

Do most church members need to be converted?

Though E. Stanley Jones was a missionary to India for 50 years he thought of himself as an evangelist. In his writing and preaching his central theme was Jesus Christ. Jones constantly pointed people to Jesus. That is the work of an evangelist.

Titles mattered little to Jones. He asked people to call him “Brother Stanley.” We are brothers and sisters, he said, and God is our Father.

I met Brother Stanley when he was 77. He was fit as a fiddle. His wit and teaching, and his gentle spirit, captured my heart. When he preached for 45 minutes it seemed like five minutes. I was blown away by the power and clarity with which he shared the faith.

When Brother Stanley spoke about Jesus you felt like he knew Jesus and knew him well. Jesus was not a historical figure; he was alive and present here and now. Jones said, “I know Jesus better than I know anyone on this planet, and he knows me better than anyone else knows me.”

For Brother Stanley life was “in Christ.” In Christ you are alive; outside Christ you are dead. He described his life like this: “When I live in Jesus, by him, and for him, I live; if I live some other way, I tend to go to pieces – I perish.”

He went even farther to say, “I know exactly what happens when I depart from the way of Christ. I am orphaned, estranged, underground, out of harmony with myself and the universe. Everything within me cries out and says: ‘This is not the Way.’ That is the best proved fact of my life.”

Brother Stanley said he had met people both inside the church, and outside it, who live consciously “in Christ.” He hastened to add that life in Christ has “a better chance of being heightened” when people are also in the church, and that outside the church “this life in Christ has a chance of being dimmed.”

Jones was well known for having declared that “two thirds of the people in the church need conversion.” Only one third really understand what conversion is. The rest are “a field for evangelism” rather than “a force for evangelism.”

This led Jones to conclude, “If a church is no longer able to produce, by the grace of God, the miracle of conversion, it has lost its right to be called Christian.”

Conversion, Jones insisted, was the result of surrender to Jesus Christ. It is to be made over again, to be saved from yourself, your sins, your conflicts, your futility, and your emptiness. Conversion gives us a personal relationship to Jesus. We get to know Jesus and he knows us.

Jones said, “Jesus makes men different, as different from the ordinary man as the ordinary man is different from the animal.” I can testify that Brother Stanley’s conversion made him different from ordinary people. He was full of life and hope and peace. His walk with Jesus inspired those around him to walk to walk with Jesus.

Toward the end of his life Brother Stanley said, “Jesus has given me power to turn every sorrow into a song, every hurt into a hallelujah. So I believe in miracles, for I am a miracle – a miracle of grace!” What a difference Jesus made in his life!

Pause for a moment and think with me about this matter of conversion. If you are in a church, are you one of the converted or one of the majority who still need to be converted? Can it be true that two thirds of your fellow church members do not have a personal relationship with Jesus? If you are not converted, let me encourage you right now to surrender to Jesus and get to know him.

If you are converted and thus alive in Christ, should you not witness to this reality in thoughtful, winsome ways so that your unconverted friends may find their way out of the darkness into the light?

Jones was fond of saying, as he held up three fingers, “Jesus is Lord!” When Jesus is truly Lord, he gives the redeemed the grace to say so! When the redeemed share their love for Jesus, the Spirit begins to woo the lost into the Kingdom!