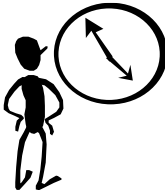


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### Time of Assembly



<b>Sunday:</b>	
Bible Study	9:00 a.m.
Worship	10:00 a.m.
(Or every other week)	
Bible Study	4:00 p.m.
Worship	5:00 p.m.
<b>Wednesday:</b>	
Bible Study	7:00 p. m.

## Is Sincerity Enough?

By Jefferson David Tant

A popular idea among many people when questioned about their religious beliefs is that sincerity is the final judge of what is right and wrong. So long as a person believes in Christ, whatever his practices or beliefs may be in regard to that faith, so long as he is sincere, God will accept that.

Question: Is this belief in line with Biblical teaching? It is a vitally important question, for our eternal destiny is involved in the answer. Let us go to God's word to see if there is any validity to the thought that so long as you are sincere in your service to God, that's all that matters.

We can go back to the beginning when Satan approached Eve with the temptation to eat some fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We know that Eve understood what God had told her and Adam, which was that if they ate of the tree, they would die. But Satan convinced her that was not true. So, when she was sincerely convinced that it was good to eat the fruit, she ate and gave some to her husband. Then what happened in the years to come? Adam and Eve died. (Genesis 3:1-6) Her sincerity didn't save her.

Obviously, Eve thought it would be OK to eat the fruit, so she was sincere in eating it. She had believed Satan's lie, which brought about the ultimate consequence of death for her and Adam.

We could go through many pages of the Old Testament as we see God's people worshipping idols, and even sacrificing their children in fires. Consider what the prophet wrote in Jeremiah 19:5: "*and have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, a thing which I never commanded or spoke of, nor did it ever enter My mind.*" Question: As abominable as this was, do we suppose that those who burned their children were sincere in their actions? Obviously so, no matter how evil the practice was, they believed they were doing something good. Now, some will say that they were wor-

shipping idols and not true God. That's right, but where do we draw the line on sincerity? Aren't women sincere when they have their babies killed in an abortion? (In some states, babies can be killed even weeks after birth.)

Let's go to the New Testament where we find people who are worshipping the true God rather than idols. Notice what Christ said about some of the Jewish leaders in His day. The Pharisees and other leaders among the Jews were all believers in God, but they were teaching things that were not a part of the Law of Moses which God had given to Israel. "*But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men*" (Matthew 15:9).

Consider that these teachers believed in and worshipped the true God, but in their teaching, they had added their own doctrines. Christ said that made their worship "*in vain*," i.e., worthless. Were they sincere in what they were teaching and practicing? Who can deny it? Did God accept it just because they were sincere? The text certainly doesn't support that view.

When we look at the "Christian" world today, we see some 42,000 different denominations, all claiming to be Christian. In addition to the Bible, they have their creeds, manuals, catechisms, disciplines, etc. Consider that they all teach something different from the other denominational creeds, but more than that, they all teach something that is different than the Bible. If the creeds were teaching the same thing as the Bible, we wouldn't need them, as God already gave us that.

## **Some Denominational Practices that Differ from the Bible**

### *Baptism*

The New Testament was written in Greek, and it is a very precise language. The Greek word "*baptizo*" means "to dip, plunge, immerse." All Bible scholars agree with that and agree that immersion in water was the practice for quite a long time before men decided to sprinkle or pour water in the place of immersion. So, what about the churches that sprinkle or pour water? They may be sincere, but does that mean God will accept that men have changed what God said?

Consider what God said baptism is a picture of: "*Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin.*" (Romans 6:3-6).

God says baptism is a reminder of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. The person is "buried" in the water and then "raised" to a new life. How does sprinkling water on someone picture that? If the "burial" is what God told us to do, who gave man the right to change that, no matter how sincere the motive might be? Well, if it's OK to sprinkle wa-

ter, what about the church my father told me about that baptizes by sprinkling rose petals? I'm sure they are sincere in doing that, and I'm sure it smells nice, but where is the indication that God will accept it?

Ages ago, the Church of England had a meeting of leaders to discuss the question of immersion vs. sprinkling. One said they needed to vote out the rite of immersion because it was so "inconvenient." They took a vote, and the vote was even until one leader cast a vote for sprinkling, and so it became the law of the church. Question: Do church leaders and members have the right to ignore and change what God has said simply because they may be sincere? And who gave them the right to vote on whether or not to follow God's teaching in the Bible?

So, when I ask some about their church's "baptism" by sprinkling, some may reply, "Well, I know what the Bible says, but it is more convenient to sprinkle. My heart is right, and I believe God accepts that." Question: Where can I find a passage in the Bible that accepts that reasoning?

### *The Lord's Supper*

There is no confusion over what Christ taught about this memorial. Not long before his crucifixion, when he was with his disciples, we have him establishing this memorial. While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "*Take, eat; this is My body.*" And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "*Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins*" (Matthew 26:26-28).

