

## ***Is Sincerity A Sufficient Guide In Religion?***

*by Lynn Parker*

### **SINCERITY AN INSUFFICIENT GUIDE**

Imagine two carpet men estimating a job, both eyeing the distance between two walls, and one saying, *“Fred, I think the distance between the two walls is 12 feet.”* The other replies, *“Joe, you’re wrong—it is 14 feet, 2 inches.”* Joe says, *“But I really feel that the distance is just 12 feet!”* Fred tells him, *“But, Joe, I’ve got the tape measure, and it tells me the exact distance.”*

One of these men relied on his feelings for the distance, the other used the proper standard of measurement. Which would you want to install your carpet?

More importantly, let’s consider your relationship with God. Relying on feelings is a common mistake that folks make in religion. How many times have you said (or heard someone say), *“Well, I don’t think God will care if...”* or, *“I just feel in my heart that I am saved.”* Jesus spoke to this very subject when He delivered these words in the Sermon on the Mount:

*“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21)*

It may surprise many people to know that God does not accept every religious belief and practice—even though it may be offered with the sincerest of hearts.

### **SOME BIBLE EXAMPLES**

In the Old Testament, you can read of Cain and Abel, brothers who offered sacrifices to God (Genesis 4:2-4). Abel’s offering, an animal from his flock, was acceptable to God. Cain offered the “fruit of the ground” but his act of worship was not acceptable.

What, you may ask, made the difference in the offerings of these two brothers? The answer is seen in looking at two New Testament passages which serve as a Divine “commentary” on this Old Testament account. The Hebrew writer tells us,

*“By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he had witness borne to him that he was righteous, God*

*bearing witness in respect of his gifts: and through it he being dead yet speaketh" (Hebrews 11:4).*

Abel offered a sacrifice "by faith." But what does it mean to do something by faith? Carefully weigh this inspired statement: "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). Faith comes by God's word! The two are inseparably connected. Abel offered a sacrifice by faith, faith comes by God's word, so we conclude that Abel offered a sacrifice in keeping with the word of God.

Paul, the apostle of Christ, was once Saul of Tarsus. Before his conversion, Saul persecuted Christians—even to imprisonment and death. Later he would recount,

*"I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. {10} And this I also did in Jerusalem: and I both shut up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, and when they were put to death I gave my vote against them. {11} And punishing them oftentimes in all the synagogues, I strove to make them blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto foreign cities" (Acts 26:9-11).*

Paul learned the error of his way and became a Christian. The point is, Saul (Paul) thought he was right in persecuting the church. If ever there was a sincere person with a clear conscience, it was Saul (Paul). Though sincere, he was still wrong. Feelings and human opinion are insufficient standards in religion.

### **HE THAT DOETH THE WILL OF MY FATHER**

In our text under consideration, Jesus presents to us a graphic picture of Judgment Day. Simply calling on Jesus as Lord at that Day will leave one lacking. Christ tells you that the one entering Heaven is "*he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven*" (Matthew 7:21). But our Lord does not stop there—He gives us the sincere appeal of no doubt many religious people on that Great Day:

*"Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works? {23} And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matthew 7:22-23).*

Will you also see that although sincere, many will be lost because they were religiously wrong. They thought they were doing right in their good works accompanied by the best motives, but they were disobedient to the Heavenly Father.

## **GOD DEMANDS OBEDIENCE**

Obedience has always marked those who were approved of God; as a matter of fact, it cannot be separated from that faith that saves.

*"By faith Noah, being warned of God concerning things not seen as yet, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house..." (Hebrews 11:7)*

*"By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed to go out..." (Hebrews 11:8).*

Likewise, obedience cannot be separated from love for our Lord. Jesus stated, *"If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments"* (John 14:15) and, *"Ye are my friends, if ye do the things which I command you"* (John 15:14). Christ is the "author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Hebrews 5:9).

## **EXAMINE YOUR BELIEFS**

Seeing that obedience to the Father's will is essential to your salvation, we humbly ask you to compare your religious beliefs to God's word. Only God's word can provide an infallible standard for determining what is right or wrong in religion. Though faulty standards in religious matters, many people rely on these for religious guidance:

*Opinions  
Traditions  
Parents  
Feelings  
Sincerity alone  
Conscience alone  
Religious leaders  
Majority  
Popular practices*

The Bible is all-sufficient to guide and govern (2 Timothy 3:16-17; John 12:48). It is truth (John 17:17) and it can be understood (John 8:32).

## **SOME SUGGESTIONS**

Ask questions concerning your beliefs. Spend time diligently studying the Bible. Where should you start? How about these points:

1. Where did my religious group originate, and by whom was it founded, and when? The church in the New Testament was built by Jesus (Matt.16:18) and began on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem (Luke 24:47ff; Acts 2:38-47)
2. Does it wear the name of the church I see in the New Testament? The early church was referred to in a way that showed its ownership (Rom. 16:16); its members also wore the name of Christ (Acts 11:26). [\*There are other terms by which the early church and its members were called that are given in the New Testament]
3. Does it follow the pattern of church worship of which I read in the New Testament? Do I take the Lord's Supper every first day of the week as did the 1st century church? Does the church use instrumental music in worship to God—a practice unheard of and unauthorized in the New Testament?
4. Does it have special titles given to religious leaders that are foreign to the Bible?
5. Does it use things other than the Bible for its standard and rule?
6. Are there commands given in the Bible that I have not obeyed? Remember Matthew 7:21!
7. Does the church I attend preach and teach what the church described in the New Testament did concerning salvation and faith (Heb. 11:6), repentance (Acts 2:38), confession (Rom. 10:10; Acts 8:37), and baptism (Acts 2:38)?
8. Does the church teach that my sins are forgiven BEFORE I am baptized (see Acts 22:16)?
9. Does the church of which you are a member teach that there are many churches approved of God? Study Ephesians 1:22-23 and Ephesians 4:4.

## CONCLUSION

These are all vital topics that you will want to study. Take no man's word for any religious matter—be like the noble Bereans who “examining the Scriptures daily” sought to see if what they heard was true to God's word (Acts 17:11). Will you examine the scriptures with an urgency? Will you manifest the courage and humility to change if the Bible shows you to be in error? We stand ready to study with you at your convenience.

Jesus, in Matthew 7:21-23, pictured a coming Judgment. Every person will then give account for his life (2 Corinthians 5:10). How tragic to find out, too late, that although you were religiously sincere, you were **sincerely wrong**.