

ARE YOU REALLY SINCERE?

Today people put a lot of stock in being sincere. I once heard someone say, “He didn’t mean to do something wrong. He sincerely thought he was doing what was right.” Somehow being sincere was supposed to help mitigate the wrong.

The original meaning of *sincere* suggests being completely open and truthful, genuine and honest. However, it is now often used to mean that we really believe in what we are doing and that it must be OK since we are devoted to it. Certainly being sincere is a noble virtue, at least if it is for the right cause. However, people may lie, kill, or steal thinking they are sincerely helping in a situation. But it is possible to be sincerely wrong!

The Bible links true sincerity with believing and living the truth. “*In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned*” (Titus 2:7, 8). Another Bible passage directly links such sincerity to truth. “*My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth*” (1 John 3:18).

Once I was studying several Bible passages about sincerity and ran into a concept I hadn’t expected. I was looking at the meaning of Greek words in the passage. (Greek is the language in which the New Testament was originally written.) A study source I was using suggested that 2 Peter 3:1 is a verse about sincerity. “*This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance.*” My first thought was, “What does this passage have to do with being sincere because I didn’t find that exact word in the passage.”

This was one of the times when a study of the meaning of the words in a Bible passage yielded a most interesting gem of truth. I began researching what the Greek word translated *pure* implied.

I was expecting it to mean something like *clean, without defect* or maybe even *undefiled* or *unblemished*. To my surprise, I discovered the Greek word translated *pure* is *eilikrines* which literally means “tested by sunlight.” I saw that it is translated in the Bible by the English words *pure* and *sincere*. That word is translated *sincere* in Philippians 1:10: “*That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be **sincere** and without offence till the day of Christ.*” In an English dictionary, I looked up the word *sincere*. This word comes to us from Latin and literally means “without wax”—another puzzler.

A bit of investigation revealed the reason for these unusual meanings and the connection between “tested by sunlight” and “without wax.” In Bible times, people used pottery vessels far more than we do. One could purchase pottery of many sizes for dozens of uses. The pottery purchaser was, of course, very concerned that his new pot or drinking vessel be free from defects, especially small nicks and cracks that could weaken the vessel. Sometimes less-than-honest pottery makers would try to conceal hairline cracks with a type of brown-colored wax almost the color of the pottery itself.

The pottery purchaser, concerned about this possibility, might ask, “Is the vessel without wax?” (The Spanish word for *sincere*, which comes from Latin, is *sincera* and literally means “without wax.”) The pottery buyer in ancient times could take the seller’s word, or he could hold up the vessel between himself and the sun to see if he could see any hint of a defect. This “sunlight” test could often reveal a flaw glossed over with wax.

So, that explains the meaning “tested by sunlight” and why the English translators picked the words *sincere* or *pure* to translate the Greek word. Today we might use the word *genuine*, but we would still not realize the connection with “tested by sunlight”!

The implication became obvious. My mind, my thoughts, and my attitudes need to be tested by the sunlight—the sunlight of God’s Word, the Bible. The Bible likens God’s words to us as a lamp or to a light. What does my life reveal when tested by this light? Perhaps the light would reveal some fairly well-concealed flaws that no one but God really knows about. The only solution to this is for the Master Potter, Jesus Christ, to correct the problem. I need to be willing to let Him correct my life in light of the truth of the Word of God. That Word will expose the flaws that need to be dealt with. I have no right to compare myself with others and let that decide how the flaws will be corrected. When others look at my life, what will they see? When they compare it with what they read in the Bible, God’s Word, will they be disappointed? May God help me to be a sincere Christian “without wax” and “tested by sunlight.”

~Roger Berry