

Living without Wax

It's a self-evident truth that what we truly believe will affect our lives for better or worse. What I mean primarily is this: no matter what we say we believe, we will live out of our deepest held convictions as a pattern of life. I've heard it said, "It doesn't really matter what we believe as long as we're sincere about it," and although I could never affirm such a statement, it does matter that Christians are sincere about the teachings of scripture. In the New Testament letter of James we're told that sincerity is one element of true wisdom. James writes, "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere." (James 3:17) Let's take a moment to look further into the meaning of sincerity. To begin with, the English definition of the word 'sincere' speaks of being "honest" or "genuine." Scholars teach us that one Greek word that's often translated "sincere" in the New Testament can mean, "judged by sunlight." That word picture is expressive of what it would mean for our deepest heart motivations, thoughts and actions to be placed under the brightness of the sun as a test to see if there is any flaw or deceit. The English word 'sincere' actually comes from two Latin words: 'sine' and 'cera' meaning, 'without wax.'

I once read that, "in the ancient world, dishonest merchants would use wax to hide defects, such as cracks, in their pottery so that they could sell their merchandise at a higher price." Merchants who were honest would often hang a sign over their pottery—'sine cera'—('without wax'), to inform their customers that their merchandise was genuine. Sincerity has an important place in Jesus' teaching. In the New Testament gospel of Matthew, beginning in chapter six, Jesus teaches that we must be sincere in the practice of our Christian lives. This is something that we must do always, but in this passage Jesus is focusing on our sincerity as we interact with others. "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven." (Mt. 6:1) Clearly Jesus is saying that we're not to be pretenders or hypocrites. We should always seek to live so that our deepest heart desires would be to please God and not, first and foremost, to be men-pleasers.

Although there are many illustrations that I could think of to make the point, I want to give a couple of examples of how we Christians may lack sincerity in our lives. If we're to be totally honest, often times we're not living consistently with what we say we believe. For example, we may say to ourselves and others that growing in the knowledge of God through his word is important to us and yet we often fail to regularly spend time meditating on the scriptures. We may say that we agree with the teaching of scripture that gathering with the body of Christ and regularly sitting under the preaching of the word is important (Romans 10:14; 1 Corinthians 1:23), and yet do not attend Lord's Day worship service at all or, if we do, we're often distracted, looking at our watches and focusing on other things during the sermon. Do we sincerely believe that the things that God says are important really are important? The

lack of sincerity in our Christian lives is harmful—not only to us—but also to our witness for Jesus Christ.

In conclusion, let me be clear that we all fall short of God’s perfect standard. We’re not Christians based on our own perfect obedience but rather, we’re Christians because of God’s gift of grace through faith in the perfect life and atoning death of Jesus Christ alone (Romans 3:21-26). But as Christians we also know that Jesus taught us, “If you love me you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). It matters how we live and we want our lives to be—without wax—before God and others.

Rev. Dr. Steve Jones is the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church PCA in Paxton, Ill.