiblical, and diabolical. And it was Sabbath-keeping, tithe-paying, Bible teachers who made that accusation. Because of their great influence on the people, Jesus turned to them and said, "No, it is not I who have a devil. You are of your father, the devil, and you prefer his lies to the truth" (John 8:45-49). Yet, when He said that, there were tears in His voice.

The Death of the Wicked

Even in the final, awesome death of the wicked, God is still respecting the freedom and the individuality of His intelligent creatures. He has made it very plain, all through the sixty-six books of the Bible, that He doesn't want to lose any of His children. That is certainly emphasized in the New Testament. "[The Lord] is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." 2 Peter 3:9, NIV. It is emphasized all through the Old Testament as well:

As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel? Ezekiel 33:11, RSV.

Like a physician, God stands ready to heal us. But He cannot, will not, force us to be well. If we prefer to leave Him, He will respect our decision and sadly let us go. But as we leave Him for the last time to reap the awful consequences, we will hear His sad cry, "How can I give you up? How can I let you go?" Hosea 11:8. We discussed this text when we talked about why Jesus had to die (Chapter Eight). Do you remember the dramatic story about Hosea and his wife? When God interpreted what Hosea had done, He said, "I have pled so long, so many centuries, with My people Israel to please come home. Bring words of repentance with you, and I'll heal you and forgive you" (based on Hosea 14:1-4).

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Something similar is acted out in the parable of the prodigal son. Jesus told the story to show how glad God is when anyone does come home. How eager He is to heal! How magnificent is that story! Notice the attitude of our Father toward His sinful children:

While he was still a long way off his father saw him, and his heart went out to him. He ran to meet him, flung his arms round him, and kissed him. The son said, "Father, I have sinned, against God and against you; I am no longer fit to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Quick! fetch a robe, my best one, and put it on him.... And let us have a feast to celebrate the day. For this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found."
Luke 15:20–24, NEB.

Jesus added that there is joy among the angels in heaven whenever anybody comes back (Luke 15:10). But Israel did not come back in the days of Hosea. Note this powerful appeal from God: "Come home, Israel, come home to the Lord your God.... Take words of repentance with you as you return to the Lord.... I will heal their unfaithfulness, I will love them with all My heart." Hosea 14:1–4, *Phillips*. But they didn't come. "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*.

As in Hosea, He will sadly hand us over if we insist on turning away. I understand that God will miss us if we are lost. He will miss us forever if we don't come home. Think of the eternal void that brilliant Lucifer will leave in the infinite memory of God! The good news is that this magnificent picture of God leads some of us to repentance and to trust. "Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" Romans 2:4, RSV. And when we learn to trust, we will actually look forward to seeing the Infinite One. Even though He will come in unveiled majesty and power, we will not be afraid. Sinners though we all have been, we will be comfortable in His presence for eternity.

Questions and Answers

Louis Venden: The title, “How God Treats His Erring Children,” raises a question in my mind, Graham. You have reminded us of some beautiful, gripping stories! But they all have centered, for the most part, upon Jesus and how Jesus treated people. And I think we’re fairly clear about that. We all have that image of a gentle Jesus in our minds. But I think some still have questions: “What if this were the Father? Would He be treating people the same way? And what about the Holy Spirit?”

Graham Maxwell: When most people hear the title, “How God Treats His Erring Children,” does the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit come to mind first? I’m hoping that it wouldn’t make any difference, that we can accept the repeated testimony of Jesus: “If you’ve seen Me, you’ve seen the Father” (John 14:9). “The Father loves you just as much as I do” (John 16:26). “And if I go, I will send another Counselor just like Myself” (John 15:26–27; 16:7, 13–14). It would make no difference; Father, Son, or Holy Spirit. That’s the most wonderful thing to understand. Everybody loves gentle Jesus, but the Father would treat us exactly the same as Jesus would. We may have to remind ourselves of this truth many times before we really believe it.

Lou: You used a version for John 20:17 that I’ve never heard of before. *Noli*? What translation is that?

Graham: The translator’s name is Theophan (or simply Fan) Stylian Noli. He was Archbishop of the Albanian Orthodox Church in America. He produced an unusual version most people have never seen. I enjoy it very much. And there’s a reason why I chose it. The Greek of John 20:17 literally means, “Don’t go on holding Me, don’t go on touching Me, don’t cling to Me, because I must go.” What Jesus said was actually very polite and gracious. So I love the translation, “Do not detain me.” I went through my many versions and *Noli* had it closest to the meaning of the Greek.

Lou: I noticed that with the exception of Hosea, your stories about God’s kindness are all from the New Testament. Does that mean that the God revealed in the New Testament is really gentler than the One revealed in the Old Testament?

Graham: The only remedy for that is to go through all sixty-six biblical books and note how much tenderness there is in the Old Testament. For example, you could look at the parable of God in His vineyard (Isaiah 5:1–7), something you’ve preached on many times. How tenderly that story is told. “What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it?” Isaiah 5:4, NIV. Or, “My people...how have I wea-

ried you?” Micah 6:3, ESV; see also Isaiah 43:24. Of course, the whole book of Hosea is *so* moving. So are the texts where God says, “Anyone who touches you, touches the apple of My eye” (Deuteronomy 32:10; Zechariah 2:8). That is sometimes translated, “Anybody who hurts you, My people, sticks his finger in the eye of the Almighty” (based on Zechariah 2:8). That would hurt! And God says, “That’s the way I feel about you.”

One of the most impressive Old Testament stories, though, is God’s treatment of David. Now David sinned enough to be disfellowshipped from most churches, yet God says to his son Solomon, “Solomon, obey Me in all things, just as your father David did” (based on 1 Kings 11:6). That is one of the most generous statements in the whole Bible, so I will use it again when we talk about the subject of perfection (Chapter Fourteen).

Lou: Graham, you referred to this beautiful scene in the New Testament where a woman taken in adultery is brought to Jesus and He says, “Neither do I condemn you” (John 8:3–11). But when you go back to the Old Testament, God is ordering the destruction and death of Achan and his family (Joshua 7). Why would there be that apparent discrepancy?

Graham: If Jesus had agreed that the woman taken in adultery should be stoned, He would probably have had a large following. They would have approved of this. One explanation of the Achan story is that Achan did not repent, and so he had to be stoned. The woman taken in adultery did repent, which raises the interesting question: Had she not repented, would Jesus have joined in stoning her? I don’t think so!

I’d rather look at the Achan story in its total setting. In the case of Achan, there was irreverence, there was lack of trust. They were about to go into Canaan. God needed to make an important point in that context, whether or not there was repentance on Achan’s part. With the woman taken in adultery the situation was different. It called for Him to say something else. His gracious treatment of this woman who had been taken advantage of, and His incredibly gracious treatment of those pretentiously pious accusers, is what needed to be said at that time. Everything God does in Scripture is designed to say something that needs to be said at that time, and when you take the Bible as a whole, you see a consistency in it.

Lou: Jesus is so gentle with them in John 8. And that’s what His ministry was like for three and a half years. But then, in the early

church, you have the story of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11), something similar to the Achan story.

Graham: And the third angel’s message is fire and brimstone (Revelation 14:10–11).

Lou: So why couldn’t God act throughout the whole biblical period the way He acted during those three and a half years?

Graham: As I understand it, *those three and a half years were a demonstration of God’s ideal way of doing things.* This is the way He would like to do it all the time. It wasn’t well received by many. Some despised Him for being so gentle. He was gentle with everybody. He was gentle with Judas, gentle with the men who nailed Him to the cross. This is the way God wishes to act for all eternity. He was demonstrating that you can only govern that way when the people you are governing are impressed favorably with that, when they respect you and do not misunderstand this gentleness as weakness. But where there is rebellion and disrespect, God has had to act differently.

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Jesus’ three and a half years of ministry were a demonstration of God’s ideal way of doing things. This is the way He would like to do it all the time. It wasn’t well received by many. Some despised Him for being so gentle.

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Lou: This ties in with what you have talked about before. When God *doesn’t* act with that kind of gentleness, we’re in emergency situations where the uniqueness of the situation calls for an action appropriate to that situation, even though that action is still based upon love.

Graham: That’s right. I love going through the sixty-six books of the Bible to see the consistency there. God all the way through is trying to say and demonstrate what needs to be said — under varying circumstances with the whole universe looking on.

Lou: But when God comes in the person of Jesus Christ and acts with gracious acceptance, we take Him out and crucify Him!

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

Lou: They really didn’t want the kind of God that Jesus talked about.

Graham: That’s right. They even said He was possessed of a devil

to describe God in that way (John 8:48). Yet He wept even as He denounced them for doing this.

Lou: This question has come up again and again: “If God is as kind as Jesus is, how can He turn and destroy sinners in the end?”

Graham: If all God really wants is love and trust freely given, He can't say, “You give Me that, or I'll destroy you.” So that leads me to go back to the Bible and try to understand what He means when He says, “I will destroy.” For example, when the Israelite King Saul committed suicide the Bible said, “Thus God slew Saul” (based on 1 Chronicles 10:13–14). Yet God never laid a hand on him (1 Samuel 31:2–5)! And then, of course, there is the cross. Jesus died as sinners will die, yet God did not destroy His Son. So I think we can find a consistent meaning through there.

It's true that God uses the word “destroy” in the Bible. It is language that we can understand when we are hard of hearing and have to be almost terrified to take God seriously. But if we really want to know what He will do to the wicked in the end, look at what happened to His Son. He died the death of a sinner.

Lou: So what DO the many biblical references about God destroying the wicked mean?

Graham: I particularly want to know what He's going to do to me if I'm a lost sinner in the end. The Bible says, “He made His Son to be sin, though He knew no sin” (based on 2 Corinthians 5:21), and He died the sinner's death (based on Romans 8:3; 1 Peter 2:24). So I should go to the cross and watch Jesus die the sinner's death. The death of the wicked is absolutely devastating, but God isn't taking you by the scruff of the neck and saying, “Since you've chosen not to love Me and trust Me, I am going to kill you as painfully as I know how.”

Lou: Here's a question that reflects a widespread concern. “Are you saying that God never really kills anyone? What about the Flood?”

Graham: I believe God has put millions of His children to sleep in what the Bible calls the *first death*. And He promises them all resurrection, something none of us could do if we should take someone's life. At the Flood, the Life-giver interrupted many lives. None of them are even aware that they are asleep. God will awaken each one in the resurrection, either the first resurrection for those who have trusted God or the second resurrection for those hardened in rebellion (based on Revelation 20:4–6). Yes, I would see God doing that.

But taking away our eternal life in the end, what the Bible calls the

second death (Revelation 20:6, 14–15), I believe that destruction is not at His hands. That's when He leaves us, gives us up to the awful consequence of our choices. And cries as He gives us up, just as He did in Hosea (Hosea 11:8). But the difference between the first and the second death and how God acts in relation to them is a very biblical distinction.

Lou: This is a bit of a footnote, but someone raised a question about the story of the woman taken in adultery (John 8:3–11). She said that she had tried to find it in her Bible and it wasn't there. Why is that?

Graham: That would be a serious loss. It's one of the greatest stories in the Bible and absolutely unique. But it's actually missing in the earliest manuscripts. When it does appear, sometimes it is between John 7:53 and 8:11. Sometimes it's in another part of John or at the end of John. One or two manuscripts have it in Luke. Scholars agree that they're not quite sure where it belongs. But lest we be disheartened, they also agree there is no way anybody would have made up such a story. It ran so counter to the thinking of the day. There is no way some monk in a monastery would have thought up a story like this, where God would be so generous to an immoral woman! He wouldn't do it. So the general agreement is that the story bears all the earmarks of genuineness and should be left where it is in most manuscripts. But some versions put it in brackets and others in a footnote. Some leave it out entirely. I would say to people, don't give up too soon. Look in the footnote, then look at the end of John, then look at the Appendix before you decide it's not there. The issue in the manuscripts is more about where the story appears, than whether the story is a faithful representation of Jesus.

Lou: In your presentation, you referred to the fact that we will be comfortable with God even though we are in the presence of Someone who knows everything about us, even things we ourselves may have forgotten. Yet there are references in Scripture about how God has taken all our sins, put them in the depths of the sea, and will remember them no more (Jeremiah 31:34; Micah 7:19; Hebrews 8:12; 10:17). Wouldn't it be more reassuring to say, "He has blotted them out and they just don't figure into any recollection whatsoever"?

Graham: Yes, I think some derive comfort from the thought that God will be unable to remember their sins, some kind of divine amnesia. They would prefer that none of their neighbors and friends, especially their guardian angels, will know about their sins or be able to remember them. But I think it shows even more trust in God to understand that He can remember very well, but He would never haunt anyone with this

memory.

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The history of the Great Controversy will be the history of the evidence of how God has won that conflict. He will never destroy the evidence, or the conflict could arise again and again.

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Now there is a vital reason for none of us forgetting, not even God. The history of the Great Controversy will be the history of the evidence of *how* God has won that conflict. After He has won it, He will not destroy the evidence, or the conflict could arise again and again. This explains why Jesus is pictured as keeping His human form (Luke 24:36–43; John 20:26–28; Acts 7:56). You may remember the wonderful painting of a little girl sitting in Jesus' lap, picking up His hand and saying, "How did You get this mark?" Should that happen, will He say, "I don't know, I'm hoping somebody can tell Me some day"? Of course not! There's no point in His keeping His human form if the whole thing has been forgotten.

There is even further evidence that the record of sin will not be forgotten. The sins of many saints up there have been recorded in Scripture. In order for the record of David's sins to be forgotten, all Bibles would have to be destroyed, along with all memory of the Bible's contents. Psalm 51, David's beautiful prayer for a new heart and a right spirit, would have to go. All that would be gone.

Lou: I suppose statements about our sins being "blotted out" and buried "in the depths of the sea," are God's way of reassuring us that though He knows us that well, He loves us and accepts us just as though we had never sinned.

Graham: My mother knew me very well, better than anyone. When I was invited to come to Loma Linda in 1961, she could have come before the Board and said, "You don't want my son. Let me tell you some of the things he has done." Yet I wasn't concerned. I knew my mother would rather die than say such a thing! I knew my reputation was absolutely secure with my mother and with my father. Well, if our reputation can be secure with our parents, our reputation is totally secure with God.

Lou: Perhaps we are comfortable with God remembering. But what about *our* remembering, Graham?

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No one will be admitted to the hereafter who cannot be entrusted with the memory of other people's sins.

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Graham: No one will be admitted to the hereafter who cannot be entrusted with the memory of other people's sins. God does not want us going up to Rahab and saying, "Hey, tell us a little. What was it like before you met the two spies?" That's why in the middle of Paul's list of dreadful sins in Romans 1:28-32 is the sin of gossiping. And then there's 1 Timothy 5:13, RSV, where Paul talks about people who not only go from house to house learning to be idle but become "gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not." Such people would not be safe to save for the Kingdom. They would make life a misery for everyone else. There will be no news service up there spreading the bad news about the things the rest of us have done.

Lou: I want to press you just a little bit further on this. I'm not thinking so much about my recollection of what others may have done. I'm thinking about the burden of my own memory and the things I'd like to forget.

Graham: I think that might require some good conversations with the Lord, and God would say, "Look, I'm not thinking about them. Why are you? Don't worry."

And you might say, "Well, I was afraid *You* might bring it up."
"Really? No, not a chance."

Lou: I suspect that I will be praising Him throughout eternity for being that kind of God!

Graham: Absolutely! And time is so healing, isn't it? I know people who have had enemies who became their best friends. And when that happens you don't bring up those unpleasant occasions anymore, except maybe to laugh about them. I can think of a couple of people who have hurt me, but I am now on very good terms with them. We never think about that anymore. We're almost better friends because of it. That's why David and Uriah can meet in the hereafter and not come to blows.

Lou: Here's a question related to the previous chapter (see section "The Teachings and Example of Jesus" in Chapter Twelve). "Why did Jesus heal the paralytic on the Sabbath?"

Graham: Many of His Sabbath healings were elective, weren't they? After all, the paralytic had been by the pool of Bethesda for thir-

ty-eight years. This was no emergency. As a rule I think Jesus tried to keep a low profile. If He became very public, His actions would be so controversial that He wouldn't last very long. But when it came to the Sabbath, He risked His life repeatedly to clear the Sabbath of misunderstanding. An arbitrary approach to the Sabbath puts the Father in the worst possible light. So Jesus ran the risk of healing and helping to redeem the Sabbath of arbitrariness, because the Sabbath speaks so eloquently of God. And He ran into trouble every time.

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

Graham: Well, in a way He does. I think the story was told in that way to indicate that absolutely nothing had to be done to persuade the father to love his son and to forgive him (Luke 15:11-32). I believe the father had forgiven the son long before the son headed for home. But that's not the whole story in the Great Controversy. God is forgiveness personified, but questions have been raised. God has been accused, and these questions must be answered. Satan's charges must be met. All the misunderstandings regarding the consequences of sin or the seriousness of sin must be handled. And that's why more has to happen than this story tells. But the story is clear that nothing needs to be done to win the Father to our side, to "assuage His wrath," before He'll forgive. The story of the prodigal son is really more about the father than the son. We call it the story of the prodigal son. But it's actually the story of a father who was so delighted that his son came home, he didn't even let his son finish his speech of repentance.

Lou: Several people wanted you to retell the rat poison story to again underline the difference between the legal approach and the "larger view" you have been talking about in this book.

Graham: Just to give the essence of it, the difference is this. In the legal way of approaching the plan of salvation, the father says to the son, "If I catch you taking that poison, I'll kill you!" Then the father hears the son falling down in the garage. He runs in there and finds the son drank the poison and is dying. And the father reminds him, "The punishment for drinking the poison is that I'll kill you." And the boy says, "Please forgive me." And the father says, "Well yes, Son, I love you, so I'll forgive you." The trouble is, being poisoned, he dies anyway. The legal model has difficulty conceiving of sin as a poison in itself, that sin

is intrinsically bad.

In the other model, the father says to his son, “Don’t touch the poison, I don’t want you to die.” He runs out to the garage. The boy is dying. Forgiveness would not keep the boy from dying. The boy needs an antidote. If only he’d trust his father enough, the father could heal him. That’s the key difference in these two models. Is the death from sin an imposed penalty because we have offended the One in charge? Or is the death that comes from sin the result of poisoning ourselves? We don’t need forgiveness as much as we need a healing antidote. And if we trust God, He can heal the damage done. That’s the difference between the two: Sin is not primarily a legal infraction, it is a poison.

Lou: That seems like an absolutely pivotal understanding. It makes a real difference in terms of how God views sin and why God hates sin. It isn’t just His personal opinion.

Graham: No! He doesn’t want us to die! And certainly He wouldn’t kill His dying Son, would He? Would He say, “Hey, don’t die too quickly, because I have to kill you as a penalty”? Doctors don’t kill their dying patients, and God does not kill His dying children.

Lou: Thinking further about the prodigal son story, is it necessary to repent and to confess one’s sins before one is forgiven?

Graham: In the story, the boy had hardly begun to speak when the father interrupted and said, “I forgave you long ago.” An even more stunning illustration is Jesus forgiving on the cross. There was no indication that the soldiers who were nailing Him to the cross were saying, “Please forgive us; please forgive us.” They didn’t even ask, and He said, “I forgive you anyway” (Luke 23:34). God is forgiveness personified.

On the other hand, our response to God’s forgiveness does matter. The offer of forgiveness does us no good unless we are moved by His forgiveness to repent. We often have it the other way around, “If I repent, maybe He will forgive me.” Instead, it is learning of His forgiveness that moves us to repentance — some of us, anyway. As Paul said in Romans, it’s the kindness of God that *leads* us to repentance (Romans 2:4). But God’s kindness doesn’t make repentance unimportant. If I don’t respond to His gracious forgiveness, it doesn’t do me any good. Repentance means changing my mind and confessing, “I am sick, help me, what must I do to be well?”

Lou: So the difference here is based on the reason we come to God. Are we drawn by His gracious character? Or do we hope that our repen-

tance and confession will win God over to where He might be willing to forgive us? In that case, the story would have the father saying to the prodigal son, “Well, since you have made all these promises, maybe I’ll welcome you home.”

Graham: I want to say this very reverently, but if it requires that I bring the blood of His Son to God before God can say, “Well, now I can forgive you,” that denies the prodigal son story. You don’t have to bring Him anything. God sent His Son to die to answer all those questions and to draw us to Him, to handle all the emergencies in the Great Controversy. Why? Because He had already forgiven us, but we didn’t know it. He sent the Son to make it clear. And the Son hanging on the cross said, “I forgive you. You don’t understand what you’re doing.” That’s incredible! That kind of forgiveness wins some to repentance. It won one of the thieves hanging on the cross next to Him.

Lou: What is our topic for Chapter Fourteen? Please introduce where we are going next.

Graham: The title of the next chapter is: “God Can Completely Heal the Damage Done.” It’s really talking about perfection, a topic which has probably given many people hypertension or ulcers. It is a topic that can be very discouraging. But in the Bible, perfection is not a requirement. Perfection is an offer. Do you want to be well or not? How well do you want to be? The message of perfection, instead of being forbidding, can be very comforting news.

Lou: So this chapter is about God’s wonderful treatment of us. The next chapter is about how He goes on to heal us.

Chapter Fourteen

God Can Completely Heal the Damage Done

In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ uttered those memorable words that have troubled saints and sinners alike ever since. “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” Matthew 5:48, KJV. Whether we find those words encouraging or discouraging depends, as with so many of our beliefs, upon the kind of person we believe our God to be. It also depends on our understanding of what He wants for His children throughout the universe. This is especially true for those of us who live on this planet, who have been caught up in the damaging consequences of the Great Controversy.

The topic of this chapter is the Christian doctrine of perfection, but in the larger setting of the conflict in God’s family. Rightly understood, perfection can be good news and speak very well of our heavenly Father. But misunderstood, it can put God in a very bad light — it can make Him appear to be arbitrary, exacting, and severe.

As we’ve considered before, all God wants in His family is peace and freedom. But to have peace and freedom there must be mutual love and trust, maturity and self-control. Things like this cannot be commanded, or produced by force or fear. Instead, God offers to set right and keep right everything that has gone wrong. That means He is willing to *completely* heal the damage that sin has done.

Jesus the Healer

When Jesus was here to demonstrate the truth about His Father and the plan of salvation, He spent most of His time healing rather than preaching. While there is influence and value in preaching, healing eloquently illustrates the truth about God and His government and what it would mean to set right everything that has gone wrong. Jesus certainly didn’t practice the healing arts to attract crowds of people to His meetings. Whenever He found that people were coming for the wrong reason, He said something that caused most of them to go home (see John 6 as a whole, for example).

When Jesus healed the paralytic at the pool (John 5:1–15), He was preaching in action rather than in words. The healing was a demonstration of the truth about God. Forbid the thought, but imagine that you

had terminal lung cancer as the result of a lifetime of smoking. You're sitting anxiously in the office of your physician. What is the best news you could possibly hear at that moment? Would it be for the physician to say, "I forgive you for smoking"? Forgiveness wouldn't heal the damage done by smoking, you would still die. The only difference is that you would die forgiven. And forgiveness would only help, in this instance, if your physician were accustomed to killing all the patients who contracted lung cancer because of a lifetime of smoking. It would be a relief to hear such a physician say, "I forgive you." Now you won't be killed after all. But physicians do not kill their patients. Neither does God.

What if the physician should say instead, "I have very good news for you. I can make you completely well, if you'll cooperate"?

"Do you mean that, although I have spent a lifetime smoking, and this is really my own fault, you can make me perfectly healthy again?"

"Yes, I can."

"Well actually, Doctor, all I really want is to be forgiven."

Would you say anything so absurd? Yet so often we seem to say that to God. Wouldn't you rather say, "Doctor, if that is true, how can I cooperate? What do you want me to do?"

The doctor might respond, "Well this will require some changes. But if you trust me enough to follow my instructions, I can absolutely guarantee that you will be perfectly restored."

Would you say, "One moment, Doctor. I don't want to have to do anything, I was counting on you to do it all. I am expecting you to put your hand on my chest and heal me by a miracle. If I have to work to get well, then I am going to look for another physician." Would you do that? Or would you say, "Doctor, do you mean that if I trust you enough to cooperate with you and follow the instructions you give me, you can guarantee to make me well? Then, please tell me what I have to do." Wouldn't you eagerly ask, like the jailor during the earthquake at Philippi, "What must I do to be saved (Greek: *sôzô*)? What must I do to be well (same Greek word — based on Acts 16:30)?"

As Christians we need more than mere physical healing. We have been damaged in many other ways. The most serious damage has been done to our ability to live in love, peace and freedom, to be able to trust and be trustworthy. In other words, we are no longer the kind of people God could really trust with all the privileges of eternal life.

The Biblical Meaning of Salvation

As we considered last time, we have all sinned and we continue to come short of God's glorious ideal (based on Romans 3:23). You recall that sin is rebelliousness and disorderliness. Sin is cheating on our relationships. Sin is knowing what's right to do and not doing it. Sin is a breakdown of trust. We have so damaged ourselves that, left alone, we would die. Would it be enough for God to say, "I forgive you"? Would forgiveness alone heal the damage done? Or would we still die?

If you believe that eternal torture is the penalty for sinning, then forgiveness would be your primary concern, so God won't have to torture you after all. Just think how that cruel teaching about eternal torture has cast its hellish shadow over the picture of God and the plan of salvation.

If you are afraid of God, then it is wonderful to hear Him say, "I forgive you." And He has said that, hasn't He? Many times. But heaven is not going to be filled with pardoned criminals. It wouldn't be safe. Heaven will be filled with healed, changed, trustworthy saints. God proposes to set right everything that has gone wrong, to completely heal the damage done by rebellion and distrust.

It is most significant to know that the word "salvation" means, essentially, healing. To be saved is to be healed. In a more legal understanding of the plan of salvation, to be saved is more to be forgiven. It is like having your fire insurance paid up, so you can be admitted to eternity. In the trust/healing model, on the other hand, salvation means healing the damage done. This is made plain in many places in Scripture.

Let's use Luke 18:42 as an example. In the *King James Version*, Jesus said to the blind man: "Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee." But in the *New International Version* it reads: "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you." The Greek word is exactly the same, *sôzô*. This word is sometimes translated "I save" and sometimes "I heal." This double meaning of *sôzô* can be found multiple times in the New Testament (Luke 7:50; 8:48, 50; 17:19; see also Acts 16:30, referenced above). Luke's wording is powerful evidence for the trust/healing model of salvation. But there is much more.

Matthew 5:48: Command or Promise?

There is an issue in the translation of Matthew 5:48 ("Be ye therefore perfect," KJV) that we need to look at. The original language here is not entirely clear. Is it a promise or is it a command? Does it read "you *must* be perfect," or "you *will* be perfect"? The key word (Greek: *eses-*

the) is in the future tense. It literally means, “You will be perfect.” You can’t tell from that if it is a promise or a command. It can be simply a future statement: “You *will* be perfect.” Or it can be a command, as when a sergeant puts up a sign saying, “There will be no smoking in the barracks.” That use of the future is the equivalent of a command.

Notice how other versions have rendered Matthew 5:48. First of all, from the *Good News Bible*: “You *must* be perfect.” Second, from the *American Standard Version*: “Ye therefore *shall* be perfect.” They each expressed their choice as strongly as possible. On the other hand, Goodspeed, ever the skillful translator, brought into English both meanings of the Greek (and others, like the NASB, have followed his example): “You are to be perfect.” Which is it, a promise or a command? Some of you are familiar with the words in *Desire of Ages*, “This command is a promise” (page 311). What insight that shows into the meaning of the verse! Now if it is a command, it could be terrifying. We have to be perfect or else! It would certainly be terrifying if we didn’t know the One who has asked us to be perfect. But that is the subject of all sixty-six books of the Bible and the subject of the earlier chapters of this book. Scripture as a whole reassures us about the One who said we must be, or will be, perfect.

We find a beautiful picture of God in the cases of David and Solomon, as described in 1 Kings 9:4–5 and 11:4–6. God spoke to Solomon: “If you walk before me, as David your father walked, with integrity of heart and uprightness.... I will establish your royal throne.” 1 Kings 9:4–5, RSV. Do you remember David’s life and all the awful things he did? Yet here we have God describing David. “He walked before Me with integrity of heart and uprightness.” Then it tells us, “When Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods. And his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father.” 1 Kings 11:4, RSV. “Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not wholly follow the Lord, as David his father had done.” 1 Kings 11:6, RSV. David did some terrible things, but evidently his heart stayed “wholly true” to God throughout! Can you imagine having to deal with David’s problems in a church board meeting? Most boards would censure and even disfellowship him. Yet through it all God could say that David walked before Him with “integrity of heart.” What do you think of a God who would describe David in that way?

What about Solomon? How were his sins different than David?

The Bible tells us that his heart went after other gods, some of them are even listed in verses 5 and 7. He did what David never did. David never left God to go after other gods. Solomon did. He even went after the most disgusting of the gods, as some of the versions translate it. Yet at the end of his life he came to his senses and God took him back. Did he become a second-class member of the family from then on? Not at all! God even said to Solomon, "Write Me another book for the Bible." And Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes after living such a life. According to 2 Peter, what kind of people write books in the Bible? "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." 2 Peter 1:21, KJV. Holy people wrote the Bible.

How could God describe Solomon as one of the holy men of God? A man who devoted himself to abominable pagan gods? The lives of Solomon and David do not speak too well of them, but what does this passage tell us about our God? We like to cite the promise that He will treat us as if we had never sinned. But these stories are not promises; they are facts. They are evidence. God demonstrated in His treatment of David and Solomon that He really will treat us as if we had always been His loyal children. And there are many other examples like them in the Bible. That is the kind of God who wants us to be perfect. Do we have any need to be afraid of Him?

The Meaning of Perfection

What does it mean to be perfect? How perfect must one be in this life? Suppose you saw someone who never swore, never gambled, never smoked, never drank, never stole anything, never lost his temper, never broke the Sabbath. Would you be looking at a perfect person? I hope not, because you could be in an anatomy building, looking at a well-preserved corpse. Corpses never do anything bad, but they never do anything good either. They just never do anything, which is a rather popular view of perfection.

In the early days of the church, the number one exponent of that view was a man by the name of Simeon, a member of the church in Antioch. He so much wanted to overcome sin, that as soon as he could afford it, he got material and built himself a small pillar. He climbed up on top, but found it was not tall enough. So he got more material and built on it until it was sixty feet high. He perched on top of that pillar for 30 years until he died. Think of all the bad things you cannot do on top of a sixty-foot pillar. So they called him Saint Simeon Stylites.

Other members of the church envied his perfect life, and as soon as they could afford it, they built pillars all around the area. Pretty soon most of the members were perched on pillars. So Simeon founded a whole order in the church, known as the Order of the Stylites; the order of the polesitters. Is that how the saints are going to be found when the Lord comes, all perched on pillars? They are of no use to anybody, but they never do anything wrong either. Is that the best definition of perfection? The absence of doing wrong?

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Corpses never do anything bad, but they never do anything good either. They just never do anything, which is a rather popular view of perfection.

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There is a much more positive approach to perfection. It is to understand that the very word in the Bible (Greek: *teleiôtês*) means “completed” or full-grown. When referring to animals or human beings, it means mature, or grown up physically. It is generally used in the New Testament for spiritual maturity (1 Corinthians 2:6; 14:20; Ephesians 4:13; Hebrews 5:14). So to be perfect means to be mature. And one version, at least, has it that way in Matthew 5:48: “You must become spiritually mature, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” *Norlie*. You see, when someone is converted, when they are won back to trust, and the procedure of healing begins, the change is so great that it is like being born all over again. Jesus said this to Nicodemus: “I am telling you the truth: no one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again.” John 3:3, GNT. Do you remember Nicodemus’ response? He thought that was a little too much to believe (John 3:4). That is how great the change is.

That’s why Paul interpreted baptism the way he did. Baptism by immersion symbolizes the great change in a person’s life. “By our baptism we were buried with Him in death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father’s glorious power, we also should live an entirely new life.” Romans 6:4, *Weymouth*. Baptism by immersion represents this new life best. It is like washing the dishes. It doesn’t do much good just to sprinkle them a little — though our children might try that short cut sometimes. The word “baptize” means to dip, to immerse.

This is recognized by many scholars, including Roman Catholic scholars. In a footnote to Romans 6:3–4 in the Roman Catholic New Testament by Kleist and Lilly, you can read the following: “St. Paul

alludes to the manner in which baptism was ordinarily conferred in the primitive Church, by immersion. The descent into the water is suggestive of the descent of the body into the grave, and the ascent is suggestive of the resurrection to a new life.” That is why many Christians still symbolize the beginning of healing through baptism by immersion. At the time of baptism, of course, Christians are just beginners. Paul and Peter call them babes in the truth (Romans 2:20; 1 Corinthians 3:1; 1 Peter 2:2; Hebrews 5:13), and babies need a great deal of protection. Yet even at that beginning stage, God treats them as if they had never sinned, as if they had always been His loyal children.

Does that mean that since He is so generous, it is all right to remain “babes in the truth”? Or does God want us to grow up into perfection and maturity? We know from the biblical record that it disturbed Paul a great deal when, even after a few months, he found that the Christian converts were still babes in the truth (1 Corinthians 3:1–3). When a child’s physical development is delayed, we become very worried, don’t we? When a child’s mental development is delayed, we are even more concerned. But when a Christian adult is spiritually immature, we say, “Isn’t that precious? Isn’t that sweet? He still has the faith of a little child.” But the most serious of all conditions is to be spiritually immature. Notice what the Bible says about this:

... though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truth of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature [Greek: teleiôs], who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity.... Hebrews 5:12–6:1, NIV.

The author of Hebrews essentially urges new believers to “grow up.” Compare that passage with Paul’s advice to the believers in Ephesus:

*His gifts were made that Christians might... arrive at real maturity [Greek: teleion]... We are not meant to remain as children, at the mercy of every chance wind of teaching, and of the jockeying of men who are expert in the crafty presentation of lies. But we are meant to speak the truth in love, and to **grow up** [emphasis supplied]*

every way into Christ....Ephesians 4:12, 14-15, Phillips.

Paul says in Ephesians that the whole purpose of the church is to help people grow up to perfection and maturity. The Bible explains why. Daniel 12 (verse 10), the Book of Revelation (chapters 13 and 16), and the warnings of Christ (Matthew 24:24-27) and of Paul (2 Thessalonians 2:8-12), tell us that we face a time of confusion and deception such as the world has never seen. If we are still babes in the truth then, we will never survive. And so God in mercy waits for us to grow up, and to be as settled into the truth as Job was. This topic is so important for the church that we will invest a whole chapter (Eighteen) on it, under the title "God Waits for His Children to Grow Up." This is even the reason for His merciful delay of the Second Coming. You see, it is not an arbitrary requirement that we grow up. It is absolutely necessary if we're going to survive in the end times. We must not be satisfied to be babes in the truth; but we must grow up and be able to distinguish between right and wrong.

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To really obey God's commandments is to simply grow up; to be a safe and pleasant person to live next door to.

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There is another way of looking at perfection; we can look at it as perfect obedience to God's law. The perfect person is the one who is perfectly obedient. That might sound arbitrary until one takes another look at God's law. You see, God's law is no threat to our freedom. All God asks of us is love. But what does it mean to love? "Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful" (1 Corinthians 13:4-5, RSV). Isn't that the description of a grown-up person? To *really* obey God's commandments is to simply grow up; to be a safe and pleasant person to live next door to.

You Become Like the God(s) You Worship

How does one grow up like this? How does one become perfect and mature? It is very simple; we are saved, we are healed, by faith. And faith, as we've discussed earlier, means trust. It means love. It means admiration. And that means a willingness to listen. It is a law in this orderly universe that we will inevitably become like the person we wor-

ship and admire. We know that from experience. We also see it corroborated and confirmed in Scripture:

Then with unveiled faces we can all behold as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord. And we become changed into His likeness, from glory to glory, through the Spirit of the Lord working in us. 2 Corinthians 3:18, Norlie.

This is how the Spirit works. He brings us the truth. He brings us the picture of God. He brings us all the evidence of Scripture. We look at the picture. We like what we see, and it changes us.

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It is inevitable that we will become like the person we worship and admire. If we regard God as arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe, we too will become like that.

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The same principle works in the other direction as well: “Those who make them [idols] will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.” Psalm 115:8, NIV. It is inevitable that we will become like the person or the object we worship and admire. If we regard God as arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe, we too will become like that. History has borne out the truth of that, hasn’t it? Think of so many who have claimed to worship God, but having the Devil’s picture of God, have been incredibly cruel in their treatment of other people, even as Paul was before the Damascus road.

On the other hand, we can look at God as He really is, as His Son proved Him to be, and as He is portrayed in the Scriptures. If we like and admire what we see there, if we worship the One we see there, then it is a law that we will become like Him. How absolutely essential, then, that we have a true picture of our God. The hazard of a false picture, if we prefer it, is that we will become like that. The trouble with this matter of perfection is that we tend to talk too much about perfection and not nearly enough about God. We tend to be preoccupied with our performance rather than being preoccupied with the truth about God.

Paul admits this was his error before the Damascus road. But when his picture of God changed, he became totally preoccupied with the truth, with Jesus Christ, with why Jesus had to die, and what this said

about the Father. Look what it did to Paul from Damascus on, when he shifted his attention from his own performance to the good news about God. Look how he treated the problems in the city of Corinth with such incredible grace and skill. When he was through, he wrote: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” 1 Corinthians 11:1, RSV. Paul knew how it works. It is a law that we become like the one we worship and admire.

How very sad it is that God’s offer of perfect healing should be seen as a very forbidding and burdensome requirement. It is the cause of much anxiety and fear, and sometimes even the subject of heated criticism and debate. As our Physician Father, God has offered to make us completely well and to completely heal all the damage done. Our part is not to heal ourselves. Our part is to cooperate. As Jesus said to the paralytic at the pool, “Would you like to be well? Would you like to be made whole?” John 5:6. Perfection is not a command, it’s a generous offer. How could we possibly turn such an offer down?

Questions and Answers

Louis Venden: As you were talking about perfection, I heard an emphasis on the generous gift of God, His eagerness to heal us and to make us well. It makes one wonder, who would want to be imperfect or continue to be ill when all this healing is available? Why do you think there has been so much debate on this subject?

Graham Maxwell: Whole books have even been written about it. I suppose there are many reasons. One is that people who claim to be perfect can be quite insufferable. It has given perfection a bad name. Another reason people might avoid the subject is that perfection involves our behavior. And talking about behavior smacks of works, our having to do something. Many people are so concerned to make salvation by faith that they can’t fit this in.

Lou: How do you avoid the tendency to think in terms of your performance, to concentrate on how well or how poorly you’re doing?

Graham: I think your question goes back to things we’ve discussed before. What is it that went wrong in the universe, and what would it mean for God to set things right? If our problem is a legal one, our primary concern is to somehow set things right legally. In that case we might be trying to please the Father and persuade Him not to punish or destroy us. If my efforts toward perfection are in order to turn away His wrath and improve my legal standing, then that’s salvation by works.

People who claim to be perfect can be quite insufferable. It has given perfection a bad name.

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In the case of the healing model, most of us have had a moment when we've not been well and have had to go to the physician. And we've heard the physician say, "Will you do the following?" And the most logical thing in the world is to go home and do it. I don't feel I'm being a legalist to do that. It seems to me that if I really trust my doctor, I will be willing to do what the doctor says. The only difference is my work is in harmony with the Divine Physician. I'm not trying to please the Doctor, nor am I trying to improve my legal standing with the Doctor. I'm trying to do what is for my own best good. The gracious Physician is saying, "Do the following. It will produce good results." And I go home and work hard to follow the regimen that He recommends.

