

## Miscellaneous Acts and Epistles Discussion Posts

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### My Conversion Experience

I was raised in a Catholic family. As a child, being Catholic meant going to church every Sunday, going to confession every week or so, doing an occasional Stations of the Cross, lighting an occasional candle at church (you had to pay based on the size of the candle), and attending catechism, weddings, etc. Attending mass mostly meant standing when everyone else stood, sitting when everyone else sat, and kneeling when everyone else knelt, since the mass was in Latin at that time. When you took communion, the priest placed a wafer on your tongue that was believed to be the actual body of Christ. We were told to cooperate carefully with the priest while he was placing the wafer on our tongues, because it would be very, very bad if the wafer fell and touched some other part of our bodies, although we were never told exactly what would happen.

When you went to confession, you entered one side of a dark booth and a priest was on the other side with a wall in between. The priest would slide a little screened window open so you could hear each other, and you would begin your confession by saying, "Bless me, father, for I have sinned, it has been 2 weeks (or 1 month, or whatever) since my last confession." Then you would tell him the sins you committed since your last confession - "I lied three times, I got angry twice", etc. When you were done he would assign you

a certain number of prayers to say depending on how bad you had been, and then you would exit the booth and pray them silently in the pew. Usually, the priest assigned three 'Our Fathers' and three 'Hail Marys'. I remember hearing a joke about a priest that would always assign the same penance no matter what you had done. "Father, I just robbed a bank." "For your penance say three 'Our Fathers' and three 'Hail Marys'."

Sins were divided into two classes: mortal and venial. Mortal sins included only really bad things like murder, adultery, and missing church. If you sinned a mortal sin, and you didn't make it to confession before you died, you would go to hell forever. Everything that wasn't a mortal sin was a venial sin. Venial sins would send you to purgatory to suffer a while, but eventually you would get to heaven. There was also a place called Limbo, which was like the garden of Eden, and which was for people who would have gone to heaven except that they hadn't been baptized. I remember getting pretty excited as a kid when it was time for me to go through "Confirmation". When you were confirmed, you became a soldier for Christ, and you got to start over with a clean slate with no sin; plus you could start wearing these little pictures on a string around your neck (under your shirt) that would help protect you from sinning so you could keep the slate clean. Of course, it's not long before you realize you've sinned again, and that kind of takes away the excitement of confirmation and those little pictures on the necklace.

I don't remember how it happened, but somehow as a teenager, I stopped going to church, confession, and such. But when I began to go through some trouble in my life, I took a Catholic prayer book, and went into the bathroom, and prayed a full hour of all kinds of prayers that I had never seen before. But it didn't help at all. So then I took the huge family Bible that was only used to record marriages and births, and began reading it. I was shocked and amazed at what I read. Catechism had been merely memorizing questions and answers about sacraments and such. But here I was reading things like, "**the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; and who can abide it? ... The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD come, and it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call upon the name of the LORD shall be delivered**", Joel 2:11, 31-32. So whenever there was a storm, I would lay awake in bed at night, so I could be awake to call upon the Lord if he was coming in the storm to judge the world.

I also polished a little table in my bedroom and placed the family Bible there on a doily as if it were an altar, and read it daily. I noticed that version of the Catholic Bible had a warning in front that only the Pope can understand the Bible, so it would be safer for us common folk if we didn't read it. The author quoted II Peter 3:16, "**in which are things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest ... unto their own destruction**". That Bible also had a list of indulgences prominently displayed. Indulgences are points that you get for doing certain things, like lighting candles, that help reduce your time in purgatory. The list showed that you could get X number of indulgences for reading your Bible every day, but you could get a lot more for kissing your Bible every day. However, I wasn't interested in getting indulgences at this point, and despite the risks, I had to keep seeking.

