

Are you Sincere?

The word sincere is often times misused. Some say that one is sincere if he or she is teaching or practicing something sinful with a clear conscience. Said individuals truly believe that the erroneous teaching they do is truthful and so are determined to be sincere by others upon the basis of individual conscience. An example of this thinking was put forth in the November 1988 issue of Christianity Magazine (Homer Hailey: False Teacher?) when Ed Harrell stated, “As I have already noted, the presumption that one becomes a ‘false teacher’ on the basis of holding one doctrine that I judge to be erroneous is loaded with consequences that none of us would accept. **A false teacher is surely one whose dishonest motives and or ignorance distinguishes him from the sincere brother who has reached an erroneous conclusion (emp. mine jr).** If that is not the case, then I am surrounded by false teachers.” There is an erroneous approach to the study of who a false teacher is with such statements. One must ask what determines whether one is sincere or dishonest with their dealings or teachings. Brother Harrell’s defense of Homer Hailey explains sincerity to be measured by whether one believes his dealings and teachings are “dishonest.” Sincerity is thereby measured by one’s own feelings and beliefs as opposed to divine revelation. A brother who “reaches an erroneous conclusion” apart from “dishonesty” is deemed sincere.

Let us begin by defining the word “*sincere*” as the word of God uses it. Paul prayed that the Philippians would gain knowledge and discernment “*so that ye may approve the things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and void of offence unto the day of Christ...*” (Phil. 1:10). The word “*sincere*” (Gr. *heilikrines*) = “unmixed, without alloy, pure, Latin: *sincerus*... without mixture, of itself, simply, absolutely” (LS 228). Moulton defines the word *heilkrineia* as “sunshine,... that which being viewed in the sunshine is found clear and pure; met. Spotless, sincere, ingenuous” (117-118). The American Heritage Dictionary defines the word sincere as “not feigned or affected; true: Presenting no false appearance; honest; pure unadulterated” (1142). This verse clearly teaches us what Bible honesty and “*sincerity*” (*heilikrineia*) is about. The Christian must understand that God’s word is the standard of truth (cf. Eph. 4:1ff; Jude 3). Considering the definition of sincerity (i.e., pure, absolute, spotless, honest, unadulterated) and the NT use of the word (i.e., found five times at I Cor. 5:8; II Cor. 1:12; Phil. 1:10; II Pet. 3:1; and here at Phil. 1:10) the evidence is conclusive that truth is the standard by which a man or woman is judged to be sincere or honest (cf. Lk. 8:15; I Jn. 2:4; 3:7-8). Paul clearly states the contrast between man’s “*fleshly wisdom*” and “*sincerity*” when it comes to determining truth at II Corinthians 1:12.

Many are not using the word sincerity correctly. To connect “sincerity” with “reaching an erroneous conclusion” is not how the NT uses the word. Some brethren today are associating an individual’s motive with sincerity. When one’s motive is not dastardly, then the individual is sincere. Note; however, from the definition of sincerity that it is only when one’s teachings and practices are held up to the light of the gospel that it is exposed to be sincere or erroneous. According to the definition of sincerity, one cannot be spiritually sincere while representing error. Consequently, this study indicates that one cannot be considered sincere while preaching or practicing error even though they have no motive of harm. To say that one is sincere in his error is to speak an oxymoron. When one preaches error, it is a lie no matter what one’s **motive** or **ignorance** of a subject may be (cf. I Jn. 2:21). Said erroneous information “*leads astray*” (I Jn. 2:26; 3:7) and, therefore, can in no way be honest or sincere.

The NT reveals that at times men will practice or teach sinful things. These sinful events are at times conducted in “*ignorance*” and such “*ignorance*” is to be repented of (Acts 3:15-19). Let no man use the words ignorance, error, honesty, and sincerity as synonyms. The false teacher is thereby irreverent and dishonest when it comes to God’s Word (even if he is totally convicted that his preaching and teaching represents truth). The idea of honesty and sincerity suggest a standard by

which one is measured to be honest and sincere. If one can be counted honest and sincere without being measured by a standard it would stand to reason that there is no standard (i.e., humanism / what ever I deem to be correct is the basis for sincerity)

The apostle Paul said at Ephesians 5:8, “*For ye were once darkness, but are now light in the Lord: walk as children of light*” (5:8). The idea of spiritual “*darkness*” (uncertainty) is put in contrast with “*light*” (Gr. *phos* = “The light of divine truth, spiritual illumination” (Moulton 432)). Clearly the use of the word *phos* in verse eight indicates spiritual illumination through study and knowledge of truth. This spiritual illumination is “*in the Lord*” and thereby Paul commands that Christians “*walk as children of light*” (i.e., understanding). Said light identifies one as either sincere or insincere in their teaching and manner of life. The gospel message is the light that exposes a man for what he truly is. Consider this definition of the word **sincere** at askjeeves.com, “Today's definition of the root word, 'sincere', is 'honest and genuine'. But you have to go all the way back to the original Greek word to learn its fascinating origin. The original word for 'sincere' is a composite of two other words: 'helile' (meaning 'the sun's rays') and 'krino' (meaning 'judged by sunlight'). The two words come together to form a new word - 'eilikrines' – meaning 'tested as genuine'. In ancient cultures it was common for pottery to be sold at market. Occasionally the pottery cracked and was worthless. Some merchants would try and hide or disguise the cracks by filling them in with wax. The pottery would look fine until filled with a liquid. Only then would the unsuspecting buyer discover the cracks! For this reason it became a common practice when buying pottery to hold the piece up to the sun while looking into it. If the pottery had any cracks they would immediately become visible. Even if filled in with wax, the sunlight would shine through the cracks. The pottery was literally 'judged by sunlight' and 'tested as genuine'!”

Considering the above definitions and scriptures would you consider your teaching and practices sincere? The only way that you or I can answer such a question is to let the light of the gospel expose my teachings and practices as either truthful or erroneous... it's not rocket science.