Lou: So it really is a question of motivation that makes all the difference.

Graham: Your motivation and the model of salvation you are working with. The legal model of salvation has obscured the healing model, and also perfection as complete healing.

Lou: The concern with perfection sometimes leads people to evaluate one another on how well they are doing.

Graham: That's another thing that has given perfection a bad name. It is the idea that "I have my own blueprint for perfection, and I'm getting closer and closer to it. But I can tell you're pretty far behind in comparison!" Facing such an attitude can be quite discouraging. But who is it that does not want us to understand the good news that God would like to completely heal the damage done? The Devil has many versions of perfection that are a corruption of the truth and are not good news. He uses one thing to confuse one person, and another thing to confuse another.

Lou: A lot of sincere discussion has centered around the question: Does perfection mean that one never makes a mistake? We might think, "If I could just be perfect, I wouldn't make a mistake."

Graham: This question recalls the time we discussed the meaning of sin. Sin is not just making a mistake. Sin is rebelliousness. Sin is a stubborn unwillingness to listen. Sin is a breach of trust. Imagine in the hereafter I plant a pomegranate tree a little too close to the house, and it gets bigger and bigger in the fertile soil there.

Then the Lord comes by and says, “Say, you planted it too close to the house, didn’t you?”

And I’d say, “Yes, I did. Why didn’t You stop me?”

“It’s not a problem,” He’d say, “that’s how you learn. Pomegranate trees grow rather large up here. Plant it a little farther away.”

So I would proceed to move it.

Lou: You are making a distinction between a sin and a mistake.

Graham: Yes. There’s no sin in making a mistake like that. Not unless there is a spirit of rebelliousness within you, a stubborn unwillingness to accept advice, which would mean you’re not safe to have around in eternity.

Lou: But can a perfect person sin? Not just make mistakes, but actually sin?

Graham: What you are really asking is, can a perfect person ever rebel? Look at Lucifer, the most perfect of all God’s creation. He was still free and he exercised his freedom in rebellion. Think also of Adam and Eve. They were perfect, and they rebelled. So though God heals all the damage done by sin, He does not take away our freedom. We will still be free in the hereafter.

Lou: You referred to Job. If I remember correctly, God called Job a perfect person. And yet when you come to the end of the book of Job, it says he repented in dust and ashes (Job 42:1–3). What did he have to repent of? What does repentance mean when God has said to Satan, “Have you considered My servant Job? A good and perfect man.” Job 1:8.

Graham: That’s right. In the hearing of the onlooking universe God said, “Here is a perfect man.” And then the perfect man says, “I repent.” I think we are more inclined to point out Job’s repentance than God’s word that he is perfect. Under the pressure of bad advice from his friends, Job finally said, “God, I’m sorry I have talked about things beyond my understanding” (Job 42:1–3). And God immediately intervened and said, “Don’t give up, Job. You have done splendidly! You have said of Me what is right. Don’t let these three theologians discourage you. In fact, pray for them. They need a lot of help to know Me the way you do” (Job 42:7–8). We really need to take the book of Job as a whole. God said Job was perfect.

Job in his humility said, “God, I have said a lot, and I’ve said it with a great deal of feeling. If I seem the least bit irreverent, I repent.”

Then God could have said, “A man who is covered with boils and

has lost his whole family; I can understand why you cry the way you have. You did not insult Me by this. You honored Me with your confidence.” We will explore this in more depth in the next chapter, “Talking to God as a Friend.” Job is a marvelous example of how freely we can talk to God, and still be reverent.

Lou: Let’s come back to this matter of perfection as “healing the damage done.” Does that include restoration both physically and mentally? It reminds me of a question someone sent in: “Will you please tell me why the people of the Old Testament lived longer than the people of our day? What gave them a longer life span? Does food have anything to do with our life span today?” I think that ties in with the topic of healing all the damage that has been done by sin.

Graham: It does. I love to read about Methuselah and how long he and his fellow patriarchs lived. Up until the Flood, they all lived a long time unless they were murdered, or translated as Enoch was (based on Genesis 4 and 5 — see especially Genesis 4:23 and 5:23–24). I remember the first time I went through the sixty-six books of the Bible. I wrote in my margin the declining ages of the patriarchs after the Flood. It’s precipitous! Their ages drop from almost a thousand down to a little over a hundred. We have lost a great deal physically. We’re pygmies compared with Adam and Eve. Fortunately, we’ve all sort of withered up together so we look relatively respectable to each other, but if Adam and Eve were to walk into the room, we’d be embarrassed, wouldn’t we?

We need both physical healing and mental healing. But in this life, although we should do the best we can with the little that we have, we’re all getting older. Not until the earth made new will all that be restored. So some people say, “Well, if I can’t be physically and mentally perfect in this life, I guess I can’t be perfect in any way.” No, spiritual perfection, perfection of character, *is* held out to us. God could say of us, as He did of Job, “I would trust you even through the last-day time of trouble. I know you wouldn’t let Me down.” Perfection is not a brittle thing. It is about being mature. It actually means just plain growing up. It is unnatural *not* to grow up.

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Perfection is not a brittle thing. It is about being mature.

*It actually means just plain growing up. It is unnatural
not to grow up.*

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Lou: Does a person have to be perfect in any sense of the term in order to be saved?

Graham: One can certainly be perfect in one's willingness to listen. That willingness begins when one is converted, and to be converted is simply to reverse one's course. The unconverted person is stubbornly unwilling to listen. The converted person is reverently and humbly willing to listen. One couldn't do that if one didn't have a new heart and a right spirit (Ezekiel 36:26). It is the marvelous work of the Holy Spirit that brings us to the conviction of truth (John 16:8-11), that leads me to want to reverse my direction. And since it is the work of God, it is perfectly done; but I would only be a perfect baby at that stage. God doesn't need us to focus on our performance, but if I'm cheating in my willingness to listen, there's something seriously wrong.

Lou: I missed some words in this chapter that I've often heard associated with the subject of perfection. I didn't hear you say that it is "Christ's righteousness imputed" or "the covering of Christ's righteousness" that enables God to say, "You're perfect." Why didn't you use phrases like that?

Graham: We need to be familiar with such phrases and use them at the right time. Actually those words belong to the legal model, which is an emergency model. In the legal model the righteousness of Christ is reckoned to us so that our account may look all right in the judgment. And that's often attributed to the verse: "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned (or imputed) to him as righteousness" (Romans 4:3, RSV, alluding to Genesis 15:6). The Greek word there can actually mean, "considered, recognized."

In the trust/healing model, however, I would translate that verse: "Abraham trusted God, and God said, 'That's good! That's what I want. If you trust Me, all is well.'" All God ever asked of us is trust. And Abraham trusted Him enough to become His firmest friend (Exodus 33:11; 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23). Abraham really grew up, and while he remained reverent, he was not afraid of God. Look at the relationship they had. That's the ideal. And one does not need to explain their relationship in legal terms at all.

It's the same way with the term "covered." The legal model suggests that if I were to stand in the presence of the Father as a sinner, He would be very angry and destructive toward me if I were not covered. So I am covered with something that keeps God from seeing the way I really am. You can see how the legal model could have a comforting mes-

sage for people who are afraid of God. “Don’t worry. God can’t really see you the way you are.” That’s emergency talk.

In reality, however, the Lord knows exactly the way I am. And the Devil is reminding everyone of the way I am. But in the trust/healing model, God still treats me as if I had always been as loyal as His own Son. He treats me as if I had lived as righteously as Christ. I know I haven’t and so does He. But that’s how real and generous He is. And that’s a clearer and more marvelous picture than the other. So we can use phrases like “the covering of Christ’s righteousness” when people need them. But whenever the audience is ready for it, we should also explain the healing model. The legal language has its place, but it’s a station along the way.

Lou: In the beginning of the chapter, you talked about it not being enough just to be forgiven. But if I’m forgiven, if I know that God has forgiven every sin, what more do I need to be saved?

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God doesn’t need us to focus on our performance, but if I’m cheating in my willingness to listen, there’s something seriously wrong.

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Graham: Just to say a person is forgiven doesn’t heal the damage done. Just to forgive a Hitler or an Osama bin Laden would not make them very desirable neighbors in the hereafter unless they have changed. But if King Manasseh can be changed (2 Chronicles 33:11–23), so could they. We must leave that decision in God’s hands. But if I meet one of them in the Kingdom, I wouldn’t want to know whether he has been forgiven. I would want to know if he is safe to live next door to. When Isaiah meets King Manasseh in eternity, he won’t want to know if Manasseh has been forgiven. He will want to know if Manasseh can be trusted with a sharp saw, because Manasseh ordered that Isaiah be sawn in half inside a hollow log (based on 2 Kings 21:16, Hebrews 11:37 and the early Christian non-biblical text *Martyrdom of Isaiah* 4:12–5:14)!

So forgiveness alone is not enough. Just because God says, “I forgive you,” does not mean I’ve been changed in any way. Remember that Jesus on the cross forgave the people who rejected and tortured Him. They didn’t even want to be forgiven. So unless we respond to God’s forgiveness, and the kindness of God leads us to repentance and to trust, that forgiveness has done us no good. In the case of the centurion at the cross,

at least, Jesus' forgiveness changed his life.

Lou: So Jesus' prayer for those who were crucifying Him represented the heart of God, how He actually felt towards them at that moment. But God's forgiveness meant nothing to them unless they were open to receive it.

Graham: Right. Unless we respond, it will not make us safe to save.

Lou: I want to ask the same question, but in another way. Isn't it enough to be justified? Do I also have to be sanctified? Are you saying here that the healing/trust model really challenges that kind of separation?

Graham: Very much so. Of course the words "justification" and "sanctification" do not occur in the Bible. They are English words drawn from the Latin. That doesn't mean they are unimportant. But the Greek word *dikaïosunē* could be more literally translated "set right" or "put right" rather than "justification." Now if a person has been set right with God, now loves and trusts Him, and is willing to listen; don't you think that person would also say, "What else do You want me to do, Lord?"

"I want to heal you if you will cooperate."

"Absolutely! Just tell me, and I'll follow."

Back to using the terms from your question, there's no way to be justified without sanctification following. If you're not willing to be kept right, you obviously haven't been set right. So being set right and kept right are all part of the same package. They belong together.

Lou: But I worry a little about this. Consider the following question from the audience: "You've made it so complicated. There is so much to think about: justification, sanctification, and all of this. If what really is at stake is simply trusting God, why isn't it enough to say, 'I'm going to have the faith of a little child? I'll just trust God, and don't bother me with all the rest of this'?"

Graham: Let's not underestimate the faith of a little child. The faith of a little child implies he or she is really willing to listen. So if we truly have the faith of a little child, we will be willing to listen and to be trusting, which is why small children need protection. They are too willing to trust just about anybody. But on the good side, the faith of a little child is wonderful. My grandchildren will sit there, listen, and believe anything Grandpa says. I could misuse that trust, but I won't do it. Nevertheless, to have them sit and look and hang onto every word is

beautiful. I love it. So if we have the faith of a little child, we're sitting there listening to God and saying, "Tell me. Tell me more. Tell me more." There's no way to have the faith of a little child without following along and being healed. There's no way to avoid it.

Lou: As I remember the little children in our house, they were trusting, but they also loved to ask why.

Graham: Oh, that's part of the faith of a little child.

Lou: You mentioned baptism in the chapter. Would you comment on how baptism was changed from immersion to sprinkling, pouring, and a variety of other forms?

Graham: In response, let me cite a footnote in a Roman Catholic Bible translation. It says, "Admittedly, the early Christian method was immersion. However, on the authority of the Church and for convenience, it was changed." The sad thing is, though, that the change to sprinkling and to pouring has come with a change in the meaning. And that's why churches can perform sprinkling and pouring on little infants who have no understanding that it represents the burial of the old nature and the rising to a newness of life. With the change of the method has come a change of the meaning, which is a loss to us. It ought to be a memorable occasion when I say, "I bury the old man, the man I used to be; I want to start all over again." The rich symbolism of baptism ties in with the subject of this chapter.

Lou: You've talked of Jesus as our example in this series of conversations about God. We've had several questions come in as to whether Jesus had an advantage over us. How could He be regarded as our example if He did have such an advantage? Let me refer to just one of these questions. "When Christ came to the world and took on human flesh, did He take on sinful flesh in essence or vicariously?" The kind of humanity Jesus had, I think, ties in here in an important way. Would you comment briefly on that question?

Graham: Well, I'll cite Paul for that. He said, "Christ came in the likeness of sinful flesh to deal with sin" (based on Romans 8:3). I think the question is, can we really look to Jesus as an example of the perfection that we should have?

Was He exactly like us? There are some interesting differences. For one, He was born of the Holy Spirit. Some of us might be sixty-five before we're born of the Holy Spirit. In that case, when we're reborn, we've got sixty-five years of bad habits to fight with for the rest of our lives. Jesus, on the other hand, never acquired a bad habit. The only way

you can develop a bad habit is to do something bad, which He never did. And so you say, “Well, then, He’s not an example for me.” How low do we want Him to go? Do we want Him to wallow in the gutter as a wino, so that He can be an example as to how you can get out of the gutter? I don’t want Jesus to be more and more like me. I want to be more and more like Him. He came in human form, in the likeness of sinful flesh, using no power that is not available to us. And He showed that even little boys can be good. And that you can grow up to be good like that.

“But,” you say, “I have bad habits.”

“Look,” He says, “I’m your Physician; I understand. I’ll be very patient. And I guarantee I’ll help you get over all of those things. Just trust Me.”

So how much more would we want Him to do before we accept Him as an example? He’s certainly enough of an example to show how we could have lived. The problem is that we didn’t. So what will He do with us now? He’s the Physician, and He knows exactly what it’s like to go through what we are going through. So you can count on Him to be patient. Are you still worried that the Father won’t be as patient as Jesus? Remember that Jesus came to show just how patient the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are. I think sometimes we run into problems when we raise the wrong questions about what He came to tell us, and what He came to show us.

Lou: One final question: “Is the healing we are talking about dependent upon perfect obedience to Christ’s teaching? Or does God’s mercy at times supersede even the doubts of those who question His divine authority?”

Graham: Oh, that’s true. I suppose we could refer to times when Jesus went places and healed everybody (Matthew 4:24; 8:16; Mark 6:55–56; Luke 4:40). He went through entire villages, and when He left, nobody was sick. On one occasion He healed ten lepers, and only one came back to thank Him (Luke 17:12–19). I think on that occasion Jesus was saying that the Father is a healer, not a destroyer. Jesus often healed people whether they trusted Him or not (John 5:1–15).

Lou: That’s very comforting. What is our topic for Chapter Fifteen? How will the healing we talked about here change the way we relate to God?

Graham: That’s a very good question, because the topic of the next chapter is “Talking to God as a Friend.” What does God really want from us? Will He be satisfied with rote obedience to rules? Or does

He desire genuine relationship with the free and diverse creatures He has made? How do we talk to a God we cannot see, hear or touch, but who nevertheless much prefers friends to servants? In the next chapter we will explore how our picture of God impacts the way we relate to Him, especially in the matter of prayer.

Chapter Fifteen

Talking to God as a Friend

If the Father were to appear visibly among us, how would we address Him? What language would we use? Would we be too afraid to speak? Would we feel constrained to mention only the most lofty themes, or would we be free to talk candidly about what He already knows is in our hearts? Would it be easier to discuss such matters with the Son? Would it be more appropriate to speak or listen? How does one listen to the voice of God?

As you can see, our topic in this chapter is the meaning and purpose of prayer. As with all the topics in our conversations, the way we pray depends upon the kind of person we believe our God to be. Surely no one knew better how to talk to God than the Son of God Himself, the one we call Jesus. In the Sermon on the Mount, you recall, He gave some very clear advice as to how to pray:

When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; they love to say their prayers . . . for everyone to see them. . . . But when you pray, go into a room by yourself, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is there in the secret place. . . . In your prayers do not go babbling on like the heathen, who imagine that the more they say the more likely they are to be heard. . . . Your Father knows what your needs are before you ask him. This is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, thy name be hallowed; thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us the wrong we have done, as we have forgiven those who have wronged us. And do not bring us to the test, but save us from the evil one." Matthew 6:5-13, NEB.

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The way we pray depends upon the kind of person we believe our God to be.

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If God already knows our needs before we ask Him, why should we take time to pray at all? That question assumes, of course, that the primary purpose of prayer is to lodge our requests with the Lord. But there are others who prefer to understand prayer as conversation with God as

with a friend. It's in the biblical record that the Son of God Himself engaged in many such conversations with His Father. We are told: "He went up into the hills by himself to pray" (Matthew 14:23, RSV), often after a very busy day. "All night he continued in prayer to God." Luke 6:12, RSV.

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If God already knows our needs before we ask Him, why should we take time to pray at all?

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Have you ever prayed all night? How could Jesus pray to His Father all night long without a certain amount of repetition? Do you think Jesus babbled on like the heathen, supposing that the more He said the more likely His Father was to hear Him? That would be inconceivable, wouldn't it? Or were His conversations with His Father so real that the night hours simply slipped away? Haven't you had the experience of visiting with a friend of whom you are especially fond, and the hours just flew away? You see, everything depends on whether or not God is our friend. The way we pray reveals to others, and to ourselves, the kind of person we believe and understand our God to be.

Talking with God Face to Face

Imagine the Father appearing visibly at the front of your church, or even better, in a cozy fellowship room. A group would gather around Him there, just as the crowds did around Jesus. Suppose we could talk there freely with God the Father for a whole hour. Would it be appropriate at the end for someone among us to rise and say, "This has been such a special occasion, don't you think we ought to close this meeting with a word of prayer?" Or would it be correct to understand that, having just been in conversation with our God as with a friend, we have been praying the whole hour long?

Or could such a conversation only be possible with Jesus the Son? Is it even thinkable that we could converse with the Father, the Awesome One, as with a friend? The disciples wondered about this. They were comfortable with Jesus, and appreciated how He wanted them to regard themselves as His friends. He said this more than once. One of those places is John 15:15, RSV: "I have called you friends..." Their friendship with Jesus prompted Phillip to say, "Could the Father be like You?" John 14:8. You may remember Jesus' answer: "If you really

knew me, you would know my Father as well. . . . Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” John 14:7, 9, NIV.

Marvelous as that is, I think much of our theology and worship fails to recognize that magnificent truth, *to know the Son is to know the Father*. That is why Jesus went on to say those stunning words, hardly ever incorporated into Christian theology: “There is no need for Me to pray to the Father for you, for the Father loves you Himself” (based on John 16:26–27). Notice Goodspeed’s translation of the same text: “I do not promise to intercede with the Father for you, for the Father loves you himself.”

How hard it has been for God to convince us that He really is our Friend. Centuries ago, when He came to speak to the people on Mount Sinai, they were so terrified (Exodus 19:16) that they said to Moses, “Don’t let God speak to us, lest we die” (Exodus 20:19). But Moses stood there in the midst of all the thunder and lightning and said to the people, “There is no need to be afraid” (Exodus 20:20). You see, all those centuries before Christ, Moses already understood the truth that John wrote about: “There is no fear in love; perfect love drives out all fear. So then, love has not been made perfect in anyone who is afraid, because fear has to do with punishment.” 1 John 4:18, GNT.

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Much of our theology and worship fails to recognize this magnificent truth; to know the Son is to know the Father.

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If you were ushered right now into the presence of God, would you be afraid He might hurt you? That He might hit you? Do you trust Him with His almighty power? On the day that every one of us approaches God, the way we approach Him will reveal the kind of person we are persuaded He really is. With this series of conversations in mind, then, let’s go back with renewed courage to the imaginary fellowship room where God is waiting. Whether the One there is Father, Son, or Holy Spirit should make no difference to us. For Paul said in Romans 8 that all three are on our side, all three are our Friends.

Now as we walk into the room, we know that God is the all-powerful Creator of the whole vast universe. We know that the mighty angels, sinless as they are, stand overwhelmed with awe and wonder at the majesty and glory of God. Nevertheless, if we are afraid to go in, God has failed to convince us of the truth about Himself. And Jesus has

also failed to convince us, not just with His words, but with what He has demonstrated to be true when He was here: God is infinitely powerful, but equally gracious, and there is no need to be afraid. And so, overwhelmed with awe, we venture to go inside.

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God is infinitely powerful, but equally gracious, and there is no need to be afraid.

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God is seated there and we gather around Him. What should we say? Should one of us be the first to speak? Once we have started speaking, would we talk all the time? Or would we let God speak now and then? Normally, when we pray we do all the talking, don't we? And when we're done, we say "Amen" and go about our business, or go to sleep. That kind of prayer would be like meeting in a room with our heavenly Father, talking to Him incessantly for several minutes, and then saying, "Amen, thank You very much," and then leaving. It wouldn't make sense if He were there, would it? It certainly wouldn't be the kind of conversation one has with a friend.

How to Converse with God

Conversation means at least two people speaking. But how do we converse with God when we can't see Him because of the present emergency? In this emergency situation, He does not reveal Himself visibly to us, for our sakes. This is why the Bible is called the Word of God — it is God speaking to us. If we wish to hear God speak, except in extraordinary circumstances, He speaks to us through the Bible. We speak to Him in prayer. Truly, as someone has said, "We commune with God through the study of the Scriptures."

I certainly find prayer much more meaningful while reading the Bible. Have you ever had the experience of talking to God while reading certain parts of the Scriptures? I often find myself saying out loud, "That's magnificent!" Who am I talking to at that moment? That's real conversation. We read and we listen in that way. And then we talk back to God.

Going back to the imaginary fellowship room, our heavenly Father waits and we begin to speak. What language should we use? Should we look at our heavenly Father respectfully and say, "We prithee Lord that Thou wouldst bestow unctions upon us from on high"? I think He

would smile sweetly and say, "Please relax, you can talk a little more plainly if you wish." Unless of course, you are used to talking that way all the time. But did the disciples talk to God that way? Did Moses? Did Abraham? No, they all used up to date, everyday speech. They wanted to be clear. It was the language of their times.

I believe if we began to speak to God in that fellowship room, we would surely be reverent, yet we would be conversing with a friend and should use the kind of language we would use with our closest friends. Just what that should be is a personal preference. But surely we would use the best possible language to clarify our convictions, our feelings, our desires, our admirations, and our worship. The important thing is to converse with our heavenly Father as with a friend.

So what language would you use? Jesus addressed His Father as "*Abba*, Father" (Mark 14:36). *Abba* is the Aramaic word for "father." So it is almost like saying, "Father, Father," although it is a term of endearment. Some versions translate "*Abba*, Father" as "Dear Father," the way some of us like to start our prayers. Paul urges us to do the same in Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6. He says that when the Spirit of Truth dwells within us, we will address the Father as "Dear Father."

But most importantly, what would you talk about? Would you take time on such a precious occasion to say, "Thank You, God, for today's groceries and here is my list for tomorrow, amen," and then go on about your business? Or would you say, "Bless the missionaries as they carry the truth to the far-flung corners of the earth"? The Lord might say, "How sweet. How is it that you only think of these things when you are praying?" Of course, if you are the mother of a missionary, it would be appropriate for you to talk to God about your loved ones. But if we only think about missionaries when we talk to God, why do we talk about them and not the things we have really been thinking about all day?

You see, those well-worn phrases we think we *ought* to use when we pray, might seem rather empty when we are talking face to face with God. Suppose one of us left the meeting and walked with God through a garden nearby, wouldn't it be natural to comment to God about the beauty and fragrance of a rose, and the beautiful sounds of the mockingbird? Or the lovely, lonely sound of the mourning dove? Couldn't we tell Him how beautiful it was of Him to create things that way? Or would we simply say, "We thank Thee, Lord, for the beauties of nature that surround us"? We do have such well-worn phrases to cover these things. It seems to me that if God really were our Friend, we would take

time to talk about these everyday things, and to be as specific about them as we would be with other members of the family. We might even venture to ask Him about the thorns on a rose. “Did You put them there? If so, why?”

Confrontation Is Part of Friendship

Is it all right to ask questions of our God? Job certainly did. He boldly, reverently, agonized with God—to the consternation of his friends. They worried that God would smite Job down for daring to talk to the Father like this. In a way, the whole book of Job is on this subject. Note what Job says in the following excerpts:

If only my life could once again be as it was when God watched over me. God was always with me then.... And the friendship of God protected my home.... I call to you, O God, but you never answer; and when I pray, you pay no attention. Job 29:2-4; 30:20, GNT.

How that worried Job’s friends! But was God offended? No, to the contrary. God later said to the three friends: “You did not speak the truth about me, the way my servant Job did.” Job 42:7, GNT. You see, Job knew God and he honored God with those cries. But God was not talking to him just then. And Job was deeply upset, because their friendship seemed to be at an end. So what upset Job’s friends actually complimented God, and spoke well of their relationship.

Surely there are serious questions we also could ask about God. Think of the accidents that happen, sometimes to the best people among us. Did that person’s guardian angels relax their protection? Serious questions about God often arise when people are dying or seriously ill. Why is it that God sometimes does not heal His trusting friends, even though we ask Him to? I believe that God, as we know Him, might well say to us, “Trust Me. I can’t explain it to you just now. I hope that you will trust Me enough to wait for the day when I can make it plain to you. I hope you have found enough evidence and enough reason for trusting Me that much. Besides, you know I would never allow you to be tried and tested more than you are able to bear.” Paul expressed this clearly later on: “God can be depended on not to let you be tried beyond your strength.” 1 Corinthians 10:13, *Goodspeed*. Or as he said in Romans: “We know that in all things God works for good with those who love him...” Romans 8:28, GNT.

If we trusted God enough to *really* listen, then we might hear God provoke the questions Himself. Think about how God provoked His friend Abraham as He was on His way down to Sodom and Gomorrah to consume those cities. He said, “I wouldn’t do this without first telling My friend, Abraham.” In response Abraham dared to reason with his God: “Then Abraham drew near, and said, ‘Wilt thou indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked?...Far be that from thee! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?’” Genesis 18:23, 25, RSV. Have you ever dared to say something like that to God? Was God offended by what Abraham said? No: “Abraham was called God’s friend.” James 2:23, GNT.

And that’s just one of the places in the Bible where God is addressed in such a way. You may remember how God spoke to Moses, another of His friends. He essentially said, “I am sick and tired of these people [the Israelites]. Step aside and let Me destroy them” (based on Exodus 32:9-10). But look at how Moses responds to God:

Then the Egyptians will hear of it...The nations who have heard thy fame will say, “Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which he swore to give to them, therefore he has slain them in the wilderness.” Numbers 14:13, 15–16, RSV.

In this passage Moses showed his jealousy for God’s reputation. Was God offended by this? No: “The Lord would speak with Moses face-to-face, just as a man speaks with a friend.” Exodus 33:11, GNT. Now, one would need to know God very well to talk to God like this. And surely Moses and Abraham knew God well. You recall how even Peter once dared to say “No” to God. In fact, he did it three times in his vision of the unclean animals (Acts 10:5–16). “There came a voice to him, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’ But Peter said, ‘No, Lord.’” Acts 10:13–14, RSV. Did God rebuke Peter for doing that? No, this is the kind of relationship that God desires to have with us, His children.

Being Honest with God

When we have such a relationship, prayer simply cannot be a trite formality, it is honest conversation about the things that matter the most to us. Above all, the conversation must be honest, or it isn’t real friendship after all. Suppose there’s a Brother Jones working near you who is irritating you to death and that night you kneel and say, “Oh Lord, do

bless Brother Jones. Thou knowest how I love him.” If you listen closely you might hear God say, “That’s very sweet. But, why don’t you tell Me the truth? You hate the ground he walks on. And if you would only just admit it, maybe I could begin to help you. But so long as you pretend, there is not much I can do.”

When King David was depressed, he said so:

Will the Lord spurn forever, and never again be favorable? Has his steadfast love for ever [sic] ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time? Has God forgotten to be gracious?... And I say, “It is my grief that the right hand of the Most High has changed.” Psalm 77:7–10, RSV.

David said that to God in prayer. Of course, that is only the first half of the psalm. You will find at the end of the seventy-seventh Psalm how David resolved his depression (Psalm 77:11–20). But if David wanted vengeance, he wouldn’t say, “Lord, Thou knowest how I love Brother Isaac, and I hope his crops will flourish this year,” when really David wished that the blood of Brother Isaac would flow down the street and would water the furrows of his field and the locusts would consume his crops! So David would kneel and say something like, “Lord, Thou knowest my thoughts anyway, so why should I pretend?” Based on Psalm 139:1–12. Then he would continue:

O that thou wouldst slay the wicked, O God.... Do I not hate them that hate thee, O Lord? And do I not loathe them that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Psalm 139:19, 21–24, RSV.

In this passage David invited healing. He knew he needed a new heart and a right spirit, truth in the inner man. So first he presented himself honestly to God. He said, “You know all my thoughts anyway. So, why should I hide? You know how I feel. So search me and may my thoughts and the meditations and the words of my mouth be acceptable to You.”

If you should watch a loved one die, and you should cry, “Why God? Why?” would God be offended? Or would the God you know reach down and put an arm around your shoulder and say, “I understand

how you feel. You wouldn't be human if you didn't feel that way. Someday I'll make it plain to you. I wish I could right now. But please trust Me, and trust Me enough to be willing to wait." But, you see, we have to know God well before those emergencies arise, so that we can trust Him and pray to Him like this.

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Prayer in its very essence is thinking toward God. It means that God is at the very center of our thoughts.

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Paul assures us that the Holy Spirit will help us pray: "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought..." Romans 8:26, RSV. And so the Holy Spirit brings the truth about God to us. He helps us to see that truth and to be convinced about it. He helps us see the truth about ourselves, and learn how to tell that truth to our gracious heavenly Father. And then God can do good things for us. Paul even said we should pray without ceasing: "Never stop praying." 1 Thessalonians 5:17, *Norlie*. Or as *Goodspeed* translates it: "Never give up praying." But if we should spend all our time on our knees, we would never get anything else done. So how can one pray without ceasing and still be effective in this life? To put it simply, prayer in its very essence is thinking toward God. It means that God is at the very center of our thoughts. Eventually it becomes a habit that God should be at the very center of all our plans, always.

When we see God face to face one day, will that be the end of prayer? Could prayer be yet another of the emergency measures that keep the channels of communication open between God and His children, until the time comes when there will be no need for emergency measures anymore? What do we mean when we sing, "Farewell, farewell, sweet hour of prayer"? Do we mean "Farewell, farewell, I will never talk to You again, God"? No, if prayer is conversation with a friend, then when we meet God face to face, the hour of prayer will have just begun.

Questions and Answers

Louis Venden: It seems to me that this topic comes under the heading of what we could call "Practical Godliness." You have been talking about our daily walk with God and practical Christianity. And people have a lot of questions about such things. These questions are not

theoretical. They really address how we go about living our lives. The first question has to do with the wording of the Lord's Prayer, the version you quoted didn't sound familiar. "If we're going to pray the Lord's Prayer, shouldn't we use the words that Jesus gave us instead of some new translation like this?"

Graham Maxwell: Well, if we were to use the words that Jesus used, we would have to speak in Aramaic.

Lou: But *King James* English is so familiar to us, Graham. It's so ingrained in our lives and in the worship of all Christian churches.

Graham: I think there's a very important lesson in this. We are most familiar with the version of the Lord's Prayer recorded in Matthew (6:9-13). But the version recorded in Luke (11:2-4) is the version He gave to His disciples when they came and said, "Teach us to pray." The two are similar, but they have interesting differences, and that's the point. As the Preface to the *King James Version* says, "The Kingdom of God is not words and syllables; it's the great ideas." You can translate those into any language. So it's the *meaning* of the Lord's Prayer that counts and not the precise words.

Lou: So this isn't a prayer to be repeated over and over?

Graham: I don't think we can pray it too often if it's a meaningful experience. But the danger is, we can go from "Our Father" to "Amen" and not even remember what we have said in between, because we've done it so often.

Lou: That leads to another question: Why is this called the Lord's Prayer?

Graham: The title is just tradition, that's all. It's called the *Pater Noster* in the Latin. "*Pater*" in Latin means "father," and "*noster*" means "our." Our Father. Actually, Jesus prayed other prayers that could be called the Lord's Prayer. For example, that magnificent chapter 17 in John, when in the hearing of His disciples He prayed to the Father. Now that's *really* the Lord's Prayer.

Lou: It might be better to say this is "our" prayer, the one He gave to us.

Graham: Yes. That's right.

Lou: In many translations, the prayer seems to end abruptly. Those great words, "for thine is the Kingdom, and the power and the glory," are left out (Matthew 6:13, KJV — compare the ESV, RSV and NIV).

Graham: That's because in the early manuscripts of Matthew it's not there. And it isn't in any manuscripts of Luke. So apparently when

the Lord actually gave the “Lord’s Prayer,” it ended with, “Deliver us from evil or the evil one.” But does that mean we should stop repeating the doxology (a statement of praise) at the end? There’s a doxology in 1 Chronicles 29 that is four times as long as this one (1 Chronicles 29:10–13). David prayed it himself. It’s simply magnificent. So if one wants to be a purist when doing this, you could switch to 1 Chronicles 29 when you come to the end of the Lord’s Prayer. It’s very biblical and it’s also very beautiful. Personally, I like ending the prayer with a doxology. Jesus on other occasions may well have done the same. So it’s a beautiful custom to say the whole traditional prayer, as long as it’s meaningful and we’re thinking about it.

Lou: There’s something in the Lord’s Prayer as we traditionally use it that has puzzled me. In other churches they say, “Forgive us our trespasses,” while some of us were brought up saying, “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” Which is right?

Graham: Actually, this was a problem in our home. Growing up in England, it was always “trespasses.” When we moved to this country, we learned “debts,” and the younger members of the family all changed, but my father never did. So even when I took my children home, they always knew, when praying with Grandpa, it was, “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” But in my own home it was, “Forgive us our debts,” and I don’t recall my children ever making a mistake, although I’ve heard people in church sometimes fumble over this.

Lou: Where did the word “trespasses” come from? Is that a particular translation?

Graham: The English *Book of Common Prayer* was quite an influence on the way some of these things are phrased. I think of Handel’s *Messiah*. “Why do the nations so furiously rage together?” You look in vain for that in the *King James Version*. It comes out of *The Book of Common Prayer*, I believe.

Lou: So maybe the word “trespasses” was used to avoid the idea that debts had to do with a money problem, rather than sin.

Graham: I like the translation that adds “if we’ve wronged anyone.” The meaning is clear. And the variety of words helps us concentrate on the meaning. That’s the all-important thing.

Lou: Now in the *New English Bible* it says, “Save us from the evil one.” The familiar version of that phrase is “deliver us from evil.” What’s the difference between evil and the evil one?

Graham: The Greek is exactly the same. To be delivered from the evil one is indeed to be delivered from evil; so it makes no difference. Many versions prefer “the evil one.” It brings the Great Controversy to mind rather vividly. But either way, the point is clear.

Lou: When we pray “lead us not into temptation,” what are we really praying? Does that imply, “God, be careful; please don’t get me into temptation”? Would God really want to do that?

Graham: It helps to know that the word “temptation” here actually means trial or testing. Some versions have, “Lead us not into hard testing.” The idea that God would tempt is unthinkable; James deals with this (James 1:13–15). He tells us that when we’re tempted, we shouldn’t even blame the Devil. “You are led away by your own lusts and enticements” (based on James 1:14). Certainly don’t blame God. He wouldn’t do any such thing. So “lead us not into temptation” cannot mean, “Please, don’t You tempt us,” but, “Lead us not into difficult trials.” Jesus prayed something similar in Gethsemane. He said there, “Remove this cup from Me, if possible” (based on Matthew 26:39). I don’t think we should pray, “Lord, I’m ready for it. Bring on the trials; I feel very strong today.” I believe we should say, “Lord, in all humility, don’t bring me into trial; nevertheless, Your will be done.”

“Lead us not into testing” must be coupled with, “Nevertheless, Your will be done.” Jesus did it in Gethsemane, and we do it in the Lord’s Prayer. The Lord’s Prayer and the prayer in Gethsemane are very similar in a number of respects. So I think the prayer in Gethsemane helps us to understand the Lord’s Prayer.

Lou: We’ve explored talking to God as with a friend. Yet I can still remember the shock I felt when in a public prayer a seminary student spoke to God with a familiar “You.” I wondered at the time if this young man had lost his way. But really, when we come to church, we usually put on special clothes, something that’s just a little different than other times, out of respect. Isn’t there an analogy here perhaps as to the kind of language that we ought to use when we talk to God? He is our Friend, but we still want to show respect for His majesty. What about that?

Graham: It’s true that many of us dress in a special way when we come to church. But I don’t see us wearing antique clothing. And so, when we come into the presence of God, I believe we should use the best words we know to express ourselves. We should be reverent and respectful, to be clear, but it doesn’t mean we use old-fashioned words.

Lou: But isn’t reverence and respect the purpose of the “Thees”

and “Thous?”

Graham: I believe that has come to be true for many, but I think people need to realize why they are doing it. The Thees and the Thous and the wists and the wots are the way English was spoken in those days. Folks can look at the Preface to the *King James Version* and notice that the language there is the same. Actually, if the garbage collector came in those days, you might say, “We salute thee, thou gatherer of refuse, and we prithee that thou wouldst place yonder vessel ere.” That’s how you would speak to the garbage man. That’s the way you talked to *everybody* back then. But today people say about our common speech, “Well, that’s no way to talk to God.” But *King James* English was simply the common language of the day. It’s beautiful language, but it was not special at that time. Forty years ago I was explaining that there’s no basis in the original language for using Thee and Thou and wist and wot. Yet I still find myself saying Thee and Thou when praying in public. These words have become a symbol of something, so I’m still doing it.

Lou: What words do you use in your personal prayer?

Graham: I often say “You,” and I’m comfortable with that. But I must say, I like the way you pray. You say “You” to God, but you say it very reverently; it’s in the tone of your voice. It’s in your choice of words. So I feel it’s very reverent. I’m accustomed to Thee and Thou in public prayer, and there are a number of people I feel might be a little distressed if I switched. I don’t want words to be a barrier. But maybe I’m just getting too old to shift.

Lou: Well, I’ve gone through my own struggle with that, and it strikes me that I really made the change after I came here to Loma Linda. Even here I wondered how the congregation would feel.

Graham: I think the important thing is: “Rend your heart and not your garments” (Joel 2:13). If the reverence is in your heart, the language is not the important thing. I want words to be my servant, and I want to use them with care. I’m ready to change as need be.

Lou: The crucial thing is that prayer is talking to God as to a friend.

Graham: Language mustn’t stand between us and our God.

Lou: We must move on. Let’s talk about the phrase, “Thy will be done.” If we really want God’s will to be done, why ask for anything? Wouldn’t it be more trusting to just say, “God, do what You’re going to do”?

Graham: Jesus is our example in almost every important area. He would say to His Father, “Let this cup pass from Me, nevertheless, . . .”

Matthew 26:39. If prayer is conversation with God, we will be honest with Him. "I do not relish what's coming. I want You to do things Your way. I want to defer to Your wisdom. Nevertheless, may I talk to You about this? May I tell You honestly that I want this, or I want that, I shrink from this, or I shrink from that?" That's real, honest conversation. But behind it all, we are deferring to God's wisdom. It's genuine, honest conversation.

Lou: But aren't there people who feel it expresses a lack of faith to say, "Thy will be done," when you're praying for a loved one that you very much want to be healed? Wouldn't it be more trusting to just say, "Lord, heal. I believe You are going to"?

