**Case Study: The Gospel conversation**

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I encounter all kinds of people from different spiritual, social, and political backgrounds, so if I am not careful to ask lots of specific, and strategic, questions, conversations can end up all over the place. Here is a common scenario:

[**Me:**] How are you today sir? Did you get one of these? [Hand him a tract]

[**Man:**] No, what is it?

[**Me:**] It's a "Good person" Gospel tract. Have you ever seen one of these before?

[**Man:**] No, I don't think so.

[**Me:**] Well, the idea here is; if you put your finger on the purple guy, and he turns green after 3 seconds, you are good enough to go to heaven. Do you believe in heaven?

[**Man:**] Well, I believe in heaven, but I'm not sure this card has the authority to determine that.

**[Me:]** Ok, so what does determine whether or not you are going?

**[Man:]** God.

**[Me:]** Ok, what does God require of us to in order to get into heaven?

**[Man:]** Just to be a good person.

**[Me:]** Ok, and how do we know if we are on the right track?

**[Man:]** I think we can just feel it as we try to do what's right.

**[Me:]** Ok, so what does your conscience do for you?

**[Man:]** It lets me know whenever I am doing anything wrong.

**[Me:]** Ok, according to what standard?

**[Man:]** I think it depends on the way you were brought up in life.

**[Me:]** Ok, so if it is a standard that we are conformed to, or that we have shaped for ourselves, why do we violate our conscience?

**[Man:]** I don't know.

**[Me:]** Well, I would say that God has said that He has written His law on the human heart and the conscience is the inner testimony that He gave us to let us know that we have broken His laws.

**[Man:]** Okay...

**[Me:]** I am a Christian, so I am speaking of the God of the Bible, and I believe that the Bible is God's Word. The Bible says that God created the Heavens and the Earth, and that He has also created man in His own image in order to reflect His glory. Therefore, He has commanded man to be holy as He is holy in order to properly represent Him on the Earth. Do you know what holiness means?

**[Man:]** No.

**[Me:]** It's not a word we hear very often, but it means to be set-apart from sin. Sin is a violation of God's law and a misrepresentation of God's attributes. Since God is holy, and we are not, He gave mankind the law in order to show him what holiness looks like. Are you familiar with the 10 commandments?

**[Man:]** Yes.

**[Me:]** Do you know them?

**[Man:]** Not all of them.

**[Me:]** Well, let me just run a few by you. Have you ever told a lie?

**[Man:]** Yes.

**[Me:]** Ok, what do you call someone who lies?

**[Man:]** A liar.

**[Me:]** Right. Have you ever stolen anything?

**[Man:]** No.

**[Me:]** You have never downloaded music illegally, or took an office supply from work?

**[Man:]** No.

**[Me:]** Ok. Have you ever disobeyed parents or authority?

**[Man:]** Yes.

**[Me:]** Ok, have you ever committed adultery (had sex outside of marriage)?

**[Man:]** No.

**[Me:]** You know Jesus said that if we even look at a woman with lust in our minds, we have committed adultery with her in our hearts.

**[Man:]** Ok, then yes.

**[Me:]** Yes, the Lord is even interested in our words and thought life. Have you ever said the Lord's name in vain?

**[Man:]** Probably.

**[Me:]** Do you know what that's called?

**[Man:]** No.

**[Me:]** It's called blasphemy, and it's very serious. In fact, God said He will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses my name.

**[Man:]** I see.

**[Me:]** Yes, so let's just recap. By your own admission, you are a liar, an adulterer at heart, a blasphemer, and you disobey the authority that God has given over your life. If God were to show up today or, God-forbid, that you died today, do you think that God would judge you as innocent or guilty?

**[Man:]** Well, I think that God is loving and merciful, so He can forgive me.

**[Me:]** Ok, I agree God is loving and merciful. Is He just?

**[Man:]** I think so.

**[Me:]** Ok, what does that mean to you?

**[Man:]** It means that He is fair.

**[Me:]** Ok, do you think that it's fair when a judge sentences the criminals? Let me give you an example; if I were to run through that stop light at the corner, and I got a ticket from the police officer, can I go before the judge and say; I believe you are a nice and merciful guy, I believe you will just rip up that ticket?

