Can Those Who Are Sincere Be Wrong?

Honesty and sincerity do not guarantee that our positions and actions are right. We recognize that principle in other areas of life. Why not grabble with it in religion? We all know that it is possible for one to take the wrong medication, while believing it to be correct, and then suffer the consequences. If a person drank a glass of poison, thinking it to be water, would it not have an adverse affect upon him?

All through the Bible there are examples of those who were sincere and still in sin. To illustrate, consider the case of Abimelech who took Sara from Abraham. He said, "In the integrity of my heart and innocence of my hands I have done this" (Gen. 20:5). Yet, it was still wrong for him to take her. God told Abimelech, "Indeed you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife" (v. 3). As a consequence, God "closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife" (v. 18).

Do you remember the old prophet who lied to the younger one about God telling him to come back with him (1 Kings 13)? The younger prophet had been specifically warned by God who said, "You shall not eat bread, nor drink water, nor return by the same way you came" (v. 9). The older prophet "lied" to him and convinced the younger prophet that the Lord told him to bring the younger prophet home with him. So, he did what he was told. The text says the Lord allowed a lion to slay him because of his disobedience. Sincere? Yes. Honest? Absolutely. Wrong? No doubt!

More specifically, there are cases of people who were sincere and yet they were still wrong and in need of salvation. Saul of Tarsus is a case in point. Before his conversion he persecuted the church making havoc of it (Acts 8:1-3). He assisted in putting Christians in prison and voiced his opinion about some being put to death. In fact, he was so bad that he described himself as the "chief" of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). Yet, during that time, he lived with a clear conscience (Acts 23:1). The whole time he was doing what he thought to be right. He was wrong, though sincere. He still needed to be baptized to wash away his sins (Acts 22:16).

Another case is that of Cornelius, the first Gentile convert (Acts 10). He was a good man (vv. 2, 22). He feared God, gave alms, and prayed regularly. Yet, he still had to hear the gospel by which he could be saved (Acts 10:6; 11:14). Was this notable leader sincere? No one would question that. Was he still lost and in need of salvation? He certainly was.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that there would be some who would be surprised at the judgment day. He said, "Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" (Matt. 7:21-23)! Their reaction shows their honesty and sincerity. Yet, these would be cast off because they work lawlessness (doing that which is not lawful).

While we do not determine what is right and wrong by whether we like the consequences, we can see something is wrong with a conclusion if its consequences contradict plain and simple passages. If we cannot conceive of sincere people being lost, then we must conclude that any who are honest and sincere cannot be lost. Who could affirm that? That would mean that sincerity is all that is essential. It wouldn't matter what you believe, practice, or teach in religion as long as you are sincere. This would mean that any Jew or Muslim who denies that Jesus is the Son of God would not be lost (even though he doesn't believe in Christ) since he is sincere. Thus, any passage demanding faith would have to be wrong! Furthermore, even an atheist would not be lost if he is honest and sincere in their conclusions. Who can accept these consequences?

- by Donnie V. Rader

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Following The Pattern In Edification

We know that the Lord's church is certainly authorized and obligated to work in the area of edification. By this we have specific reference to the job of strengthening the faith and devotion of those who are already Christians. Paul instructed the Corinthian church to be careful in their work and worship so that "all things be done unto edifying" (1 Cor. 14:26). In Antioch, for "a

whole year" Paul and Barnabas "assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people" (Act 11:26).

In order to accomplish this important task, prudent decisions must be made about where and when the teaching and encouragement will take place. Teachers must be designated, students assigned, subject matter selected, etc. All of this constitutes a "feeding the flock of God" (1 Pet. 5:2), and the church is thoroughly equipped to handle this assignment. When the work is properly done, it "maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Eph. 4:16).

We must be cautious to follow God's plan for this important work. There is no place for the multitude of innovations that men have conceived. For instance, there is no authority for a congregation to maintain a separate 'Sunday school organization' with its own officers and treasury. Neither is there a right for a church to support so-called 'Christian colleges' from their collective treasury using the justification that 'edification is being done'. When men call for these additional organizations they are reflecting a lack of faith in the church to do all that God designed it to do, and they usurp the work God gave the church to fulfill.

Furthermore, we know that the church cannot use 'edification' as an excuse for diverting into the areas of social, recreational, and entertainment activities. When one first century congregation started down that road, the inspired apostle rebuked them by saying: "What? Have ye not houses to eat and drink in?" (1 Cor. 11:22). Many today have gone much further than the Corinthians ever imagined.

- by Greg Gwin