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Tower of Strength

**“The name of the Lord is a strong tower
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”**

—Proverbs 18:10

Sincerity

The etymology of the English word “sincere” is very interesting. Most scholars believe it comes from two Latin roots, *sin* meaning “without,” and *cerus* meaning “wax.”

The story goes that in the days of Rome, dishonest potters used a trick. Sometimes a finished item would come out of the kiln with a small crack or noticeable flaw. Rather than discard the item at a loss, the potter would fill the crack with wax and sell it as unblemished.

Of course, someone who purchased the item would eventually discover the deception, after heat and use had melted away the soft wax. But by that time, it was nearly impossible to find the potter and complain.

Thus, honest potters began guaranteeing their work by stamping the bottom of their items with *sincerus*, “without wax.”

Sincerity is thus defined as, “being in reality as it is in appearance; real, genuine, free from deceit or hypocrisy.” Of course, when we see the word “sincere” in the Bible, we realize the Greek author

did not have that image in mind. That word is actually *a-dolos*, meaning “without guile.” But, I still think of that vivid word picture of an ancient potter, every time I see the word “sincere.”

Sincerity is a virtue in all aspects of Christian life. First of all, we need to be sincere with God. The Bible admonishes us to conduct ourselves with “holiness and godly sincerity” (2 Cor. 1:12). Our whole lives are to be “sincere and blameless until the day of Christ” (Phil. 1:10). An insincere Christian pays lip service to God, but does not obey Him. If we claim to be servants of Jesus Christ, then our behavior should be consistent. We may fill the sinful cracks in our life with wax and deceive our brethren, but obviously God cannot be fooled. “Each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work” (1 Cor. 3:13). We are to draw near to Christ “with a sincere heart” (Heb. 10:22), a heart that doesn’t just pretend to be Christ’s, but a heart that is really and truly devoted to Him.

Insincerity, better known as hypocrisy, damages the church. When people in the community see those who claim to be Christians acting like heathens, they question why anyone would need Christ. When this happens, God says angrily to the church,

“You therefore who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal? You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you” (Romans 2:21–24).

Sincere Christians are a great advertisement for the Lord, but insincere Christians damage God’s image. As Peter Kreeft once said of hypocritical evangelists, “What you are speaks so loudly I hardly hear what you are saying.”

Second, we need to approach the Bible with sincerity. In our searching out of the gospel message, we must have a “sincere mind” (2 Pet. 3:1). An earnest desire to read the Bible, a heart that says, “Lord, teach me the truth,” will find the answers. One who is reading out of the Bible (which is called *exegesis*) rather than reading his own prejudices into the Bible (which is called *eisegesis*) will discover the truth. One who is “examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things are so” (Acts 17:11) is not going to be sucked into false doctrine easily.

Putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves (James 1:21–22).

Third, we need to be sincere with ourselves. George Burns once said, “sincerity—if you can fake that, you’ve got it made.” But we must be true with the man in the mirror. Paul told Timothy, “the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Tim. 1:5). He later praised him for “the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice” (2 Tim. 1:5). A sincere faith is one that doesn’t play at church or stick with Jesus only while it’s convenient. A sincere faith is one that is willing to “examine itself” (2 Cor. 13:5) and address the deficiencies, rather than pretend that everything’s OK, or smooth over problems with a thin film of wax.

Fourth, we need to be sincere with others. The Bible commands us to demonstrate “a sincere love of the brethren” (1 Pet. 1:22). We are not to be disingenuous with our brothers and sisters in Christ. There can be no ulterior motives for our kindness. No helping just to tally up favors that can be redeemed later. No compliments paid just to get on someone’s good side. Our love must be real, and ready to sacrifice time and effort when necessary. As Tracy Lawrence sings in *You Find Out Who Your Friends Are*, being broken down on the side of the road quickly reveals

which of your friends sincerely love you, and which smile at you only for advantage.

Furthermore, our actions in the world must not be designed simply to impress those in positions of power or win us promotions, but to truly serve their best interests.

In all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve (Colossians 3:22–24).

Old timers who grew up in the north and who know what a few seasons of salty roads can do to a car's metal body, often bring a magnet when looking to purchase a used car. Why? To hold to the body of the car in various places to check for the presence of Bondo, a cheap putty that will fill holes and dents and can be painted over to look good, but which indicates the car's structural integrity is questionable. Be sure that in your dealings with employers and acquaintances you aren't just a car patched with Bondo, looking nice at first, but sure to disappoint a few miles down the road. Serve others sincerely, as if you were serving Jesus Christ himself.

—*John Guzzetta*

Quote of the Week:

“Though the fig tree should not blossom
And there be no fruit on the vines,
Though the yield of the olive should fail
And the fields produce no food,
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold
And there be no cattle in the stalls,
Yet I will exult in the Lord,
I will rejoice in the God of my salvation” (Habakkuk 3:17–18).