Graham: We do it that way because we want to tell Him what to do. It shows much more trust to say, "God, You know best. Please do what is best for this person."

Lou: You're saying that it's perfectly all right to express my will very forcibly, to tell God exactly what I want?

Graham: If I don't, I'm not telling the truth. I want this person to be well. But "Thy will be done" expresses even more trust. I love it when the person you are praying for says, "Look, you don't have to dictate to God. He doesn't have to heal me for me to trust Him. I'm willing for Him to do whatever is best, and you may pray that way." Isn't it easy to pray around the bedside when the patient trusts God like that?

Lou: That's true. But now let's get down to even more practical matters. Does it do any good to pray for a safe trip? If you pray, "Thy will be done," and then you have an accident, should you assume that was what God had in mind for that trip?

Graham: I suppose it is good to pray for a safe trip as long as it isn't a presumptuous prayer. "Now that we've prayed, I can up the speed ten miles an hour. You see, I'm guaranteed a safe trip, I prayed." A good trip prayer would be committing ourselves into God's hands and also praying, "God, help me to drive more carefully. Help me to be more alert. And Lord, whatever comes out of this, I have confidence that all will be well." Some people die on the way to camp meeting or church. Will they awaken in the resurrection, see all the good things of eternity and say, "Wait a minute, Lord. Am I in the Kingdom? This isn't what I wanted." The Lord would say, "Aren't you really happy to be here?" God guarantees to take care of us in the larger perspective, but He doesn't say, "No trouble, no sickness, no accidents on this planet." That kind of thinking is spiritually dangerous.

Lou: You're not saying, then, that if an accident happens, it is because God planned it out that way?

Graham: He could step in at any time to prevent accidents, but He doesn't. He's trying to say something about the results of disorder in the universe, how there's an enemy abroad, and how He hopes we will bear with Him and wait. And when we look back over all this, I believe we will not wish to have been led in any other way than the one He has chosen. And He hopes we will trust Him enough to wait.

Lou: What about intercessory prayer, praying for others, does that really do any good?

Graham: That's a very good way to put the question. One reason we pray is because we don't want to miss out on any good thing that God might have for us. We want to get our money's worth, so to speak. But that doesn't sound to me like conversation with God as with a friend. Let's take an example, a mother with a son who has chosen to go his own way. She loves her son, so every night she talks to God about her son. If she didn't, she wouldn't be normal. She talks with God about the things that are on her mind. She doesn't say, "God, force my boy back." She knows that if God would pour out His Holy Spirit with one hundred-fold greater intensity on her son, that alone would not make him a Christian. He could still say, "No." So she prays, "God, You choose the time. You choose the way. Help me to be patient. Help me to do what I can do, and maybe bring every influence possible to bear, but I know my son can still say 'No,' just as Lucifer said 'No' to Your very face." I'm not going to say it does no good for her to talk to God. She's going to talk to Him anyway. This is her son. She's going to talk to Him about her son.

Lou: But what if there is a particular need? I remember years ago there was a situation in one of the countries of Europe where people were suffering persecution and doors to churches were being closed. And we had a day of fasting and prayer. Did all of us joining together in a special movement of prayer bring about a decision by God to intervene? Did it bring extra power into the situation?

Graham: If more of us twist God's arm, are we more likely to get what we want? Actually, I remember when that event occurred back in the 1950s. A whole group of theology majors at Pacific Union College, where I was at the time, said, "Let's meet for lunch every Monday noon and discuss intercessory prayer until we understand this process." And we finally agreed that, in the context of an enemy accusing God of

manipulating things, our united requests set God free to do things He had been longing to do. When we all together said, “Please, open the churches in Romania,” or wherever it was, God could say to the adversary, “Step aside. I’m on My way.” And He could say to the angels, “Is this interference? Is this manipulation? Do you hear them all asking Me?” I think the Great Controversy is very much involved here. I believe our prayers set Him free to act, to say to the adversary, “Step aside, I’m being asked to do this.” Our prayers really *do* make a difference. But even if they didn’t, we should still pray, because prayer is how we talk to God as to a friend.

Lou: What if we did the same thing for that lady’s son? If we all prayed for his conversion, would God have to convert him?

Graham: If that happened, what would it say about God? If God by force can keep His family together, how did He lose one-third of the angels? I don’t believe God would ever overthrow the freedom of that woman’s son.

Lou: In Romans 8 it says something about how the Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words, or as the *New International Version* puts it: “With groans that words cannot express” (Romans 8:26). What’s happening there? What is the Spirit doing with God on our behalf?

Graham: Well, we need to consider that in line with John 16:26. If there is no need for the Son to intercede with the Father for us, there’s no need for the Holy Spirit to intercede with the Father for us either. All three of Them are on our side. So this means that the Holy Spirit of truth comes and helps us to pray by bringing us the truth about God, that we might be encouraged to pray. He also tells us the truth about ourselves, so we can be honest with God and tell the truth about ourselves as well. That’s prayer that makes a difference. So the Holy Spirit, when we are struggling to find words, guides us into true conversation with God as with a friend (Romans 8:26).¹

Lou: I have heard a fairly well-known minister talk about how God speaks to him. Now what about that? How do you judge that kind of thing? When you speak about prayer as conversation with a friend, is that ever a two-way conversation? What about God speaking back to us? Can we talk more about that?

¹ (JP) This surprising reading of Romans 8:26 is grounded in the Greek gender of the text. The Holy Spirit is neuter in Greek (to pneuma) but the “wordless groans” are masculine (Greek: stenagmois alalētois). So it is our groans, not those of the Holy Spirit, that the text is referring to!

Graham: When someone comes and says, “God spoke to me last night,” I mustn’t be rude enough to say, “I think that’s a lie.” But I must remember verses we considered in earlier chapters. One of these is about the prophet who said, “The angel of the Lord has told me thus and so, but he lied to him” (based on 1 Kings 13:18). So if this person says, “God spoke to me last night and I bring you this message,” I must take that message to the Scriptures and see if it measures up. For no matter who it is that comes to me with a message from the Lord, though he may say, “The Lord spoke to me last night,” I still must take that message to the Scriptures. But if I’m taking that message to the Scriptures, then what is the highest authority? Isn’t it the Scriptures? Then why not go straight there? I believe God speaks to us primarily through the Scriptures.

God has certainly spoken to individuals from time to time. And we’ve taken some of those messages to the Bible, and they’ve measured up. There is one such person you and I know especially well; what she wrote measures up magnificently. That’s where the authority lies. I test what she wrote by the Scriptures.

Lou: A couple more questions. Should we pray to the Father, the Son and/or the Holy Spirit? Should we pray to all three?

Graham: I would say all three, as in the Doxology. There we praise the Father, we praise the Son, and we praise the Holy Spirit.

Lou: What about praying in the name of Jesus? What is the significance of that?

Graham: I think it is significant that Jesus said, “Pray to the Father in My name, and the Spirit will help you do it” (based on John 14:13–14, 26; 15:26). I think that’s for historical reasons. You see, the Son is the One who came to reveal the truth about the Father. The Spirit gives us the record and brings the confirmation. And so to be in tune with the whole history of the revelation, He says, “Pray to the Father, but in My name.” “In My name” is not a magic formula, it’s simply saying, “I recognize that if Jesus had not come, I would not know You, I wouldn’t have the courage to come. I wouldn’t know how to pray.” So, “in His name” is a statement of gratitude and worship.

Lou: Can you say just a word about prayers that God says He won’t hear? For example: “You spread forth your hands. I will hide My eyes from you. Even though you make many prayers, I will not listen” (Isaiah 1:15). What kind of prayers does God refuse to hear?

Graham: In the letters of John it says a similar thing (1 John 4:6).

God doesn't listen to the prayer of hypocrisy, the prayer that really isn't asking for any help, the prayer that is cheating with God. Now He loves the cheater and He loves the hypocrite. He simply cannot help them, and so He says, "I will have to give you up." Prayer must be honest. We must walk humbly with our God and tell the truth. It's the same way with a physician—a physician cannot help a cheating patient who won't tell the truth.

Lou: The next chapter will be number sixteen in our series. What's our topic?

Graham: "God's Last Pleading with His Children." As some might guess, we will be reviewing the Three Angels' Messages in the setting of the Great Controversy.

Chapter Sixteen

God's Last Pleading with His Children

The last of the sixty-six books of the Bible, the book of Revelation, describes the war that began up in heaven, triggered by distrust regarding God's character and government (Revelation 12:4, 7–10). A lack of trust led one-third of the brilliant and intelligent angels to rebel against God. That war is further described (Revelation 14:6–12) as culminating in three final messages of warning and invitation, all sent from a heavenly Father who wants none of His children to be lost. So the same Bible book that describes the beginning of the war also speaks of its end.

The final resolution of this conflict of distrust includes the second coming of Christ and the restoration of this damaged planet to its original beauty and peace. But Revelation also tells us that some great and terrible events stand between us and that full restoration. We can trust the God we worship and admire not to leave His children unenlightened and unwarned. So He gave us a picture of three angels, bringing three messages from heaven. Each of these angels proclaims a special message of warning and invitation. I share the whole passage here:

Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.”

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

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

mandments and remain faithful to Jesus. Revelation 14:6–12, NIV.

The Three Angels' Messages

As you look over those three messages, there are many terms that call for explanation. But they are all discussed elsewhere in the Bible. That is why we really need all previous sixty-five books to understand the sixty-sixth. You may recall our discussion of one of these terms in Chapter Nine, “There Is No Need to Be Afraid of God,” the word “fear” (Greek: *phobêthête*), as in “fear God” (Revelation 14:7). In contexts like this, the word does not mean terror. It means reverence. Since this angel brings good news (Revelation 14:6), he must not mean that we should be *terrified* of God. A number of versions have ventured to clarify this, for example: “Honor God” (Revelation 14:7, GNT), and “Revere God” (*Berkeley*). Words like that can also express the meaning of “fear.”

Still, there is much fearsome wording in these three angels' messages. If this is God's last pleading with His children, would it not have been better to have just the first angel's message, and then the last sentence of number three? If God is pleading with us to trust Him, wouldn't that have been better? The message could then say, “Honor God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come. Worship Him who made the heavens, the earth, the seas, and the springs of water” (Revelation 14:7). And then go straight to, “This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus” (Revelation 14:12). Why do we need all that fearsome wording in between? Wouldn't the shorter version have seemed more like pleading?

In answering these questions, it is important to note what has gone before, particularly Revelation 12, 13, and then 14. Chapter 12 describes the war between Christ and Satan, and all the efforts of Satan to deceive both angels and men. Then Chapter 13 describes Satan's final effort to deceive, which is the subject of the next chapter in this book, “Satan's Final Effort to Deceive.” In his final effort, Satan is primarily seeking to deceive the people living on this planet. Revelation 13 describes his almost complete success. The whole world worships him, except for a certain few. The chapter even describes the powers and the organizations that Satan works through in order to accomplish his deceptive purposes. They are represented by biblical symbols drawn from the other sixty-five books of the Bible. More than that, near the end of Revelation

13, his loyal followers are pictured as bearing a mark of their preference for and trust in Satan's end-time emissary — that mark is notoriously known as the "mark of the beast" (Revelation 13:16–17).

Then comes Revelation 14, God's last pleading with His children, the three final messages of warning and invitation that are the subject of this chapter. Knowing the whole history of earth, one is not so surprised at the fearsome words of warning in the second and third angel's messages (Revelation 14:8–11). But we should always read these in light of the first angel, who comes with good news, the everlasting gospel (Revelation 14:6). That's what the word gospel means; good news. The first angel doesn't come with new information. He brings the everlasting good news. This good news has always been the truth. It will always remain the truth. It will always remain the basis of our faith and trust and freedom for eternity.

The Eternal Good News

What is this eternal gospel, this eternal good news? Surely, no one was more confident that he knew the content of the gospel than the apostle Paul. On one occasion, when his version of the good news was being seriously challenged by some of his own colleagues, Paul made this extraordinary claim:

If anyone, if we ourselves or an angel from heaven, should preach a gospel at variance with the gospel we preached to you, he shall be held outcast. I now repeat what I have said before; if anyone preaches a gospel at variance with the gospel which you received, let him be outcast! Galatians 1:8–9, NEB.

Now if the apostle's language should seem too strong, this rendering in the *New English Bible* is the mildest I could find. Gentle J. B. Phillips translates, "May he be a damned soul!" The Greek is *anathema esto*. May he be "anathema." The *Good News Bible*, produced by the American Bible Society, translates, "May he be condemned to hell!" The *Living Bible* states, "Let God's curse fall upon him!" The *King James Version* translates, "Let him be accursed!" When do we say that about our fellow human beings? The *New International Version* translates, "May he be eternally condemned!" To say the least, Paul was profoundly convinced of the rightness of his version of the good news and the dire consequences of turning to another gospel. You recall how Romans 1

describes the dire consequences of turning away from the truth (1:20–32).

Paul was stunned to observe the willingness of so many early Christians, who had recently been set free from the meaningless requirements of false religion, to go back once again to the fear and the bondage of their former ignorance and misinformation about God:

*I am astonished to find you turning so quickly away...and following a different gospel. Not that it is in fact another gospel; only there are persons who unsettle your minds by trying to distort **the gospel** [emphasis supplied] of Christ. Galatians 1:6–7, NEB.*

He goes on to ask how they could possibly be so foolish, comparing the good news they had received with what they had given up. Look at Galatians 3: “You foolish Galatians! Who put a spell on you? Before your very eyes, you had a clear description of the death of Jesus Christ on **the cross!**” [emphasis supplied], Galatians 3:1, NEB. He continues reasoning with them in Galatians 4:8–9, GNT: “In the past you did not know God, and so you were slaves of beings who are not gods. But **now that you know God**...[emphasis supplied], how is it that you want to turn back...?” Notice how the same turning point for the Galatians is related to the knowledge of God (Galatians 4:9), to the good news (Galatians 1:6–7), and to the cross (Galatians 3:1). All three of these texts address the same subject. The good news of the cross is the truth about God.

Paul is sympathetic with the Galatians, in spite of his strong words. After all, what could be expected of new converts when some of the leading Christians in Jerusalem were themselves contradicting and compromising the gospel of Christ (as described in Acts 21:15–28)? Even Peter, after his broadening experience with Cornelius, reverted to some of the narrow views that he used to hold. According to Galatians 2:11–14, Paul was moved to correct Peter to his face and in public. How could Paul feel right about doing that? In 1 Corinthians 13 he wrote that love is never rude. Love never insists on having its own way. This is also the Paul who wrote Romans 14. He was so respectful of other people’s freedom that, when there was disagreement over this or that religious matter, he would say, “Let everyone be fully convinced in his own mind,” and, “Who are you to criticize one another?” Romans 14:5, 10.

But when people suppressed or perverted the good news about God, gentle Paul spoke out with almost frightening conviction and power. He even went so far as to suggest that these legalistic agitators

were confusing the new saints about the good news of truth and freedom. They were upsetting the new converts by urging them to re-adopt the rite of circumcision and other legalistic details. He said, "I wish they would go the whole way and make eunuchs of themselves" (Galatians 5:12). You know that Paul must have been deeply moved to say that about those legalistic agitators.

The Good News and the Character of God

How could Paul be so sure about this good news, when it has been opposed or misunderstood by so many through the centuries? What perversion was so serious that Paul could speak as strongly as he did to the Galatian believers? Through the years, I've asked many Christians what they consider to be the essence of the good news. The responses have included things like the atonement, the Second Coming, and eternal life; almost every aspect of the Christian faith. But if God is the way His enemies have made Him out to be, eternal life would not be good news, would it? Whether any doctrine, even the Second Coming, is good news depends on the kind of person we believe God to be.

I think, therefore, that the most fitting and truest answer to that question is one that a good friend gave me years ago: "The good news is that God is not the kind of person Satan has made Him out to be." Coming back to an earlier text, Paul related the good news to the issues in the Great Controversy when he suggested that if even an angel from heaven should come with a different version of the good news, we should not believe him. Instead, let him be outcast or accursed (based on Galatians 1:8-9).

It seems, at first, incredibly dogmatic, almost arrogant, for Paul to speak like that. What if your pastor, at the end of the sermon this weekend, should say, "If anyone of you in the audience should disagree with my sermon, let him be condemned to hell!" Would we think that perhaps the pastor was in need of a vacation? What do we make of Paul talking like this? Let's not forget that it was an angel from heaven who began the circulation of misinformation about God. And that same angel from heaven masquerades as an angel of light in order to deceive you and me and turn us against our God (2 Corinthians 11:14-15).

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*By the life that He lived and the unique and awful way
He died, Jesus demonstrated God's righteousness,*

answered all the questions, and met any accusations leveled against God.

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Throughout this book we have spoken about Satan's charges; that God is arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe. He even charges that God has lied to us when He says that sin results in death (Genesis 2:17). He says that God is selfish, not worthy of our love and trust, and not respectful of our freedom. At some length we have considered the way God replies; not in claims, but in demonstration. Remember how humbly God took His case into court, the court being the family of the universe? The good news is that God has won His case. The whole universe now agrees that Satan has lied about our God. "It is finished," Jesus said (John 19:30).

By the life that He lived and the unique and awful way He died, Jesus demonstrated God's righteousness, answered all the questions, and met any accusations leveled against God. Paul said he was proud to be a bearer of this good news. He also links the good news with the cross in 1 Corinthians:

Christ did not send me to baptize. He sent me to tell the Good News....For the message about Christ's death on the cross is nonsense [emphasis supplied] to those who are being lost; but for us who are being saved it is God's power. 1 Corinthians 1:17-18, GNT.

Note how he combines the good news with Christ's death, and also God's power to save. He uses similar language in Romans 1: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel [the good news]: it is the power of God for salvation....For in it the righteousness of God is revealed...." Romans 1:16-17, RSV. The good news, power, God's righteousness, and the cross are all tied together. And there's nothing new about this. This was the everlasting good news in Old Testament times as well:

Let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight, declares the Lord. Jeremiah 9:24, NIV.

Let's combine them all together now. The good news is about God. It's about His righteousness. It cost the death of Christ to prove it. This

good news about God's righteousness has great power to move people, if they're willing to listen. It has great power to win them back to repentance and faith. It has great power because it is the truth. It has great power because it is such good news.

What God Is Really Like

We have earlier discussed the meaning of Romans 3:25–26 at some length. Forgive me for putting in my own translation. I just can't find one that does it right, in my opinion:

For God showed Him publicly dying as a means of reconciliation [at-one-ment]. This was to demonstrate God's own righteousness... to show that He Himself is righteous and not as His enemies have made Him out to be. And because He is righteous and trustworthy, He sets right everyone who trusts in Jesus (Maxwell).

Paul confessed with shame that formerly he had misrepresented God. He had believed Satan's lies to the extent that he used force, even stoning, to compel people to obey (based in part on 1 Timothy 1:12–16). But after Paul accepted the good news, he devoted the rest of his life to telling the truth. Who has written more eloquently about freedom, about love, and about trust than Paul? Who else has so clearly assured us that all God asks of us is trust (Romans 1:16–17), that we are not under law, but under grace (Romans 6:14–15), and that there is no need to be afraid of God (Romans 8:15)? Paul had learned the truth about God that sets His children free.

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The good news about God's righteousness has great power to move people, if they're willing to listen.

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You may remember Jesus' words: "You will know the truth and the truth will set you free." John 8:32, *Williams*. For Jesus, in John, "the truth" is always the truth about His Father (John 1:17–18; 14:9). You see, if God were the kind of person Satan has made Him out to be, there would be no freedom. There would only be the bondage of fear (Romans 8:15). But Paul had learned the truth, and now he took it everywhere he could. He took it to the Galatians. And when he brought them the truth, he also brought them freedom. They loved it at first. Then they

turned away from it. He urged them: “This is the freedom with which Christ has made us free. So keep on standing in it, and stop letting your necks be fastened in the yoke of slavery again.” Galatians 5:1, *Williams*.

There was a time in Paul’s life when he himself was satisfied with the obedience that resulted from law and from fear. He thought it was the right thing to do, what the sovereign God preferred. But once Paul discovered the good news, the truth, he realized that God does not want the obedience that springs from law and from fear. He wants the obedience of faith; the obedience that comes from free people who agree with God that this is the right thing to do. They agree so fully, they don’t even need to be told to do so. They do what is right because they agree that it is right.

Notice Paul’s understanding of his commission in Romans 1. He begins the book by saying, “I have been called to make known God’s good news about Him and about His Son” (based on Romans 1:1). Then he goes on with these words: “Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom I have received grace and a commission for His Name’s sake to win men to the obedience that springs from faith. . . .” Romans 1:4–5, *Weymouth*. Not the obedience that springs from law, but the obedience that springs from faith. What produces this obedience that springs from faith? Isn’t it the good news about our God, the kind of person He is, that leads us to a willingness to listen (the definition of obedience)? Isn’t it how highly He values our freedom, and how infinitely worthy He is of our love and trust, that leads us to loyalty? “Here are they who keep God’s commandments and maintain their loyalty to Him and to His Son” (based on Revelation 14:12).

The Climax of the Eternal Good News

So the first angel comes with the everlasting gospel, the everlasting good news. What is it? Each of us should study and think this through for ourselves. The following is a summary of my understanding of the good news:

God is not the kind of person His enemies have made Him out to be — arbitrary, unforgiving, and severe. Jesus said, “If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father.” God is just as loving and trustworthy as His Son, just as willing to forgive and heal. Though infinite in majesty and power, our Creator is an equally gracious Person who values nothing higher than the freedom, the dignity, and the

individuality of His intelligent creatures — that their love, their faith, their willingness to listen and obey may be freely given. He even prefers to regard us not as servants but as friends.

This is the truth revealed through all the books of Scripture. This is the everlasting Good News that wins the trust and admiration of God's loyal children throughout the universe.

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You can be adamant, immovable, and dogmatic about freedom, because you will never hurt anybody with that view.

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It seems to me that's the only "truth" it is safe to be dogmatic about. Here we can be like Paul and say, "Even if an angel came with a different picture of God, it is wrong, and I will not believe it." To me, this is not a negotiable position. You can be adamant, immovable, and dogmatic about freedom, because you will never hurt anybody with that view. You are immovably committed to freedom, and to the picture of God as valuing nothing higher than the freedom of His children. To me, that is the essence of the message of the first angel (Revelation 14:6–7). With that in mind, the second angel comes and simply says, "The opposition has collapsed in corruption and defeat" (Revelation 14:8). Then the third angel warns of the inevitable consequences of preferring Satan's lies to this magnificent truth (Revelation 14:9–11).

Now it's true that the third angel's message has the most fearsome wording in the whole Bible. I'm sure the Devil would have us misunderstand these words as the words of an angry God. But all the previous books of Scripture have prepared us to understand the terrible consequences of sin. Through the words of Scripture, we watched Jesus die. We know that God would do anything to spare His children the same fate. Story after story in Scripture prepares us to see our heavenly Father as the One who would much prefer to speak gently to us of the truth.

When we know Him in this way, we can trust Him when He raises His voice one last time in these messages of warning and invitation. The God we worship would never allow us to pass through these closing events unenlightened and unwarned. Behind the fearsome warning of the third angel's message there stands the God of Hosea 11:8 crying: "How can I give you up? Why will you die? How can I let you go?" The same person who wrote the awesome words of the third angel also wrote

1 John 4: “God is love....There is no fear in love.” 1 John 4:16, 18, *Williams*. The apostle John was the beloved disciple who knew all about love, the one who told us there is no need to be afraid. He is also the one who wrote the fearsome words of the third angel’s message. God could reveal this to him because he understood the larger picture of what God is like.

As loyal members of God’s family, we have the privilege of participating in the final proclamation: “This Good News about the Kingdom will be preached through all the world...and then the end will come.” Matthew 24:14, GNT. The good news about the Kingdom is about the way the King runs His Kingdom. Could you conceive of any higher honor or privilege than to join with the loyal angels in making this good news, this everlasting truth about our God, known to all the world?

Questions and Answers

Louis Venden: I was thinking about the title of this chapter, “God’s Last Pleading with His Children.” Then I looked at those messages in Revelation 14, particularly the second and the third, and wondered if a more appropriate title might have been, “God’s Last Threatening.” Isn’t that what’s happening here?

Graham Maxwell: Well, it certainly is a warning. The language is so serious. If we were more willing to listen, God wouldn’t have to talk like this. We looked earlier at the words of Hosea, “Come home, come home” (Hosea 14:1–9), but humanity, both then and now, is not listening. This is the same God who sent she bears (2 Kings 2:24), and thundered on Sinai (Exodus 19:16–19; 20:18), because He doesn’t want to lose His children. In Chapter Nine I tell the story of a father on a mountain trail thundering at his son to keep him from falling off a precipice. People nearby might misunderstand what the father is doing until they see the whole situation. They might end up apologizing for misunderstanding the father’s action. Similarly, I think we owe God an apology for misunderstanding the times He’s raised His voice.

Lou: So what you’re really saying is that the tone of God’s voice is not angry as He says these things. It’s the serious consequences that call forth such serious warnings.

Graham: He certainly wishes to spare us these consequences. It’s somewhat like the tobacco problem. People often don’t believe there is danger in smoking, so the government requires serious notices on each pack of cigarettes. They’re trying to find as many ways to warn people

as possible.

Lou: You gave a good deal of emphasis in this chapter on the gospel as “good news.” Still, it’s hard to see how the second and third angel’s messages (Revelation 14:8–11) are really good news.

Graham: Well, there is also sadness in the good news. Victory in the Great Controversy will bring great joy on the one hand, but God is also going to lose vast numbers of His children forever. When the End comes, I see Him crying and smiling at the same time. “We’ve won, but look how many we have lost.” I just wouldn’t want people to think that the second angel is announcing good news because the other side has taken a beating, and the third angel is good news because the people who hurt me are going to be burned. I hope no one thinks it is good news in that way. But there is another way in which it’s good news. In the third angel’s message God is not torturing His children to death. If the death of Christ tells us how the wicked will die, God did not torture His Son to death. He sadly gave Him up, as He will give up the wicked in the end. That is also important good news. But you are right; it’s not totally good news. It’s also very sad.

Lou: But if the gospel includes all three of these messages, as I think you are saying, shouldn’t we say a great deal more about the destruction of the wicked when we preach the gospel?

Graham: Yes, if we say we are preaching the three angels’ messages (Revelation 14:6–12), then we’ve got to preach number three (Revelation 14:9–11), which is about destruction. But if the cross demonstrates how the sinner dies, how can you preach the cross without preaching the destruction of the wicked? Or to put it another way, to preach the third angel’s message is to explain why Jesus died and how He died. So the third angel’s message is the message of the cross. That’s why we even speak of the third angel’s message as being righteousness by faith. It’s only if we preach it correctly, only if the third angel’s message raises serious enough questions about the death of the wicked, that we can go to the cross to find out by observation just how Jesus died. The cross is amazing good news, because it says there is no need to be afraid of God. He did not torture His Son on the cross and He will not torture the wicked at the End.

Lou: Graham, you and I know that the Seventh-day Adventist denomination is strongly connected with this third angel’s message. How was it that our church came to identify with the third angel’s message?

Graham: It's actually something of a historical accident. The Adventist pioneers saw the three angels happening in a historical order. The first angel's message was given, and then the second, and then the third. We do feel that we're the people with the final message, which includes number three. But the Adventist pioneers always referred to "the three angels' messages." They realized it's a barren message to preach number three alone. We should always preach all three.

Lou: Would you go so far as to say that there's something especially unique about this third angel's message? Is it appropriate to identify myself as a Christian who believes in the third angel's message?

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

Lou: Uh, oh! That's not what I had in mind!

Graham: I'm sure it wasn't, but by calling people's attention to the meaning of the cross in the larger setting of the Great Controversy, we can offer a truly biblical explanation of the third angel. At first glance, the third angel's message is fearsome. But to explain it in the light of how and why Jesus died is to bring very heartening news to people. The message is serious, yes, but it is no reason to be afraid of God.

Lou: So the Seventh-day Adventist Church has chosen to strongly identify itself with all of the three angels' messages. Revelation 14:6–12. How did that choice come about? Do you think it was a good one?

Graham: I think it was a very good choice, because the position that these three messages have in the Bible suggests they are the final messages of invitation and warning. They also provide us with a wonderful opportunity to summarize all the rest of Scripture. If you read these three messages apart from the rest of the Bible, they're fearsome. But if you read them in the light of all sixty-six Bible books, it is an opportunity to demonstrate our conviction that the whole Bible is the word of God. The Bible should be read as a whole, and these three messages must be understood in the light of all that's gone before.

Lou: But that raises another question. Why not just take the third angel's message (Revelation 14:9–11) as it reads? Why not read it and just believe it the way it reads, that people are going to be burned forever, that the smoke of their burning goes up forever and ever? Revelation 14:11.

Graham: Well, if you were reading the whole Bible you would just have read in Jude that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed with eternal fire (Jude 1:7), but that fire went out a long time ago. So the book of Jude prepares you for these words in Revelation. And then there is the slave who doesn't want to be set free, so they punch a hole through the lobe of his ear and he serves his master "forever" (Exodus 21:2-6). The rest of the Bible prepares you to understand this fire and smoke that goes up forever and ever (see also the section in Chapter Nine on "How Sinners Die the Second Death").

Lou: So you're saying that I have to interpret the Bible to find its real meaning. I can't just take the surface meaning of texts. Each text has a context and a history, so I have to work at understanding Scripture.

Graham: When people say, "We must take that text just the way it reads," I often say, "Well, let's turn over here to Deuteronomy where it says, 'Take the tithe and buy strong drink with it and rejoice before the Lord'" (Deuteronomy 14:22-26).

And they'll say, "Oh no, don't take that text just the way it reads; let's interpret that with care."

And then we turn to the text where it says, "Give wine to the poor, that they may forget their misery" (based on Proverbs 31:6-7).

And they will say, "No, let's interpret that."

Then we go to, "It would be better not to marry; but it's all right if you can't control yourself" (based on 1 Corinthians 7:36-37).

"Oh, let's interpret that."

"Women shouldn't speak in church" (based on 1 Corinthians 14:34-35).

"Let's interpret that."

Then we come to the third angel's message and they say, "Let's take it just how it reads."

When it comes to the Bible, we need to be consistent all the way through. We want to find the true meaning, we don't want to cheat. We want to know exactly what it means. And it takes the whole of the Bible to do that.

Lou: Now in light of this book's theme that there is no need to be afraid of God, I have to ask; how can you preach the three angels' messages without inspiring fear? Even the first angel's message sounds a note of judgment (Revelation 14:7). That makes one feel a bit uneasy. And after that comes the second and the third. How can you preach judgment, even in the first, without producing fear?

Graham: This is a very good illustration of the points we made before. We need to interpret texts like these. We did some of this in Chapter Nine, the one entitled “There Is No Need to Be Afraid of God.” We talked about judgment there. People interpret the concept of judgment in various ways. Those who prefer a more legal model of atonement will say, “There is no need to be afraid in the judgment, because we have a Friend up there.” But they don’t mean the Father, they mean the Son. Or they may say, “We have no need to be afraid, because the legal penalty has been paid. The Father is fearsome, but if you’re paid up you don’t have to worry.”

I believe the good news that we don’t have to be afraid is based on the fact that our Friend up there is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All three are our friends. That’s the best reason for facing the judgment unafraid.

Lou: You’ve challenged us to the hard work of thinking, yet you’ve still said the message is simple enough that a child can understand. If that’s true, then how is it that people have so many different versions of the gospel, even within our own fellowship? Why is there so much disagreement, often generating more heat than light, over the gospel? Why isn’t it so simple that everyone can say, “Oh yes, fine, that’s it, I agree.”

Graham: Well, Paul seemed to think it was simple. He says, “Since the death of Christ was explained so clearly to you, how could you be such dear idiots as to go back to the other view?” He even goes so far as to say, “Who has been casting a spell over you?” or as some versions say, “Who has bewitched you?” Galatians 3:1. Actually, Paul was right about that. We cannot leave out the adversary when talking about the gospel. The gospel is what defeats him. And he is determined to pervert it, not so much by contradicting it as by twisting it. There are many “twistings” of the good news and the adversary is involved in that. But we also need to allow for some honest differences. It’s hard to give up our prejudices, so we should be patient with each other. But the day is coming when we all need to have it clearly worked out, so we can stake our lives on it and survive the troubles of the End-time. We will have more to say about that in Chapter Eighteen.

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

Graham: Oh, I like that. That was good to add. There are always different facets, but the different facets will not contradict each other. It’s only worrisome when there’s a contradiction. But no one person will

see it all, nor speak of it in exactly the same way. Yes, that's very well said.

Lou: Matthew 24:14 speaks of Jesus' promise that the gospel will be preached in all the world. Now if the three angels' messages are that gospel and they are to be proclaimed before the End comes, how widely are these messages being proclaimed and how close are we to that day?

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There are many "twistings" of the good news and the adversary is involved in that. But we also need to allow for some honest differences. It's hard to give up our prejudices, so we should be patient with each other.

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Graham: An even more important question would be: Suppose we could document that the three angels' messages were being broadcast to the entire world, how sure could we be that we're giving them correctly? To me that would be the more worrisome thing, because there are different versions of how people understand them. But even if we knew they were being given correctly, would we ever be able to tell the day when Jesus will come? I don't think we'll ever know. We just need to give the message and go on giving it, and the Lord will know when the work is done.

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

Graham: Paul was much less concerned to know *when* it would be finished than *that* it would be finished. He said, "I want to get to you in Rome and beyond; I'd like to get everywhere with this good news" (based on Romans 15). That should be our preoccupation as well, I think.

Lou: You spoke about the last sentence in the third angel's message (Revelation 14:12). Is that really part of the message? The punctuation seems a bit ambiguous.

Graham: Most commentators believe verse twelve is included in the third angel's message, even though in most translations the quotation marks close with verse eleven. But the message of the third angel is so fearsome, it calls for the endurance of the saints. Perhaps verse twelve is a response to all three messages, but it especially responds to that dreadful number three.

Lou: I'm concerned about the wording of verse twelve because it has been a favorite of mine for many years. In the *New International Version* it talks about "remaining faithful to Jesus." The *King James*

Version, which I learned many years ago, talks about “having the faith of Jesus.” How do we interpret that phrase?

Graham: Well, it’s a technical thing, but the Greek can be translated “faith in Jesus” or “the faith that Jesus had.” And that’s why some versions go one way and some go the other, and none of them are consistent in the way they translate it from one place to another.

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

Graham: Well, the context will sometimes indicate. At other times, the context makes no difference either way. In this case, Revelation 13 talks of those who are loyal to the adversary, and Revelation 14 talks of those who are loyal to the true Christ. So in Revelation 14:12 I like the translation “faithful to Jesus.” But suppose it’s the other way. “The saints are those who have a faith in God such as Jesus did” or, “The saints are those who trust in Jesus.” Either way we come to exactly the same conclusion. So it really makes no difference. If I were to create my own version, though, I’d put it, “Remain loyal to, or trust in, Jesus.”

Lou: There’s another word in there: “Here is the *patience* [emphasis supplied] of the saints” (KJV). Other translations say: “Here is the endurance of the saints” (RSV, ESV). And still others have “patient endurance” (NIV).

Graham: That last phrase is an interesting combination of patience and endurance. One possible translation is “patience,” as in “I am patiently waiting for the Lord to come; don’t disturb me.” The underlying Greek word means “remaining under,” as if you were pushing something or carrying a heavy burden. You put your shoulder to the wheel, you stay under, and you shove with all your might. That’s the root word here. “Endurance” is a better English translation. But the *New International* is even better, “This calls for patient endurance.” That’s really bridging both ideas. Patient endurance isn’t easy.

Lou: It strikes me that this phrase is comparable to our colloquial expression today, “hanging in there.”

Graham: That’s true.

Lou: The third angel’s message refers to a “mark of the beast.” Revelation 14:9, see also 13:16–17. Many Christians put a lot of emphasis upon the mark of the beast. It seems to be very important to the message. So what is it?

Graham: Well, since dreadful things happen to those who have the mark, we had better know something about it. There are many, many different answers to your question. We will go into this in more detail in

the next chapter, when we talk about Satan's final effort to deceive. In a nutshell, earlier in the book of Revelation it talks about God's loyal people having a seal (Revelation 7:1-3). It seems they have some mark of loyalty and trust. The mark of the beast seems to be comparable to this seal. Those who have the mark prefer Satan's lies to the truth. They have accepted him, the false Christ, as their redeemer. So we need to identify something that would be an appropriate mark.

If you research *Vicarius Filii Dei*, a historic papal title, the literal meaning is "substitute for the Son of God," which is exactly what Satan has wanted to be. But I'm more intrigued with the fact that, through the centuries, you can find the very number 666 connected with devil worship and other misrepresentations of the truth. Whatever it is, the mark of the beast is connected with rejection of the truth, a preference for Satan's lies, and loyalty to him.

We will focus more on these issues in the next chapter. The issues are more important than the identity of the mark. You won't get the mark unless you prefer Satan's side, so I'm more concerned about being on the right side, than about what the mark itself might be. Because if I'm on the right side, I won't get it.

Lou: Good point. I'm intrigued by the *Maxwell* version of Romans 3:25-26 that you gave earlier. Why do so many versions translate this gospel passage as a revelation of God's activity in salvation rather than a revelation of God's character, or the kind of person God is? Is the gospel the truth about God's character or the truth about how God saves us?

Graham: To understand what Paul is saying here, you need to go back to Romans 1:17-18. According to the Greek of verse seventeen, the gospel derives its power from the fact that it reveals the righteousness of God. But then in verse eighteen Paul says, "The wrath of God is revealed." The Greek in these two phrases is almost identical. It is God's wrath one verse below, and God's righteousness one verse above. But many of our good Christian friends say, "Why would God's righteousness need to be revealed? He's the Sovereign of all things, of course He's righteous." You see, following Luther's example, they don't understand this text in light of the great controversy over the character and government of God.

In the larger, great controversy view, it's God's righteousness that has been challenged. If God is not proved to be righteous, there is no basis for us to trust Him. The good news, in that case, is that God is

righteous. Those who are not aware of a conflict over His righteousness, choose something else, such as, “It’s God’s way of righting you and me.” What’s beautiful about this, though, is that both ideas are true. If the good news is about God’s righteousness, then the revelation of God’s righteousness *is* the way in which He rights you and me. And so the larger view contains the smaller view, but the narrow view denies the larger view.

That’s what I like about the larger view of Scripture. You can be much more generous when you hold it. You can say, with the beautiful *Good News Bible*, “God’s way of righting wrong.” That’s beautiful. But what *is* God’s way of setting men right with Himself? It is to reveal and demonstrate the truth about His own righteousness at infinite cost. It is our privilege to explain the larger great controversy view from all sixty-six books of the Bible. That view allows the Bible to be translated very literally in Romans 1:16–17, and even leaves room for narrower views which are more focused on what God has done for you and me. To many of our friends, the good news is primarily what God has done for you and me, the plan of salvation. The larger view, on the other hand, is the good news that God is not as His enemies have made Him out to be. And to see Him like that is to be won to repentance and faith. The plan of salvation has at its very heart the revelation and the demonstration of the truth about the righteousness of God. That’s a more inclusive view. That’s why we venture sometimes to call it the “Larger View.”

Lou: Another question: “I understand that the wrath of Satan (Revelation 12:12, 17) and the wrath of God (Revelation 14:10; 15:1) are based on the same word in the original language. How can we fit Satan’s wrath into the picture you are helping us to see regarding God’s wrath? Or could it be that I am misinformed regarding the original language?”

