

Bible Sincerity

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Most people claiming to be sincere in their religious beliefs usually express their sincerity in terms of genuine feelings which they hold dear from the very depths of their hearts. This is in accord with Webster's definition of the word 'sincere' which stresses feelings that are pure, unfeigned, heartfelt, and absent of any hypocrisy.

Yet, while there are deep feelings and emotions in what we believe, a careful student of the Bible will find that the word 'sincere' has nothing to do with the way one feels about anything, but has everything to do with what one knows and how one uses his/her knowledge to distinguish between things that differ from what God says versus what man says.

This point is brought out vividly in Paul's prayer for the Philippians where we read: "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ..." – 1:9-10. [Cf. footnote, v. 10, ASV/NASB]

The Philippian's love for the apostle Paul was unquestionable. They were the only ones who supported him when he first began to preach the gospel – 4:15. Yet, their love needed to grow even more into a deeper knowledge to enable them to have a keener power of discernment. The basic Greek word for 'knowledge' is 'ginosko.' But here, the word is 'epi' (upon) ginosko,' an intensification of the word, adding strength and suggesting a deeper knowledge. But why should the Philippians need a deeper knowledge? They needed a deeper knowledge to provide for themselves a deeper discerning power!

The word for discernment is, 'aisthesis' (translated 'judgment' in the KJV and used only here in the NT). One can see in aisthesis our English word aesthetic which pertains to our physical senses and appreciation for material beauty. But the Greek word aisthesis goes much deeper than that. Thayer describes aisthesis as a perception, not only by the senses but also by the intellect. He cites Phil. 1:9 where this deeper knowledge gives one a broader range of understanding both in moral as well as ethical matters. A word of similar character, 'aistheteria,' is used in Hebrews 5:14 where the more mature Christian has his faculties (senses) sharpened and better trained to discern between good and evil. This is not a new concept (Cf. Lev. 10:10; Ezek. 22:26).

But what does all this have to do with sincerity? The word here for sincere is 'eilikrines.' One can see two words in this: 'eile' (sun) plus 'krino' (judge), literally to mean: 'judge by the sun.' Let me illustrate: If a sculptor of a bust allows his chisel to go deeper than intended, he can cover his flaw by putting wax in the crevice and it may be impossible to

detect with the unaided eye. However, once the work is completed the owner can set the bust in the sunlight and any wax added will melt. Hence, the word 'sincere' came to mean the same as our word 'guarantee' meaning this work is without wax and is flawless.

And one more advantage of knowledge and discerning power is this: The record says, "...that you may be sincere and blameless..." The word for blameless is 'aproskopto' which means literally: 'not falling forward' i.e. 'not stumbling.'

CONCLUSION AND APPLICATION

On the Judgment Day when all things hidden will be exposed (Ecc. 12:14), the Lord will deny even knowing those who did only what they felt in their heart was right – Matt. 7:21-23. But when the books are opened and the sunlight of God's word falls upon the lives of those whose love has abounded in real knowledge and all discernment, if they have used this power to distinguish between the things that differ from what God says versus what man says, they will be found sincere (flawless) and blameless (not stumbling), being filled with the fruits of righteousness unto the glory and praise of God. Will the Lord find you sincere?