I was also handed a gospel tract on the street downtown about this time. It was entitled, "You're Dead A Long Time". I didn't understand a word of it, but I kept it (and later after I accepted Christ it made perfect sense). I also started praying the rosary for the first time ever. I carried it around in my pocket and fingered the beads and prayed as I went about my day. Each bead represented one 'Our Father' or 'Hail Mary'. During this time I also started asking people, "Did you ever read what's in the Bible? You'd be surprised at some of the things that are in there." I said this to a schoolmate in shop class one day. He was a Christian and went home and told his parents, and they told him to invite me to a Word of Life basketball marathon in Danville. Now, I had never been interested in basketball before then and I haven't been since, but for some reason that year I was interested enough to chip the ice off the driveway so I could practice. I went to the marathon, played terribly, and got my glasses knocked off and stuff. But half way through the tournament, Bobby Muir, who had been the leading high school scorer at one time, gave a simple gospel message.

Bobby said, "If I asked how many of you know how to go to heaven, would you be able to raise your hand?" I thought, "Well, it's quite complicated. You do good things but you also do bad things. You go to confession for the bad things, but there's also indulgences, and sacraments, and ...". Bobby said he would tell us how to go to heaven. He quoted from the Gospel of John, chapter 3, verse 36, "**He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life**". He pointed out, "It doesn't say, 'He that goeth to church', or 'He that is good'; but rather 'He that believeth on the Son' that has everlasting life.

And it's not enough to believe in the Son; you have to believe on the Son. Like an elevator, you can believe in it all day, but until you get on it, it won't help you." As he spoke, I realized that when the Bible said, "**whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered**" (Joel 2:32), it was talking about calling on him for salvation from sin, not for salvation from his coming in the clouds in wrath. I also realized that the death of Christ that I had seen represented on the crucifix in the Catholic church every Sunday actually counted, and that it satisfied God's requirements for the punishment of sin.

At the end of the message, Bobby asked us to bow our heads and close our eyes, and to raise our hands if we wanted to believe on the Son. I raised my hand. Then he said that those of us that raised our hands should come down to the front so they could give us a gospel of John. I was a very shy person at this time, but I had raised my hand, so I went to the front along with many other people. They took us to a classroom, and as we sat at desks, they asked people if they understood what they had done. I don't know if I would have lied if they asked me, or what, because I was too shy to have said so, but I hadn't done anything by this point. I was planning on waiting until that night when I was alone in my own bedroom to ask Jesus to be my Savior.

That night I did call upon the name of the Lord. I asked him to save me, and acknowledged my trust in the salvation he provided for me through his death on the cross. The next morning I woke up early and fixed myself something to take along in a sandwich bag for breakfast at school, and I did something else I had never done before. I went to the Catholic church by myself on a weekday when there was no service scheduled. It never occurred to me that the church building might be locked, but it wasn't, so I went in and knelt in the pews, and thanked God for my salvation. That was the last time I ever went to a Catholic church. The following Sunday, the family of the classmate that had invited me to the basketball marathon, brought me to a Baptist church with them. It was refreshing because the service was in English, the windows were bright, and especially because we sang songs together. The next week, the family switched to a different Baptist church, and I continued to attend with them.

It was also helpful that a man from the church visited me at home and gave me a book about the First Epistle of John. (Epistle means 'letter', and the epistles of John are not the same as the Gospel of

John.) That epistle was written so we could know we had eternal life. **“This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God,”** 1 John 5:11-13. He pointed out that when God promises in his word that we have eternal life if we believe on the Son, then so long as we are sure that we believe on the Son, we can be sure we have eternal life, because God doesn't lie. All my sins were future to Christ's death. When he died for my sins, he died for all of them, not just for those up to the point I believed on him. Since all our sins, past, present, and future are forgiven when we believe on Christ, we have eternal life.