Graham: Yes, the two main words for “wrath” in the Greek are *orge* and *thumos*. Both words are used for God (in Revelation 14:10) and for Satan (in Revelation 12:12, 17), the same words. Similarly, the word “faith” is used for “saving faith” or “trust” (Romans 3:28) and also for the frightened kind of faith the devils have (James 2:19). The only difference is that when God expresses His wrath, He sadly gives us up. When the Devil comes down with great wrath he comes “like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). That’s the difference between the two. Same words, different context. The context indicates the meaning.

Lou: It has to do with the kind of person the Devil is and the kind of person that God is. Because their characters are different, their expres-

sions of wrath are also different.

Graham: That's the difference.

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God expresses His wrath by sadly giving us up. When the Devil comes down with great wrath, he comes "like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." 1 Peter 5:8. That's the difference between the two.

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

Graham: Well, when you think of the price God has paid to show what freedom means to Him, and to restore freedom, you could say, "Absolutely, yes." The end of the conflict doesn't mean that freedom is gone, to the contrary.

Lou: Let's move very quickly to one other question: "Why wasn't the conflict ended with Christ's victory at the cross and His resurrection? Why has pain and suffering gone on since then?" We have covered this before, but it may help to review it here.

Graham: The fact that this issue keeps coming up suggests how important it is. We will address it again at some length in "God Waits for His Children to Grow Up" (Chapter Eighteen). In the narrower, more legal view, if it's done at the cross, why wait any longer? In the larger, great controversy view, there are terrible events to occur at the End, and there will need to be a mature generation — not a generation of children, or even the "dear idiots" of Galatia. Galatians 3:1. There needs to be a group of Jobs who are so grown up and settled into the truth, that like Paul they could say, "If even an angel from heaven should come with a different gospel," pretending to be Christ, "he is wrong and we will not believe it" (Galatians 1:8–9). So God in mercy waits.

Lou: Our next chapter is "Satan's Final Effort to Deceive." What more important subject could we study to be prepared for these final days?

Graham: I considered putting that chapter before this one, but I wanted to do the good news first. Having said that, it is a truly important subject for the times in which we live.

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The Good News

God is not the kind of person His enemies have made Him out to be — arbitrary, unforgiving, and severe. Jesus said, “If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father.” God is just as loving and trustworthy as His Son, just as willing to forgive and heal. Though infinite in majesty and power, our Creator is an equally gracious Person who values nothing higher than the freedom, the dignity, and the individuality of His intelligent creatures — that their love, their faith, their willingness to listen and obey may be freely given. He even prefers to regard us not as servants but as friends.

This is the truth revealed through all the books of Scripture. This is the everlasting Good News that wins the trust and admiration of God’s loyal children throughout the universe.

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Chapter Seventeen

Satan's Final Effort to Deceive

The book of Revelation describes not only God's last pleading with His children (Revelation 14:6–12) but also Satan's final effort to deceive (Revelation 13:12–18). Though Jesus "saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18), the defeated enemy of God and man still "prowls around like a roaring lion" (1 Peter 5:8), knowing that his time is short (Revelation 12:12). The one whose insane desire to be God led to the war up in heaven will at last seem to enjoy complete success (Revelation 13:8). So how can we resist Satan's last and most diabolical attempt to convince us of the truthfulness of his lies about God? How will he seek to persuade us to join his side as the great controversy over God's character and government comes to its end? Revelation 13 describes Satan's final effort to deceive us into accepting his lies as the truth.

When Adolph Hitler knew that he had lost the war, he announced his intention to bring the whole Third Reich down with him in destruction. The world said he was mad. Satan suffers from a similar madness. When Jesus said, "It is finished" (John 19:30), Satan knew that he had lost the war. He knew that the falsity of his charges had been exposed before the whole family of the universe. He knew that he had failed to provoke the Son of God to anger and retaliation. He had lost his case. Like Hitler, his only remaining purpose is to bring as many as possible down with him at the end (Revelation 12:12).

The Cross and Satan's Deceptions

How easily Jesus could have used His power to blot out His tormentors at the cross. And He knew, moreover, that if He used His power, the people would be pleased. They would follow Him, but for the wrong reason. The people were looking for a Messiah that would use His power to conquer their enemies and set up an earthly kingdom where they could rule over the world. What a temptation it must have been for Christ to demonstrate His power and His majesty, to come down off the cross and blot out the Roman soldiers, to see all the people fall at His feet and worship Him. If He had done that, a cry would have gone throughout Judea and the countries beyond, "The Messiah has come! The Messiah has come!" How rewarding that might have seemed for at least a moment.

Satan had done his best to break down Jesus' trust in His Father and in His mission to reveal the truth about God. But the things that God desires the most—love, trust, peace and freedom—are not produced by shows of power or force. They are not produced by terrifying people until they fall on their faces in fear. So Satan watched in frustrated fury as Jesus, instead of becoming angry, said to His tormenters, “I forgive you” (Luke 23:34). Satan watched Jesus saying to John, “Please look after My mother” (John 19:25–27). Satan watched Jesus say to the repentant thief, “I would be pleased to remember you when I come into My kingdom” (based on Luke 23:42–43).

Jesus' behavior at the cross completely refuted Satan's charges that God is arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe. All the other questions that had been raised about God's character and government had also been clearly answered, not with claims, but in very costly and painful demonstration (see “Three Questions Regarding the Character of God” in Chapter Eight). The angels in the universe got the message. They have been celebrating ever since. How do you think Satan feels when he hears lyrics like the following?

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty.... You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power.... Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. Who will not fear [reverence], you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed. Revelation 4:8, 11; 15:3–4, NIV.

The object of this praise is God's own righteousness. That is the crucial issue in the cosmic view that the great controversy theme provides. In the narrower view, we are more preoccupied with what God has done for you and me. But if that were the primary focus, and it is an important one (Revelation 5:9–10), they would not be singing about God's righteousness. God has been accused of being unrighteous and unworthy of the trust and worship of His children throughout the universe. That is also the theme of Romans 3:25–26. Jesus died to demonstrate the righteousness and the trustworthiness of our God. Even before the victory on the cross, as Jesus watched the disciples gradually learning the truth about His Father, He could say that He “saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.” Luke 10:18, RSV.

The Center of Satan's Deceptive Activity Today

It was insane of the adversary to begin this war over his desire to be worshiped as God. It is equally insane for him to continue this war, now that he knows that he has lost. But continue he does, in a mad desire to bring down as many as he can with him. And since no one in the wider universe is willing to listen to his charges any more, he concentrates his destructive efforts on us here on this planet. Only on earth can he find individuals willing to listen, he even finds many who *agree* with him. That explains the warning of Revelation 12:

...be glad, you heavens, and all you that live there! But how terrible for the earth and the sea! For the Devil has come down to you, and he is filled with rage, because he knows that he has only a little time left. Revelation 12:12, GNT.

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The apostle John warns that Satan's final efforts to deceive will apparently be rewarded with complete success. For the whole world is described as worshipping him, the very thing he's wanted all along.

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We are at the center of Satan's deceptive activity because earth is where we live. Hence Peter offers a similar warning in 1 Peter 5:8-9, GNT: "Be alert, be on watch! Your enemy, the Devil, roams around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Be firm in your faith and resist him...."

The apostle John warns that Satan's final efforts to deceive will apparently be rewarded with complete success. For the whole world is described as worshipping him, the very thing he's wanted all along:

*The beast [Satan working through agents on earth], was allowed to make proud claims which were insulting to God....It was allowed to fight against God's people and to defeat them....All people living on earth will worship it, except those whose names were written before the creation of the world in the book of the living....This calls for **endurance and faith** on the part of **God's people** [emphases supplied]. Revelation 13:5, 7, 8, 10, GNT.*

These words in Revelation 13 remind us of another text: "Here is a call

for the *endurance of the saints*, those who keep the commandments of God and the *faith* of Jesus” [emphases supplied]. Revelation 14:12, RSV. So that appeal is made more than once. The closing up of the Great Controversy and Satan’s final effort to deceive call for endurance and faith on the part of God’s people.

The Special Target of Satan’s Deceptions

Naturally, those who remain loyal to God are the special target of Satan’s final effort to deceive. Revelation 12, the chapter that first mentions the war in heaven, describes God’s loyal ones as being the special objects of Satan’s wrath (Revelation 12:12). He goes to make war on those called the Remnant, the ones left over. Those who are the object of Satan’s special wrath are: “All those who obey God’s commandments and are faithful to the truth revealed by Jesus.” Revelation 12:17, GNT. They do not accept Satan’s lies.

If we count ourselves among God’s loyal people, we would do well to notice Satan’s successes through the centuries in deceiving the saints. He doesn’t normally tempt saints into the gross indulgences, the things which most saints would never think of doing. Rather, Satan has used insidious methods to turn saints against our heavenly Father, even while they professed to be God’s chosen people. We remember his original success among the brilliant angels in heaven. How is it possible Satan could deceive them right in the very presence of the Father? Yet he did.

We gain some insight into Satan’s deceptions as we consider how he worked against God’s chosen people in the Old Testament. After the discipline of Babylon and the great revival and reformation that took place under Ezra and Nehemiah, God’s Old Testament people never worshiped idols again. Oh, how they read their Bibles, paid their tithe, watched their diet, and were so very careful not to be contaminated by association with unbelievers! Oh, how they waited for the coming of their Messiah! You could say, in principle, they were all eager “adventists.”

Yet, when the Messiah came to live among them, they denounced His picture of the Father as heretical and unbiblical. They even said the Son of God had a devil to be talking about His Father that way: “The Jews answered him, ‘Aren’t we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?’” John 8:48, NIV. Imagine them saying that the Lord had a demon for describing God the way He did! When they said that the Lord had a devil, they seemed so devout. They were eager to be known as God’s true people, even working hard to win others to the truth. Recall

Jesus' own words as He commented on the worldwide evangelistic efforts of His people in those days:

How terrible for you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees! You hypocrites! You sail the seas and cross whole countries to win one convert; and when you succeed, you make him twice as deserving of going to hell as you yourselves are!... You give to God one tenth even of the seasoning herbs, such as mint, dill, and cumin, but you neglect to obey the really important teachings of the Law, such as justice and mercy and honesty....Blind guides! You strain a fly out of your drink, but swallow a camel! Matthew 23:15, 23-24, GNT.

They would win that convert to the Sabbath and all those other things. Yet their convert might at the same time be a son of hell, as other versions say. They had accepted Satan's picture of God and completely overlooked what God really wanted from them.

In saying this I am not being disrespectful to Jewish people. Keep in mind, when I refer to the Jews, that Jesus was a Jew. Paul was a Jew. The apostles were Jews. The prophets of the Old Testament were Jews. Where would we be but for the Jews? Jews have always sought to be God's obedient saints. I am simply pointing out that their failings then were similar to ours now. Notice how their passion to obey God caused a serious problem for them on crucifixion Friday:

Early in the morning Jesus was taken from Caiaphas' house to the governor's palace. The Jewish authorities did not go inside the palace, for they wanted to keep themselves ritually clean, in order to be able to eat the Passover meal. John 18:28, GNT.

Think of what the Passover represented. The Jews rightly and devoutly wanted to partake of the Passover. But the crucifixion threatened to interrupt their plans. Since the day of the crucifixion was not just a Passover, but a Passover Friday, there was one additional problem that faced them:

Now it was the day of Preparation [Friday], and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. John 19:31, NIV.

After the bodies were taken down, they hurried home to keep the Sabbath holy. This is perhaps the most insane thing in the history of the universe. Having nailed their Saviour to the cross, they ran home to keep the Sabbath holy in honor of the very One they had just crucified. They had watched the way Jesus behaved as He suffered. They heard Him say, "I forgive you." They heard Him say to John, "Please look after My mother." They heard Him forgiving the thief. Jesus had behaved precisely as the Old Testament prophets had said He would. But they were so deceived by Satan's lies that they were totally unmoved by this. Instead they asserted that Jesus was the One who had accepted Satan's lies about God.

Satan and Evangelism

At first, Saul (later Paul) shared the same picture of God. His evangelistic methods showed that he, too, had been deceived. He saw nothing wrong in using force or fear to win converts to the kind of God he worshiped. And he was not alone in this. Jesus had very serious words for hard working evangelists and soul-winners who portray a false picture of God. What a devastating thing it will be for evangelists to find out later that this is what they have been doing:

When the Judgment Day comes, many will say to me, "Lord, Lord! In your name we spoke God's message, by your name we drove out many demons and performed many miracles!" Then I will say to them, "I never knew you." Matthew 7:22-23, GNT.

In other words, Jesus is saying, "We were never friends. You never really knew the kind of person I am. By the way you represented the truth to people, you actually supported Satan's charges against Me and My Father."

Satan and Spiritual Satisfaction

Just as God in many and various ways has sought to reveal the truth to us (Hebrews 1:1), so in many and various ways Satan has sought to keep us from seeing this truth. He has tried to deceive us into turning against this truth, even as we are claiming to believe it. One of his most successful deceptions has been leading God's people into a grateful satisfaction. They come to feel that the Lord has blessed them with so much

light that they really don't need to pursue it anymore. It can even seem an act of gratitude to God to stop learning and growing. God has favored them with so much truth that they become conservative and discourage further investigation. Revelation 3 has a most serious message for such falsely secure saints:

I know what you have done; I know that you are neither cold nor hot. How I wish you were either one or the other! But because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I am going to spit you out of my mouth! You say, "I am rich and well off; I have all I need." But you do not know how miserable and pitiful you are! You are poor, naked, and blind. Revelation 3:15–17, GNT.

The Greek word for "miserable" above means to be worn out from hard work. The Laodiceans are worn out from trying to please the Lord. At the same time they are satisfied with their efforts and what they believe they have from God. But this combination of hard work and spiritual self-satisfaction does not make God angry, it makes Him sick. The word translated "spit" above is where we get the English word "emetic." That's why some versions say, "I am going to vomit you out of My mouth."

Satan and the Nature of Christ

Other saints are in danger of underestimating Satan's ability to deceive and confuse. I have heard many say, "There is no way I could be deceived when Satan comes as Christ in the last days. I have two or three things carefully stored away by which I will test him when he comes." But I doubt that the Devil will make it that easy on us. History offers many examples that warn against such overconfidence. For example, when Jesus suffered, died, and rose again, Satan knew that the great weight of evidence was against him. Therefore, he worked very hard to destroy or hide the evidence. One of his most diabolical successes, right from the beginning, was in leading some to believe that Jesus did not really come in the flesh. He did not *really* suffer and He did not *really* die. He only seemed to do those things. The group of people who believed that were known as the Docetists. They taught that Jesus did not have a physical body, that He did not really die and rise. He was more like a ghost than a person. This was an effective way by which Satan sought, right from the start, to destroy the evidence Christ provided of

what God is really like. This idea was widespread in John's later years:

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. 1 John 4:1-2, NIV.

We know historically that people were going around saying Jesus had not really come in the flesh. John wrote a whole Gospel to show that Jesus, a real, embodied human being, was also fully God and came to reveal what the Father is truly like. If Satan can get people to believe that Jesus was not both human and divine, the clarity of His revelation of God's character is lost.

Satan and the Meaning of Salvation

Another way Satan attempted to confuse the evidence was through the ancient "mystery religions." Even before the earthly ministry of Jesus, Satan was at work to undermine and confuse the evidence by counterfeiting Christ's first coming. In the mystery religions the central figure was a dying, rising savior who had been supernaturally born. He died a cruel and violent death, was exalted up to heaven, and there mediated supernatural help to his followers on earth. Later that savior would return, resurrect his followers and annihilate the forces of evil. These mystery religions even had the equivalent of the Lord's Supper, baptism, washing in the blood, and many other things.

One of the main researchers in this field was a professor who taught at the University of Chicago just before I got there. His name was Shirley Jackson Case. He wrote a book entitled, *The Origin of Christian Supernaturalism*. He observed, "Of the Gentiles it might truly be said that there was no salvation without the shedding of blood." And they were doing this even before Christ came. Let me share a quote or two:

Long before Christianity arose, there were many Gentile religions inviting those who felt the need of divine assistance for the inward man. The rites of the various mystery religions offered an especially good opportunity for the attainment of a new emotional experience, readily interpreted as an effective acquisition of fresh divine power. The stimulation of the senses by music and proces-

sionals, the play upon the feelings attending various acts in connection with the rites of initiation, the pledge to secrecy, solemnly imposed upon all the candidates, the wild orgies connected with some of the cults, all served to produce the desired emotional agitation. The necessity of presenting oneself voluntarily for membership as well as the purifications and the other preparatory acts only heightened the effect.

Everything that was done happened to one as an individual. This strong emphasis on the personal relations between the devotee and his god gave precisely the sense of divine interest which alone could produce in needy humanity feelings of solace and satisfaction. Initiation into the mysteries was likened to the experience of death itself. It filled one with terror, but issued in triumph. It was easy for the members of the mystery cults to believe that they were under the protection of divinities who had successfully engaged in a mighty cosmic struggle with the forces of evil and men spoke of being born again, born unto eternity. Shirley Jackson Case, *The Origin of Christian Supernaturalism*, 166–167.

Does all of that sound familiar to you? Before Jesus came, Satan was already working to distract people from the revelation about God that was coming in Christ. I believe we will see brilliant counterfeits of Christ's second coming as well. Popular and apparently spiritual movements are using the wonders of technology to distribute "every wind of doctrine" (Ephesians 4:14, ESV) all over the globe. Even the most important beliefs and teachings of Christianity are being bent to support Satan's position against our God. Even faith, the subject of sin, the atonement, the cross, law, judgment, Christ's intercession, the destruction of the wicked, all God's emergency measures, are being twisted just enough to obscure the real truth about God.

Do you feel ready for this? Have we oversimplified? Are we in danger of being overconfident? Are we interpreting these truths in such a way that we are leaving ourselves vulnerable and leading the people we win to be vulnerable with us? That is why, in the very next chapter, we are going to talk about why "God Waits for His Children to Grow Up." You can trust our God to wait for that to happen.

Questions and Answers

Louis Venden: The title of this chapter, "Satan's Final Effort to

Deceive,” makes me think of the fact that Satan has been a deceiver all along. That’s just his nature. Are you aware of any evidence that we are into that final time of deception the Bible warns us about?

Graham Maxwell: That question is so significant that we will devote the whole of Chapter Nineteen to it (“How Soon Will the Conflict Be Over?”). Are we really in the last days? You and I have both had fathers who preached the nearness of the End. My father preached that for fifty-five years, and we’re still here. What’s the reason for the delay? Are we now in this final period of earth’s history?

Lou: Do you consider it an encouraging sign that our world is at least talking more about Satan than in the past? There is talk of “black magic” and there is even a Church of Satan. Does that mean the world in general is more aware of Satan’s existence and deceptions?

Graham: I think the fact that people talk about Satan so much should not be interpreted to mean that we are more alert or more ready for his deceptions. It all depends on what we are saying about him. This very surge of interest may all be part of his deception. He wants us to think of him in a way that he is not. Eventually he wants to come in the guise of Christ.

Lou: Here’s a question I’ve heard asked before: “Since Christ is not going to come until after Satan’s final effort to deceive, does Satan have some control over the timing of the End? In other words, if Satan were to work a little harder, and be a bit more successful, would that help to hasten the second coming of Jesus? What part does he play in the timing here?”

Graham: Giving Satan that much credit would be a terrible thing. It would be as if the text, “Work to hasten the coming of the day of God” (2 Peter 3:12), were really addressed to the adversary. I think as far as Satan is concerned, he would provoke the final events immediately, but the Lord knows we are not ready. And so in mercy He waits, as Peter also says (2 Peter 3:9). And that’s why the subject after this one will be, “God Waits for His Children to Grow Up.” If we would be as ready as Job was, God would allow these closing events to occur right away; but He’s our heavenly Father, so He waits.

Lou: So Satan does not have controlling power over the timing of the End. God and he are not partners in this.

Graham: Well, he *is* being restrained; that is the picture in Thessalonians (2 Thessalonians 2:6–7) and elsewhere (Revelation 7:1–3).

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Up to this point in history, Satan has never been given an entirely free hand to run things his way, to demonstrate what the universe would be like if he were in charge. So in the final period of earth's history we are going to see this.

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Lou: But that brings up another question: "If Satan's deceptions are being restrained, that also implies that God is allowing, at least in some sense, for Satan to deceive. How does that serve God's purposes in the Great Controversy?"

Graham: Good question. If God won the victory on Calvary, why not terminate everything right afterward? After all, look what has happened these last two thousand years and what is happening in the news most weeks. How does the delay speak eloquently to God's purposes?

I would say there are things yet to be demonstrated—and not just about God and His government. Up to this point, Satan has never been given an entirely free hand to run things his way, to demonstrate what the universe would be like if he were in charge. So in the final period of earth's history we are going to see this. We understand from Romans (1:18–28), Hosea (11:1–9), and the cross (Romans 4:25), that the seven angels pouring out the wrath of God means He is giving people up, handing them over. The Spirit ceases to restrain (Revelation 7:1–3) and Satan will have a free hand. Just before the Second Coming, the whole universe, and even Satan's own followers, will see how he would run things if he could run them his own way. And all hell will break loose at that time.

I think it demonstrates something else also. I wouldn't blame the angels for wondering if we rebels could really be as convinced of the truth as they are. They are all ready to see the seven last plagues and not interpret them as God's vengeance. They are also prepared to see the wicked consumed and not be afraid of God. But they might wonder if we are. They might also wonder if the truth will be able to heal us to the point where we could pass through that awful time of trouble and not be led away from God. Would we think of Him as vengeful during the seven last plagues? Would we be ready to see the final destruction without being afraid?

The generation that will be alive to see the Lord come will also be able to speak eloquently of God's power to heal, and the power of the truth to restore the damage done by sin. This last generation has the

great privilege of bringing honor to God. God shows the universe through them that He can heal with the truth. He can restore sinners to the kind of trust the angels have. That is a high privilege. We'll go deeper into that in the next chapter.

Lou: I was fascinated by your reference to ancient mystery religions that seem to have closely counterfeited the Christian faith. How popular were these?

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Just before the Second Coming, the whole universe, and even Satan's own followers, will see how he would run things, if he could run them his own way. And all hell will break loose at that time.

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Graham: The mystery religions were very popular throughout the New Testament era and for some time thereafter. They were so popular that some people joined several of them, just to be on the safe side, like the altar to the "Unknown God" in Athens. They counterfeited and confused the issues both before and after Jesus came. One of my teachers at the University of Chicago, Dr. Harold Rideout Willoughby, was a real expert on the mystery religions, so we heard a lot about them. He wrote a long Ph.D. dissertation on rebirth in paganism called "Pagan Regeneration." Many of the ideas in the mystery religions are very close to the truth, and yet they are diabolically perverse. That's why I came to the conclusion that the Devil really tried to counterfeit the first coming of Christ. But he failed with many back then, and he has learned from his failures. With his final, ultimate cunning, he will counterfeit the Second Coming as far as he can.

Lou: You used the phrase "mystery religions." Didn't Paul himself speak of Christianity as "the mystery of godliness"? 1 Timothy 3:16.

Graham: Yes. That's right. I think he was using that language on purpose. It was not that God deliberately kept the truth a secret. Circumstances did not allow Him to reveal it all (see John 16:12). But one of the major differences between the mystery religions and Christianity was this: When you were initiated into one of the mysteries, you were sworn never to tell anybody. Whereas, the Christian "mystery" was to be told to everybody. So Paul loved calling Christianity a mystery and then telling everybody everything about it. So what we have in the New Testament is a "revealed mystery." Paul's hearers would under-

stand that, and would be rather struck with the contrast. We have the most important information in the universe and, instead of keeping it to ourselves, we want to tell everybody. The followers of the mystery religions were not allowed to tell; it's amazing that we know anything about them at all.

Lou: But was the Greek word that Paul used the same word?

Graham: Yes, *musterion*. The English word "mystery" comes from it.

Lou: As you talked about this matter of Satan's final effort to deceive, I wondered if you expect that we are going to see direct devil worship before the end of time, the kinds of things we tend to associate with other places on earth?

Graham: I don't think so, especially among the Christian nations. Satan wants to be worshiped, but not as the Devil; he wants to be worshiped as Christ. And so he masquerades as an angel of light at the End. He will be worshiped by humans (Revelation 13:8) the way he wanted to be worshiped by Jesus and the angels. His great moment in history will be when the cry goes forth, "Christ has come! Christ has come!" and the world prostrates itself before him; all except the few who will say, "No, you not only have a devil; you are the Devil." And you can see why it would go hard for these few.

Lou: That ties in with what you said earlier. He really isn't anxious to be identified as Satan, he really wants to masquerade as Christ.

Graham: That's the deception. If he came with horns and a tail, that wouldn't really fool anyone. Instead, he comes as a gracious redeemer, the great medical missionary. He heals the diseases of the people and even appears to raise the dead. Since people often use miracles to validate their beliefs, Satan will deceive many. He will lie to us the way that older prophet did in 1 Kings 13 (see verse 18). But the way he uses his authority and relies on miracles will warn the faithful.

Lou: When Peter admonishes us to resist Satan (1 Peter 5:8-9), how can one resist such a clever, intelligent, wily foe?

Graham: We can only resist him with the truth. We will have to be so settled into the truth that we cannot be moved.

Lou: If you were to sense the presence of Satan, would it help to call on the angels? Would it help to recite the name of Jesus several times? What do you think of such approaches?

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Since miracles are the evidences people often use to validate

their beliefs, Satan will deceive many. But the way he uses his authority and relies on miracles will warn the faithful.

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Graham: If you're using the name for the purpose of "magic," you should know that Jesus never went by that name. "Jesus" is an English pronunciation of the Greek *Iesous*. His actual name in Hebrew and Aramaic was Joshua (*Yehoshuah* or *Yeshuah*), and I've never heard anybody using "Joshua" to scare the Devil away. So I regret it very much when people use the name of Jesus as a good luck charm. I think it is an insult to Him and does us a lot of damage. But I hear it all the time. We're always singing about those precious two syllables, "Je-sus," and He never went by that name. What matters is the Person, not the name. If we could remember Him and call on Him, that would be the only way to go.

Lou: But you could use the name "Jesus" at that point.

Graham: Yes, because we know who we mean by it. If I'm thinking of the real Person when I say "Jesus," even though that's an English pronunciation of a Greek transliteration, He will understand that. But if I'm just using that name as a good luck charm, I might as well use garlic to scare off vampires and that sort of thing. I think it is diabolical to use His name as magic. Why would the Devil be scared of the name anyway? But if Jesus were there, the Devil certainly would flee. So I would want Him there by whatever name you might call Him.

Lou: But if the Devil could deceive a third of the angels, what chance do we have to resist him by ourselves?

Graham: Well, there were people in the Bible who did succeed in resisting him, like Job. Job even called to God for help and no help seemed to come. And yet he survived.

Lou: But things seemed to get worse when he called for help.

Graham: Things did get worse, that's right. The more he called for help, the worse things got. He said, "God, I call and You never answer me" (based on Job 30:20). And yet Job did not let God down. I believe God wishes to bring us to the point where we can actually stand singly and alone, and the only restraint on the Devil is, "You may not take his life" (Job 2:6). The incredible thing is that Job survived. But did you notice Job bragging about it when it was all over? Oh no, he was humbled by it all, and he was hardly prepared when God said, in effect, "You did wonderfully, Job (Job 42:7-8)! When you felt you were doing so badly, here in heaven I was saying, 'Now there's a perfect man.'" But

that was God speaking about Job, Job himself was not conceited (see Job 42:1–6).

Lou: You used the expression “to stand singly and alone.” You don’t mean standing without God, do you? Do you mean standing alone as far as the presence of others is concerned?

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We can only resist Satan with the truth. We will have to be so settled into the truth that we cannot be moved.

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Graham: Satan was given a completely free hand with Job. Satan said: “Just let me get my hands on him, and he’ll curse You to Your face” (Job 2:5). So Satan eventually took everything away from Job. All Job had to help him, it appeared, were those theologians; and they were all wrong. They were miserable help (Job 16:2). Satan’s final effort to deceive may come most persuasively through caring theologians. So we must be alert. But Job was certainly protected to the extent that Satan could not kill him.

Lou: Yet he had to trust in the truth, and he was growing in his understanding of what that truth was, wasn’t he?

Graham: He was still learning and growing at the time of his suffering. At this point I can’t help but use Ellen White’s magnificent thoughts on *what it means to be sealed*. It is to be so *settled into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, that one cannot be moved*. Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events*, 219; *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, 1161. As we have said, that is the work of the Spirit. It was the Spirit of Truth and his conversations with God that brought Job to a similar place. It was all God’s doing, but Job’s part was to always say “yes” to God. And if we can say “yes” to God long enough, the heavenly Physician can heal us and bring us to the place where Job was.

Lou: In Revelation 12:17 it speaks of those who “have the testimony of Jesus” (KJV). What is this “testimony of Jesus” that the remnant will have?

Graham: That phrase is also translated, “Bear testimony to Jesus,” in some versions (RSV). But you can take it either way. In one version of this phrase, the Remnant hold fast to Jesus’ testimony about His Father. They believe that what Jesus said about His Father is true. In the other version, the remnant bear witness to Jesus. They believe in Him, and it’s their privilege and pleasure to bear witness to Him, the One who

brought them the truth. So it can work either way, you don't have to get into the technicalities of the Greek. Whichever way you take it, it makes sense. You find these kinds of double meanings everywhere in the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation.

Lou: Is that same thing true when we come to Revelation 14:12? It speaks about "those who keep the commandments of God and have 'the faith of Jesus.'"

Graham: The Greek there is a genitive, "of Jesus." The Greek genitive expresses relationship or belonging. It can be translated in this case as "the faith that Jesus had" or as "faith in Jesus." The Greek technical point is exactly the same as in Revelation 12:17. It could go either way. You can have the faith in God that Jesus had, or faith in Jesus as the One who brought the truth about the Father. If you have either one you're going to arrive at the same place. So I like to translate it both ways.

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If Satan were to say, "You may investigate me and study the evidence," he would be exercising authority the way God does. But when we start investigating the Devil he loses, so he won't do that.

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Lou: You have spoken about Satan not coming with forked tail and hooves and a pitchfork, but masquerading as an angel of light. That raises the question, if he comes as an angel of light, how are we going to recognize him? You mentioned strategies and insights we might have tucked away because we think they are going to work for sure. But he's going to be more clever than that, so I have an uneasy feeling. How will we recognize him? Especially when nearly the whole world is going to be worshipping him (Revelation 13:8). What are the best ways to identify the Devil and his work?

Graham: The answer lies in the one central issue in the Great Controversy, the question of authority. The goal of God's authority is peace and freedom throughout the universe. That's one thing Satan cannot counterfeit. If Satan were to say, "You may investigate me and study the evidence," he would be exercising authority the way God does. But when we start investigating the Devil he loses, so he won't do that. When we compare how Satan and God exercise authority, therefore, we will be able to perceive that Satan is the adversary.

Lou: So the key is not how well he can perform things that dazzle

and catch our attention?

Graham: That he can do easily.

Lou: So we need to see behind the theatrics to the way Satan exercises authority and the character that motivates his behavior.

Graham: You see, such theatrics could deceive the very elect, if that were possible (Matthew 24:24). But it's not possible. The elect are so settled into the truth about God's way of running the universe that they perceive the falsity of the Devil's way.

Lou: Your mention of Revelation 13 raises a question about the beast and the mark of the beast (verses 16–17). “Do you think that anyone has the mark of the beast now?”

Graham: That depends on what the mark of the beast is. I think that the best way to understand the mark of the beast is to consider first the seal of God. And in the next chapter we will consider in some detail what it means to be settled into the truth.

Lou: I want to come now to something that you touched on a bit at the conclusion of your presentation. How could we, as Christians, allow the adversary to deceive us regarding the very truths that we hold? For example, how could Satan distort “faith” in such a way that it would be a deception rather than the truth?

Graham: He already has. When people understand that faith is a religious conviction for which you do not need evidence, they are totally vulnerable to him. If they truly looked at the evidence, they would not be deceived because the evidence isn't with him. But he's led many Christians to understand that faith is believing without evidence, without inquiry, without investigation. And so he's turned faith into a vulnerability, and he has set us all up to be deceived. The idea of blind faith is widely held. And in the next chapter I'd like to go more deeply into this.

Lou: But what about the matter of “sin”?

Graham: When he suggests that sin is the violation of an arbitrary command, he can use the misunderstanding of sin to support his charges that God is arbitrary.

Lou: Another area he could exploit is understandings of the atonement and the cross.

Graham: On the atonement, Satan is particularly behind the idea that Christ died to reconcile the Father to us. That He died to assuage the Father's wrath. These things are widely held by Christians, but they imply a God who is vengeful, unforgiving and severe. That is not the pic-

ture of God that Jesus brought. Who had to die to persuade Christ? And yet He's also God. Who had to die to win Christ to our side? Yet He said: "If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father" (John 14:9). So a widely held Christian view of God could be used to support the Devil's charges.

Lou: Would "the law" be another area he tries to distort?

Graham: Yes, when we say that the Sabbath is an arbitrary test of our obedience, we are saying, "God is arbitrary." But then we try to sanctify that by saying, "Well, He's sovereign. He has a right to be arbitrary. If He seems arbitrary, He really isn't because He has a right to be." My mind begins to go around and around when I hear that kind of talk. It isn't logical to talk that way. Behind that kind of talk is the idea that religion doesn't have to make sense. And when we say that religion doesn't have to be reasonable or logical, we are playing into Satan's hands. Since the truth is not on his side, Satan gets us to do this to all the doctrines. And all the while we are saying that we are Christians.

Lou: What do you see him doing with the word "judgment" or the idea of the judgment?

Graham: The idea of judgment can be fearsome when we think that the Father is not as gracious as the Son. When we say, "Don't be afraid, we have a friend in court, and that Friend is Jesus," the Devil smiles, because that makes it seem the Father is not our friend. Yet the truth is, the Father is just as friendly as the Son.

Lou: That leads up to the idea of Christ's intercession; the thought that the Son has to plead with the Father to forgive us.

Graham: I remember the words of my daughter when she was only six: "Does that mean God doesn't love us as much as Jesus does?" Well, we encouraged our children to raise those questions, and to raise them early, because they may still have to pass through this experience. Jesus said: "There is no need for Me to intercede with the Father for you, for the Father loves you Himself" (based on John 16:26-27). That's the plainest testimony about intercession in the whole Bible. We say we accept the testimony of Jesus, but then we picture Him pleading with the Father. The Devil must smile when we do this. The most gracious things about God, he has twisted to his advantage.

Lou: That's true. But what about that matter of the destruction of the wicked (Revelation 14:9-11; 20:11-15)? He's done a number on that one as well.

Graham: Yes. Satan manages to cover up this deception by keeping

us from discussing religion in simple language. We use euphemisms and sanctified phrases so that our teachings don't sound too bad. But the underlying message of the common position is that God has said to His children, "You either love Me, or I will torture you in the fire for eternity. Now do you love Me?" It's the most diabolical thing he's ever perpetrated on the human race. And even if we say, "No, He won't burn you forever; He'll only burn you as long as you deserve," Satan's still smiling. Just stop to think of what that means. Our heavenly Father says, "Children, all I want is your love, because all I want is peace and freedom up here. But if you don't love Me, I'll burn you as long as you deserve. Now, I hope I didn't scare you." It doesn't make sense, and religion *must* make sense. Truth makes sense.

Lou: When you say it makes sense, is there anything about it that goes beyond my understanding?

Graham: It makes sense that the One who created this whole vast universe is way beyond my understanding, but I can understand Him enough to trust Him. I can understand Him enough to know He'd never say, "Look, you either love Me, or I'll kill you." If He said that, it would make no sense. But then we say, "Well, religion doesn't have to make sense. His thoughts are not like ours" (based on Isaiah 55:8-9). True, but His thoughts are at least as good and gracious as ours.

Lou: Now in the previous chapter on the Three Angels' Messages, I think you spent about ninety percent of the time just talking about the "good news" part. And I was wondering, shouldn't we have divided the time equally between all three messages? Why such an overemphasis upon that first one?

Graham: I think there's an important message in your observation. We need to know the everlasting good news before we even start to look at the other two. You've got to know the truth about our God before you can understand the consequences of rebellion. The truth is our protection. We should go to the world with all three angels' messages, but we should always start with number one. Never start with number three. We need to understand the other two in the light of number one. That's why I spend ninety percent of the time on number one.

In the next chapter our topic will be: "God Waits for His Children to Grow Up." We need to grow up. And so, in mercy, He waits.

Chapter Eighteen

God Waits for His Children to Grow Up

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

When Jesus returns, He will come to a generation of believers who have experienced Satan's final desperate attempt to deceive and destroy God's loyal children on this planet. This generation of believers will have accomplished something that one-third of the brilliant angels failed to do. They will have refused to be turned against God by Satan's lies. They will have been able to say with Paul, "If anyone, if even an angel from heaven, should come with a different version of the everlasting good news, a different picture of God, he is wrong and we will not believe it" (based on Galatians 1:8-9).

The Seriousness of the End-Time

God does not want us to underestimate the seriousness of these final times of confusion and deception. He does not want us to underestimate Satan's cunning and persuasive power. So there are vivid descriptions of this time to come, both in the Old Testament and the New, even beyond the ones we have examined earlier. One of these texts is near the end of the book of Daniel:

There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered.... Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. Daniel 12:1, 3, NIV.

The time of distress mentioned here reminds us of Revelation 13, where the whole world will worship the adversary except those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life (Revelation 13:8). But notice

that the saints not only survive this time of deception and confusion, they are described as leading others to righteousness (Daniel 12:3). Our concern toward the End is not only to survive, but to bear an encouraging witness to the truth about our God. Compare Daniel with Paul's picture of the End in 1 Timothy:

The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. 1 Timothy 4:1-3, NIV.

The last sentence in this passage offers examples of the kinds of things that will misrepresent God in the last days. Satan has accused our God of being arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe. So in the name of God, religious leaders order people to abstain from certain foods for arbitrary ceremonial and spiritual reasons. They also forbid people to marry. Wouldn't the Devil love to have us forget how and why God gave us marriage in the Garden of Eden? Marriage is such an eloquent representation of God's willingness to share His creative power with us, enabling us to create little people in our own image. What an answer to Satan's charge that a selfish God refuses to share His creative power! Satan would love for us to forget the evidence of God's character that marriage provides.

Compare these texts with Paul's very dramatic description of Satan's purposes and methods in the last days (2 Thessalonians 2). It's a shame to leave out anything in that whole chapter, but let's focus on just the heart of it:

Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ... Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed... He opposes and exalts himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, and even sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God... And now you know what is holding him back... For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way... The com-

ing of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 3-4, 6-7, 9-10, NIV.

Notice that the consequences of rebellion are lawlessness (compare 1 John 3:4) and false worship (Matthew 4:8-10; Romans 1:18-23; Revelation 13:8). In 2 Thessalonians 2 there is deceit on Satan's side and truth on God's side. Because truth and evidence are not on the adversary's side, Satan cannot use evidence. He does not dare invite inquiry and investigation, the way God can with perfect safety and freedom. In order to win his case, the Devil always has to use things like counterfeit miracles, signs, and wonders to persuade.

What God Is Waiting For

The people who survive this period of extreme deception and confusion are certainly not babes in the truth. Rather, they are grown-up, adult believers. They are models of perfection and Christian maturity. They have had their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil. Though their faith is severely tried, they do not let God down. Their faith is deeper than that of a little child. Little children need a lot of protection. But these saints, like Job, can stand alone.

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God knows that if these final, awesome, closing events are allowed to come too soon, His children would not be ready. He would never allow anyone to be tested more than they are able to bear. So He waits.

