

Introduction



Sincerity is honest authenticity and genuine wholeheartedness. It is freedom from hypocrisy, and is often a pleasure to see. What is the relationship of this wonderful attribute to the salvation of the human soul?

The Necessity of Sincerity

Sincerity is required by our Creator: "Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands (obedience in the outer life), and *a pure heart* (sincerity in the inner life)..." (Psalm 24:3-4). Amaziah the king "did what was right in the sight of the LORD, *but not with a loyal heart*" (2 Chronicles 25:1-2). God places great importance on sincerity.

God spoke to his children about the sacrifices they were offering, and told them He couldn't stand it: "Bring no more futile sacrifices" (Isaiah 1:13). They were obeying after a fashion, but it was just a series of perfunctory acts. It meant nothing to them, thus they stood condemned (Isaiah 1:16, 18).

We see this in the Old Testament time and again.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). "Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith" (1 Timothy 1:5). Sincerity is necessary. God required it from the beginning and still requires it today. Nobody can successfully approach God through a legalistic form to be justified by the deeds he performs, without regard to how his heart is toward God. An honest mind set on pleasing the Lord.

The Insufficiency of Sincerity

It seems that no matter what God requires, somebody adds that little four letter word "ONLY." We often hear of one who has not obeyed the gospel, but who's sincere: "He's trying to do his best. Surely he'll be saved." That's salvation by sincerity only. The truth is that God has never set forth any one thing as a human response that we could say is the only thing necessary to salvation. We're saved by faith (Romans 3:28), but not by faith only. We're saved by works (James 2:24), but not by works only. By grace (Ephesians 2:8), but not grace only. By baptism (1 Peter 3:21), but not baptism only. By sincerity (Hebrews 10:22), but not sincerity only. Sincerity is essential, but in itself, insufficient.

We all understand the consequences of being sincerely wrong ("I didn't think the gun was loaded." "I didn't think there were any cars coming."), until we get to the area of salvation. Then some say, "It's all right as long as you're sincere." Where is the indication that Cain was not sincere in his offering? (Genesis 4:3-7) Yet God "did not respect Cain and his offering" (Genesis 4:5), because his sacrifice was not by faith (Hebrews 11:4). Where is the indication that Naaman was not sincere in his belief that the prophet had done the wrong thing? (2 Kings 5:10-13) If he'd gone home and washed in the better rivers of Syria, sincerely believing, would he have been cleansed? He was still a leper until he obeyed God.

"There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Proverbs 16:25). That's a blatant condemnation of sincerity only. It's a warning against it. If that verse does not teach that you can go forth with assurance of mind, believing that you're doing right, and still stand condemned in the eyes of God, it teaches nothing.

Educating the Conscience

God has given us a standard so that we don't have to rely on our own thoughts. His thoughts are higher than ours, as the heavens are higher than the earth (Isaiah 55:8-9). "[T]he world through wisdom did not know God" (1 Corinthians 1:21). "O LORD, I know

the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (Jeremiah 10:23). God loves us so much, He gave us His word. We can in this all-sufficient standard find the narrow path of which our Lord spoke (Matthew 7:14). We need to leave the idea of “sincerity only” behind us, and bring our sincerity to a search of God's word.

The people in Athens were so sincere they built altars to every god they thought existed, and thinking they must have missed one, they erected an altar “TO THE UNKNOWN GOD” (Acts 17:23). But Paul, in declaring the unknown God to them, preached to them as lost and dying sinners, just as he himself had been when he was killing Christians, sincerely believing that he did God service (1 Timothy 1:12-13; Acts 23:1).

Conscience is a function of education. If the education is faulty, the conscience will be skewed. We dare not let conscience alone be our guide. Still, we dare not go against conscience, for then we are not sincere. The only solution is to let our sincerity lead us to the word of God, and then let God's standard educate our conscience. ▪



Sincerity and Salvation



by

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