Acts - Paul's early ministry. Passionate but a bit erratic?  
I'm not sure how 'erratic' Paul's early ministry was. Before Antioch, he was preaching in the synagogues and then fleeing persecution; at the end of his ministry he was doing some of the same. While he was at the church in Antioch, he was working together with the other ministering brethren. The only thing I see erratic is that he was slow to begin to use his authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ, preferring to learn from others and let his ministry develop gradually, like by letting Barnabas lead the first missionary journey. That was a wise plan to start their outreach in somewhat familiar territory, starting at Barnabas' hometown and probably planning to return by way of Paul's hometown. The plan for the second journey showed great wisdom also: start by visiting the existing churches from the first journey and then go further. It is more efficient to keep what you already have than to get something new, so a little investment in the existing churches went a long way. Don't dribble when you can pass, and don't pass when you can shoot. By leading the second and third missionary journeys Paul really did seem to perfect the performance of his role as apostle though, as the size of his team grew, and he got more experience in dealing with problems of all sorts, and he became more assertive and bold in going forward with what he thought was best, taking into account whatever revelation from God he had been given also. Mostly he didn't need any special revelation because

from the time he was first saved he knew his ministry was as the apostle to the Gentiles, so putting Spain next on the list did not need any special revelation. As a side note, it's interesting that some believers try to discern the will of God by forms of direct revelation like 'open doors.' Instead Paul ministered where there was great opposition, and the only time scripture records he had an open door for ministry he didn't go through it, but put the Titus's welfare of higher importance.

Acts 13 - The Change of Leadership from Barnabas to Paul  
"Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia," Acts 13:13. Before this, the scripture indicated Paul's submission to Barnabas' leadership, as is appropriate, since Barnabas was older and had been a believer longer. But I can picture how much additional trouble they endured because Barnabas didn't give the leadership to Paul right from the beginning of Paul's first missionary journey, when he knew Paul was personally chosen by Jesus to be the apostle to the Gentiles.

With Barnabas primarily responsible for the success of the mission (from the human aspect), it makes sense for him to have picked Cyprus, where he was from, as their first stop. But what fruit was there on Cyprus except for Sergius Paulus (thank the Lord for him)? Who knows if some of Paul's "perils of robbers, ... perils by the heathen, ... perils in the wilderness, ... perils in the sea" (), etc. may have come because they went to Antioch in Pisidia by way of Cyprus and Perga, instead of by way of Paul's city of Tarsus, and then Iconium, since the trail from Perga to Antioch Pisidia is believed to have been difficult and dangerous?

Nevertheless, I give Paul credit for submitting to Barnabas for the beginning of the journey. The only times after Acts 13:13 that Paul didn't lead was when those at Lystra thought Barnabas was Zeus, and when they went up to the Jerusalem council regarding their message and the status of the Gentiles in Acts 15.

A correction:

I just realized the Spirit said, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them," so the Spirit indicated Barnabas should lead at that time. So, as you said above, all the more credit to him for perceiving the need and being willing to switch roles mid-stream. As for the difficulty of going to Antioch Pisidia via Cyprus and Perga, maybe Paul's eagerness to lead "his company" and get the gospel out made him choose sailing to Perga instead of to Tarsus for the Iconium way to Antioch Pisidia; or maybe the trails from Perga to Antioch Pisidia weren't as bad as people say, but in any case Mark left them at that point. Even if they made a poor decision, God was directing their steps, and ensuring the success of Jesus' continued work in Acts.

#### Acts 17 - Paul's Areopagus Speech in Athens

I don't know how many of you are familiar with the popular house church, simple church, organic church views on Paul's speech at Athens, but it's commonly believed among those groups that Paul realized he violated his own principles in Athens, and that he was careful never to do it again. Where is the epistle to the church at Athens?

Paul had some fruit, "certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them" (Acts 17:34), but he left Athens without even waiting for Silas and Timothy to arrive, without any mention of a church, and without being forced to leave because of persecution.

Some of the lack of response may have been because "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise" (1 Cor. 1:27), and the philosophers of Athens were not as abundant a field; but some of the problem may be what Paul fixed as soon as he arrived in Corinth. "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). Paul used logic a lot, but logic can't do miracles, only the word of God can.