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I understand that God is waiting for the development of such firm believers. He waits in mercy because He loves His children. He is not willing that any of them should be lost. God knows that if these final, awesome, closing events are allowed to come too soon, His children would not be ready. They would be confused, and some would be deceived. He would never allow anyone to be tested more than they are able to bear (1 Corinthians 10:13). So He waits.

The last book of the Bible pictures angels mercifully holding back the final winds of strife until God's children have been sealed and settled

into the truth. It makes sense that He should do so. It is consistent with what we know to be true about our God:

After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree. Then I saw another angel ascend from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels.... "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God upon their foreheads." Revelation 7:1-3, RSV.

The closing events of human history are being held back because we have not yet been sealed. But what would sealing have meant to the early Christians who heard this section of Revelation being read out loud to them? Let's imagine a congregation in Ephesus. After all, that is where the scroll would have arrived from the Island of Patmos. Someone arose and read it out loud to the congregation. No doubt they were familiar with Paul's letter that eventually became known as the letter to the Ephesians. And in the letter to the Ephesians, Paul has quite a lot to say about the sealing and how this is the work of the Holy Spirit. For example: "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." Ephesians 4:30, NIV. How is the Holy Spirit involved in our being sealed?

In him [Christ] you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel [good news] of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.... Ephesians 1:13, RSV.

Note the combination of truth, the gospel, salvation, faith and the sealing work of the Holy Spirit. What is this truth? What is this good news? That is the subject of all twenty chapters of this book. The truth, the good news, is that God is not the kind of person His enemies have made Him out to be. See how Paul clarifies that: "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better." Ephesians 1:17, NIV. Notice the last phrase, "know Him better." That is the truth. That is the good news. That is the work of the Spirit of Truth. The Holy Spirit comes to lead us into truth so that we might know the Father better. This is also a theme in the Gospel of John:

The Holy Spirit...will be your teacher and will bring to your minds all that I have said to you...But when the Helper comes, that is, the Spirit of truth,...he will speak plainly about me. And you yourselves will also speak plainly about me...(the Spirit) will guide you into everything that is true. John 14:26; 15:26-27; 16:13, Phillips.

John, who wrote about sealing in Revelation 7, also wrote the Gospel which includes much information about the Holy Spirit. The Spirit was coming to guide us into the truth, to convince us of the truth, to settle us into the truth. John likely also knew about Paul's letter to the Ephesians. John knew that the believers would have some background for understanding what it would mean to be sealed. It means, in the words of Ellen White, to be so settled into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, that one cannot be moved. Ellen G. White, *Last Day Events*, 219; *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, 1161.

Settled Into the Truth

What truth can we be so settled into that despite the Devil's most convincing efforts to the contrary, we cannot be moved? Is it the truth that God exists and that He is infinitely powerful? Well, the devils believe that and it scares them (James 2:19). Is it the truth that the End is coming soon? Satan agrees that it is coming soon (Revelation 12:12), and he works all the harder. He is settled into those two things. Is it the truth that the seventh day is the Sabbath? Is it the truth that we should keep all ten of the commandments, that we should read our Bibles faithfully as God's word? Is it the truth that we should pay a careful tithe, be very careful about what we eat, and be very careful how we associate with sinners who might lead us astray?

I don't want to minimize those matters, but they are not enough in themselves. All of the above were believed and practiced by the very ones who put Jesus on the cross. After Jesus died, they rushed home to keep the seventh-day Sabbath holy, with their tithe paid up and no forbidden food in their stomachs. Evidently the truth into which we must be sealed is far more than just the list of beliefs I mentioned above, important as they are.

Throughout the Bible, the all-important truth, the saving truth, is above all else the truth about our God. Jesus came to bring us this truth about His Father, so that we might be won back to God in love and trust.

It is the truth that God can heal and save all who trust Him. When the Spirit comes, He will bring to our remembrance the things that Jesus has said about the Father (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit comes so that we may know God better (Ephesians 1:17). That's the consistent picture of the truth that runs all through Scripture.

Do we really accept Jesus' picture of the Father? Jesus is very specific. In John 16 He makes a statement about His Father that has no symbols, figures of speech or parables in it. He says, "The time has come for Me to tell you plainly and clearly about My Father. There is no need for Me to pray to the Father for you. For the Father Himself loves you" (John 16:25-27). Do you accept that? Do you accept it to the extent that it's an integral part of your whole theology and understanding of the plan of salvation? Or are you still unable to accept what Jesus described as a plain, clear statement of the truth about His Father? There is no need for the Son to plead with the Father in our behalf, because the Father loves us just as much as the Son does.

Let's recall other things that Jesus said. The Spirit brings these sayings back to our remembrance (John 14:26). "If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father" (John 14:9). "If you know Me, you know the Father" (John 14:7). Do we really believe that the Father is just as gracious as the Son? Is that an integral part of our Christian theology? Did anyone need to reconcile Christ Jesus to us as sinners? Did anything need to be done to assuage and appease the wrath of Jesus and win Him to our side? Then if we believe Jesus' testimony about the Father, nothing had to be done to reconcile the Father to us either. He loves us just as much as the Son does. Are we so settled into this truth about our God that we cannot be moved? Or are we still easily swayed to and fro by every wind of doctrine? Back to Ephesians:

We are no longer to be children, tossed by the waves and whirled about by every fresh gust of teaching, dupes of crafty rogues and their deceitful schemes. No, let us speak the truth in love; so shall we fully grow up into Christ. Ephesians 4:14-15, NEB.

We should ask ourselves: Are we still such children in the faith that we need emergency measures in order to be reverent toward God and to do what is right? If we still need those emergency measures, we are still babes in the truth. That's why Paul, in the book of Hebrews, wrote:

Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity.... Hebrews 5:13–14; 6:1, NIV.

What are the elementary teachings about Christ? Well, let us ask ourselves. Do we still need the law in order to love God and love each other? Do we need it to keep us from hating and murdering our enemies? Would we murder them if there was no law to say we must not do it? If it's the law that keeps you from murdering your mother-in-law, then you are still very much a child and not ready for the awful "time of trouble" that is coming (Daniel 12:1; Revelation 7:14).

Mature Obedience

Let me ask it another way. Which moves you more, the thunders of Sinai (Exodus 19:16–19) or the still small voice of truth (1 Kings 19:11–12)? Satan is going to bring great thunder and fire from heaven in the sight of men; miracles and wonders (2 Thessalonians 2:8–10; Revelation 13:13–14). If that is what moves us, then we are very vulnerable. We're still babes in the truth. God has used those methods with babes, but He waits for us to grow up. The one thing that the Devil cannot produce is the still small voice of truth, for the truth is not with him. We must be ready to recognize truth as the supreme authority.

Do you obey because God has told you to, and He has the power to reward and destroy? That's the obedience of a little child. Do you obey because God has told you to, and you love Him and want to please Him? Is that the only reason why you don't murder your enemies? Because it upsets Him and you'd rather please Him? That's sweet, but still the faith of a little child. Or do you do what is right, because it is right? Do we offer God the intelligent, agreeing obedience of free, grown-up children? That is what pleases Him the most. With mature obedience like that, we are ready for the days to come.

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Do we offer God the intelligent, agreeing obedience of free, grown-up children? That is what pleases Him the most. With mature obedience like that, we are ready for the days to come.

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Are we still preoccupied with our own salvation, with what God has done for us? Or do we see the plan of salvation in its larger perspective, a plan that involves the whole universe? In the great controversy view, Jesus Christ died on the cross to demonstrate the truth about our heavenly Father that will establish this universe safe and free for all eternity. It is *that* truth which also saves us, but there was a far larger purpose in the plan of salvation than just to save you and me.

Do you still demand vengeance on your enemies — tit for tat, an eye for an eye? Of course, you wouldn't call it that. You would call it justice. But is that really what it is? Do you demand that your enemies suffer all that they deserve in the final fires of the End, or you will not be satisfied? Would you lose respect for a God who would do anything less? Do you demand that wicked people get precisely what they deserve, or you will not be satisfied?

Or are you ready to join our heavenly Father as He cries, watching His rebellious children reap the consequences of their own rebellious choices? God does not turn His back on His sinful children. He watches them as they die. He is not torturing them to death. He leaves them to reap the consequences of their own choices. I would dare suggest that if you still desire vengeance at the End, though you may call it justice, you are acting like a little child.

Biblical Examples of Maturity

When Saul of Tarsus (Paul) was a grown-up man and the religious leader of his people, he came to realize that in his legalistic theology he was still a little child. He had assumed he was doing God a favor when he helped stone Stephen to death (Acts 7:58–8:1). But when he learned the truth about God, he began to grow up and put away childish things. He wrote: “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways.” 1 Corinthians 13:11, RSV. In the context of 1 Corinthians 13, maturity is defined as love. We'll come back to that in the Question and Answer section at the end of this chapter.

Now there is a time in life when it's appropriate to be a child, to believe what we are told, and even to do what we are told. But while we are still children, since the enemy of God and man is abroad in the land, we need much protection. We need God's emergency measures to help us believe and do what is right (see Chapter Eleven). God has been will-

ing to give them to us and we thank Him for them. But in the last days, there will be no protection. Satan will twist all of God's emergency measures to support his own position, and to put God in a very bad light. In those days, we will really need to be grown-up.

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Job was grown-up. But consider the ways in which Satan sought to break him down and undermine his trust in God. God said in Job 1 and 2, for important great controversy reasons, "Satan, you may do anything you like to this man, except take his life. He will not let Me down (Job 2:3-6)." Satan set out to destroy Job. He destroyed his family. He destroyed his estate. He destroyed his reputation. He destroyed his health. Then he set out to undermine Job's theology, his picture of God. Three or four friends came to help him. But those friends did not know God very well, although they thought they did. In fact, the God they worshiped was arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe. If only those friends had known the Larger View, the Great Controversy, what we now know from Job, chapters 1 and 2. Think how they could have helped and blessed poor Job. Instead, Job said, "Miserable comforters are you all" (Job 16:2). They were only making things worse. Perhaps the greatest distress that came to Job came from the bad theology of his well-meaning, but mistaken friends. Caring theologians, who did not know God but had a very legal view of things, caused Job great distress. But he would not be deceived, even by them.

Maturity in the Last Days

In the last days, our experience will be very much like that of Job. If we do not have a bigger perspective, based on all sixty-six books of the Bible, we will not be ready for what is coming. Unless we are grounded in the universe-wide understanding of God, the Great Controversy and the plan of salvation, we will be no help to ourselves. We will be very vulnerable when Satan seeks to deceive us, when he tells us that God is an arbitrary, vengeful Deity. And we will be no help to anyone else.

It seems to me that a great deal of current Christian theology is pre-

occupied with our legal standing before God. Is that why God still waits until we grow up into a much larger understanding of the truth? For without that larger understanding of the truth, we will never survive the time of trouble that is coming. That's why Paul says, "Put on the whole armor that God has supplied, and particularly the armor of truth." And in Ephesians 6 he places that theme in the context of the Great Controversy:

Put on all the armour which God provides, so that you may be able to stand firm against the devices of the devil. For our fight is not against human foes, but against cosmic powers [Satan and his angels], against the authorities and potentates of this dark world, against the superhuman forces of evil in the heavens. Therefore, take up God's armour; then you will be able to stand your ground when things are at their worst, to complete every task and still to stand. Stand firm, I say. Fasten on the belt of truth [emphases supplied]. Ephesians 6:11–14, NEB.

We know what that truth is: the good news about our God.

Questions and Answers

Louis Venden: The title of this chapter leads to the question: "How much longer do you think God is going to wait?"

Graham Maxwell: I think that subject is so important that it's the topic for the entire next chapter: "How Soon Will the Conflict Be Over?"

Lou: The idea of waiting also raises the question: "How is He waiting? Is God Himself uncertain about just how and when things will turn out? How does this relate to God's knowledge about the future?"

Graham: My personal preference is not to limit God's knowledge of the past, present or future in any way. I believe He knows precisely when He's coming, but He speaks of waiting, and in some places He speaks of delay. We'll cover those texts in the next chapter. The language of waiting indicates to us what is most important to Him. He will not come until the conditions are right. It does not suggest that He's ignorant of these matters.

Lou: The idea of growing up raises another question: Most congregations include people at different ages and different stages of spiritual growth. Won't there always be babes in the truth, people who need to

grow up, new converts? How could it ever happen that everybody will be all grown up at the very same time? What exactly is God waiting for?

Graham: That's why we included a whole chapter on perfection (Chapter Fourteen). Some in the church have made perfection almost unattainable, but I would define perfection as growing up, God healing the damage done by sin. Everything depends on what it means to be grown up. One does not have to be thirty or fifty or ninety to be grown up. I'm impressed with the maturity of Jesus at the age of twelve. He was so settled into the truth that, when He talked with the theologians of the day, He understood things better than they did. Perhaps we think maturing takes a long time, because we've made the truth too complicated. I think we will be amazed at how young people and new converts will be immovably committed to the truth that God is different than His enemies have made Him out to be. If we rightly understand what it means to be grown up and settled into the truth, it would make this much more attainable in the End.

Lou: I hear you suggesting that what really matters is simple, and yet profoundly important.

Graham: Both of those things, just the way you said it. The simplest statement is about the sublime truth that holds the universe together.

Lou: It seems there is a bit of incongruity in the Scripture. It talks about us growing up (Ephesians 4:13–15), but then suggests we become like little children (Matthew 18:3–4). If we're not like little children, we can't enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus places a high priority on being like little children, yet you're saying, "Why don't you grow up?" What do you do with those references?

Graham: Consider the context in Matthew where Jesus makes that statement. His audience was misbehaving, so He takes a little child and says, "Unless you're at least like this, you'll not see the Kingdom" (Matthew 18:1–4). And I don't think we should ever lose that childlike trust, the curiosity, the willingness to listen, the willingness to learn. I think that is never to be lost. But Ephesians also says that we should not remain as children, requiring much protection (Ephesians 4:13–15). We should become adults who can stand on our own. I think it's marvelous to see mature people in their seventies, eighties, and nineties who still have the curiosity, interest and trust of a little child.

Lou: That does lead to another question: "Is it possible for a person to tell that he or she is in fact growing up?"

Graham: This contrast between genuine love and the behavior of children gives us some ways to tell if we are growing up. In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul says, “I once thought like a child, but now I’ve given up childish ways” (1 Corinthians 13:11). Think of how little children boast, and how impatient and demanding they often are. The rest of the chapter, in contrast, explains how a grown-up behaves. Grown-ups love. Love is never rude, never impatient, never arrogant, never boasts, never insists on having its own way.

I think there’s an additional thing to consider. Why am I behaving the way I do? Am I doing it because somebody in authority has told me to, and He has the power to reward and destroy? Or am I sold on Paul’s message of love? In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul is describing how Jesus behaved. Not only that, ultimately he is telling us what God the Father is like (John 14:9; 1 John 4:8). In the end, maturity means to want to be like God. As I mature, God doesn’t have to tell me not to murder my mother-in-law anymore (by the way, my mother-in-law died before I met my wife, so this illustration is not personal). I no longer like the idea myself, you see. Eventually we will do what is right because it is right. We become like the God we worship. That’s all part of growing up.

Lou: Are you saying, then, that there is a certain legitimacy in evaluating the way we act, or the way we feel about other people?

Graham: I think if we see no progress at all on these matters over the past year, we should be concerned.

Lou: But there’s a certain danger in focusing on our growth, isn’t there? You don’t grow by trying to grow or by looking at yourself and hoping to grow. And how can you avoid the self-confidence of the Laodiceans, who felt very content with their spiritual situation?

Graham: One of the evidences that one is growing up is that one is becoming less and less arrogant. It’s little children that insist, “My daddy says it, and he’s bigger than your daddy, and therefore it’s true.” It would be a mark of great immaturity for an adult to talk like that. Boasting and arrogance suggest one is still a child. For someone to say, “I think I’ve almost made it now,” suggests they may not have even started. On the other hand, humility and the willingness to listen should become even greater as one gets older.

Lou: Changing the subject a little, will we know if and when we have been sealed?

Graham: Well, if we understand that we are sealed by the Spirit, we can look for the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23). One of these

fruits is a great concern for truth (Ephesians 5:9). Another fruit of the Spirit is love (Galatians 5:22). And love does not insist on its own way (1 Corinthians 13:5, ESV, RSV). All the fruits enter into the reckoning. The more I am perceiving and liking the truth, the more I'm willing to stake my life on this conviction about God. Then I realize the Spirit is having His way in my life. However, I must check my convictions by Scripture, where I got them from in the first place. I must continually submit my convictions to the correction of the Scriptures that were inspired by the Spirit.

The key is to be more and more settled into this picture of God, not just as an opinion but as something we would stake our lives on. Over time we will see that it is really affecting the way we behave and treat other people. Then one could say, "God, I thank You for the Spirit. He's evidently having some success with me."

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To receive the seal of God is to be so settled into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, that one cannot be moved. Conversely, to receive the "mark of the beast" is to be so settled into the lie, that you've completely substituted Satan's lies for the truth.

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Lou: When you talk about the seal of God, that reminds me of another phrase that you commented on. What really is the "mark of the beast"?

Graham: In Revelation the sealing is mentioned first, then the mark of the beast. If the seal is a symbol of loyalty to God, then the mark of the beast is a symbol of loyalty to the opposition. To receive the seal of God is to be so settled into the truth, both intellectually and spiritually, that one cannot be moved. Conversely, to receive the mark of the beast is to be so settled into the lie, that you've completely substituted Satan's lies for the truth. To receive the mark of the beast is to be so settled into Satan's false picture of God that not even the Spirit of God could move us. So in essence, both the seal and the mark represent an inner commitment for eternity with respect to the truth about God.

Lou: For many of us Seventh-day Adventists, the seal of God has been tied very closely to the Sabbath. In fact, I myself have said that the seal of God is the Sabbath. But I hear you making a distinction between the Sabbath and the seal.

Graham: One has to stop and realize that the people who crucified Christ kept the seventh-day Sabbath scrupulously. Did they have the seal of God? They certainly were not settled into the truth about God. When Jesus brought the truth about God, they said He had a devil (John 7:20; 8:48), and they killed Him to silence His witness. On the other hand, the Sabbath reminds us of the things God has done. Knowing, intelligent, thoughtful observance of the seventh day is a reminder of all these great demonstrations of the truth about God. So in that sense, the Sabbath could be an outward expression of one's settling into this truth about our God.

Lou: So the Sabbath has something to do with very deep understanding and experience.

Graham: Yes. When the issues in the Great Controversy are clearly seen, the preference for a substitute Sabbath could suggest preference for, even faith in, the one who wants to "be like the Most High" (Satan — 2 Thessalonians 2:4). But not until then.

Lou: You made reference at the beginning to 1 Timothy 4:1–3. It says some interesting things about forbidding marriage and certain foods. With regard to marriage, didn't Paul go so far as to say that we shouldn't marry (1 Corinthians 7:25–28), and didn't he write 1 Timothy too?

Graham: Well, by selecting random texts you can prove anything you like from the Bible. But if you take Paul's comments on marriage in the full setting of 1 Corinthians, he has nothing against marriage whatsoever. In fact, at weddings, whose writings do we quote more than the writings of Paul? He said the nicest things about love and marriage. So one needs to read that part of 1 Corinthians as a description of an emergency; his advice about marriage was an emergency measure at that particular time. It's not fair to Paul, or to the meaning of marriage, to pluck verses out of their setting.

Lou: This reference to food in 1 Timothy 4, however, makes me wonder. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has had a message about food and health. Could 1 Timothy be talking about that?

Graham: That text is sometimes used against us. We certainly do have some things to say about food. But we don't teach people to avoid certain foods for arbitrary, ceremonial reasons. Through the centuries there have been religious organizations that have forbidden marriage and certain foods for ceremonial and religious reasons. That's all 1 Timothy 4 is talking about.

Lou: So you are saying it's quite a different thing to emphasize con-

cerns about food for health reasons.

Graham: That's right. Paul in Timothy is not discussing health at all. He is discussing arbitrary ceremonial restrictions that put God in a bad light.

Lou: Moving in another direction, you refer to Job frequently. But why would you use Job as a model, when at the end of the book he talks about repenting? That sounds like somebody who has been wrong and is saying, "I'm sorry. I'm a sinner." How could Job be a good model when he is repenting?

Graham: A lot of folk, I think, misunderstand Job when they summarize with that statement. Job says, "I repent." And they say, "The friends were right; they said he should repent." You see, many people who read Job actually side with the friends. Those who take the narrow, legal view are more comfortable with the theology of Job's friends than the theology of God in the book. But they fail to read on. After Job says, "I repent," God says, "Don't. You have done a beautiful job. You have said of Me what is right and those theologians have not" (Job 42:6-8).

Why then did Job say, "I repent"?

"God," he says, "I have spoken of many things beyond my understanding. I wouldn't say it the same way next time" (Job 42:2).

And God says back to him, "Look, We're sympathetic up here. You've lost your family, lost your estate, lost your reputation and you are sitting on a dung heap with your clothes torn and your body covered with boils. We didn't expect eloquent speeches from you. We think under the circumstances you did magnificently, Job! We couldn't be more proud of you. You have said of Me what is right."

Job was saying what every preacher could say at the end of every sermon, "I'm sorry I didn't do a better job."

Lou: Someone said the other day that there is actually a condition in the medical dictionary called *theophobia* — fear of God. It's an actual ailment that a physician might need to be alert to.

Graham: That's right. Doctors run into it now and then. It is a morbid fear of the wrath of God. Some saint preaches, "Fear God," and doctors have to rush in to cure the *theophobia*. We'd better tell people the truth about God. Otherwise, we ministers will be working at odds with our clinical friends, making people ill with *theophobia*. We had better bring the good news that there is no need to be afraid of God. Jesus spent all His life healing the sick. It would be tragic to think about God, the One who meant to cast out fear, and have that become a *theophobic*

experience.

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God does not ask us to believe anything for which He does not provide evidence. He urges us to inquire, to investigate. These are the things that a grown-up does.

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Lou: You also mentioned Ephesians 4, where it suggests that the work of the church community is to help people grow up (verses 11–16). How does a church try to do that? What can a church do to really help people grow?

Graham: As a pastor, you've devoted your life to thinking of ways to do this. It would be growing up for a member to go from a child-like, legal, authoritarian view to a larger understanding of freedom and truth. God does not ask us to believe anything for which He does not provide evidence. It is evidence that appeals to the reason. He urges us to inquire, to investigate. These are the things that a grown-up does.

We have to take trusting children and make them independent, but loving and trusting adults, adults who can withstand what's coming. I think one of the first ways to do that is to invite our members to investigate every sermon that they hear. If they go home and investigate, over time they'll grow up.

Lou: Toward the close of the previous chapter, you were suggesting some ways in which the Enemy has distorted and perverted Bible truths. Bible truths can be twisted to offer a terrible picture of God, one in which God is pictured inaccurately and unfairly. I'd like to turn that around here and have you suggest how a *right understanding* of those same truths can help people to grow up. For example, what is the correct understanding of faith?

Graham: The Devil would love to have saints understanding faith as believing what someone in authority tells us; that faith is a leap in the dark, it's just believing. Because then he'll have his way with us. The truth isn't on his side. So what he needs is our willingness to believe without investigation. Genuine faith means trust, a well-founded trust, based on God's demonstration of the truth.

Lou: What about the Holy Spirit?

Graham: The same way there. I think the Devil has perverted the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, offering the Holy Spirit as a shortcut. "You don't need the truth; you just need the Spirit." He teaches that when

you have this indwelling, this feeling that comes up through your body, the Holy Spirit is taking over. And when the Spirit is in charge, God will run your life. It sounds so good, but it's a devilish perversion.

In contrast, the Bible says, "When the Holy Spirit comes, He will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). He will help you investigate, and He will give you the gift of self-control (Galatians 5:23). So all of these doctrines can be used both ways. We've got to present the Spirit as bringing independence (John 3:8), teaching us self-control, things like that.

Lou: What about some of these things you have referred to as "emergency measures;" like the law? Are you saying that even the law can be distorted? What is the right place for the law in a healthy, balanced view?

Graham: If we present the great controversy view, we show how God added these emergency measures when we needed them. Faith does not deny them, it thanks God for them. The law was given to lead us to Christ that we may grow up. For some, this is an essential step along the way. Misunderstood, emergency measures like the law can keep us as children, and hence vulnerable to Satan's influences at the End.

Lou: What about the destruction of the wicked?

Graham: If that produces *theophobia*, it will lead to the obedience that springs from fear. Such obedience turns us into rebels and certainly keeps us children. "Love Me, or I'll kill you" won't produce real love, not even in a little child. So we need to see the destruction of the wicked in light of the cross.

Lou: How about the cross then?

Graham: If the cross is seen as propitiating the anger or winning the favor of an offended God, it also produces *theophobia*. Even the cross can make me afraid of God if presented in that way. "Thank God He's forgiven me just now, but I better not give up or you know what He'll do to me."

Lou: What is the healthier view of the cross then?

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The healthier view of the cross is as a demonstration that sin does indeed lead to death; it's that serious. But the cross is not torture and execution at the hands of an angry God. He simply gave up His Son as He will give us up in the end.

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Graham: The healthier view of the cross is as a demonstration that sin does indeed lead to death; it's that serious. But the cross is not torture and execution at the hands of an angry God. He simply gave up His Son as He will give us up in the end. And when the Son died, the Father cried, as He will cry over us when we die in the end (see section "Three Questions Regarding the Character of God" in Chapter Eight). So, rightly understood, there is no need to be afraid of God when we stand at the foot of the cross. And there is no need to be afraid of God when we see the destruction of the wicked either.

Lou: How should we understand sin in the larger view of things?

Graham: If we view sin as breaking arbitrary rules, it makes sin something that God doesn't like. It offends Him. It makes Him angry, so He punishes us. That's a childish view. But in the Larger View, sin is something that's really wrong in itself. It is like poison, producing its own consequences. In that case, the "punishment" for sin is not really punishment, it is a consequence inherent to the crime itself. Sin leads to consequences, all the way up to the consequence of death, and God would prefer to spare us those consequences.

Lou: What about atonement?

Graham: The Devil wants us to view atonement as reconciling God to us, assuaging His wrath, instead of God winning us back to Himself. The truth is, God never left us; we left Him.

Lou: Let's take two more. First, intercession.

Graham: If by intercession we imply that the Father is not our friend, we've driven a wedge between the Father and the Son, and we've made the Father look very unforgiving and severe. So the intercession message could be used by the Devil to turn us against God and keep us as little children. But it can also be an encouraging message for those who need it.

Lou: What about the Judgment?

Graham: Again, if the Judgment is seen as arbitrary, or a positive outcome is seen as dependent on the pleading of Jesus, I think that's cruel. The Devil is pleased when we assume that one member of the Godhead is more friendly than the other two. But a biblical view of judgment focuses more on what God is like and what He is doing *for* us.

Lou: You could say we just tried to review the first eighteen chapters of the book in the last three minutes here. Hopefully that will prepare us for Chapter Nineteen, "How Soon Will the Conflict Be Over?"

And that has been a topic of conversation for God's people ever since John said, "Come soon, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:21). I'm looking forward to it.

Chapter Nineteen

How Soon Will the Conflict Be Over?

In the last three chapters we have introduced the topic of when the conflict of earth's history will be over and Christ will return. That time comes when God's children on this planet have fully responded ("yes" or "no") to His final pleading. The conflict will be over when His loyal children on this planet have become so settled into the truth that they are ready to resist Satan's final efforts to deceive. The conflict will be over when like grown-up believers, they not only know the truth well enough to survive but, like Job, they know it well enough to speak well and truly of their heavenly Father. This chapter explores the timing of the end of human history and its relevance to how we view the character of God. Our question in this chapter is not so much *when* the conflict will be over, but rather *how soon* it will be over.

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If we trust Him enough to be ready for His coming, we really don't need to know the exact time. If we trust Him, all will be well.

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Many of us wonder if the conflict will end and Christ will return in our own lifetime. The disciples wondered about this too, and they asked Jesus: "Tell us, when will this be and how can we tell when You're coming back and the world will come to an end?" Matthew 24:3, *Beck*. And Jesus replied that even the angels do not know. In fact, in His human form, even He did not know: "But about that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, not even the Son; only the Father." Matthew 24:36, NEB.

More Important Than Knowing the Time

Jesus went on to indicate that there was something much more important than knowing the exact time. It was far more important that His followers trust Him enough to be willing to wait. Do you remember Chapter Three, "All God Asks Is Trust"? If we trust Him enough to be ready for His coming, we really don't need to know the exact time. If we trust Him, all will be well. Jesus indicated this in John 14:

Set your troubled hearts at rest. Trust in God always; trust also in me....I shall come again and receive you to myself, so that where I am you may be also. John 14:1, 3, NEB.

Jesus did not tell His disciples when, but He did give them some details by which they could tell the approximate time. As they sat together one day on the Mount of Olives, Jesus spoke of many signs by which the disciples could tell when the End was getting near. These are very familiar passages to all who believe in the Second Coming. He spoke of alarming disturbances in earth and sky. He spoke of growing distrust between the nations. He spoke of the rise of false religious leaders. He particularly warned of those who would arise and teach that His return was to be in secret. “Don’t believe it,” Jesus said:

For the Son of Man will come like the lightning that flashes across the whole sky from the east to the west....and all the peoples of earth will weep as they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. The great trumpet will sound, and he will send out his angels to the four corners of the earth, and they will gather his chosen people from one end of the world to the other. Matthew 24:27, 30–31, GNT.

Now that is hardly the description of an invisible event. Quite to the contrary, John affirmed very clearly in the last book in the Bible that “every eye will see him” come. Revelation 1:7, RSV.

Reacting to His Return

Now in the passage we read above from Matthew, Jesus speaks of all the people on earth weeping as they see the Son of Man coming back. But other passages tell us that not everyone will be weeping. Those who have learned to trust Him will be very glad to see Him come. This was clearly predicted way back in the days of Isaiah: “In that day they will say, ‘Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.’” Isaiah 25:9, NIV.

While many will rejoice when Jesus returns, most of the world will have turned against God (Revelation 13:8). And because they have not learned to trust Jesus, they will flee from Him in terror, even though He will come back in human form: “They called to the mountains and the

rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!'" Revelation 6:16, NIV. How could they possibly flee from gentle Jesus, meek and mild? While He does come back in majesty and power, there is still no need to be afraid. But Satan has so convinced his allies that God is arbitrary, vengeful, and severe, they will actually flee from Him as He cries after them, "Why will you die? How can I give you up? How can I let you go?" Ezekiel 18:31; Hosea 11:8. How thoroughly Satan will have convinced these people that his lies about God are the truth!

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Satan has so convinced his allies that God is arbitrary, vengeful, and severe, that they will actually flee from Him as He cries after them, "Why will you die? How can I give you up? How can I let you go?"

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What makes the difference between the reaction of the righteous and the reaction of the rest? Peter and Judas looked at the same gentle but majestic face of Jesus during His trial. One of them was moved to repentance (Matthew 26:75; Mark 14:72; Luke 22:61–62). The other one was moved to go out and take his own life (Matthew 26:47–50; 27:3–5; Acts 1:15–20). Our Lord is not two-faced. The difference is in us! Those who have learned to welcome the good news, the truth about our God, have learned to trust and admire God's wise and gracious ways. They will be ready to see Him come, even to see Him in His glory, and not be afraid. They will be awestruck, to be sure, but not scared of our God. Those who have despised and rejected this good news, on the other hand, will actually look at the One who died for them and, like Judas, be driven by that sight to suicidal action (Revelation 6:15–17).

The Gospel and the End

Of all the things that must happen before the conflict is over, Jesus especially emphasized one. He said that the gospel, the true picture of God, must go to the whole world before the End will come (Matthew 24:14; Mark 13:10). We can trust God to wait until His children all over this planet have had a chance to make an enlightened decision. In view of the confusion and the deception to come, God would not ask anyone to pass through that period without sufficient information upon which to base an intelligent choice.

This is consistent with the way God has treated angels and men ever since the Great Controversy began. He has always waited patiently for His children to make up their own minds. Think of how many centuries He waited for Israel to respond to the information brought by the prophetic messengers that He sent one after the other. It was not until the children of Israel had resisted the truth so long they were beyond even the Creator's power to restore, that He finally and reluctantly gave them up. But after the Israelites had been taken off to Babylonian captivity, God inspired the writer of 2 Chronicles to explain why He could no longer protect them, why He *had* to let them go:

The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people...but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets, till the wrath of the Lord rose against his people, till there was no remedy. 2 Chronicles 36:15-16, RSV.

It was not an arbitrary decision. They were misbehaving so grossly (as we know from Kings and Chronicles), He simply could not do anything more for them. He had to let them go into the discipline of captivity. And that's what the "wrath of God" means, God sadly giving Israel up. Fortunately, it was not the final awful destruction at the end of the world. But it *was* discipline. And though God seemed to have abandoned them, we know that He went with them, didn't He? He blessed Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, Esther, Mordecai, and Ezekiel while they were in captivity. But by and large, God could not work through His people as a nation at that time. He had to give them up into the discipline of captivity.

The Misunderstood Patience of God

Sometimes this patience of God has been misunderstood. Some think we can go on sinning with impunity because God is simply too kind and too patient to discipline us or to turn us over to destructive consequences. Paul warned that presuming on the kindness of God is a serious error: "Are you, perhaps, misinterpreting God's generosity and patient mercy towards you as weakness on his part? Don't you realise that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" Romans 2:4, *Phillips*.

God's patience has even puzzled His trusting children. In the days

of Habakkuk, they cried out to God, “Why don’t You do something? Why don’t You rescue us and help us in our predicament?” They were in despair that God seemed to be doing nothing (all based on Habakkuk 1:1–4, 13). And so the prophet Habakkuk was sent to urge them not to give up their faith, but to trust God to work out His plans in His own good time (Habakkuk 2:1–4). The problem, according to Micah, is that we often don’t understand God’s plan (Micah 4:12). Let us trust Him as we seek to understand His plan, and let Him do it in His own time and in His own way.

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We can trust God to wait until His children all over this planet have had a chance to make an enlightened decision. In view of the confusion and the deception to come, God would not ask anyone to pass through that period without sufficient information upon which to base an intelligent choice.

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The prophet Habakkuk sums up his message by saying: “(What God has planned) may seem slow in coming, but wait for it; it will certainly take place.” Habakkuk 2:3, GNT. In fact, God’s first message to Habakkuk was, “I am doing something, but you wouldn’t believe it if I told you” (based on Habakkuk 1:5). Habakkuk said, “Try me, Lord. Tell me” (based on Habakkuk 2:1). And the Lord did (Habakkuk 2:2–4). Habakkuk then indicated that he was willing to wait. That’s the source of that great verse, “The just, God’s friends, will live in faith, in trust” (based on Habakkuk 2:4). That verse was not about forgiveness. It was written about trusting God enough to be willing to wait. That great verse that Paul quoted in Romans (1:16–17) is a most appropriate one for those who wonder why the Lord still waits.

In these last days, God’s patience even gives His enemies an opportunity to misinterpret it as weakness. They scoff at God’s apparent inability to bring the conflict to a successful conclusion. This issue is addressed in the whole of 2 Peter 3. Peter warns that:

In the last days there will come men who scoff at religion and live self-indulgent lives, and they will say: “Where now is the promise of his coming? Our fathers have been laid to their rest, but still

everything continues as it has always been since the world began.” 2 Peter 3:3–4, NEB.

Doesn't that sound like the doctrine of uniformitarianism? Nothing has ever changed and nothing ever will. But that is not the real reason for the delay:

It is not that the Lord is slow in fulfilling his promise, as some suppose, but that he is very patient with you, because it is not his will for any to be lost, but for all to come to repentance. 2 Peter 3:9, NEB.

Then Peter refers to Paul's earlier advice in Romans 2:4: "Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you." 2 Peter 3:15, NIV. God's patience is often misunderstood.

The Embarrassing Patience of God

God's incredible graciousness has even been an embarrassment to some of His people. Do you remember when the prophet Jonah was asked by God to go and give a serious message of warning to Nineveh? At first he ran away. Later, under considerable pressure, he went and delivered his message. He was hardly a "missionary volunteer." Think of the pressure the Lord had to put on Jonah to get him to go to Nineveh and deliver a very serious message to a very dangerous people. Jonah walked the streets and said, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be destroyed" (based on Jonah 3:4).

Then he went out and sat down on a hillside nearby to watch the city come to its end (Jonah 4:5). But it didn't. The people of Nineveh repented, and the city was not destroyed (Jonah 3:10). And Jonah complained angrily to God. He said:

Lord, didn't I say before I left home that this is just what you would do? That's why I did my best to run away to Spain! I knew that you are a loving and merciful God, always patient, always kind, and always ready to change your mind and not punish. Now then, Lord, let me die. I am better off dead than alive. Jonah 4:2–3, GNT.

Think how well this man knew God way back in Old Testament times! Those are words Isaiah, Jeremiah, Moses, or Abraham would have

been proud to speak. In fact, none of them used better words than that to talk about our God. But Jonah was ashamed. God's kindness had embarrassed him. He was so humiliated, his reputation as a reliable prophet was so destroyed, that he was prepared to die!

God reasoned with frustrated Jonah. "Have you no pity for these people? Aren't you glad that they have chosen to repent?" Jonah 4:4, 11. God even mentioned the cattle in the city at the end of the book (4:11). "Don't you care about them?" But Jonah was much more concerned about his own reputation. Moses, Abraham, Jeremiah, and Paul all announced themselves proud to know God as they did. They were proud of Him and proud of the good news. Jonah also knew God, but he was ashamed.

The Great Advent Movement

About a century and a half ago there arose, in various parts of the world, the growing conviction that the coming of Christ was very near. Bible students in many different churches began to see in certain remarkable events the fulfillment of some of the signs that Jesus had given to His disciples in Matthew, signs like: "The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky...." Matthew 24:29, NIV.

They saw the fulfillment of this verse in the darkening of the sun and moon on May 19, 1780, and the remarkable falling of the stars on November 13, 1833. They combined these observations with their study of prophecies in Daniel and Revelation that pointed to important events that would occur in 1798 and 1844. They saw in all these things an accumulation of evidence that the long-looked-for advent was very near. Though some are now puzzled about these signs and dates, that was when the great second-advent movement did begin. It was precipitated when all those remarkable signs and prophetic periods seemed to come together. It was not just one date, one event, or one piece of evidence. It was all that evidence combined. That's the way God has always sought to convince us throughout the history of the conflict. Not just a little here and a little there, but an accumulation of evidence.

Some of those eager "adventists" were led by their study of the prophetic times and the heavenly evidences to begin giving special attention to the three angels' messages in Revelation 14. They came to the conclusion that the time had arrived for these three messages of warning and invitation to be given to the whole world. They undertook a very

bold venture. The excitement and the disappointment of those days are all part of religious history. There are millions of Christians in the world today who still agree that those early adventists had indeed seen God's signal that the Second Coming was near. They didn't read it correctly at first. It was not a signal to pack for the trip up to Heaven. Rather, it was a call from God to prepare the whole world for His coming. That's why we are still here, because we haven't completed the task.

Time has continued much longer than the early adventists expected. The signs that so stirred them occurred hundreds of years ago. But are we surprised or even ashamed that our God would be willing to wait this long? Are we more concerned about our reputation or His? The good news, the gospel, is not about us.

Sometimes I think we make that mistake. We act as if the good news were about us, but it's not. The good news is about our God. Now if our failure to complete the task has contributed to the long delay, then we deserve to be ashamed. But the longer God waits, the more gracious He looks. His delay only confirms the good news. The delay should lead us to speak with pride about our God and not to make the awful mistake that Jonah made.

