

The Place of Sincerity in Religion – No. 2

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God despises hypocrisy, which is the equivalent of insincerity (Mat. 24:51). But does He require anything more than sincerity? What about the familiar phrase: “It makes no difference what you believe if you’re sincere?” Is it a great proverb of truth or is it another popular lie that has been foisted on a gullible populace? It certainly indicates a great degree of tolerance and broadmindedness, both of which are greatly admired by most moderns. However, our interest must be more in what pleases God than what pleases man. Therefore, what does the Bible say about the question?

If sincerity alone were sufficient to please God, Jesus need never have come to earth, much less died on the cross. The world was full of religion when He came and surely some, if not all, of these religionists were sincere devotees to their gods. Does the fact that Jesus came to save a world full of religionists, at least some of whom were sincere, teach us that more than sincerity is required?

No man was ever more sincere than Saul of Tarsus. When we first meet him in Scripture, he is laying waste the church in Jerusalem (Acts 7-8). He obtained orders to do the same in Damascus (Acts 9:1-2). Later, after becoming a Christian, he spoke of these times in a way that indicates his absolute sincerity and honesty in doing what he thought was correct (Acts 23:1; 26:9). Yet, he also describes himself in those earlier days as “a blasphemer, a persecutor, an injurious person” and the chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:13, 15). Had he died while he was persecuting God’s people, how can one believe that he would have been saved, even though he did it sincerely? Saul’s case teaches us that sincerity alone is insufficient to please God.

The case of Cornelius (Acts 10-11) is enlightening. His sincerity can’t be questioned: he was devout, God-fearing, generous, and prayerful (Acts 10:2). God said to this sincere man to send for Peter who would tell him what to do to be saved (Acts 11:13-14). Sincerity was insufficient for Cornelius. He had to **hear and obey** the Truth.

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