

What Does It Mean To Be Sincere?

Introduction

1. Sincerity is a subject worthy of consideration in the world in which we live.
2. It is a quality that is valued and respected by most people.
3. But it is also a subject that is misunderstood in the religious world.
4. So today, I want to take a few moments to consider the question what does it mean to be sincere?

I. What is Sincerity?

- A. Biblically the term is defined as genuine, without hypocrisy. Similarly, the word is defined in our English language as, “free from pretense or deceit; proceeding from genuine feelings.”
- B. The Bible speaks clearly of the importance of sincerity in a Christians life.
 1. “But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Timothy 1:5).
 2. “Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls through the Spirit for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart” (1 Peter 1:22).
 3. “So that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ” (Philippians 1:10).
- C. But when it comes to applying God’s word, sincerity is something that often misunderstood.
 1. There are many today who reason that as long as one is sincere, that is all that matters.
 2. It does not matter what I believe as long as I am sincere - God will accept me.
 3. In other words, as long I am sincere in what I believe and practice I am right with God as we all are.
- D. The scriptures overwhelmingly demonstrate that it is possible to be sincere yet be wrong.
 1. Prior to his conversion, Paul the apostle persecuted the church - he thought he was doing right but he was wrong (Acts 26:9-10 cf. 1 Tim.1:13).
 2. Uzzah, as he reached for the ark, did so with pure motives, but he was wrong and struck down for is error (2 Sam.6:7).
 3. “There is a way (religious views / practices) which seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 14:12).
 4. “Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter” (Matthew 7:21)
- E. Thus, sincerity alone is not enough; it must be coupled with truth (cp. Joshua 24:14; 1 Corinthians 5:8; Ephesians 6:24 cf. John 14:15; 1 John 5:3).

II. What Are Qualities of True Sincerity?

A. A Sincere Person Is Open Minded

1. Are we open minded? When it comes to studying God’s word, are we willing to listen to what others have to say? Are we willing to admit that it is possible that we might be wrong on a particular passage or subject? If we are shown to be wrong, are we willing to admit to it?
2. Understand, more than likely, on certain subjects we are not wrong; but our attitude needs to be a willingness to consider a message.
3. We need to be like Cornelius; gathered together with his house to hear the entire message of God.
 - a. “So I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. Now then, we are all here present before God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord” (Acts 10:33).
4. When Paul went to Berea he found people that were open-mind willing to give him a fair hearing:
 - a. “Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness...” (Acts 17:11).
 - b. “This is the first particular in which they were more noble-minded (open -minded)” (Barnes).

5. Acts 7:57 sadly describes the attitude of the religious leaders when Stephen exposed their corruption. They cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears. They then stoned him to death.
 - a. One reason Jesus spoke in parables was because there were many who were not open minded. He explained in Matthew 13:14-15 the prophecy of Isaiah 6:9-10 where they had closed their eyes and stopped their ears and dulled their heart.
 - b. One of the problems we have today with many is the closed mind. People make up their minds before they hear and give consideration to all the facts. Others are happy where they are at and don't want to change or HEAR about their need to change.

B. A Sincere Person Will Investigate The Truth

1. "Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11).
 - a. This is second particular in which he Bereans prove themselves more 'noble-minded'.
 - b. They searched the scriptures to see if the things Paul were claiming was actually and scripturally true.
 - c. Being open minded does not mean blindly accepting whatever is presented to us - but having the attitude, could this person be right?
2. Christians are to cultivate the habit and art of investigating things taught and presented as truth.
 - a. "But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22).
 - b. "Beloved, 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" (1 John 4:1).
3. Sadly there are many today - both without and within the church - that are satisfied at where there at, and have not further desire to study God's word.
4. If we are sincere, we are going to want to be right; so we will take the time to investigate.

C. A Sincere Person Puts Truth First

1. "Buy truth, and do not sell it, Get wisdom and instruction and understanding" (Proverbs 23:23).
 - a. If we are sincere and open minded, have considered what someone, have been shown to be wrong, then true sincerity values God's truth above all else.
 - b. One commentator writes: 'obtain the truth at all costs...then never relinquish it at any price.'
2. True sincerity not only loves the truth; it also recognizes God's word as the source of religious truth.
 - a. "From Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way. Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path" (Psalms 119:104-10).
 - b. The problem with many today is not their sincerity; but the source upon which it is based.
3. The apostle Paul commended the brethren Thessalonica for accepting God's word as the source of truth:
 - a. "For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe" (1 Thessalonians 2:13).
4. If we are truly sincere, then we are going to put truth above everything and everyone else - even ourselves.

D. True Sincerity Will Not Manipulate Scripture

1. "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).
 - a. If we are sincere about seeking God's truth, then we take what the text says as it says it.
 - b. We will not look for loopholes so that we can continue in sinful conduct; or sweep under the carpet passages that counter our argument; or reinterpret scripture to bolster our own beliefs.
2. "As also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16).

- a. These individuals were twisting the words of Paul, as they did not fit in with their beliefs.
 - b. People similarly twist the scriptures; dismissing whole sections of the Bible (James); discounting plain scripture (Mark 16:16; John 1:3)
 - c. When we study God's we will handle it accurately and respectfully, taking the text at face value, accepting for what it says, and seeking to make sure that our understanding of it is the understanding of the inspired writers - e.g. fellowship
3. Paul was clear as he taught the Corinthians. "For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God" (2 Corinthians 2:17).
 4. "Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, intensely crave the uncorrupted milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation" (1 Peter 2:1-2).

E. True Sincerity Will Change When Confronted By The Truth - When Learn We Are Wrong

1. You can be sincere and be wrong (as Paul), but when you hear the truth that combination no longer exists.
2. Either you change because you are sincere, or you continue on your former course and cease to be sincere.
3. Paul is a classic example of this "For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions" (Galatians 1:13-14 NASB).
 - a. Paul in his sincerity was completely confident that he was right with God and in his beliefs; but when confronted with the truth, he changed.
 - b. What if he had not? Could he claim he was sincere and had lived in good conscience before God as he did before the council (Acts 23:1)?
4. Other examples of those exhibiting a sincerity that led to them to change when proved wrong are Apollos and the 19 disciples of John (Acts 18:24-28; 19:1-5).

Conclusion

1. And thus we see some qualities of the sincere person. In 2 Corinthians 13:5 we are called upon to examine ourselves. As you do so, do you find true sincerity in your service to God?
2. As we have seen, true sincerity is not ignorant. Instead it is resolved and it is demonstrated throughout our lives. What about you? Are you sincere?