Acts 23 - Yeshua's encouragement to Paul in Acts.

Acts 23:10-12, "When there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle. And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome. And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul."

This is the second time the chief captain, Lycias, had to have Paul carried away into the castle to save his life. But "the night following, the Lord stood by him" (Acts 23:11). I don't think this kind of revelation can happen for us today, but I think we can be assured that Yeshua is aware of our trials and cares about us as much as for Paul. He told Paul "Be of good cheer, Paul," (Acts 23:11), and though he won't appear and say that to us today, we can also rejoice that he is in control. He also told Paul, "as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome" (Acts 23:11). With that promise, Paul was indestructible until he reached Rome; and we are indestructible until we finish anything God has determined for us to finish, and then we are dispensable, so far as this life is concerned.

The reason we're unwilling to risk suffering is that we don't have enough faith that everything the Bible says is true, like 'what if it isn't true and we expose ourselves to unnecessary suffering because of our belief?' I had a friend that was dying from cancer from having been a smoker (and not the only person I lost because of smoking), and he was reading Luke 16:22, "it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died, and was buried," to encourage himself that God provides angels to help us "walk through the valley of the shadow of death" (Ps. 23:4). It's one thing to 'believe' these things, and potentially another to believe these things when the reality will soon be tested by experience.

But from the beginning of Acts, when the risen Messiah, who had allowed himself to be killed by those who hated him; to the end of Acts, when Paul is teaching and writing while a prisoner; the Spirit “witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions” (Acts 20:23) are part of God’s will for the church. “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints,” Ps. 115:16. “Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator,” 1 Pet. 4:19. “When they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ,” Acts 5:40-42. I’m not saying I would or would not be willing to suffer for the Lord, but the church in Acts certainly was.

Acts - What made Paul so effective despite so much prison time?

Paul was effective primarily because of “grace and apostleship,” (Rom. 1:5). God never fails to accomplish his purpose, so his prophets can’t either. Paul doesn’t get rewards for continuing to preach the gospel, because he didn’t have free will about this. “I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me. ... For if I do this thing willingly [by choice], I have a reward: but if against my will [by grace], [I do it because] a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me,” (1 Cor. 9:16-17.) “By the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me,” 1 Cor. 15:10.

Paul was effective because God worked through him in the power of the Spirit, “I was made a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power,” Eph. 3:7. Paul ministered, “through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God,” Rom. 15:19. “The signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds,” 2 Cor. 12:12.

Paul didn't rely on carnal methods. "I ... came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, ... for I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. ... And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power," 1 Cor 2:2-4. "I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence am base among you. ... We do not war after the flesh: for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds," 2 Cor. 10:1-4. As Keith mentioned, he was aware of the Enemy and the importance of prayer.

Of course, he also was very loving, "God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ," Phil. 1:8. He was self-controlled, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway," 1 Cor. 9:27. He was fully committed to Christ, as Phil mentioned, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things. ... That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death," Phil 3:8-10. He was also humble, passionately opportunist, and unashamed as Keith mentioned. He was a wise strategist, who considered securing the existing churches to be a priority before establishing new churches. So many things. I look forward to hearing more in the following posts.

As for prison, I've usually thought of those times in terms of Frodo and Sam destroying the ring as the real battle, not the two warring armies as the real battle; or like the Lord's obedience to the cross which ended his public teaching ministry but won the real battle. In Paul's case his imprisonment furthered the gospel and gave us Ephesians, etc. But even if we don't have an outreach like Paul's during 'downtimes', what's important is our individual obedience and fruitfulness. "Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you," can be done on a sick bed as well as anywhere else. God has plenty of resources to send to the

places he wants them. The bigger battle may somehow hinge on our holding our little hill.