You see, God needs better witnesses than Jonah proved to be. Reluctant teachers of the truth, moved only by fear or obligation, are themselves a very sad denial of the good news. God is waiting for people who, in the words of Peter: "Look eagerly for the coming of the Day of God and work to hasten it on." 2 Peter 3:12, NEB.

How Long Will God Have to Wait?

That leads us to the question, how much longer do you think God will have to wait? Well, we can trust God to wait just as long as there is hope for anyone. We can also trust God not to wait a moment longer than makes sense. After all, who longs more than God to bring everything to an end, recreate this world, and give it to His trusting saints? When, then, will it end? Only God, the One who reads our every thought, will know when all final decisions have been made. That's why Jesus gave this advice in Matthew: "So then, you also must always be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you are not expecting him." Matthew 24:44, GNT.

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God never asks us to believe without evidence. He does not offer claims, but rather demonstration, and this takes time.

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We are not entirely in the dark about this, however. Paul counsels us in 1 Thessalonians: “But you, brothers, are not living in darkness, and so the day will not like a thief take you by surprise.” 1 Thessalonians 5:4, *Kleist and Lilly*. You see, like the angels, we do not know the exact day or hour. But we do know what *will* take place before the End comes. We can count on it. After all these years and after paying such a price, God is not about to change His way of leading the family. Nor is He about to fail. Consistent with the way God has always handled this conflict in the family, He never asks us to believe without evidence. He does not offer claims, but rather demonstration, and this takes time. We know that God will not come until the world has been warned. And He will not come until His children are ready. But when they are ready, He will waste no time. He will come.

So how soon do *you* think the conflict will be over?

Questions and Answers

Louis Venden: Our question in this chapter has been, “How Soon Will the Conflict Be Over?” From what you have said, the close of the conflict seems to be tied in very closely with the Second Coming of Christ. But is that really the end of the conflict? Aren’t there some other very important events, such as the Millennium and the destruction of the wicked, that are part of what we might call “the conflict”?

Graham Maxwell: That’s true. There are major events that come after the Second Coming. But there is a sense in which the Second Coming really *does* mark the end of the conflict, because the key to the conflict is not a physical war in which the powers of heaven are arrayed against the powers of earth. Rather, the essential conflict is in the minds of God’s children throughout the universe. And the Second Coming means it’s all over in that sense. The loyal are committed forever to loyalty, and the disloyal are committed forever to their rebellious rejection of God. The important conflict is the one that takes place in our minds.

We’ve talked about how the most essential aspect of the conflict is for God to demonstrate the truth about Himself. Some will object, “That doesn’t make *us* very important.” But if His demonstration does not lead some of us to inner conviction, He’s failed. So we are not just pawns. He is trying to win us. We are very much involved in this conflict. It is not just heavenly, this war is being fought in the minds of God’s own children.

Lou: This takes us all the way back to the first chapter, the one about the nature of the conflict. If it were a struggle about power or armies, God could have settled such a conflict in one minute. Instead, it is a struggle for decisions related to trust.

Graham: So we are not just spectators of the conflict. We are very much involved, and we are coming to understand some of the most important questions about Him.

Lou: Since we're talking about the End, it reminds me of the first letter of John: "Children, it is the last hour. We know that it is the last hour" (based on 1 John 2:18). Was John wrong?

Graham: All the Bible writers who deal with the subject describe the End as very near. I'm thinking of Joel and of Jesus Himself, who both said the End was very near. One could also point to the statement in Peter, "With the Lord a thousand years are as a day, and a day is as a thousand years" (based on 2 Peter 3:8). Then John saw signs of antichrist in the apostasy of some key people in the Church, and that led him to believe that the End was near (1 John 2:18-19). And the impending death of John (he was in his nineties) also suggested it could have been near (John 21:20-23).

One night, perhaps soon after writing his letters, John fell asleep in death. When he wakes up, from the most refreshing sleep ever, it will be the Second Coming! Now, he might have some questions about the timing of the End at that point, but I doubt he will have any complaints. And while he didn't see the great closing events before the Second Coming, he will get to witness everything from then on: the Millennium, the Third Coming, the re-creation of the world (Revelation 20 and 21). John won't miss any of that. All he will really miss are the troubles of the End-time (Daniel 12:1; Revelation 7:14). As we have discussed before, the saints who fall asleep before the Lord comes will arise in time for everything that really matters. They will even rise first (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Lou: John talks about the Antichrist in his letters (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 1:7). What is the Antichrist? What do we mean by that term?

Graham: "Anti" suggests opposition, and that opposition is expressed in many ways. The most destructive way is not open opposition but subtle misrepresentation. If anyone misrepresents Christ, he is an "anti-Christ."

Lou: So it's not just one person in all the history of the world.

Graham: There are many, many antichrists. Already in John's day

many antichrists had appeared (1 John 2:18). The spirit of antichrist has been working all these hundreds and thousands of years. I believe the End has always been very, very near. If the conditions had been met, everything would have ended much sooner.

Lou: As Jesus was talking to His disciples on the Mount of Olives, He said He didn't know the time, the day, nor the hour (Matthew 24:36) of His Coming. That statement was true then. Is it still true? Does Jesus not know now?

Graham: I would understand that He's taken back all His kingly power, and so He knows now. According to Philippians 2:6, when He was here He truly "emptied Himself." He lived as a human to show that humans, by the power of God, can lead good lives. He used no power that we cannot use. So I accept what He said then. He really didn't know at that time, but He does know now.

I'm impressed, though, that He says the Father knows. Some wonder how much the Father can know about the future. After all, if the conflict is in our minds, if the conflict is over trust, then the conflict is about moral choices. So Jesus would actually be saying, "The Father knows when the world will have made up its mind and will have made these moral choices." This is my basis for believing that God can fore-know our moral choices. If He did not know them, how could He know the day or the hour when the conflict will be over?

Lou: You talked about the signs in the sun, moon (1780 A.D.) and stars (1833 A.D.), and these events seem rather long ago now. Didn't Jesus also talk about "this generation"? Matthew 24:34. Wouldn't the generation that saw some of these signs be the one that wouldn't pass away? If you're right about the dates of these signs, was Jesus wrong about "this generation"?

Graham: I think I know about twelve different explanations of "this generation." And they're all an attempt to extend it longer and longer. I remember when some thought it was good news to read in the paper that somebody living in Outer Mongolia had made it to his 167th birthday. And people said, "Oh good, that generation is still alive!" I believe that generation is long since gone. I would have to put this with similar expressions in the Bible. It means we could have completed the work back in those days. God has always held out these kinds of possibilities to us. We could have done it, but we didn't. I believe that the generation that saw those signs should have seen the End.

Lou: Is it possible that there are still more signs that we should be

looking for? For example, you didn't mention Daniel 12:4, "Knowledge shall be increased, and men and women shall run to and fro."

Graham: Yes, the beauty of that one is that it can be constantly updated as knowledge and travel continue to increase. It is very interesting to look at the pictures on the old *Signs of the Times* magazine that Dad edited for so long. You see in the earlier covers men running to and fro in antiquated Model-T automobiles and even before that in antiquated locomotives. But periodically they had to send the word out to the Art Department, "Update this, because people are now running a little faster to and fro, and knowledge keeps increasing." And you can see the evolution of the airplane as well as the automobile. And then, of course, when the first rocket went up and Sputnik was going around, the word had to go out to the Art Department, "Update Daniel 12:4 again." Anything that can be updated for hundreds of years isn't much use as a sign, even if an increase of knowledge and transportation is supposed to tell us that the End is near.

So I have to go back and read Daniel 12:4 again. The text is saying that knowledge of the prophecies of the book of Daniel will increase as a result of people urgently searching. The words used in Daniel are the same as those used in Amos 8:11-12, "There will be a famine for the Word. People will be running to and fro looking for it but they will not find it." So in the context of Daniel 12 in the Hebrew, I believe this means that those prophecies in Daniel, which were sealed up until the Time of the End, would then be studied afresh. And as a result of that study, people would come to an understanding of the predictions in Daniel, and a great second-advent movement would begin. And this is exactly what happened. So I would date the fulfillment of Daniel 12:4 around 1798, when the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation were receiving new attention. This prophecy belongs at the same time as the heavenly signs we were talking about.

Lou: Talking about fulfilled prophecies reminds me of a question one of our listeners wrote out very nicely for us. He says, "What answer might I give my neighbor who believes that Israel will once again become a great nation? There are many unfulfilled promises to Israel. He believes that these promises have yet to be fulfilled, and he bases his beliefs on Jeremiah 31:35-36; Isaiah 2:2-5; Romans 11, and Isaiah 31. And this neighbor does not accept these promises in the Old Testament as conditional, ending when Christ died. He says, 'God will keep His promises to Abraham.'" Here's someone who thinks that the things that are happen-

ing to the country of Israel must be tied in with the events we are talking about.

Graham: Well, what I like is his selection of verses. They are all excellent verses. And if one were to lay those side by side, all of them express some qualifications. For example, in Romans Paul says, “Not all the physical descendants of Abraham are real Israelites; only the children of the promise” (Romans 9:6–8). And Isaiah says that though the children be “as the sand of the sea for multitude, only a remnant will be saved” (Isaiah 10:22), because only a remnant will respond. And Jeremiah says, “Only those who have My law written in the heart will be My loyal children” (Jeremiah 31:33).

Every one of those biblical writers suggests that many of Abraham’s physical children will not be among God’s loyal people. Paul, for example, says that only those whose hearts are circumcised will be regarded as true Israelites (Romans 2:26–29). So I think if one were to look carefully at the passages listed there, one would have the answer. I would not look to what’s happening in Israel today as a fulfillment of prophecy. God is looking at the state of Israel today as He looks at all the other people in the world; if they trust Him, all will be well.

Lou: You mentioned that the coming of Christ, in one sense, has been near for centuries. Do you think this delay of His coming has caught God by surprise?

Graham: Your comment makes me remember the statement, “My Lord delayeth His coming” (Matthew 24:48; Luke 12:45). It’s thought to be a bad thing to say. But in the story, the Lord *did* delay His coming. What was bad was not the delay itself, but that the servant in the story began misbehaving as the Lord delayed His coming. The Lord has in mercy delayed His coming. The Bible foresees this many, many times. One of these is Jesus’ story of the ten girls waiting for a wedding (Matthew 25:1–13). The bridegroom delayed, and they all slept, even the saintly five. Another example is the text about the four winds being held back (Revelation 7:1–3). They are held until an angel stands and says, “There shall be no more delay” (Revelation 10:6). Second Peter 3 not only predicts a delay, but explains the delay. The Bible very clearly prepares us for delay, but we must not misunderstand it. God hasn’t been caught by surprise.

Lou: As I mentioned earlier, I have noticed that you sometimes speak about “early adventist believers,” with a small “a.” I guess I’m so used to seeing it with a large “A” I was wondering what you meant.

Graham: I deliberately use a little “a” because there are many other “adventists” besides Seventh-day Adventists. We’ve been rather possessive about that name. But there are many “adventists” in other denominations, adventists in the sense that they are anticipating the Advent. So “adventist” with a little “a” is not referring to a denomination.

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*The Bible very clearly prepares us for delay, God hasn't
been caught by surprise.*

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Lou: You and I are both Adventists with a big “A.” That is, we belong to a church that wants to emphasize the return of Christ by including that truth in its name. You grew up, as I did, with our dads talking about the End being near. I can remember as a small boy reading that magazine your father edited so capably for many years, *Signs of the Times*. And I just can’t help but ask you this question. With all of that background, do you still believe that the End is near? Do you really think Jesus is coming soon?

Graham: I asked my father that. I heard him preach the nearness of the End for fifty-five years. When I was a small boy, I used to go around England with my father, and I would sing and read the Scriptures. He would preach on the nearness of the End. He always preached on the nearness of the End. So just before he died, I asked him, “Do you still believe it after all these years?” He said, “Had I seen and known all the things we’ve seen and learned these last few years, I would have preached it with much greater vigor.” So Dad was absolutely convinced. But it is also true that God is waiting, as we could count on Him to do. God’s waiting is even evidence of the good news; He is willing to wait even though He’s so eager to terminate things.

Lou: I had the privilege of being your father’s pastor for a couple of years up there in Mountain View, and I was always blessed by his vigorous conviction and confidence in the soon coming of Christ. And I came to the conclusion that your father and my father were looking for the return of Someone they loved deeply and trusted most profoundly.

Graham: Even my grandfather was the same. He died at ninety-five, still confident in Jesus’ soon return. So I’ve grown up hearing about the nearness of the End all my life.

Lou: They were not just looking for something to happen; they

were looking for Someone they wanted to come.

Graham: You can tell that the Uncle Arthur who wrote *Bedtime Stories* obviously liked God.

Lou: That's right. But let me ask you this. Did you expect things would take as long as they have?

Graham: Well, we thought it was almost a lack of faith to suggest things could take longer than five or ten years.

Lou: When you and I were young, it didn't seem possible we'd still be here. What leads you now to think of the End as near and the Lord's coming as something that may happen soon?

Graham: One way would be to go through the biblical description of the events to occur and look for evidence of those. Another way would be thinking of the larger, great controversy view. God is consistent with Himself, His government, and the way He handles things. He is consistent in the way He treats His family, the way He treats the opposition, and the way He wants to make things crystal clear. He will end things in a certain way. So I'm looking for things to end that way. For example, the gospel is going to all the world (Matthew 24:14). But it's hard to measure that in some ways.

Here is a more measurable evidence of His soon return. The good news is based on the Bible. People have to be able to get hold of the Scriptures. And never has the Bible been so readily available or so readable as it is now. A key condition of the End is the Bible getting out to the world. The opportunity to know the truth about God is increasing.

Another evidence would be that God will not release the four winds of calamity until His people are settled into the truth (Revelation 7:1-3). If I should see Him apparently releasing them, it would suggest His friends are settling into the truth. Some of the things going on in the world today make one wonder if the four angels are releasing their hold.

There's another important indicator. People in the world need to realize their freedom to ask questions, to make up their own minds. They cannot accept dictated truth about God. They need to think for themselves. And I sense a great longing for freedom all over the world. Often people don't know how to handle it at first, but the desire for freedom around the world is an important indication. There are also increasing attempts to stifle freedom in certain parts of the world. Freedom is the essence of this thing. People must recognize their right to weigh the evidence for themselves.

But maybe most of all, I would look for the counterfeit. Satan's final

effort to deceive will be a brilliant counterfeit. I think seeing the counterfeit developing would be the most troubling thing.

Lou: In terms of counterfeits today, which do you see as the most serious threat?

Graham: I don't see the counterfeit as open opposition or a black and white issue. The counterfeit is going to be something very, very close to the truth. The Bible speaks of a counterfeit gospel going to all the world, the Holy Spirit being poured out, and people seeing wondrous things (Revelation 13:13-14; 16:13-14). And I think, without indicting anyone in particular, there is a vast counterfeit spiritual revival sweeping the world. There are many innocent people caught up in it, and they're looking for the truth.

The emphasis in this counterfeit revival, however, is not on the truth. It's not on weighing the evidence in Scripture. It isn't even about God. It's all about ourselves. It's all about our feelings. And there is great emphasis in this kind of religion on "getting in touch with your feelings." We think about ourselves too much as it is. There's such an emphasis on feeling in this kind of religion, feeling the power coming up through you, from your feet on up to your head.

The gospel, to the contrary, is best apprehended the other way around. It should come through the head first. The truth is apprehended by the mind, a mind that is sanctified by the Spirit of Truth. There will be great feeling in true faith, but to start out focused on feeling is very hazardous. The good news is "get in touch with God," not with your feelings. A religion of feelings is winsome, there's lots of love, and tears are shed, with miracles of healing and apparent conversion. The deception will be very close to the truth. But as a friend of ours once said, "I am afraid of anything that would have a tendency to turn the mind away from the solid evidences of the truth as revealed in God's Word. I am afraid of it. I am afraid of it. We must bring our minds within the bounds of reason, lest the enemy so come in as to set everything in a disorderly way." Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, vol. 2, 43.

Lou: Just to clarify, at the beginning of your previous comment you said that the conflict wasn't a matter of black and white. You weren't talking about a racial difference, were you?

Graham: No. I was talking about counterfeits coming in with shades of understanding and deception. Satan will come as if he were Christ, so the counterfeit will seem Christian.

Lou: What do you think is the greatest cause for the delay? Are we

contributing to this? You have spoken about God's patience and how the delay really makes God look good. Where might we fit into this?

Graham: We might be candidates for the Kingdom but are not giving the message that must be heard. I think the greatest cause of the delay is that we are giving a beginning message all the time and not a finishing message. We are giving a narrower view, a somewhat self-centered view. We are leading people to be gratefully preoccupied with their own salvation. We are grateful for what God has done for us, yet we are preoccupied with ourselves at another level. The finishing message, the great announcement to the world that will prepare the world for the deception, is about God. We've got to talk about the bigger picture, the issues in the Great Controversy. We've got to help people understand the whole picture in Scripture. That's the finishing message. But meanwhile, we're still using emergency measures to get people to be reverent and to behave. As long as we have to depend on rules and regulations and authority and pomp to keep people reverent, we're keeping them in a child-like condition. Until we can truly turn people free, we are not giving a finishing message.

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The counterfeit will not be open opposition or a black and white issue, it is going to be something very, very close to the truth.

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Lou: What kind of circumstances will eventually move people to embrace a bigger picture of God? Do you think it will take some fear-producing event, a world catastrophe, or something like that?

Graham: That is often suggested as a catalyst, but fear is more the experience at the foot of Sinai. Fear gets one started. Fear is no way to finish. How the Lord will bring this about, I don't know. Insurance policies sometimes mention "acts of God." But when the opportunity comes, will we be ready to take advantage of it? When people want to hear the truth about God, will we be ready to help them find it?

Lou: What's the best way to prepare for this, to take advantage of these opportunities?

Graham: I think it is understanding the importance of this larger, great controversy view—the truth about our God. Since that is to be found in all sixty-six books of the Bible, there is nothing more practical and essential than learning to read the Bible as a whole. We need a

tremendous revival of studying the entire Bible, all of it, every story. We need to take the Bible and read it through and through to get this larger view and decide whether we like it or not. And if we're proud of it, it will show through in the way we speak. We will not talk so much about ourselves, but about our God. Then when the opportunity comes, we will be ready.

Lou: At a recent funeral service, you shared your conviction about the nearness of Jesus' return. He is coming soon. Won't you review that for us here? What do you mean when you say that? You used to preach the same years ago, so, "How near is near?"

Graham: Actually, I used that title about forty years ago up at Pacific Union College: "How Near is Near?" I think historically the great event that is coming is just around the corner, because what needs to be done could be done. And I think the increase of knowledge, which Daniel 12:4 foretold, is occurring. Look at the technology now for communicating with the whole world, incredible technology.

It may be possible to communicate with the whole world and give them this picture. On the other hand, the Second Coming is as near as our last moment of breath. And that's why I think of it at funerals. When a loved one dies, the next moment of consciousness will put that person face to face with the Lord at the Second Coming. And I love the passage in Thessalonians which says that if someone dies before the Lord comes, they will not have missed anything, they will arise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17).

More important than knowing when the End is coming is to trust God. If I should die tonight, I want to die His trusting child, because then I will arise His trusting child. I'll have no complaints, lots of questions, but no complaints. We might even say, "I kind of wanted to live through the final events." I think Paul did. He felt torn between staying to help the Corinthians and his desire to be with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8-9). He didn't believe in the immortality of the soul. He knew that as a Roman citizen, when his head was cut off with that sharp sword, in the next instant of consciousness he'd be face to face with the One he'd been preaching about with such pride. He had no complaints.

One way or the other, the End is really very near. Especially in a medical center, as many people face the end of their lives, we have good news for them, "If you should fall asleep tonight; you will wake up the next moment from a dreamless sleep face to face with the Lord." That's

how near it is for us personally. But I believe the big, global event is also near.

Lou: We're almost at the end of the book, the last chapter explores the final outcome of the conflict.

Chapter Twenty

At Peace with our Heavenly Father

We began this book by remembering that there once was peace throughout the universe. There was peace because all the members of God's vast family trusted each other. They trusted their heavenly Father, and He, in turn, could safely trust in them. But then a war began in heaven, a conflict of distrust. An adversary leveled false charges against God, and God began His long and patient demonstration of the truth. This conflict was not over mere obedience to the rules, but over the very character and government of God Himself. In this last chapter we explore the outcome of that great conflict, what it means to be truly at peace with God. The resolution of that conflict was and is costly, but the ultimate outcome will be worth the cost.

Peace Cannot Be Established by Force

Victory for God is more than the destruction of His enemies. He could have won that kind of victory very easily, by the exhibition of almighty power. But such a victory would be sad, since God's enemies have been His own beloved and misbehaving children. What victory would it be for God to destroy them? There will be no victory for God unless what went wrong has been set right, and peace in His family has been made eternally secure. God will not settle for a false peace based on force or fear, He desires a real peace based on freely given love and trust. How could He be satisfied with anything less from His children?

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There will be no victory for God unless what went wrong has been set right, and peace in His family has been made eternally secure.

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There could certainly be no peace if God were the kind of person Satan has made Him out to be — arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe. And yet there are explanations of salvation that seem based on the assumption that Satan's false picture of God is the truth. For example, "God is arbitrary," some will say, "but as Sovereign He has the right to be." "God takes vengeance," others will say, "but for Him we should call it justice."

Few would dare say that God is unforgiving and severe, yet they imply the same by urging the necessity of a friend up there to plead with God to forgive and heal. If God is like that, the mere adjustment of our legal standing would be like a presidential pardon. It would hardly bring peace between God and His misbehaving children. While He might choose to forgive under certain circumstances, peace with a God who is arbitrary, vengeful, and severe would be little more than a ceasefire, a temporary truce.

The Basis for Genuine Peace

Paul explained to early Christians that sinners *can* be restored to genuine peace with God: “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, *we have peace* [emphasis supplied] with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Romans 5:1, RSV. According to this translation, peace is a present and ongoing reality for those who have been set right by God. But other versions translate the key phrase, “Let us have peace,” or something similar. According to that reading, we have justification first and then seek for peace afterwards as an additional blessing. Is that how things work or does justification in and of itself bring peace?

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*God will not settle for a false peace based on force or fear,
He desires a real peace based on freely given love and
trust.*

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I like it when translators combine the best of both options, as in “let us go on having peace.” Justification brings us peace. So let’s go on having it. Such a reading is supported by Moffatt, “Let us enjoy the peace we have.” And Montgomery renders it, “Let us continue to enjoy the peace we have.” And Phillips translates it, “Let us grasp the fact that we have peace.” That *really* combines the two, doesn’t it? Justification does indeed bring peace, which indicates that it must be more than mere pardon or the adjustment of our legal standing.

Have you ever wronged someone, been very generously forgiven, and then been embarrassed to meet that person again? Would God want us to avoid Him in the hereafter because He has been so forgiving? Would we be uncomfortable in His presence, fearing that He might bring up the subject of our sinful past? Mere pardon is no guarantee that He won’t do that. But God not only forgives, He treats us as if we had

never sinned. He treats us as if we had always been His loyal children.

How do we know that to be true? Because of God's promise (Jeremiah 31:34)? But a promise is only a claim. Is there direct evidence in Scripture that God not only forgives us, but treats us as if we had always been His loyal children? Look how God spoke to Solomon about his father David: "...walk before me in integrity of heart and uprightness, as David your father did." 1 Kings 9:3-4, NIV. Integrity of heart? Uprightness? Think of all the things that David did! And yet, because David had been set right with God, and had been won back to trust, and had received a new heart and a right spirit, God describes sinful David as if he had always been His loyal son! He did it for David, and He is willing to do it for every one of us. Now *that* is the experience of justification!

Since that Latin term, justification, has come to have such a narrow, legal connotation in theological circles, I suggest we use different English terms such as "set right" or "put right" with God. Jesus came to bring peace with God. Not by paying some legal penalty so God would not have to kill us. Jesus brought peace with God by showing us the truth about God; that there is no need to be afraid. God will indeed give up those who refuse to trust Him, who turn down the truth, who are unwilling to listen and unwilling to let Him heal them. And they will die, not as a penalty, but as a consequence. God will *not* torture His dying children to death.

What Genuine Peace Cost

Jesus also brought peace, not by assuring us that He would be our friend in court, but by showing us there is no need for Him to plead with the Father in our behalf, for the Father is just as much our friend. The only way to set us right, keep us right, and restore us back to peace with God, was for Jesus to demonstrate, at great cost, the truth about His Father. As one of God's best friends has expressed: "...the whole purpose of (Christ's) own mission on earth (was) to set men right through the revelation of God" (Ellen G. White, "God Made Manifest in Christ," *Signs of the Times*, January 20, 1890). This is the great truth that sets us free. This is the truth that brings everlasting peace throughout the universe.

We know what it cost to demonstrate this truth. You may recall Chapter Eight, "The Most Costly and Convincing Evidence," the chapter about the meaning of Christ's suffering and death. There we looked

at Colossians: “Through him God chose to reconcile the whole universe to himself, making peace through the shedding of his blood upon the cross.” Colossians 1:20, NEB. Christ died for the whole universe, even for the loyal angels, to answer their questions.

The Extent of Peace Today

How successful has God been in restoring peace to His universe? Does peace prevail in heaven? Read the whole book of Revelation. The heavenly beings never cease to celebrate God’s victory in the Great Controversy and how trustworthy and righteous He is. How about peace in the hereafter? Read the marvelous descriptions of the peace to come in Isaiah, many of the other prophetic books, and the last two chapters in Revelation. In contrast, how successful has God been in restoring peace on this earth? Evidently, not so much. Because many have chosen to twist or even reject the truth, it has not produced peace on earth. Instead, the truth has produced argument and debate—even to the point of violence and persecution. But Jesus warned us this would happen. He foresaw what His demonstration of the truth would cause:

I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. I came to set sons against their fathers, daughters against their mothers, daughters-in-law against their mothers-in-law; a man’s worst enemies will be the members of his own family. Matthew 10:34–36, GNT.

Look at what the members of Jesus’ own family did to Him: “He came to His home, and His own family did not welcome Him.” John 1:11, *Goodspeed*. In fact, they told Him that He must have had a devil to describe His Father in that way (John 8:48). And they killed Him in order to silence Him. We need to remember that the very ones who rejected Christ, and preferred Satan’s picture of God, were the most pious group of Sabbath-keeping, tithe-paying, health-reforming, Bible-studying “adventists” the world has ever known. Peter warns that those who accept the true picture of God may expect similar treatment to that which Christ experienced:

...do not be surprised at the painful test you are suffering... Rather be glad that you are sharing Christ’s sufferings... Happy are you if you are insulted because you are Christ’s followers; this means that the glorious Spirit, the Spirit of God, is resting on you. 1 Peter

4:12–14, GNT.

Who today would bring such trouble to those who hold the true picture of God? Could such trouble come again from the same sort of pious, Sabbath-keeping, tithe-paying, health-reforming, Bible-quoting “adventists” as before? It certainly could.

Wherever the Holy Spirit is received, however, He brings peace: “The Spirit, on the other hand, brings a harvest of love, joy, peace....” Galatians 5:22, *Weymouth*. These are the fruits of the Spirit. But how does the Holy Spirit bring peace? Does He bring peace by working on our feelings, like a divine tranquilizer? Or does the Holy Spirit bring peace by reminding us of the truth? Jesus explains this as follows:

... the Counselor, the Holy Spirit ... will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.... Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. John 14:26–27, NIV.

Then in John 15 and 16 He gave the reasons why, climaxing at the end of John 16 and the beginning of John 17:

I have told you all this so that you may find peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but be brave; I have conquered the world.... eternal life is this: to know you [the Father], the only true God.... I have glorified you on earth and finished the work that you gave me to do. John 16:33; 17:3–4, Jerusalem.

When Jesus spoke about conquering the world, He meant winning God’s case in the Great Controversy. Jesus’ work on earth was to reveal the truth about His Father’s character. His mission was to show that God is not the kind of person His enemies have made Him out to be. Jesus provided costly truth and evidence that is the basis of our freedom to make up our minds about God.

Peace Amidst the Struggle

Is it possible, however, to accept this truth, and be willing to give up everything to have this peace, and yet still experience un-peaceful struggling within ourselves? This troubles many. It troubled Paul and he

confesses that struggle in Romans 7, the whole chapter, but particularly toward the end:

I see a different law at work in my body—a law that fights against the law which my mind approves of...it makes me a prisoner...What an unhappy man I am! Who will rescue me? Romans 7:23–24, GNT.

All of Romans 8, in fact, describes that rescue. The chapter begins by Paul saying that God does not condemn His struggling children (Romans 8:1). He is not only our Father, but our Divine Physician, and He knows that the habits of a lifetime are not cured overnight. And so, as we struggle, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all on our side to help us and to heal us. Notice what Paul says at the end of this chapter:

If God is for us, who can be against us?...I am certain that...neither angels nor other heavenly rulers or powers...will ever be able to separate us from the love of God. Romans 8:31, 38–39, GNT.

If, in fact, we need discipline to overcome bad habits and learn new ones, God will give it to us. But when the discipline comes, we need to understand that God is not angry with us. He is disciplining us because He loves us. We will not allow the discipline to disturb our peace with God. Hebrews 12:9–11 tells us that God disciplines those He loves like a father disciplines his children. The author goes on to say: “No discipline seems pleasant at the time... Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace...” Hebrews 12:11, NIV. In fact, if we’ve been set right with God and we’ve been won back to love and trust, God can even turn our trials and troubles to our advantage: “We can be full of joy here and now even in our trials and troubles. These very things will give us patient endurance; this in turn will develop a mature character.” Romans 5:3–4, *Phillips*. The passage goes on to say that a mature character produces a hope that will never let us down (Romans 5:4). And that makes for great peace between us and our God.

Concluding Words

The picture of God we’ve been conversing about in this book is very good news to some of us. But it is far from new news. It was pre-

sented centuries ago throughout the sixty-six books of Scripture, even in Old Testament times: “You, Lord, give perfect peace to those who keep their purpose firm and put their trust in you.” Isaiah 26:3, GNT. As far back as the days of Isaiah, we are assured that if only we would trust our God, we would have this perfect peace. According to Hebrews, this good news has been presented as far back as the Exodus: “For we have heard the Good News, just as they did. They heard the message, but it did them no good, because when they heard it, they did not accept it with faith.” Hebrews 4:2, GNT.

So the good news can be turned down. God’s chosen people in the Promised Land, with whom prophet after prophet pleaded, were not, as a whole, won back to trust by the evidence God presented. They did not find this peace, this “Sabbath-like rest,” which is available to us when we are won back to trust (Hebrews 4:9). This picture of God will do *us* no good either if it does not win us back to trust and a willingness to listen to our God.

So at the close of our twenty conversations, what position have you taken in the great controversy over God’s character and government? Can you agree that God is not the kind of person His enemies have made Him out to be? That He is indeed an infinitely powerful, but an equally gracious person, who values nothing higher than our freedom and our peace, peace with God and with each other? Such peace is not produced by force or fear. That is why God pleads with us gently, but also urgently, in the words of Paul, “Let everyone be fully persuaded in his own mind” (Romans 14:5).

Questions and Answers

Louis Venden: I believe I hear you emphasizing that peace comes through knowing the truth about God and knowing that Satan’s charges against God are false. Satan’s charges against God have been summarized in five words that you’ve used again and again: God is accused of being arbitrary, exacting, vengeful, unforgiving, and severe. I’d like to address these five terms one by one.

Why can’t God be arbitrary? Don’t we say that God is sovereign? Didn’t God create the world? Can’t He run it any way He wants to?

Graham Maxwell: Absolutely, God is sovereign. It reminds me of our earlier discussion regarding Romans 9, the potter and the clay. In the larger, great controversy view, God is definitely sovereign. He created this universe precisely as He wished it to be, and He runs it precisely as

He wishes to run it, and He always will. But the question that flows from that is, *how* does God run the world? Is He arbitrary in His government? No, He values nothing higher than our freedom. If we want to say that God is arbitrary about anything, He's arbitrary about freedom. He would rather give up everything than give up freedom. That's how arbitrary He is on that.

Lou: I take it you're comfortable with the word "sovereign," as long as His being sovereign still allows us to be free. If God were arbitrary, it would mean we are not free.

Graham: That's right. God exercises His sovereignty in a way that respects our freedom.

Lou: What about the seventh-day Sabbath? Isn't it true "because God chose a particular day and that's all there is to it"?

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God exercises His sovereignty in a way that respects our freedom.

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Graham: It might seem arbitrary on God's part if all we had of the fourth commandment was, "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8). But we have much more than that. The fourth commandment also refers us back to creation (Exodus 20:11). That means the seventh-day Sabbath reminds us of all the evidence about God that we find there. The Sabbath is a reminder that God respects us and values nothing higher than our freedom. It reminds us of the Exodus from Egypt, and also the answers given during crucifixion week. There are so many reasons for the seventh-day Sabbath, it can hardly be regarded as evidence of His arbitrariness. He gave us the Sabbath to remind us of all the evidence that He is *not* arbitrary. So it seems to me almost perverse to suggest that the Sabbath is an arbitrary test of our obedience. Just the opposite! It's a monument to His not being arbitrary.

Lou: All right. Let's look at the accusation that God is exacting. I think of that reference in the book of James where it says, "If you break one of the Commandments you're guilty of *all*" [emphasis supplied] (James 2:10). That sounds rather exacting, doesn't it?

Graham: Yes, until we stop and take a closer look at the Ten Commandments. Until we look at Moses' summary of the Ten (Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Leviticus 19:18) repeated by Jesus (Matthew 22:36-40) and then by Paul (Romans 13:10). To love God with all our

heart and our neighbor as ourselves is the fulfilling of the law. It doesn't matter which one of the Ten you break. To break any one of the Ten is to show that you are not a loving person. So it's not about God being exacting. It doesn't matter which commandment you break. The Ten Commandments, as we have them, are really an expansion on the one, which is love (for God and for each other). Love cannot be commanded anyway.

Lou: All right then. What about God being vengeful? I think about the book of Hebrews. "Vengeance is Mine; I will repay" (Hebrews 10:30). What about the destruction that takes place at the End, for example? I think we've had more questions on this than on any other topic.

Graham: Well, since God says that, and He is clearly involved in the destruction at the End and in many incidents throughout Scripture, we have to look at all those stories very carefully. We need to ask ourselves the question, "When God exercises 'vengeance,' how does He do it?" As we have covered earlier, it may be in a form of discipline, or it may even result in Him winning people over rather than destroying them. And when it comes to the final events you have mentioned, *how* the wicked perish in the end is demonstrated by the cross.

Lou: What about the accusation that God is unforgiving? Consider Adam and Eve. It is their very first offense, and they have to leave their garden home. Why couldn't God have been the way Jesus said *we* ought to be, forgiving "seventy times seven"? Matthew 18:21-22. Why couldn't He have just said, "Well, you've made one mistake, that's your first, we'll overlook that"?

Graham: If sin were merely breaking the rules, if sin were merely a legal matter, He could have forgiven and let it go. In fact, I believe He did forgive Adam and Eve. He treated them like the father of the prodigal treated his son. The father forgave him even as he left home. He regarded him with forgiveness even as he wallowed in the pigpen. The problem with a focus only on forgiveness is that *sin changes people*. Forgiveness does no good in the long run unless one responds. Forgiveness by itself doesn't heal the damage done by sin. It is not that God is unforgiving, but that, having sinned, we are changed. And what is needed is not so much forgiveness as healing the damage done. So I would say that of course God forgave Adam and Eve. But that was not all they needed.

Lou: We're back to that crucial point that you made rather early on; it matters how we understand what went wrong, the sin problem.

Graham: Sin is not so much a legal problem as a real problem. It calls for healing and not just some kind of legal adjustment.

Lou: Back to Satan's accusation that God is severe. I can hear someone saying, "Isn't death too severe a punishment for not loving and obeying?"

Graham: If death were a penalty, that would be incredibly severe. But if it's a consequence, that's something else entirely. Death tells us that sin is a very serious matter. It changes us. But unfortunately, we often speak about death as an imposed sentence or penalty. That puts God in a very severe light. Death is ultimately a consequence of sin and not a penalty that God imposes on us.

Lou: In the book of Revelation, God is described as resurrecting the wicked at the end of the Millennium (Revelation 20:5-6). Why does God do this? They are wicked and rebellious. They are lost anyway. Why not just leave them asleep? Isn't it harsh to bring them back to life only to let them burn up?

Graham: I imagine the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah arising at the end of the Millennium (Revelation 20:5), looking around and saying, "Here we go again!" It seems cruel and inhumane to resurrect them, doesn't it? There has to be a purpose.

The word "millennium" means a thousand years. The Millennium of Revelation begins with the Second Coming of Jesus and the resurrection of the righteous (Revelation 20:4-6). At that time Jesus takes the righteous to heaven (John 14:1-3), while the wicked die and/or remain in their graves. At the end of the thousand years is the third coming of Jesus and the resurrection of the wicked.

Why would God resurrect the wicked after all that? What suffering that would cause! How terrible to be in the New Jerusalem and see one's loved ones outside (Revelation 20:7-10). God would only do this if it said something of very great importance that would contribute to our understanding and to the security of the universe. For example, we might wonder why Uncle Bill is not in the Kingdom. Uncle Bill was the one who said, "If you'd just prove it to me, I'd come in." And you see Uncle Bill out there. He is looking at the New Jerusalem. He sees Christ in His human form at the apex of the city. Here's all the evidence, plain to see, and Uncle Bill is not moved one bit. In fact, Revelation goes on to say that Satan moves among these rebels who have been resurrected and he deceives them into marching against the New Jerusalem as if to destroy Christ again (Revelation 20:8-9). And you will be able to say, "God,

your diagnosis was right. More time and more evidence would not have done Uncle Bill any good.” The cause of his death is something much more important than simply imposing a penalty for his refusal to believe. Uncle Bill is simply not safe to save. God shows him all the evidence at the end of the Millennium, and he still does not respond. You’ll weep when you see it, but Uncle Bill will not respond. So these events will be a final demonstration of the character of God and, by contrast, the characters of Satan and all who follow him.

Lou: What are the redeemed, those who are saved, doing during this thousand-year period? That’s a long period of time.

Graham: I like to remember what Peter said: “With the Lord a thousand years is like a day” (2 Peter 3:8). You could translate that “a millennium is like a day, and a day is like a millennium.” I don’t think we need to worry about the time. I think that a thousand years with the Lord will seem like a day. But there are important things that have to happen during that time. The loyal angels will have had a chance before the Second Coming to meet as a heavenly family and consider candidates for the Kingdom. That way our future neighbors and friends can be satisfied that it’s safe to admit former rebels like us into eternity. But what about us? We’ve not seen the evidence that they examined. I think during the Millennium those who have been adjudged safe to save will have their opportunity to ask questions, to see the evidence, to find out why their mother isn’t there. We would all find a loved one’s absence very sad. But God will be fair about it, He will show us the evidence so we can understand.

There’s something else that may need to happen during the Millennium. We will be preparing ourselves to face that awful scene when the wicked die in a fiery moment of destruction. We will have to see that someday. Are we ready to see it and not become afraid of God? Those of us who live to see Christ come, will have become so settled into the truth that we can see the seven last plagues and not become afraid of God. But think of all the babes in the truth who have been saved from the foot of Mount Sinai through the centuries. Think of the thief on the cross. Think of all the others who have not had time and evidence to become confirmed in this.