**[Man:]** No.

**[Me:]** Why not?

**[Man:]** Because that's his job as a judge.

**[Me:]** Right, and he is appointed to pronounce the sentences of justice. Well God is the ultimate judge and, likewise, He won't just sweep sins underneath the rug. He has to make sure that those who break His laws are punished, and since our sins are against an eternal God, the crime and punishment are eternal as well. So God would be just to judge all of those who rebel against His law, and authority, and sentence them to an eternity in hell. Does that concern you?

**[Man:]** Yes…

**[Me:]** Yea. Do you think there is anything we can do about it?

**[Man:]** We can apologize, ask for forgiveness, and promise to never do it again.

**[Me:]** Ok, so that is similar to what the Bible calls repentance, which is a 180 degree turn away from our former life of sin towards a new life of obedience to God. That may take care of the future, but what about the punishment you already deserve for the sins of the past?

**[Man:]** I'm not sure about that.

**[Me:]** Well, let me tell you about what God did for man so that He could be merciful and just at the same time, because He is equally both. He sent His Son Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, 2nd member of the trinity, to Earth to be born of a virgin. He lived 33 years on Earth, perfectly obeying all of the commandments of God, something we could never do in a million lifetimes. He did that on our behalf, since God required that we live a perfect life of holiness, so He is a savior in that way. Then after 33 years of life, He laid His life down on the cross in order to pay the just and righteous punishment that we deserve from God for all of our sins. God said, "the wages of sin is death" and "the soul that sins shall die". Therefore, Christ stood in the place of the sinner and paid the death penalty on our behalf, and He is a savior in that way. So what we have here is a complete swapping of places, Christ takes our punishment, and we take His perfect life of obedience, so that when we stand before God in judgment we can enter into heaven, not based on what we have done, but based on what the Lord Jesus Christ has done on our behalf. Does that sound like a good deal?

**[Man:]** Yea.

**[Me:]** Yes, that's the Gospel! The good news! So how do you think we should respond to this message?

**[Man:]** Well, I think we should believe Christ.

**[Me:]** Yes, is there anything else?

**[Man:]** Yes, we should stop sinning.

**[Me:]**Absolutely, how can we go on sinning after we realize how much God hates sin, and how great of a price He paid in order to forgive us and reconcile us to Himself?

**[Man:]** Yes, I understand.

**[Me:]** Good. Do you know the difference between knowing the truth and believing in it?

**[Man:]** What do you mean?

**[Me:]** Well, many people say, "yes, I know about Jesus, and the cross, and that sins are forgiven". However, I can say that I believe that an elevator will take me safely up to the third floor of a building, but unless I am willing to step onto the elevator and actually ride it up to the third floor, I will never get there. So you can see that there is a difference between knowing something, and believing in it enough to place our trust and dependence upon it.

**[Man:]** Yes.

**[Me:]** Yes, the message of the gospel compels us to action. This means that if we truly understand the value of it, we will put all of our trust in it and live in a way that will honor and glorify God for His tremendous gift, since we are forever indebted to Him for His graciousness.

**[Man:]** I understand.

**[Me:]** Well, I really appreciate you talking with me, and I hope that I have given you something to think about.

**[Man:]** You have.

**[Me:]** That's good, but while I may make a good point, the truth is that true saving faith comes from hearing the Word of God. So do you have a Bible that you can read?

**[Man:]** No.

**[Me:]** Ok, well please take this one as a gift from me. Do you have a church that you attend which teaches from the scriptures?

**[Man:]** No.

**[Me:]** Well, please take this list of good Bible-believing churches in the area, or if you prefer, you can go to our website and visit our church sometime.

**[Man:]** Ok, thanks.

**[Me:]** You're welcome. I want to give you this one last resource, it's a tract that lays out some of the characteristics of what it means to be a Christian. Thanks again for talking with me and have a great day!

**[Man:]** Thank you, you too.