#### Acts - Short Term Mission Trips

I wonder what the similarities and differences are between our modern short-term missions and the “messengers of the churches” that worked with Paul at various times. While Paul was at Ephesus he sent Timothy and Erastus ahead of him in preparation for the churches offering to Jerusalem, “Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, ... So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season. ... The whole city [Ephesus] was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre. ... After the uproar was ceased, Paul ... departed for to go into Macedonia, ... And when he had gone over those parts, ... he came into Greece, and there abode three months,” Acts 19:21-20:4.

He also sent Titus and someone to Corinth to prepare their offering. “We have sent with him the brother, whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches; And not that only, but who was also chosen of the churches to travel with us with this grace. ... Whether any do enquire of Titus, he is my partner and fellowhelper concerning you: or our brethren be enquired of, they are the messengers of the churches,” 2 Cor. 8:18-23. ... Then Paul went back to Ephesus (actually Miletus), “And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus,” Acts 20:1-4.

We know Trophimus went all the way to Jerusalem with Paul since Paul was arrested because of him. “When the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the

temple, and hath polluted this holy place. (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) ... And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar,” Acts 21:27-31. Maybe it was from this trip that Trophimus decided to do more mission work with Paul later after his release from prison. “Erastus abode at Corinth: but Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick,” 2 Tim. 4:20.

Maybe Epaphroditus was pretty short term, since the only thing we explicitly know he did was deliver gifts to Paul in Rome from Philippi and then return. “Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants. For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick,” Phil. 2:25-26.

But somehow it seems different today when the trips are optional and for as many as want to and can afford to go from the high school youth group. The churches probably sent their best and most mature men to help Paul, and the need was not optional, like if no one signed up they didn’t need to do the trip that year. On the other hand it was probably similar in that if any dependable young man wanted to go they would probably let him. Some of my favorite verses are Romans 16:22-23, “I Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord. Gaius mine host, and of the whole church, saluteth you. Erastus the chamberlain of the city saluteth you, and Quartus a brother.” God let Tertius add his own greeting in Romans, of all books; and among influential brethren like Gaius, the host of the whole church, and Erastus, the chamberlain of the city, Quartus, a brother, got to be there too.

What is the gospel?

The source of the gospel is the Father. That’s why it’s called “the gospel of God,” Rom. 1:1. The Father is the one that “promised [it] afore” by “his prophets in the holy scriptures” and it’s “concerning his Son,” Rom. 1:2. So it’s incorrect to

picture Jesus as having to convince the Father not to condemn us. Paul says the same thing in Ephesians 2. It's the Father, "God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ," Eph. 3:4-5.

The content of the gospel is "concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord," Rom. 1:2. That's why it's called "the gospel of Christ," Rom. 1:16. It's about Christ's death "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures" and resurrection, "he was buried and ... rose again the third day according to the scriptures," 1 Cor. 15:3-4. The resurrection is an essential part of the gospel because it demonstrates that Christ's death was accepted as sufficient for our justification, "if Christ be not raised ... ye are yet in your sins," 1 Cor. 15:17. Paul said the same thing in Romans 4, that Christ "was delivered for [because of] our offences, and was raised again for [because of] our justification," Rom. 4:25.

The gospel is "the power of God unto" all of "salvation," Rom. 1:16 – justification, sanctification, and glorification; because it's the power of God unto justification, "for [because] therein is the righteousness [dikeos, justification] of God revealed" via "faith," Rom. 1:17. The theme of Romans is that justification always results in sanctification and glorification, and therefore the gospel is the power of God unto all of salvation by being the power of God unto justification. "[PAST - JUSTIFICATION] Being [having been] justified by faith, we have peace with God [propitiation] through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have [have had] access by faith into [PRESENT - SANCTIFICATION] this grace wherein we stand, and [FUTURE – GLORIFICATION] rejoice in hope of the glory of God," Rom. 5:1-2. The reason that justification always results in sanctification and glorification is because of the way in which we were justified by being put into Christ as we used to be in Adam, "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous," Rom. 5:19. We were put "in Christ", Rom. 3:24, at the point of his death for justification, as "many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death," Rom. 6:3, so we would also share in his resurrection for glorification and his new life for sanctification, "we are buried with him by baptism into death: that [so that] like as Christ was raised up

from the dead ... even so we also should [shall] walk in newness of life," Rom. 6:4.