Everyone must be ready for that awesome day when God says to those inside the New Jerusalem, “Children, you know what’s coming next. Do you want to come out to the wall and watch? Or do you want to hide in the basement somewhere? I’m about to give My rebellious

children up, and untold numbers of them are going to die. And you know why I've waited so long." And so we stand, perhaps, and watch our God, as fire comes down from heaven and the glory of Him who is love consumes all that is out of harmony. And we will know that, as the wicked die, God will be crying: "Why will you die? How can I give you up? How can I let you go?" Hosea 11:8. He's no more angry with them than He was with His Son when He gave Him up in Gethsemane and on Calvary.

When it's all over, I can see God turning to us and saying, "How awful that was. But children, I have one last question to ask you all. Have I made you afraid? Because if I have, I've let it happen too soon, and I would have waited longer." But hopefully we will all be so settled into the truth that we will be able to draw close and say to God, "It's all right, there was no other way." And from then on there will be peace forever, in spite of that awful end. Are we ready to see that and not be made afraid? Because if it makes us afraid, then we'll serve Him from fear, and the obedience of fear produces the character of a rebel. If any of us serves God out of fear after that, God will still have the seeds of sin in His universe, and He will not have won the war. We would be back where it all began.

Lou: At the end of the book of Revelation there's that beautiful statement, "God will wipe away all tears from their eyes" (Revelation 21:4). It just struck me as you were talking that maybe we will need to wipe the tears even from God's eyes.

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

Lou: We have more questions in this area: "If God does not punish, then who sends the fire down from heaven on the wicked?" Revelation 20:9. You've already alluded to that. Also, "Who caused Ananias and Sapphira to fall dead?" Acts 5:1-11.

Graham: I would want to make a difference between two kinds of death. What happened to Ananias and Sapphira is what the Bible calls the first death, and they will be resurrected. Their future, in which resurrection they will arise, is between them and God. But what happened to Ananias and Sapphira is different from this awful death at the end. Now when fire comes down from God and consumes the resurrected wicked (Revelation 20:9), God is there, no doubt about it. But as we have discussed before, this "fire" is His life-giving glory which is described in

the Bible as having the appearance of fire (Ezekiel 1:26–27; Daniel 7:9–10; Revelation 4:5). In fact, if we were among the saved, we would have been living in this life-giving glory for a thousand years, and it won't have hurt anybody. It's only if we're willfully and rebelliously out of harmony with God that this glory is damaging. God in mercy has veiled this life-giving glory for our sake. His so-called "strange act" (Isaiah 28:21) is when He ceases to veil His life-giving glory. When this earth is no longer a dark place, and His glory fills the earth, all that is out of harmony is consumed. He doesn't turn His back on this. He's there. He's watching His children. It's His glory. But He's not torturing His dying children to death. That's the difference.

Lou: You once told me that we will bask in that glory for all eternity. We will never want it to go out.

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God in mercy has veiled His life-giving glory for our sakes. His "strange act" (Isaiah 28:21) is when He ceases to veil His life-giving glory. All that is out of harmony will then be consumed. But He's not torturing His dying children to death.

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Graham: Oh, I like the fact that this is everlasting fire. If the fire is God's glory, it had better not go out. We will live in this everlasting fire for eternity, but it's His life-giving glory.

Lou: Someone raised the same basic question about the Flood. "Are you saying God doesn't kill? What about the Flood?"

Graham: This is a similar question to the one about Ananias and Sapphira. The deaths at the time of the Flood belong to the first death. I see God bringing the Flood as an emergency measure, and a very serious one at that. The Flood was a very risky thing for Him to do, lest we serve Him from fear. And certainly the Flood didn't win their hearts. The survivors built a tower to escape Him not long after (Genesis 11:1–9). But He did it to preserve contact with the human race. Those who died in the Flood died the first death. And all who died in the Flood will be resurrected.

Lou: A related question: "How do we explain that God in the Old Testament told His people again and again to wipe out the enemy? Here are God's children being instructed by God to do this. How do you reconcile that with a loving God?"

Graham: That was truly an emergency measure. But before He did that, He said to the children of Israel, “When I take you out of Egypt, I’ll send My angel ahead of you. I’ll send hornets ahead of you. I’ll use the forces of nature to remove your enemies one way or the other. Let Me do it” (Exodus 23:23–30). But they didn’t trust Him on this, as with so many other things He sought to do for them. And so He stooped and met them where they were and helped them fight. But while He helped them, He still hated the fighting. How do we know? When David wanted to build the temple, God said, “You’re a great man as a warrior, but you’ve been a man of blood (1 Chronicles 28:3). That’s not My ideal,” and He went on record as not wanting the fighting. He never designed His people to fight their way into Canaan. But in their lack of faith, He helped them fight.

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We know who the accuser of the brethren is, the one who accuses them day and night before God (Revelation 12:10).

But we have sometimes made God the one who is against us.

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Lou: Here’s another question. “God has the power to take away our eternal life. But does He have the right to take away our life on this earth?” I think this question is talking about the first death that you referred to. Why should or would God ever want to interrupt our pursuit of happiness?

Graham: There are two things to consider there. Who determines what God’s rights are? As Sovereign, He’s going to do precisely as He wishes to. We don’t give Him His rights. However, the kind of sovereign He is, He does want His children to see Him as doing what is right. That is a great concern to Him. Does He have a right to intervene? I would say, if God had not intervened, we would have destroyed each other long ago. It isn’t a matter of whether He has a right to interfere with my pursuit of happiness; had He not intervened, there wouldn’t be any of us left to pursue happiness. The consequences of our own choices would long ago have destroyed us. So I’m glad He has intervened. He didn’t do it to deprive us of our freedom; He did it to *preserve* our freedom. But He has had to take emergency measures to do that.

Lou: This question touches on something you referred to in the first part of the chapter. There are texts (Romans 8:34; 1 Timothy 2:5;

Hebrews 7:25, etc.) which indicate that Christ intercedes with the Father. So this questioner says: “Here are the texts. Christ intercedes for us. Now, in what sense is that true?”

Graham: Well, we need to refer to the questions in Romans: “If God be for us, who can be against us?” Romans 8:31. “Who can bring any accusation?” Romans 8:33–34. But we have sometimes turned that around and made God the one who is against us. We need to remind ourselves who the accuser of the brethren is, the one who accuses them day and night before God (Revelation 12:10). Satan is the one who is against us. And Christ does meet his charges through intercession, for the enemy of God is our enemy, too.

There are times, though, where I think God has said: “I have given you priestly intercession, even My Son in between, because I know how scared you are of Me.” And so as an emergency measure He has sometimes spoken of Jesus coming in between. But we need to read John 16:26–27. Really, there is no need for anyone to intercede with the Father, not even the Son, because the Father Himself loves us. So we need to put all those passages together.

Lou: Our problem is making a distinction between Father and Son, isn't it? It is easy to think of Jesus as more kind and loving than the Father.

Graham: How sad when people come to that conclusion. And yet, if the Father sees us thinking the Son is kinder than He is, He's not jealous of His Son. He just wants us to get the message. Many of us will arrive in the Kingdom more comfortable with the Son than with the Father. And I keep imagining what it would be like to arrive in the Kingdom and say to the Son, “Thank You for begging the Father not to kill us.” And things like that. And by and by He will say, “Look, it's time you met My Father.” So He will take us into the Father's presence and we will stand there, maybe looking at the floor in fear. And the Son will say, “Look a little higher. Look into His face. What do you see?” And we will see a face that is just as kind as the face of the Son. When that time comes don't say, “Father, thank You for letting the Son persuade You not to kill me.” He wouldn't be angry about it, but He would know you still need a little work. He will want us to grow up, but He will be patient even then.

Lou: Let's shift gears with this question: “If God knows what we need, why do we have to pray in order to be provided with our needs?” That touches on a previous chapter in this book (Chapter Fifteen—

“Talking to God as a Friend”).

Graham: Yes. God provides us with what we need whether we pray or not (Matthew 5:45). That is what is so generous about Him. Does that mean that we should not pray? Of course not. Prayer is “conversation with God as with a friend,” and He really *is* our friend, so we will talk to Him about these things anyway. After all, prayer is more than just begging Him for today’s groceries.

Lou: That’s right, that isn’t the way we treat our wives or our friends, talking with them only when we need something! Here’s another interesting question: “Should we pray to the Holy Spirit?”

Graham: I think that would be most appropriate. Father, Son and Holy Spirit—all three are co-equally, co-eternally God. However, I think there’s special historical meaning in praying to the Father in the name of the Son. It is the Son who revealed the truth about the Father with the help and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit also helps us, because we don’t know how to pray as we should. He reminds us of God’s whole way of winning us back to the truth. So what I like to do is pray to the Father in the name of the Son, in grateful recognition for what He’s done, but with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Lou: I guess we don’t have to worry about the Holy Spirit getting His feelings hurt.

Graham: The members of the Godhead go out of Their way to honor each other.

Lou: You referred to the struggle that Romans 7 describes. What is this struggle? When is it? Is it before conversion, or is it after conversion?

Graham: Let me summarize what Paul says there: “The good that I would do, I don’t do; and all the evil that I don’t want to do, is what I do. I delight in the law of God in my inner man, but in my body I feel captive to the law of sin” (based on Romans 7:19–23). People say, “That couldn’t be a converted person.” And yet if he delights in the law of God, he sounds like a converted person. If you are struggling before conversion, if you are struggling during conversion, if you are struggling after conversion, if you are ever struggling, then look to Jesus Christ. It doesn’t really matter. It’s unnecessary to squabble about when the struggle occurs. Struggle is also mentioned in Romans 8, which all interpreters recognize as applying after conversion (Romans 8:18–25). Whenever you are struggling; before, during, or after conversion, be thankful to God for Jesus Christ our Lord.

Lou: Since we are talking about peace, it seems to me that human beings often live with a sense of guilt. Guilty people are surely not at peace with God. What is God's remedy for guilt?

Graham: What worries so many people about guilt is the fear that goes with it. "I just got caught with my hand in the cookie jar, what is He going to do to me?" There is a lot of fear mixed in there. There is also a loss of dignity and self-worth. The woman taken in adultery felt very guilty and very ashamed. And the first thing Jesus did was to restore her dignity and self-respect. He did that time after time. How can we act with dignity, as people created in God's image, if we have had our self-respect destroyed? Often, the chronic torture of unnecessary guilt is one of the negative consequences of the legal model.

In the great controversy model, the emphasis is on the truth about God. How does God regard His child who is in trouble? Look at the prodigal son. The father says, "Don't even finish your speech of repentance. Come home and get a shower and put on the best clothes I can give you. I'll even give you back your ring of authority" [access to his father's bank accounts]. By so doing the father endeavored to give him back his self-respect. And the son said, "But I am guilty; look what I have done!" And the father said, "Look, I'm willing to forget it if you will (Luke 15:17-22)."

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The real remedy for the anguish of guilt is the truth about God. The remedy for guilt is to know what God is like.

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Who was the one who wanted to rub the son's nose in his misdeeds from time to time? The pious older brother, of course. But as far as God is concerned, He's our physician, He doesn't want to talk about guilt. He doesn't even want to dwell long on forgiveness. He says, "Son, you're My patient; you've come home; you trust Me. Let's not waste any time on the past. Let's work from here on. I want to make you well. And if you're depressed about what you've done, it's going to retard your healing. So please forget about it the way I have." The real remedy for the anguish of guilt is the truth about God. The remedy for guilt is to know what God is like.

Lou: All right. We know what *God* gave up to have peace in His universe, but I guess I'd like to close with this question, What is it that *we* have to give up to really have peace?

Graham: There is a sense in which we don't have to give up a thing. The gospel is about God not about us. Yet, at another level, there are things we have to give up or they will get in the way of what God wants to do for us. We need to co-operate with the Great Physician. So we *do* have to give up prejudice, bias, and fixed opinions. We do have to give up our unwillingness to listen, a self-satisfied stubbornness that there can be no new ideas. We do have to be willing to investigate the evidence. But in the end, we don't give up a thing. The great good news about God is His gift to us. And I wonder sometimes how anybody could turn it down.

Think how the Son of God was the most skillful and persuasive teacher of the truth there will ever be, God Himself in human form. And He came to a very pious people who had bought into the Devil's picture of God. Driven by that understanding of God, they were doing many of the right things, but for the wrong reasons. They were moved by law and by fear. And in most cases, Jesus couldn't change their minds. But He did change a few minds, the very ones who gave us the marvelous picture of God we find in the New Testament.

Perhaps even today we have "dear idiots" scattered all over the planet, like the "dear idiots" of Galatia, who seemed to have a spell cast over them. Galatians 3:1, *Phillips*. We must realize the Devil is our foe. He does not want us to see the truth. He does not want the Great Physician to heal us. He does not want us to become friends of God. But the good news about God is too good to turn down. It is everything that the old English word "gospel" implies. What good news!

Lou: Someone once said, "The Gospel we preach must be the Gospel by which our own souls are saved." As we draw this book to a close, could you summarize your understanding of that gospel one last time?

Graham: For me, the heart of the gospel is this. God is not the kind of person His enemies have made Him out to be: arbitrary, unforgiving and severe. Jesus said, "If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father" (John 14:9). God is just as loving and trustworthy as His Son, just as willing to forgive and to heal. Though infinite in majesty and power, our Creator is an equally gracious person who values nothing higher than the freedom, dignity, and individuality of His intelligent creatures. He desires that their love, their faith, their willingness to listen and obey, may be freely given. He even prefers to regard us not as servants but as friends. This is the truth revealed through all the books of Scripture.

This is the everlasting good news that wins the trust and admiration of God's loyal children throughout the universe.

The Author

Graham Maxwell served as emeritus professor of New Testament at Loma Linda University for nearly three decades. He was born in England, attended college in California, and earned his Ph.D. in Biblical studies, New Testament, from the University of Chicago Divinity School.

His dissertation dealt with the elements of interpretation that have entered into the translation of the New Testament, especially the book of Romans. Romans continued to be a subject of his research and writing for many years. Other publications include *I Want to Be Free, You Can Trust the Bible: Why, After Many Translations, It Is Still the Word of God, Can God Be Trusted?, Be Careful Who You Trust!*, and *Servants or Friends? Another Look at God*.

For nineteen years he taught Bible and biblical languages to college and ministerial students at Pacific Union College. In 1961 he moved to Loma Linda to serve as director of the division of religion and teach Bible to medical, dental, and other professional students.

His favorite course was a year-long trip through the whole Bible to discover the picture of God in each of the sixty-six books. He taught this course over 135 times, not only in the classroom, but in churches and homes, to groups ranging in size from a dozen to 700.

People in 118 different countries have shared in this book by book study of the Bible with the help of recordings. But as one man wrote from the Falkland Islands, "I want you to know that I always read the book in the Bible before I listen to those recordings."

Maxwell watched the effect of such Bible study on over 10,000 people. "Something seems to happen," he said, "when people of all cultures discover in the Bible a consistent picture of God — an infinitely powerful but equally gracious Person, who values nothing higher than their freedom and friendship." That's what led to the writing of his books.

Maxwell taught a weekly Bible class of 250 members for nearly 50 years that was recorded and sent to over 1,000 addresses around the world.

Graham and Rosalyn, the girl he met in college, were married for 67 years. They had three daughters, seven grandchildren, and ten great-grandchildren.

The Editor

Jon Paulien is Professor of Religion and Director of the Center for Understanding World Religions at Loma Linda University. Formerly (2007–2019) he was Dean of the School of Religion. He is the author of over 30 books and more than two hundred articles, scholarly papers (Society of Biblical Literature, Chicago Society for Biblical Research, and others) and other publications. Jon is a specialist in the study of the Johannine literature in the New Testament (Gospel of John and Book of Revelation) and the intersection of faith with contemporary culture. He also takes special delight in seminars and presentations to non-specialists who can make practical use of the material in the real world. When not at work, Jon enjoys being with his wife Pamela and their three children and two grandchildren. He also enjoys travel, golf and photography when time permits.

The Moderator

Louis Venden graduated from La Sierra College in 1951, married Marjorie Lewis of Glendale, California two days later, and they began their ministry in Northern California right after the honeymoon. They have served in pastoral, evangelistic and teaching ministries: teaching at Japan Missionary College, the SDA Theological Seminary, La Sierra University, Pacific Union College and Loma Linda University's School of Religion. They pastored churches in Northern California, the Mountain View Church in Central California, the University Church in Loma Linda and the Pacific Union College Church.

While at the University Church in 1984, Lou had the opportunity to participate with Graham Maxwell in the extended series of videotaped presentations (*Conversations About God*) that formed the basis for this book.

His graduate studies have included an MA at Potomac University, an MDiv from the SDA Theological Seminary and a Ph.D. from Princeton Theological Seminary.

Lou and Marjorie returned to Southern California in August of 1996 where Lou served as Professor of Theology & Ministry with Loma Linda University's School of Religion and was appointed Emeritus Professor of Religion in July, 2003.

The Vendens have three daughters: Elizabeth Sutherland of Loma Linda, California; Susan Barrow of Woodinville, Washington; and Barbara Venden of Montrose, California. They are also the immensely pleased grandparents of Amy and Michael Sutherland and Jacob Charles and Henry Thomas Barrow.

Following are Lou's remembrances of Graham and the filming of *Conversations About God* in 1984.

As I Remember

Lou Venden - August 2013

I remember my dear friend, Graham Maxwell, and his family. These memories cover many years and include a host of times, places and events. They are a treasured part of Marjorie's and my pilgrim journey.

But the publication of this very significant volume takes me back especially to 1984—to twenty Friday evenings from January to June of that year. I had the privilege of being part of the series titled *Conversations About God*.

Graham sat on the platform in a comfortable chair by a table with a lamp and simply “talked to us.” He shared out of a lifetime of commitment to “speak well and truly of our heavenly Father.” He drew upon all sixty-six books in the biblical library and called us to keep our eyes on the One who said, “If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father” (John 14:9).

After his presentation of the evening's topic he invited me to come up and take the other chair by the table. We'd dialogue some, and then I'd introduce questions from the congregation. At our first session we drew upon queries he'd encountered earlier, but after that our audience really got into it with their written questions and comments.

During this series, as you can understand, we got together often to pray, then reflect on what had happened in the earlier meetings and consider the congregation's vigorous participation. It was a setting in which we also got to know each other well and became very good friends. We were each involved in many other things, but oh how I appreciated this special fellowship and planning time. I really enjoyed being with him!

I'm sure Graham would want to join me in paying a hearty tribute to a beloved band of sisters and brothers who gave themselves unsparingly to help make this series possible. I am awed by what I personally know of all they did to make it happen. The memory of their spirit, their unflagging zeal and sense of mission still warms my heart.

He would also want to say a big “thank you” to every person who attended these Friday evening gatherings. Their presence, interest and active involvement was so vital and encouraging.

Graham devoted his life to helping us know the “truth about God.” Beginning with the conflict in God's family he helps us understand what went wrong and what God is doing to make things right. He challenges

us to be sure about who is telling the truth—about who we believe and trust, and why. My hope is that his message through this volume will be Spirit blessed in spreading the everlasting Good News and leading us all into an ever deepening friendship with God.

Someone has said, “The Gospel we preach must be the Gospel by which our own souls are saved.” I’d like to bear witness to the truth that Graham spoke well about our heavenly Father. But just as important, whether in sunshine and shadows, on the mountain-top or in dark valleys, he lived a life anchored in God’s trustworthiness.

Dear Graham, in that glad morning of the resurrection I believe you’ll hear His commendation, “You have said of Me what is right” (Job 42:7).

Conversations About God

BIBLE REFERENCE SHEETS

Chapter One

The Conflict In God's Family

Another look at the biblical basis for understanding the plan of salvation as God's provision for restoring peace in His universe.

The Bible speaks of a war that began at the very center of God's family, and all of us have been caught up in the consequences of this revolt. The future of God's family depends upon the outcome of this war, upon God's successful resolution of the crisis of distrust. The Good News is that God has already won the war!

Bible passages included:

Revelation 12:7-12. "Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, who fought back with his angels; but the dragon was defeated, and he and his angels were not allowed to stay in heaven any longer. The huge dragon was thrown out — that ancient serpent, named the Devil, or Satan, that deceived the whole world. He was thrown down to earth, and all his angels with him."

"Then I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, 'Now God's salvation has come! Now God has shown his power as King! Now his Messiah has shown his authority! For the one who stood before our God and accused our brothers day and night has been thrown out of heaven. Our brothers won the victory over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the truth which they proclaimed; and they were willing to give up their lives and die. And so be glad, you heavens, and all you that live there! But how terrible for the earth and the sea! For the Devil has come down to you, and he is filled with rage, because he knows that he has only a little time left.'" GNT.

Isaiah 14:12-14. "How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High.'" RSV.

Matthew 4:8-11. "Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Begone, Satan! for [sic] it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'" Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and ministered to him." RSV.

Genesis 3:1-5. "Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat of any tree of the garden"?' And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you

touch it, lest you die.” 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, knowing good and evil.’” RSV.

Colossians 1:19-20. “For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.” RSV.

“For it was by God’s own decision that the Son has in himself the full nature of God. Through the Son, then, God decided to bring the whole universe back to himself. God made peace through his Son’s sacrificial death on the cross and so brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in heaven.” GNT.

Ephesians 1:9-10. “For he 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 fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.” RSV.

Ephesians 3:9-10. “...and to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places.” RSV.

1 Corinthians 4:9. “...we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men.” RSV.

John 12:32. “When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to me.” GNT.

Other passages that speak of Satan and his angels:

Job 1 and 2; Zechariah 3:1-2; Matthew 25:41; 2 Corinthians 11:14; 1 Peter 5:8; Jude 1:6.

Chapter Two

What Went Wrong in God's Universe

Another look at sin and its consequences in the larger setting of the Great Controversy.

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."

Bible passages included*:

1 John 3:4. "Everyone who commits sin commits lawlessness; sin is lawlessness." *Williams.*

James 4:17. "Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin." RSV.

Romans 14:23. "Any action that is not based on faith is a sin." *Moffat.*

"Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin." RSV.

"When we act apart from our faith we sin." *Phillips.*

Ezra 10:2. "We have broken faith with our God." RSV.

"We have been unfaithful to our God." NIV.

Numbers 20:12. "Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them." NIV.

Romans 3:10-18. "As the Scriptures say: 'There is no one who is righteous, no one who is wise or who worships God. All have turned away from God; they have all gone wrong; no one does what is right, not even one. Their words are full of deadly deceit; wicked lies roll off their tongues, and dangerous threats, like snake's poison, from their lips; their speech is filled with bitter curses. They are quick to hurt and kill; they leave ruin and destruction wherever they go. They have not known the path of peace, nor have they learned reverence for God.'" GNT.

Romans 1:21-23, 28-32. "They know God, but they do not give him the honor that belongs to him, nor do they thank him. Instead, their thoughts have become complete nonsense, and their empty minds are filled with darkness. They say they are wise, but they are fools; instead of worshiping the immortal God, they worship images made to look like mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles...."

"Because those people refuse to keep in mind the true knowledge about God, he has given them over to corrupted minds, so that they do the things that they should not do. They are filled with all kinds of wickedness, evil, greed, and vice; they are full of jealousy, murder, fighting, deceit, and malice. They gossip and speak evil of one another; they are hateful to God, insolent, proud, and boastful; they think of more ways to do evil; they disobey their parents; they have no conscience; they do not keep their promises, and they show no kindness

or pity for others. They know that God's law says that people who live in this way deserve death. Yet, not only do they continue to do these very things, but they even approve of others who do them." GNT.

Hosea 4:16-17. "Israel is as obstinate as a stubborn heifer. How can the Lord feed them now like lambs in a broad meadow? Ephraim is wedded to idolatry, let him alone." *Phillips*.

Hosea 5:4. "For their spirit is steeped in unfaithfulness and they know nothing of the Lord." *Phillips*.

Hosea 4:1, 12. "There is no honesty nor compassion nor knowledge of God. . . My people! Asking advice from a piece of wood and consulting a staff for instructions!" *Phillips*.

Romans 6:23. "Sin *pays* its servants: the wage is death." *Phillips*.

"For sin pays its wage — death." GNT.

James 1:14-15. "No, a man's temptation is due to the pull of his own inward desires, which greatly attract him. It is his own desire which conceives and gives birth to sin. And sin when fully grown produces death — make no mistake about that, brothers of mine!" *Phillips*.

Romans 3:3-4. "What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God's faithfulness? Not at all!" NIV.

Romans 8:3. "What the Law could not do . . . God did . . . by sending his own Son . . . to do away with sin." GNT.

"God dealt with sin by sending his own Son." *Jerusalem*.

Romans 5:1. "Now that we have been put right with God through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." GNT.

* James 1:14-15 was inadvertently not included in the presentation on which the book's main text is based.

Chapter Three

All God Asks Is Trust

Another look at the meaning and necessity of faith, in the larger setting of the Great Controversy.

There has been a breakdown of trust in God's universe—even to the point of war up in heaven and continuing misunderstanding and distrust on this planet. There can be no real and lasting peace in God's family until mutual trust and trustworthiness have been restored. No wonder all God asks is trust—even of us damaged sinners. For if only we trusted Him enough to listen, He could readily heal the damage done. God can and will save all who trust Him.

Bible passages included:

Acts 16:30–31. “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ And they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.’” KJV.

“Put your trust in the Lord Jesus.” NEB.

“Have faith in the Lord Jesus.” *Berkeley*.

Hebrews 11:1. “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” KJV.

“Now faith is the title-deed of things hoped for.” *Montgomery*.

“Now faith means that we are confident of what we hope for, convinced of what we do not see.” *Moffatt*.

“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” NIV.

Hebrews 10:35–39. “Don't throw away your trust now—it carries with it a rich reward. Patient endurance is what you need if, after doing God's will, you are to receive what he has promised. For yet a very little while, He that cometh shall come, and shall not tarry. But my righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrink back, my soul hath no pleasure in him. Surely we are not going to be men who cower back and are lost, but men who maintain their faith for the salvation of their souls!” *Phillips*.

John 17:3. “And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.” RSV.

Exodus 33:11, 17. “The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend.... And the Lord said to Moses, ‘I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.’” NIV.

Romans 10:17. “So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ.” RSV.

Psalms 51:6, 10, 16–17. “Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.... Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.... For thou hast no delight in sacrifice; were I to give a burnt offering, thou wouldst not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God,

thou wilt not despise.” RSV.

Hosea 6:6-7. “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.” *Phillips*.

John 3:3. “Jesus answered him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’” RSV.

James 2:14, 19, 21-23. “My brothers, what use is it for a man to say he has faith when he does nothing to show it? Can that faith save him?... You have faith enough to believe that there is one God. Excellent! The devils have faith like that, and it makes them tremble... 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 fulfilment 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.’” NEB.

Hebrews 11:31, 32, 39. “By faith the prostitute Rahab escaped the doom of the unbelievers, because she had given the spies a kindly welcome. Need I say more? Time is too short for me to tell the stories of Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets... These also, one and all, are commemorated for their faith.” NEB.

Luke 23:42-43. “And he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingly power.’ And he said to him... ‘you will be with me in Paradise.’” RSV.

One way of describing faith:

Faith is a word we use to describe a relationship with God as with a Person well known. The better we know Him the better the relationship may be.

Faith implies an attitude toward God of love, trust, and deepest admiration. It means having enough confidence in God — based on the more than adequate evidence revealed — to be willing to believe what He says, to accept what He offers, and to do what He wishes — without reservation — for the rest of eternity. Anyone who has such faith would be perfectly safe to save. This is why faith is the only requirement for heaven.

Faith also means that, like Abraham and Moses, we know God well enough to reverently ask Him, “Why”?

Chapter Four

God's Way of Restoring Trust

Another look at the only safe basis for faith, in the larger setting of the conflict over God's character and government.

To have peace once again in His universe, all God asks of us is trust. But He does not expect us to trust Him as a stranger. Besides, He has been charged with being unworthy of our faith. How has God answered such false accusation? Mere claims of trustworthiness prove nothing. 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 reestablished and confirmed. The Bible is a record of just such a demonstration. This is God's way of restoring trust.

Bible passages included:

James 2:19. "Do you believe that there is only one God? Good! The demons also believe — and tremble with fear." GNT.

Revelation 12:12. "The Devil has come down to you, and he is filled with rage, because he knows that he has only a little time left." GNT.

Genesis 9:8, 11-13; 11:1, 3-4. "God said to Noah and his sons... 'I promise that never again will all living things be destroyed by a flood... As a sign of this everlasting covenant which I am making with you and with all living beings, I am putting my bow in the clouds...' At first, the people of the whole world had only one language... They said to one another... 'Now let's build a city with a tower that reaches the sky.'" GNT.

Deuteronomy 13:1-3. "If a prophet arises among you, or a dreamer of dreams, and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder which he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, 'Let us go after other gods,' which you have not known, 'and let us serve them,' you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or to that dreamer of dreams." RSV.

1 Kings 13:15-18. "Then [the old prophet] said to him, 'Come home with me and eat bread.' And [the man of God] said, 'I may not return with you, or go in with you; neither will I eat bread nor drink water with you in this place; for it was said to me by the word of the Lord, "You shall neither eat bread nor drink water there, nor return by the way that you came,"' And he said to him, 'I also am a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the Lord, saying, "Bring him back with you into your house that he may eat bread and drink water.'" But he lied to him." RSV.

Luke 24:15-17, 27, 30-31. "While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, 'What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?' And they stood still, looking sad... And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself... When he was at table with them, he

took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him.” RSV.

Romans 10:11, 13–15, 17. “For the Scriptures tell us that no one who believes in Christ will ever be disappointed.... Anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. But how shall they ask him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them?... How welcome are those who come preaching God’s Good News!... Faith comes from listening to this Good News—the Good News about Christ.” *Living Bible*.

Galatians 5:22. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith.” KJV.

2 Peter 1:20–21. “But first note this: no one can interpret any prophecy of Scripture by himself. For it was not through any human whim that men prophesied of old; men they were, but, impelled by the Holy Spirit, they spoke the words of God.” NEB.

“You must understand this in the first place, that no prophecy in Scripture can be understood through one’s own powers, for no prophecy ever originated in the human will, but under the influence of the holy Spirit men spoke for God.” *Goodspeed*.

John 14:16–17, 26; 15:26; 16:13. “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, who will stay with you for ever. He is the Spirit, who reveals the truth about God.... The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and make you remember all that I have told you.... The Helper will come—the Spirit, who reveals the truth about God and who comes from the Father. I will send him to you from the Father, and he will speak about me.... When, however, the Spirit comes, who reveals the truth about God, he will lead you into all the truth.” GNT.

John 5:39. “You study the Scriptures, because you think that in them you will find eternal life. And these very Scriptures speak about me!” GNT.

Hebrews 1:1–2. “In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son....” RSV.

Chapter Five

The Record of the Evidence

Another look at the Bible, in the larger setting of the great controversy over God's character and government.

Without the Bible we would know nothing about this conflict in God's family. Nor would we have the record of how He has demonstrated His trustworthiness by His infinitely skillful and gracious way of handling the revolt. But can the Bible itself be trusted? Do we have the right collection of sixty-six books? Have the words been accurately preserved? Can we trust the many translations? And, most of all can we have confidence that we understand the meaning?

Bible passages included:

2 Timothy 3:16. "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching..." RSV.

"Every inspired scripture has its use for teaching the truth..." NEB.

2 Timothy 3:14-17. "But for your part, —stand by the truths you have learned and are assured of. Remember from whom you learned them; remember that from early childhood you have been familiar with the sacred writings which have power to make you wise and lead you to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Every inspired scripture has its use for teaching the truth and refuting error, or for reformation of manners and discipline in right living, so that the man who belongs to God may be efficient and equipped for good work of every kind." NEB.

Luke 24:44. "Everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled." RSV.

Matthew 5:17-18. "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished." RSV.

John 10:34. "Jesus answered them, 'Is it not written in your law, "I said, you are gods?"'" RSV. (Quoted from Psalms 82:6.)

John 10:34-35. "Jesus answered... We know that what the scripture says is true forever." GNT.

Isaiah 8:19-20. "When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn." NIV.

Zechariah 7:12. "They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the Lord Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets." NIV.

The Law: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

The Writings: Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles.

The Old Testament Apocrypha: I and II Esdras, Tobit, Judith, Additions to Esther, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, Susanna, Song of the Three Children, Bel and the Dragon, Prayer of Manasseh, I and II Maccabees.

Some books of the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Testament of Adam, Book of Jubilees, Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, Testament of Job, Book of Enoch, Sibylline Oracles, Assumption of Moses, Ascension of Isaiah, Psalms of Solomon, Magical Books of Moses, Story of Ahikar.

Some books of the New Testament Apocrypha: Gospel of Thomas, Book of James, Assumption of the Virgin, Acts of John, Acts of Paul, Acts of Peter, Letters of Christ and Abgarus, Letter of Lentulus, Apocalypse of Peter, Apocalypse of Paul.

How would you read the phrase,

GODISNOWEHERE?

One competent scholar's opinion as to the preservation of the Bible:

“The Christian can take the whole Bible in his hand and say without fear or hesitation that he holds in it the true Word of God, handed down without essential loss from generation to generation throughout the centuries” (Frederic Kenyon, one-time curator of the British Museum).

Yes, for all practical purposes we have in our possession the books of the Bible as they were originally written.

HEBREW

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ
earth the and heavens the God created beginning in

ARAMAIC

מְלִכָא לְעֻלְמִין חַיִּי
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GREEK

Οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν κόσμον
So for loved the God the world

Chapter Six

Evaluating the Evidence

Another look at understanding the Bible, in the larger setting of the great controversy over God's character and government.

The Bible is no mere collection of theological statements. Nor is it a code book of deeds to be done and sins to be shunned. It is rather an inspired record of God's handling of the crisis of distrust in His universe. To be confident that we see the real meaning, we must view the Bible as a whole, relating all its parts to the one central theme — the truth about God Himself. Of every story, teaching and event the same question must be raised: What does this say about God? Another question naturally follows: Can we trust the God that we see?

Bible passages included:

Habakkuk 2:7. "Thou shalt be for booties unto them." KJV.

Job 41:18. "By his neesings a light doth shine..." KJV.

Exodus 28:11. "Ouches of gold." KJV.

Luke 17:9. "I trow not." KJV.

Romans 1:13. "Oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,)..." KJV.

1 Thessalonians 4:15. "We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep." KJV.

John 20:17. "Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father." KJV.

John 2:4. "Jesus saith unto her, Woman what have I to do with thee?" KJV.

Matthew 11:4-6. "Jesus gave them this reply, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see — that blind men are recovering their sight, cripples are walking, lepers being healed, the deaf hearing, the dead being raised to life and the good news is being given to those in need. And happy is the man who never loses his faith in me.'" *Phillips.* (See Isaiah 35 and 61.)

Hebrews 1:1-3. "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son... The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being..." NIV.

John 5:39-40. "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life." NIV.

Luke 24:27. "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." NIV.

John 14:8-9. "Philip said, 'Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.' Jesus answered: 'Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.'" NIV.

John 16:26-27. "I do not promise to intercede with the Father for you, for

the Father loves you himself. . . .” *Goodspeed*.

1 Corinthians 10:4. “They all drank from the supernatural rock that accompanied their travels — and that rock was Christ.” NEB.

Matthew 19:7-8. “The Pharisees asked him, ‘Why, then, did Moses give the law for a man to hand his wife a divorce notice and send her away?’ Jesus answered, ‘Moses gave you permission to divorce your wives because you are so hard to teach. But it was not like that at the time of creation.’” GNT.

A statement of the purpose and method of Bible study.

The great purpose of the Bible is to reveal the truth about our heavenly Father that we may be won back to Him in love and trust. This truth, this everlasting good news, is to be found in every one of the sixty-six books. But to discover this truth we must learn more than just what happened to Samson and Delilah, to David and Bathsheba, to Gideon and his fleece. The all-important question is, What do these stories tell us about God?

If one does not ask this question, much of the content of Scripture may seem unrelated to the plan of salvation, even perplexing, sometimes even contradictory. But when one learns to view the Bible as a whole, there emerges a consistent picture of an all-wise and gracious God who seems willing to go to any length to keep in touch with His people, to stoop and reach them where they are, to speak a language they can understand. And the further one reads on, book by book, the more one is moved with love and admiration for a God who would be willing to run such risk, to pay such a price, in order to keep open the lines of communication between Himself and His wayward children.

God will save all who trust Him. But He has not asked us to trust Him as a stranger. The Bible — all of it — is a record of God’s revelation and demonstration of infinite trustworthiness.

Chapter Seven

The Question of Authority

Another look at God's way of exercising authority—in the larger setting of the great controversy over His character and government.

Our heavenly Father has been accused of the arbitrary and selfish abuse of divine authority and power. If true, it would not be safe to trust Him. But the whole Bible presents a refutation of this charge—not in mere claims but with the evidence of demonstration. Even Paul once misunderstood God's use of power—then changed his mind on the Damascus road. Later he urged us not to be so easily swayed by every “wind of doctrine” but to practice being more discerning. Ephesians 4:14, Hebrews 5:14.

Many still labor under Paul's earlier misunderstanding, and we are surrounded by conflicting claims to religious authority based on position, power, miracle, or claimed communication from the Lord. How can we practice being more discerning?

Bible passages included:

Matthew 24:23–24. “If anyone says to you then, ‘Look, here is Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ don't believe it. False christs and false prophets are going to appear and will produce great signs and wonders to mislead, if it were possible, even God's own people!” *Phillips*.

Matthew 24:4–5. “Jesus answered, ‘Watch out, and do not let anyone fool you. Many men, claiming to speak for me, will come and say, “I am the Messiah!” and they will fool many people.’” GNT.

Revelation 13:13–14. “This second beast performed great miracles; it made fire come down out of heaven to earth in the sight of everyone. And it deceived all the people living on earth by means of the miracles which it was allowed to perform....” GNT.

2 Thessalonians 2:9–10. “The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.” NIV.

2 Corinthians 11:13–15. “God's messengers? They are counterfeits of the real thing, dishonest practitioners masquerading as the messengers of Christ. Nor do their tactics surprise me when I consider how Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is only to be expected that his agents shall have the appearance of ministers of righteousness....” *Phillips*.

John 8:44–45. “The father whose sons you are is the devil, and you are bent on carrying out the wishes of your father. He proved himself a murderer at the very beginning, and did not loyally stand by the truth; in fact, there is no spark of truth in him. Whenever he gives utterance to his falsehood, then he gives expression to his real character; for he is a liar and the father of lies. I, on the

contrary, speak the truth, and therefore you do not believe me.” *Kleist and Lilly*.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-3. “We ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us... Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way...” NIV.

1 John 4:1-2. “My dear friends, do not believe all who claim to have the Spirit, but test them to find out if the spirit they have comes from God. For many false prophets have gone out everywhere.” GNT.

1 Thessalonians 5:21. “Test everything. Hold on to the good.” NIV.

Matthew 7:28-29. “When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority...” NIV.

Luke 4:32. “His message had authority.” NIV.

Deuteronomy 13:1-3. (Moses’ warning not to be misled by miracle-workers who do not teach the truth.)

1 Kings 13:15-18. (The story of the lying prophet who claimed to speak for God.)

Luke 24:15-17, 27, 30-31. (The Emmaus road story of how Jesus did not reveal who He was until He had convinced the disciples first on the basis of evidence.)

One writer’s understanding of the Emmaus road experience:

“Jesus did not first reveal himself in his true character to them, and then open the Scriptures to their minds...he maintained his disguise till he had interpreted the Scriptures, and had led them to an intelligent faith in his life, his character, his mission to earth, and his death and resurrection. He wished the truth to take firm root in their minds, **not because it was supported by his personal testimony**, but because the typical law, and the prophets of the Old Testament, agreeing with the facts of his life and death, presented unquestionable evidence of that truth. When the object of his labors with the two disciples was gained, he revealed himself to them.” E.G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 3, 214 [emphasis supplied].

