

From The Minister's Desk March 29, 2009

DO RELIGIOUS PEOPLE NEED CONVERSION?

Should we attempt to convert religious people, or should the gospel be presented only to those who have no religion?

Some contend that we should “leave religious people alone” when it comes to attempts at conversion. Instead, they argue that we should focus our evangelistic attention upon “the un-churched.” However, what do the Scriptures say? Let us examine the cases of conversion in the book of Acts as they relate to this question: Were any measures taken to convert those in the first century who were already religious?

Those in Acts 2 were “devout men” (2:5) who had come to Jerusalem, a religious center, for the day of Pentecost, a religious observance. Truly, they were religious. Yet, the apostles successfully attempted to convert them to Jesus Christ. About 3,000 obeyed the gospel that day (2:41).

The Ethiopian eunuch is mentioned in Acts 8. He was a religious man who had traveled all the way to Jerusalem to worship (8:27). As he returned home, he read from the book of Isaiah (8:28). However, Philip “preached Jesus to him,” which resulted in his conversion.

Lydia was a woman “who worshiped God” (Acts 16:14). She found a place of prayer and engaged in religious activity on the Sabbath, a religious day. However, she was converted to Christ by the word presented by Paul (16:15).

Saul of Tarsus was zealously religious. He was circumcised the eighth day, a Hebrew of Hebrews, and a Pharisee. He was exceedingly zealous for the Law of Moses (Phil. 3:5,6). However, he was converted to Christ (Acts 9). He was baptized to have his sins washed away (cf. Acts 22:16).

Cornelius the centurion, although not of Jewish lineage, was a deeply religious man (Acts 10:1,2). Yet, Peter made a special trip to his home to convert him (10:19-48).

The masses of Ephesus were devotees of the goddess Diana. Yet, this did not deter Paul from preaching Christ to them (Acts 19). They needed to be converted to the truth!

From these examples we can see that most of those in the first century who were converted were already religious in some way. Nevertheless, inspired teachers did not hesitate to teach them more accurately the way of the Lord (cf. Acts 18:24-26) and convert them to the truth. Anyone whose religion does not conform **in all ways** to that presented by Jesus Christ is a proper subject of conversion to His way. In fact, many good prospects for conversion are those who already have a degree of faith in the Lord. **It is our duty to love them and kindly show them** the error of their ways so that they may embrace the pure gospel and not a corrupt perversion of it (cf. Gal. 1:6-9).

Let's love people enough to share the good news with all!

Donald