There is evidence that this memorial was observed every week's first day, Sunday. So, what do we have today? Some denominations observe it once a month, once every three months, or once a year. And then some denominations do not observe the Lord's Supper at all, including the Salvation Army and Christian Science denominations. I have no doubt that they are quite sincere when they gather to worship but do not partake of the Lord's Supper. They believe they are OK. Does God then think, "Oh well. That's OK with me, so long as they are sincere?"

Then there is the young woman I studied with who belonged to a Methodist Church where they used potato chips and Coke for the Lord's Supper. Thankfully, she came to understand that was not what the Lord wanted, no matter how sincere the people were when they partook.

In Paul's letter to the church at Corinth, he rebuked them for not properly observing the Lord's Supper, and then repeated Christ's words to his disciples, "*do this in remembrance of Me*" (I Corinthians 11:24).

### *Church Leaders*

There are three functions of leadership in the local church that are mentioned in the Bible. They are elders (also called bishops or overseers), deacons, and preachers. It is worth noting that God has given special qualifications for those who are bishops, those who guide local churches.

Note the qualifications given for overseers/bishops: "*It is a trustworthy statement: if*

*any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?)” (I Timothy 3:1-5).*

Notice that this bishop must be a married man who has children. Why children? Because through his children he demonstrates his ability to be a spiritual leader (I Timothy 3:5) We know that the Roman Catholic Church forbids bishops and priests, etc., to be married. That is in open contradiction to what God has told us. I am sure they are sincere in their practice, but is that all that it takes to be approved by God? Other churches ordain women into the ministry. One example is the Episcopalian Church which ordained Katherine Jefferts Schori as the presiding bishop some time ago. She was not only a woman but a homosexual. I believe the church was sincere in that appointment, but I do not believe God accepted her as a woman or as a homosexual.

Note what God’s Word has to say about homosexuals: *“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals”* (I Corinthians 6:9). It matters not how “sincere” the church may have been in ordaining her, I find no evidence that God will accept it.

As to women being in church leadership roles, why does God only allow men? The apostle Paul explains that for us. *“But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression”* (I Timothy 2:12-14).

The point is that a woman is more trusting by nature, and that is why she is the one who nurtures children as their primary caregiver. This doesn’t eliminate the father’s role, but the mother is primary in this. So, who did Satan approach? He approached Eve. Men tend to be a bit more skeptical, perhaps, and want to check things out. So, God prefers men to be leaders in the church. This does not mean that women have no role in spiritual matters. We have the record of a man named Apollos preaching, but who didn’t have a correct understanding of something he was teaching. A couple heard him and then took him aside to correct him. *“But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately”* (Acts 18:26). So here we have a woman engaged in teaching, but in a private way, not from the pulpit.

## **Is Sincerity Enough?**

*Paul*

Is it enough for me to think I am right if I am sincere? Is that all it takes? Note the apostle Paul’s evaluation of that. *“So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests,*

*but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them” (Acts 26:9-10).*

Note that Paul was sincere in what he was doing, but he came to realize that he was wrong in what he was doing. Sincerity was not enough, even though he believed in the true God.

Sincerity is good, but one can be sincerely wrong, as Paul was before he came to understand the truth. God’s word is complete, and we have no authority to change any part of it, or eliminate any part of it, no matter how sincere one’s intentions might be.

### *Nadab and Abihu*

In bringing the treatise to a close, I want to refer to Nadab and Abihu, who were priests of God in the Old Testament. Nadab and Abihu were sons of Aaron, the high priest, and they themselves were priests. One of the duties of priests was to offer sacrifices to the Lord. We have a record of their actions in Leviticus 10:1-2: *“Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD.”*

Consider what has happened. These brothers believed in God. They prepared a fire to offer sacrifices to the Lord. We are not told just what the problem was, but it might have been that they were some distance from the altar where sacrifices were to be offered, so they used an altar that was more convenient. And when they lit the fire, it burned them up.

Question: Were they sincere in what they were doing? Obviously so. Certainly, they would not have lit the fire if they knew it would kill them. So even though they believed in God and were sincere in what they were doing, they died because they did not obey what God had told them concerning the altar where sacrifices were to be made. And that has an application for us today.

### **What Will We Be Judged By?**

Dear reader, please understand that on Judgment Day, we will be judged not by what we thought was right, nor by denominational creed books, nor by our sincerity, but we will be judged by the Word that God has given us. Consider the closing words of Revelation.

*“I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book” (Revelation 22:18-19).*

*“And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds” (Revelation 20:12).*

Note that the record doesn’t say that we will be judged by our sincere thoughts, but by the Word of God. Thus we need to be sure that our sincere thoughts are in alignment with God’s revelation for all mankind.