Justification is when a man receives "the righteousness of [from] God," Rom. 1:17, instead of having his own righteousness, and "the unrighteousness of men," Rom. 1:18. The gospel is the power of God unto justification because the hearing of the gospel enables faith, and "the righteousness of God ... is by faith [pistos] of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe [pistos]," Rom. 3:22. Jesus death provides "propitiation" (Rom. 3:25) of "the wrath of God ... against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men," Rom. 1:18, "through faith in his blood" so that God can "be just [a just judge] and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus," Rom.3:25-26.

Justification is by faith, not works. "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight;" it's "the righteousness [justification] of God without the law," Rom.3:20-21. "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted [logizetai] for righteousness," Rom. 4:5. It's not that justification actually makes a man righteous by making him do good works (though justification does result in sanctification by putting us in Christ), but rather justification is a legal verdict where a man whose works are still unrighteous is "counted [logizetai]" as righteous. "God imputeth [logizetai] righteousness without works," Rom. 3:6. Paul says the same thing in Ephesians 2. "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that [salvation] not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast," Eph. 2:8-9.

So the gospel is the message we are debtors to preach. It's logical, but it's not merely man's logic. It not only has the power to bring men to justification via faith, but also to sanctify and edify believers by providing knowledge that how we were justified provides all we have in Christ. Paul told the believers in Rome he wanted to see them, "that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles. I am debtor ... So as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation [all of salvation]!" Rom. 1:13-16.

Should we talk about repentance when sharing the gospel?

One tool I've never used, that many others have successfully used to lead many people to Christ, is "The Four Spiritual Laws". I don't think I'd ever be able to use that booklet because it seems to imply repentance and taking Jesus as Lord is necessary for salvation. John says over and over that whoever believes on the Son has everlasting life; without mentioning repentance. Paul wrote the book of Romans about salvation, and chapters 3b and 4 as a complete treatment of justification. If repentance or baptism or anything else were necessary to become justified, Paul would have been amiss not to mention it in those chapters.

I think people get confused because John and Jesus preached that Israel must, "Repent, for the kingdom [of the God] of heaven" (spoken of in Daniel) to be set up during that generation. There was a turning point in Jesus ministry in Matthew 11-12, and his ministry changed. Before 11-12 he announced the gospel of the kingdom to repent, and taught the law in the synagogues, and healed all publicly; but after the nation rejected him in Matthew 11-12; he announced the gospel of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, and taught in parables as a judgment upon the nation, and healed only some and only privately (except for Lazarus). So, you can't preach like Jesus: you have to choose whether you will preach like Jesus before Mt. 11-12 or preach like Jesus after Mt. 11-12, since he preached differently before and after.

Of course, when a person stops believing in their own self-righteousness and trusts instead in Jesus as savior, they are changing their mind, which is "repentance from [trusting in] dead [good] works, and ... faith toward God," (Heb. 6:1). But by repentance, most people mean repentance from doing bad works, and, "Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, ... He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none, ... Do violence to no man," etc. (Lu. 3:8-14). So, I won't confuse grace and works in sharing the gospel of justification. "The righteousness [dikaiosune, justification] of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ [will come] unto all and upon all them that believe [without any consideration of

repentance],” and they will thereby receive the Holy Spirit and rejoice to have Jesus as Lord.

Everyone is free to disagree, and it’s a bigger topic than can be handled here, but I think it’s worth briefly mentioning and considering in a conversation about sharing the gospel.