Chapter Eight

The Most Costly and Convincing Evidence

Another look at the cross—in the larger setting of the great controversy over God’s character and government.

In the second Conversation we considered again the Bible’s description of 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?

Bible passages included:

Romans 6:23. “Sin *pays* its servants: the wage is death.” *Phillips*.

Genesis 3:4–5. “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....’” RSV.

Romans 3:4. “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.’” *Goodspeed*.

Romans 3:25–26. “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.” KJV.

“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. 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.” *Maxwell*.

2 Corinthians 5:21. “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin.” RSV.

Romans 1:18, 24, 26, 28. “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth.... 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....” RSV.

Romans 4:24-25. “...Jesus our Lord, who was put to death [given up] for our trespasses.” RSV.

Hosea 11:7-8. “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!” *Phillips*.

Matthew 27:46. “Jesus cried with a loud voice... ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’” RSV.

John 19:31. “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.” GNT.

2 Corinthians 5:19. “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself... ” RSV.

Colossians 1:20. “...and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.” RSV.

John 12:32. “When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to me.” GNT.

1 Corinthians 1:17-18. “For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its 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.” RSV.

Romans 1:16-17. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith... For in it the righteousness of God is revealed.” RSV.

Jeremiah 9:24. “‘Let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,’ declares the Lord.” NIV.

Chapter Nine

There Is No Need to Be Afraid of God

Another look at freedom — in the larger setting of the great controversy over God's character and government

To be afraid of our heavenly Father is to deny what He paid such a price to reveal. Though infinite in majesty and power, God values nothing higher than the freedom of His intelligent creatures, that their love and trust may be freely given. He gave His life to make this eternally clear. Surely such a God is worthy of our deepest reverence and willingness to listen and obey.

If God were the kind of person His enemies have made Him out to be — arbitrary, vengeful and severe — there could be no real freedom, and our worship and obedience would be tarnished with our fears. Sadly millions have been turned away from God by Satan's perversion of the truth. But Jesus came to bring the truth that sets us free, the truth about God that even makes it possible for us mere mortals to be His friends.

Bible passages included:

Revelation 14:7. "Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come." RSV.

Psalms 128:1-2. "Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord.... Happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee." KJV.

Proverbs 9:10. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." KJV.

"To be wise you must first have reverence for the Lord." GNT.

Exodus 20:18-20. "The people were afraid and trembled; and they stood afar off, and said to Moses, 'You speak to us, and we will hear, but let not God speak to us, lest we die.' And Moses said to the people, 'Do not fear; for God has come to prove you, and that the fear of him may be before your eyes, that you may not sin.'" RSV.

Hebrews 4:13. "There is nothing that can be hid from God; everything in all creation is exposed and lies open before his eyes. And it is to him that we must all give an account of ourselves." GNT.

Ecclesiastes 12:14. "God is going to judge everything we do, whether good or bad, even things done in secret." GNT.

1 John 4:16-18. "God is love, and whoever lives in love lives in union with God and God lives in union with him. Love is made perfect in us in order that we may have courage on the Judgment Day.... There is no fear in love; perfect love drives out all fear. So then, love has not been made perfect in anyone who is afraid, because fear has to do with punishment." GNT.

John 5:22. "The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son." RSV.

John 14:7, 9. "If you had known me, you would have known my Father also.... He who has seen me has seen the Father." RSV.

John 16:26-27. “I need make no promise to plead to the Father for you, for the Father himself loves you. . . .” *Phillips*.

John 3:19. “And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light.” RSV.

John 12:47-48. “If any one hears my sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him. . . . He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day.” RSV.

Romans 1:25, 28. “Because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie. . . . God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct.” RSV.

Revelation 22:11. “Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy.” NIV.

Revelation 14:10-11. “He also shall drink the wine of God’s wrath. . . . and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone. . . . for ever and ever.” RSV.

Jude 1:7. “Sodom and Gomorrah. . . . serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.” RSV.

Exodus 21:6. “He shall serve him for ever [emphasis supplied].” KJV.

Exodus 24:17. “Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain. . . .” RSV.

Hebrews 2:15. “. . . and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.” NIV.

John 8:32. “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” GNT.

John 15:15. “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.” RSV.

Exodus 33:11. “Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.” RSV.

Chapter Ten

The Reminder of the Evidence

Another look at the Sabbath — in the larger setting of the great controversy over God's character and government.

If God values nothing higher than our freedom, why has He placed right in the heart of the “royal law of liberty” (James) a command to remember the Sabbath? Is this possibly one instance where God has imposed an arbitrary requirement upon His people, just to show His authority and test their willingness to obey? But the whole message of Scripture is that there is no arbitrariness in our God. As Paul explained, God's laws were given to help us, to protect us in our ignorance and immaturity, to lead us back to trust.

Viewed in the larger setting of the great controversy over the character and government of God, the Sabbath was “made for man” (Jesus) not before but **after** sin entered the universe. Repeatedly in the sixty-six books the Sabbath is connected with times of special demonstration of the truth about our God — the perfection and freedom of creation week, the freeing of His people from Egyptian bondage, the costly and convincing evidence of crucifixion week, the promise of peace and freedom in the earth made new.

The Sabbath is a monument to freedom. It sums up the good news about God. It reminds us of the everlasting truth that “sets us free” (Jesus) and will keep us free for eternity. It should always be a “delight” (Isaiah), to be enjoyed in the highest sense of freedom. Observed merely as obedience to an arbitrary command, the Sabbath could turn us against God — even lead us to “crucify Him once again” (Hebrews 6) — then hurry home to keep the Sabbath holy, as happened that sad Friday nineteen hundred years ago.

Bible passages included:

Exodus 20:8, 11. “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy...for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.” RSV.

Revelation 14:7. “Honor God and give him glory, for his time has come to sit in judgment. Worship the Creator of heaven and earth, the Creator of the sea and the springs.” NAB, 1970.

Genesis 2:9. “In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” NIV.

1 Corinthians 10:13. “But God keeps his promise, and he will not allow you to be tested beyond your power to remain firm.” GNT.

Genesis 1:28. “Have many children, so that your descendants will live all over the earth and bring it under their control...” GNT.

Genesis 2:2-3. “On the sixth day God completed all the work he had been doing, and on the seventh day he ceased from all his work. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on that day he ceased from all the work he

had set himself to do.” NEB.

John 19:30. “It is finished.” KJV.

John 17:4. “I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.” NKJV.

Mark 2:27. “The Sabbath was made for the good of man...” GNT.

John 1:3. “Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.” NIV.

Colossians 1:16. “For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.” NIV.

Exodus 31:13. “Keep the Sabbath, my day of rest, because it is a sign between you and me for all time to come, to show that I, the Lord, have made you my own people.” GNT.

Ezekiel 20:20. “Make the Sabbath a holy day, so that it will be a sign of the covenant we made, and will remind you that I am the Lord your God.” GNT.

Ezekiel 20:12. “I made the keeping of the Sabbath a sign of the agreement between us, to remind them that I, the Lord, make them holy.” GNT.

Psalms 51:10. “Create in me a clean heart, O God.” KJV.

Deuteronomy 5:15. “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God brought you out with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, and for that reason the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.” NEB.

Hebrews 4:9. “So there must still be a promised Sabbath of Rest for God’s people.” *Goodspeed.*

“There must still be, therefore, a place of rest reserved for God’s people, the seventh-day rest.” *Jerusalem.*

Ezekiel 20:12. “I gave them my sabbath, to mark the tie between me and them, to teach them that it is I, the Eternal, who sets them apart.” *Moffatt.*

Revelation 14:12. “This calls for endurance on the part of God’s people, those who obey God’s commandments and are faithful to Jesus.” GNT.

2 Peter 3:10. “The elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.” KJV.

Revelation 21:1. “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.” RSV.

Isaiah 65:17. “Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth.” NIV.

Isaiah 66:23. “Month by month at the new moon, week by week on the sabbath, all mankind shall come to bow down before me, says the Lord.” NEB.

Chapter Eleven

God's Emergency Measures

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 for ever 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 the 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.

Bible passages included:

Galatians 3:19. “Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions. . .” RSV.

Galatians 3:24-25. “So the Law has been our attendant on our way to Christ, so that we might be made upright through faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer in the charge of the attendant.” *Goodspeed*.

“So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.” NIV.

Romans 3:31. “Does this mean that by this faith we do away with the Law? No, not at all; instead, we uphold the Law.” GNT.

1 Timothy 1:8-9. “We know that the law is good if a man uses it properly. We also know that law is made not for good men but for lawbreakers and rebels,

the ungodly and sinful.” NIV.

Hebrews 10:3-4. “But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin year after year. For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins.” RSV.

Jeremiah 7:22-23. “For on the day that I brought your fathers out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to them, nor give them command regarding burnt-offering or sacrifice; but this command I gave them, ‘Listen to my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people.’” *Smith/Goodspeed.*

Jeremiah 3:16. “In those days...men shall speak no more of the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord; they shall not think of it nor remember it nor resort to it; it will be needed no more.” NEB.

Jeremiah 31:33-34. “I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me...” RSV.

Hosea 6:6. “It is true love that I have wanted, not sacrifice; the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.” *Phillips.*

“I would rather have my people know me than have them burn offerings to me.” GNT.

Exodus 20:19-20. “They said to Moses, ‘If you speak to us, we will listen; but we are afraid that if God speaks to us, we will die.’ Moses replied, ‘Don’t be afraid.’” GNT.

Deuteronomy 5:24-25, 27. ““Today we have seen that it is possible for a man to continue to live, even though God has spoken to him. But why should we risk death again? That terrible fire will destroy us. We are sure to die if we hear the Lord our God speak again...Go back, Moses, and listen to everything that the Lord our God says. Then return and tell us what he said to you. We will listen and obey.” GNT.

Numbers 12:6-8. “If any man among you is a prophet I make myself known to him in a vision, I speak to him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses: he is at home in my house; I speak with him face to face, plainly and not in riddles.” *Jerusalem.*

Exodus 33:11. “Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.” RSV.

John 15:15. “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.” RSV.

John 16:25-27. “I have been speaking to you in parables — but the time is coming to give up parables and tell you plainly about the Father. When that day comes, you will make your requests to him in my name, for I need make no promise to plead to the Father for you, for the Father himself loves you...” *Phillips.*

John 14:9. “He who has seen me has seen the Father.” RSV.

John 20:28. “Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’” RSV.

Chapter Twelve

God's Law is No Threat to Our Freedom

Another look at the requirements of God's law, and especially the Ten Commandments—in the larger setting of the great controversy over His character and government.

Jesus, Paul and Moses all agree that love is the fulfillment of God's law. But love and trust—the things that God desires the most—cannot be commanded or produced by force. Nor can they be made an obligation, something that we owe to God because He's been so good to us. God wants more than this, and so should we! Our heavenly Father values nothing higher than the freedom of His family, and Jesus suffered and died to prove it. But real freedom requires mutual love and trust that have been won and confirmed by unquestionable evidence. This evidence is the truth that sets and keeps men free.

Then why does God seem to command our love in the Decalogue? The Ten Commandments voiced on Sinai were another of God's emergency measures in the Great Controversy. But how He longs for love, trust and willingness to listen that are entirely free from fear, force or obligation.

This emphasis on freedom, love and trust does not minimize the requirements of God's law. On the contrary, these are the very things the law was designed to preserve. As one good friend of God has said, "The Ten Commandments were given so that there would be no mistake as to the kind of people God could trust with all the privileges and freedom of eternal life to come." Does this include the Sabbath? The Sabbath is the reminder of the evidence of the truth, without which we never could be free.

Bible passages included:

John 14:15; 15:14. "If you love me, you will keep my commandments.... You are my friends if you do what I command you." RSV.

Isaiah 29:13. "The Lord said, 'These people claim to worship me, but their words are meaningless, and their hearts are somewhere else. Their religion is nothing but human rules and traditions, which they have simply memorized.'" GNT.

Matthew 11:28-30. "Come to me, all of you who toil and are burdened, and I will let you rest. Let my yoke be put upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble-minded, and your hearts will find rest, for the yoke I offer you is a kindly one, and the load I ask you to bear is light." *Goodspeed*.

1 Timothy 1:8-9. "We know, of course, that the Law is good in itself and has a legitimate function. Yet we also know that the Law is not really meant for the good man, but for the man who has neither principles nor self-control." *Phillips*.

Galatians 5:13-14, 18, 22-23. "You, my brothers, were called to be free... The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as

yourself...’ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law...But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” NIV.

Deuteronomy 6:5. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” NIV.

Leviticus 19:17–18. “Do not hate your brother in your heart...But love your neighbor as yourself.” NIV.

1 Corinthians 13:4–6. “Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right.” RSV.

Isaiah 58:13–14. “If you cease to tread the sabbath underfoot, and keep my holy day free from your own affairs, if you call the sabbath a day of joy and the Lord’s holy day a day to be honoured, if you honour it by not plying your trade, not seeking your own interest or attending to your own affairs, then you shall find your joy in the Lord.” NEB.

James 2:8, 12. “If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing right...Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom.” NIV.

Different reasons for obeying God. Which do you prefer?

1. I do what I do because God has told me to, and He has the power to reward and destroy.
2. I do what I do because God has told me to, and I love Him and want to please Him.
3. I do what I do because I have found it to be right and sensible to do so, and I have increasing admiration and reverence for the One who so advised and commanded me in the days of my ignorance and immaturity. And being still somewhat ignorant and immature, I am willing to trust and obey the One whose counsel has always proved to be so sensible, when He commands me to do something beyond my present understanding.

A description of true obedience:

“The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely — because he is required to do so — will never enter into the joy of obedience. He does not obey... True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. The essence of all righteousness is loyalty to our Redeemer. This will lead us to do right because it is right — because rightdoing is pleasing to God.” Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 97–98.

Chapter Thirteen

How God Treats His Erring Children

Another look at some of the most convincing evidence that God is not the kind of person His enemies have made Him out to be.

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

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

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

Bible passages included:

Revelation 20:11-12. “Then I saw a great white throne and him who sat upon it.... And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened.... And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done.” RSV.

Romans 3:10, 23. “There is not even one who is righteous.... For all have sinned, and all fall short of God’s glorious ideal.” *Twentieth Century New Testament*.

John 8:7, 9-11. “Whichever one of you has committed no sin may throw the first stone at her....’ When they heard this, they all left, one by one, the older ones first. Jesus was left alone, with the woman still standing there. He straightened up and said to her, ‘Where are they? Is there no one left to condemn you?’ ‘No one, sir,’ she answered. ‘Well, then,’ Jesus said, ‘I do not condemn you either. Go, but do not sin again.’” GNT.

John 13:27-29. “Jesus said to him, ‘Do quickly what you have to do.’ No one at the table understood what he meant by this. Some supposed that, as Judas was in charge of the common purse, Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the festival, or to make some gift to the poor.” NEB.

Mark 14:27, 29, 31. “And Jesus said to them, ‘You will all fall away....’ Peter said to him, ‘Even though they all fall away, I will not.... If I must die

with you, I will not deny you.’” RSV.

Matthew 26:69-70, 72, 74. “And a maid came up to him, and said, ‘You also were with Jesus the Galilean.’ But he denied it before them all, saying, ‘I do not know what you mean. . . . I do not know the man. . . .’ Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, ‘I do not know the man.’” RSV.

Luke 22:61-62. “The Lord turned around and looked straight at Peter, and Peter remembered that the Lord had said to him, ‘Before the rooster crows tonight, you will say three times that you do not know me.’ Peter went out and wept bitterly.” GNT.

John 20:17. “Jesus said to her: ‘Do not detain me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father. But go to my brethren and tell them that I am going up to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” *Noli*.

Mark 16:7. “Now go and give this message to his disciples, including Peter: ‘He is going to Galilee ahead of you.’” GNT.

Isaiah 38:17. “For thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back.” RSV.

Micah 7:19. “You will trample our sins underfoot and send them to the bottom of the sea!” GNT.

2 Peter 3:9. “The Lord is. . . . patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” NIV.

Ezekiel 33:11. “As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?” RSV.

Luke 15:20-24. “While he was still a long way off his father saw him, and his heart went out to him. He ran to meet him, flung his arms round him, and kissed him. The son said, ‘Father, I have sinned, against God and against you; I am no longer fit to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! fetch a robe, my best one, and put it on him. . . . And let us have a feast to celebrate the day. For this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found.’” NEB.

Hosea 14:1-2, 4. “But come home, Israel, come home to the Lord your God! . . . Take words of repentance with you as you return to the Lord. . . . I will heal their unfaithfulness, I will love them with all my heart.” *Phillips*.

Hosea 11:7-8. “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!” *Phillips*.

Romans 2:4. “Do you not know that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” RSV.

Chapter Fourteen

God Can Completely Heal the Damage Done

Another look at the meaning of perfection — in the larger setting of the great controversy over God's character and government.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus uttered those memorable words that continue to trouble saints and sinners alike, "You, therefore, must be perfect." Or should it be translated, "You, therefore, will be perfect"? Is it a promise or command?

Whether these words are encouraging or forbidding depends again on the kind of Person we believe our God to be and on our understanding of what He wants for His children throughout the universe — and especially for us on this planet who have been so caught up in the damaging consequences of the great controversy. Above all God wants peace and freedom in His family. This requires mutual love and trust, maturity and self control. Such things cannot be commanded, much less produced by force or fear. Instead God offers to set right all that has gone wrong, to completely heal the damage done.

As our physician Father, God longs to make His children well. Our part is not to heal ourselves but to cooperate. As Jesus said to the paralytic at the pool, "Would you like to be made whole?" Perfection is a generous offer — not a burdensome command! How could we turn such an offer down! But how do we cooperate?

Bible passages included:

Matthew 5:48. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." KJV.

Luke 18:42. "Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee." KJV.

"Receive your sight; your faith has healed you." NIV.

Matthew 5:48. "You must be perfect." GNT.

"Ye therefore shall be perfect." *American Standard.*

"You are to be perfect." *Goodspeed.*

1 Kings 9:4-5; 11:4, 6. "If you will walk before me, as David your father walked, with integrity of heart and uprightness... I will establish your royal throne... When Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father... Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not wholly follow the Lord, as David his father had done." RSV.

2 Peter 1:21. "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." KJV.

Matthew 5:48. "You must become spiritually mature, as your heavenly Father is perfect." *Norlie.*

John 3:3. "Jesus answered, 'I am telling you the truth: no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.'" GNT.

Romans 6:4. "By our baptism we were buried with Him in death, in order

that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glorious power, we also should live an entirely new life." *Weymouth*.

Romans 6:3-4 footnote: "St. Paul alludes to the manner in which Baptism was ordinarily conferred in the primitive Church, by immersion. The descent into the water is suggestive of the descent of the body into the grave, and the ascent is suggestive of a resurrection to a new life." *Kleist and Lilly*.

Hebrews 5:12-6:1. "...though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity...." NIV.

Ephesians 4:12, 14-15. "His gifts were made that Christians might... arrive at real maturity.... We are not meant to remain as children at the mercy of every chance wind of teaching, and of the jockeying of men who are expert in the crafty presentation of lies. But we are meant to speak the truth in love, and to grow up in every way into Christ...." *Phillips*.

1 Corinthians 13:4-5. "Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful." RSV.

2 Corinthians 3:18. "And then with unveiled faces we can all behold, as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord. And we become changed into His likeness, from glory to glory, through the Spirit of the Lord working in us." *Norlie*.

Psalms 115:8. "Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them." NIV.

1 Corinthians 11:1. "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." RSV.

One admirer's description of Christ's perfection and maturity:

"Christ carried out in His life His own divine teachings. His zeal never led Him to become passionate. He manifested consistency without obstinacy, benevolence without weakness, tenderness and sympathy without sentimentalism. He was highly social; yet He possessed a reserved dignity that did not encourage undue familiarity. His temperance never led to bigotry or austerity. He was not conformed to the world; yet He was not indifferent to the wants of the least among men." Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*, 638.

Chapter Fifteen

Talking to God as a Friend

Another look at the meaning and purpose of prayer — in the larger setting of the great controversy over the character and government of God.

If, as Jesus said, our heavenly Father knows what our needs are even before we ask Him, what is the purpose of taking time to pray at all? This assumes, of course, that the primary purpose of prayer is to lodge our requests with God. But some prefer to understand prayer as conversation with God as with a Friend. Remember how Abraham and Moses talked to God, and God called them His friends. Remember how boldly but reverently Job agonized with God — to the consternation of Job’s friends — and God was honored with his confidence. Truly the way we pray reveals the kind of Person we believe our God to be.

If the Father were to appear visibly among us, how would we address Him? What language would we use? Would we be too afraid to speak? Would we feel constrained to mention only the most lofty themes, or would we be free to talk candidly about what He already knows is in our hearts? Would it be easier to discuss such matters with the Son? Would it be more appropriate to speak or listen? How does one listen to the voice of God? And at the end of such a special meeting, would we feel that we ought to close the conversation with a “word of prayer”? Or would it be correct to realize that in talking to God as a Friend we have been praying all along?

Some day when we really see Him face to face, will that be the end of prayer? Is prayer yet another of God’s emergency measures to keep open the lines of communication with His children until there is no need to talk together anymore? What do we mean when we sing, “Farewell, farewell, sweet hour of prayer”?

Bible passages included:

Matthew 6:5–13. “When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; they love to say their prayers...for everyone to see them.... But when you pray, go into a room by yourself, shut the door, and pray to your Father who is there in the secret place.... In your prayers do not go babbling on like the heathen, who imagine that the more they say the more likely they are to be heard.... Your Father knows what your needs are before you ask him. This is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, thy name be hallowed; thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us the wrong we have done, as we have forgiven those who have wronged us. And do not bring us to the test, but save us from the evil one.’” NEB.

Matthew 14:23. “He went up into the hills by himself to pray.” RSV.

Luke 6:12. “All night he continued in prayer to God.” RSV.

John 15:15. “I have called you friends....” RSV.

John 14:7, 9. “If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. . . Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” NIV.

John 16:26-27. “I do not promise to intercede with the Father for you, for the Father loves you himself. . .” *Goodspeed*.

1 John 4:18. “There is no fear in love; perfect love drives out all fear. . . fear has to do with punishment.” GNT.

Job 29:2-4; 30:20. “If only my life could once again be as it was when God watched over me. God was always with me then. . . And the friendship of God protected my home. . . I call to you, O God, but you never answer; and when I pray, you pay no attention.” GNT.

Job 42:7. “You did not speak the truth about me, the way my servant Job did.” GNT.

1 Corinthians 10:13. “God can be depended on not to let you be tried beyond your strength.” *Goodspeed*.

Romans 8:28. “We know that in all things God works for good with those who love him. . .” GNT.

Genesis 18:23, 25. “Then Abraham drew near, and said, ‘Wilt thou indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked? . . . Far be that from thee! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?’” RSV.

James 2:23. “Abraham was called God’s friend.” GNT.

Numbers 14:11-13, 15-16. “And the Lord said to Moses. . . ‘I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they.’ But Moses said to the Lord, ‘Then the Egyptians will hear of it. . . Then the nations who have heard thy fame will say, “Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which he swore to give to them, therefore he has slain them in the wilderness.”’” RSV.

Exodus 33:11. “The Lord would speak with Moses face-to-face, just as a man speaks with a friend.” GNT.

Acts 10:13-14. “And there came a voice to him, ‘Rise, Peter; kill and eat.’ But Peter said, ‘No, Lord.’” RSV.

Psalms 77:7-10. “Will the Lord spurn for ever, and never again be favorable? Has his steadfast love for ever ceased? Are his promises at an end for all time? Has God forgotten to be gracious? . . . And I say, ‘It is my grief that the right hand of the Most High has changed.’” RSV.

Psalms 139:19, 21-24. “O that thou wouldst slay the wicked, O God. . . Do I not hate them that hate thee, O Lord? And do I not loathe them that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!” RSV.

Romans 8:26. “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought. . .” RSV.

1 Thessalonians 5:17. “Never stop praying.” *Norlie*.

Chapter Sixteen

God's Last Pleading with His Children

Another look at the three angels' messages of Revelation 14—in the larger setting of the great controversy over the character and government of God.

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

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

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

Bible passages included:

Revelation 14:6–12. "Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, 'Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.'

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

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

ship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name.' This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus." NIV.

Galatians 1:8-9. "If anyone, if we ourselves or an angel from heaven, should preach a gospel at variance with the gospel we preached to you, he shall be held outcast. I now repeat what I have said before: if anyone preaches a gospel at variance with the gospel which you received, let him be outcast!" NEB.

Galatians 1:6-7. "I am astonished to find you turning so quickly away... and following a different gospel. Not that it is in fact another gospel; only there are persons who unsettle your minds by trying to distort the gospel of Christ." NEB.

Galatians 3:1. "You foolish Galatians! Who put a spell on you? Before your very eyes you had a clear description of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross!" GNT.

Galatians 4:8-9. "In the past you did not know God, and so you were slaves of beings who are not gods. But now that you know God...how is it that you want to turn back?" GNT.

1 Corinthians 1:17-18. "Christ did not send me to baptize. He sent me to tell the Good News...For the message about Christ's death on the cross is nonsense to those who are being lost; but for us who are being saved it is God's power." GNT.

Romans 1:16-17. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation...For in it the righteousness of God is revealed..." RSV.

Jeremiah 9:24. "Let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight, declares the Lord." NIV.

Romans 3:25-26. "For God showed Him publicly dying as a means of reconciliation...This was to demonstrate God's own righteousness...to show that He Himself is righteous and that He sets right everyone who trusts in Jesus." *Maxwell.*

John 8:32. "You will know the truth and the truth will set you free." *Williams.*

Galatians 5:1. "This is the freedom with which Christ has made us free. So keep on standing in it, and stop letting your necks be fastened in the yoke of slavery again." *Williams.*

Romans 1:4-5. "Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom I have received grace and a commission for His Name's sake to win men to the obedience that springs from faith..." *Weymouth.*

1 John 4:16, 18. "God is love...There is no fear in love." *Williams.*

Matthew 24:14. "And this Good News about the Kingdom will be preached through all the world...and then the end will come." GNT.

Chapter Seventeen

Satan's Final Effort to Deceive

Another look at the enemy's last, most diabolical attempt to mislead us into joining his side in the great controversy over the character and government of God.

The book of Revelation describes not only God's last pleading with His children (Chapter 14) but also Satan's final effort to deceive (Chapter 13). Though Jesus said that He "saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18), the defeated enemy of God and man still "prowls around like a roaring lion" (1 Peter 5:8), knowing that his time is short (Revelation 12:12). The one whose insane desire to be God led to the war up in heaven will at last seem to enjoy complete success. "All who dwell on earth will worship him" — except those who prefer to believe Jesus' testimony about His Father (Revelation 12:17) and so remain loyal to God (Revelation 14:12). Naturally these loyal ones are the object of Satan's special efforts to deceive.

If even angels could be taken in, how can mere humans hope to resist Satan's most cunning persuasion? History warns of over-confidence. Even God's chosen people in the Promised Land were misled into crucifying their Redeemer and then hurrying home to keep the Sabbath holy. They read their Bibles, paid their tithe, watch their diet — and hated Jesus' picture of the Father! Is it possible we could be similarly deceived?

Just as through the centuries God has demonstrated His trustworthiness, so Satan has displayed his ability and willingness to deceive. His counterfeit of the first coming of Christ in the "mystery religions" should alert us to expect brilliant counterfeits of the second coming in the end. Since truth and evidence are not on Satan's side, he has countered with the widely held belief that religious faith requires no evidence, that religious claims need not be investigated. Such subjects as sin, the atonement, the cross, the law, the judgment, Christ's intercession, the destruction of the wicked, have all been bent to support his misrepresentations of our God. How can we prepare to resist his final efforts to deceive?

Bible passages included:

Revelation 4:8, 11; 15:3-4. "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. . . . You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power. . . . Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed." NIV.

Luke 10:18. "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." RSV.

Revelation 12:12. "Be glad, you heavens, and all you that live there! But how terrible for the earth and the sea! For the Devil has come down to you, and he is filled with rage, because he knows that he has only a little time left."

GNT.

1 Peter 5:8-9. “Be alert, be on watch! Your enemy, the Devil, roams around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Be firm in your faith and resist him...” GNT.

Revelation 13:5, 7-8, 10. “The beast was allowed to make proud claims which were insulting to God...It was allowed to fight against God’s people and to defeat them... All people living on earth will worship it, except those whose names were written before the creation of the world in the book of the living... This calls for endurance and faith on the part of God’s people.” GNT.

Revelation 12:17. “All those who obey God’s commandments and are faithful to the truth revealed by Jesus.” GNT.

John 8:48. “The Jews answered him, ‘Aren’t we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?’” NIV.

Matthew 23:15, 23-24. “How terrible for you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees! You hypocrites! You sail the seas and cross whole countries to win one convert; and when you succeed, you make him twice as deserving of going to hell as you yourselves are!... You give to God one tenth even of the seasoning herbs, such as mint, dill, and cummin, but you neglect to obey the really important teachings of the Law, such as justice and mercy and honesty...Blind guides! You strain a fly out of your drink, but swallow a camel!” GNT.

John 18:28. “Early in the morning Jesus was taken from Caiaphas’ house to the governor’s palace. The Jewish authorities did not go inside the palace, for they wanted to keep themselves ritually clean, in order to be able to eat the Passover meal.” GNT.

John 19:31. “Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down.” NIV.

Matthew 7:22-23. “When the Judgment Day comes, many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord! In your name we spoke God’s message, by your name we drove out many demons and performed many miracles!’ Then I will say to them, ‘I never knew you.’” GNT.

Revelation 3:15-17. “I know what you have done; I know that you are neither cold nor hot. How I wish you were either one or the other! But because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I am going to spit you out of my mouth! You say, ‘I am rich and well off; I have all I need.’ But you do not know how miserable and pitiful you are! You are poor, naked, and blind.” GNT.

1 John 4:1-2. “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.” NIV.

Chapter Eighteen

God Waits for His Children to Grow Up

Another look at the reasons for the apparent delay of the final events in the great controversy over the character and government of God.

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

When Jesus returns, He will come to a generation of believers who have experienced Satan's last supreme attempt to deceive and destroy God's loyal children on this planet. They will have accomplished what one-third of the angels failed to do. They will have refused to be turned against God by Satan's lies. They will have been able to say with Paul, "If anyone—even an angel from heaven—should bring a different version of the everlasting Good News, he is wrong, and we will not believe it!" (Galatians 1) These are not babes in the truth. They are grown-up believers. They meet the biblical description of Christian perfection and maturity: they have "Their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil." (Hebrews 5:14) They have not only the teachable faith of a little child, which still needs much protection, but—like Job—they can stand alone. Though their faith be severely tested, they will never let God down.

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

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

Bible passages included:

Daniel 12:1, 3. "There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. . . . Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever." NIV.

1 Timothy 4:1-3. "The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from

certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth.” NIV.

2 Thessalonians 2:1, 3-4, 6-7, 9-10. “Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ... Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed... He opposes and exalts himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, and even sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God... And now you know what is holding him back... For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way... The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.” NIV.

Revelation 7:1-3. “After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree. Then I saw another angel ascend from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels... ‘Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God upon their foreheads.’” RSV.

Ephesians 4:30. “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” NIV.

Ephesians 1:13. “In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit...” RSV.

Ephesians 1:17. “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.” NIV.

John 14:26; 15:26-27; 16:13. “The Holy Spirit... will be your teacher and will bring to your minds all that I have said to you... But when the Helper comes, that is, the Spirit of truth... he will speak plainly about me. And you yourselves will also speak plainly about me... [The Spirit] will guide you into everything that is true.” *Phillips*.

Ephesians 4:14-15. “We are no longer to be children, tossed by the waves and whirled about by every fresh gust of teaching, dupes of crafty rogues and their deceitful schemes. No, let us speak the truth in love; so shall we fully grow up into Christ.” NEB.

Hebrews 5:13-14; 6:1. “Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity...” NIV.

1 Corinthians 13:11. “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways.” RSV.

Ephesians 6:11-14. “Put on all the armour which God provides, so that you

may be able to stand firm against the devices of the devil. For our fight is not against human foes, but against cosmic powers, against the authorities and potentates of this dark world, against the superhuman forces of evil in the heavens. Therefore, take up God's armour; then you will be able to stand your ground when things are at their worst, to complete every task and still to stand. Stand firm, I say. Fasten on the belt of truth." NEB.

Chapter Nineteen

How Soon Will the Conflict Be Over?

The question this time is not **when**, but **how soon**? The conflict will be over **when** God's children on this planet have fully responded to His last pleading (Chapter Eighteen), are so settled into the truth that they can resist Satan's final effort to deceive (Chapter Seventeen) and as grown-up believers can not only survive the time of trouble but, like Job, speak well and truly of our heavenly Father (Chapter Eighteen).

"How soon?" the disciples asked Jesus. "Tell us, when will this happen? What will be the signal for your coming and the end of the world." (Matthew 24:3) Jesus spoke of alarming disturbances in earth and sky, of growing distrust between the nations, the rise of false religious leaders—and the Good News going to all the world. He said the end was near—more than 1900 years ago! But how near is "near?" Not long before he died John wrote, "Children, it is the last hour...we know that it is the last hour." (1 John 2:18) Was he wrong? When John arises at the Second Coming he will be surprised to find how long he has been asleep. He may have some questions but surely no complaints! And there will be earth-shaking events for him yet to see.

About a century and a half ago there arose in various parts of the world the growing conviction that the time had come for Jesus to return. Thousands of Christians the world around still agree that those early adventist believers had indeed seen God's signal that Christ was coming soon. But this was not a signal to withdraw from the world and pack for the trip up to Heaven. It was a call from God to finish the work of preparing the world for His coming.

It is true that time has continued much longer than early adventists expected. The signs that so stirred them are now well over a hundred years old. But are we surprised, even ashamed, that our God has been willing to wait? Are we concerned about **our** reputation or **His**? If by our failure to complete our task we may have contributed to the delay, then we deserve to be ashamed. But the longer God waits, the more gracious He looks. His delay only confirms the Good News!

How much longer do you think God will have to wait? We can trust Him to wait as long as there is hope for anyone. But the One who reads our every thought will know when all final decisions are made. "So then," Jesus advised, "you must always be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you are not expecting him." (Matthew 24:44) To which Paul added, "But you, brothers, are not in darkness, and the Day should not take you by surprise." (1 Thessalonians 5:4) What should we be looking for?

Bible passages included:

Matthew 24:3. "Tell us, when will this be and how can we tell when You're coming back and the world will come to an end?" *Beck*.

Matthew 24:36. "But about that day and hour no one knows, not even the

angels in heaven, not even the Son; only the Father.” NEB.

John 14:1, 3. “Set your troubled hearts at rest. Trust in God always; trust also in me.... I shall come again and receive you to myself, so that where I am you may be also.” NEB.

Matthew 24:26-27, 30-31. “Don’t believe it. For the Son of Man will come like the lightning which flashes across the whole sky from the east to the west.... And all the peoples of earth will weep as they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. The great trumpet will sound, and he will send out his angels to the four corners of the earth, and they will gather his chosen people from one end of the world to the other.” GNT.

Revelation 1:7. “Every eye will see him.” RSV.

Isaiah 25:9. “In that day they will say, ‘Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.’” NIV.

Revelation 6:16. “They called to the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!’” NIV.

2 Chronicles 36:15-16. “The Lord, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people... but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets, till the wrath of the Lord rose against his people, till there was no remedy.” RSV.

Romans 2:4. “Are you, perhaps, misinterpreting God’s generosity and patient mercy toward you as weakness on his part? Don’t you realise that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” *Phillips*.

Habakkuk 2:3. “It may seem slow in coming, but wait for it; it will certainly take place.” GNT.

2 Peter 3:3-4. “In the last days there will come men who scoff at religion and live self-indulgent lives, and they will say: ‘Where now is the promise of his coming? Our fathers have been laid to their rest, but still everything continues exactly as it has always been since the world began.’” NEB.

2 Peter 3:9. “It is not that the Lord is slow in fulfilling his promise, as some suppose, but that he is very patient with you, because it is not his will for any to be lost, but for all to come to repentance.” NEB.

Jonah 4:2-3. “Lord, didn’t I say before I left home that this is just what you would do? That’s why I did my best to run away to Spain! I knew that you are a loving and merciful God, always patient, always kind, and always ready to change your mind and not punish. Now then, Lord, let me die. I am better off dead than alive.” GNT.

Matthew 24:29. “The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky....” NIV.

2 Peter 3:12. “Look eagerly for the coming of the Day of God and work to hasten it on.” NEB.

Matthew 24:44. “So then, you also must always be ready, because the Son

of Man will come at an hour when you are not expecting him.” GNT.

1 Thessalonians 5:4. “But you, brothers, are not living in darkness, and so the day will not like a thief take you by surprise.” *Kleist and Lilly*.

Chapter Twenty

At Peace with our Heavenly Father

Another look at God's successful but very costly resolution of the crisis in His family.

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

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

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

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

Bible passages included:

Romans 5:1. “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” RSV.

“Let us have peace.” *Douay-Rheims, Challoner.*

“Let us enjoy the peace we have.” *Moffatt.*

“Let us continue to enjoy the peace we have.” *Montgomery.*

1 Kings 9:3-4. “The Lord said to [Solomon] ‘if you walk before me in integrity of heart and uprightness, as David your father did...’” NIV.

Colossians 1:20. “Through him God chose to reconcile the whole universe to himself, making peace through the shedding of his blood upon the cross.” NEB.

Matthew 10:34-36. “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the world. No, I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. I came to set sons against their fathers, daughters against their mothers, daughters-in-law against their mothers-in-law; a man’s worst enemies will be the members of his own family.” GNT.

John 1:11. “He came to his home, and his own family did not welcome him.” *Goodspeed.*

1 Peter 4:12-14. “...do not be surprised at the painful test you are suffering. ...Rather be glad that you are sharing Christ’s sufferings...Happy are you if you are insulted because you are Christ’s followers; this means that the glorious Spirit, the Spirit of God, is resting on you.” GNT.

Galatians 5:22. “The Spirit, on the other hand, brings a harvest of love, joy, peace.” *Weymouth.*

John 14:26-27. “...the Counselor, the Holy Spirit...will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you... Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” NIV.

John 16:33; 17:1, 3-4. “I have told you all this so that you may find peace in me. In the world you will have trouble, but be brave; I have conquered the world.’ ‘Father... eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God... I have glorified you on earth and finished the work that you gave me to do.’” *Jerusalem.*

Romans 7:23-24. “I see a different law at work in my body—a law that fights against the law which my mind approves of... It makes me a prisoner... What an unhappy man I am! Who will rescue me?” GNT.

Romans 8:31, 38-39. “If God is for us, who can be against us?... I am certain that... neither angels nor other heavenly rulers or powers... will ever be able to separate us from the love of God.” GNT.

Hebrews 12:11. “No discipline seems pleasant at the time... Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace...” NIV.

Romans 5:3-4. “We can be full of joy here and now even in our trials and troubles. These very things will give us patient endurance; this in turn will develop a mature character.” *Phillips.*

Isaiah 26:3. “You, Lord, give perfect peace to those who keep their purpose firm and put their trust in you.” GNT.

Hebrews 4:2. “For we have heard the Good News, just as they did. They

heard the message, but it did them no good, because when they heard it, they did not accept it with faith." GNT.

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