

Word Study SINCERE

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Our English word *sincere* is from the Latin *sine cera* and literally means "without wax". It originally applied to honey that was pure and transparent when held up to the sunlight. Later, the term was given a special significance. One commentator has written: "Sculptors in marble often sought to conceal the cracks in the stone by rubbing tinted wax in the tiny crevices. The inspectors would carefully examine the work of art, and if no such tactics had been employed, they would stamp it 'sine cera'."

PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE

The words *sincere*, *sincerely* and *sincerity* are not often found in the Scriptures. Here are the passages in the Authorised Version: "**Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in *sincerity* and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord.**" (Joshua 24:14); "**Now therefore, if you have done truly and *sincerely*, in that you have made Abimelech king, and if you have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have done unto him according to the deserving of his hands...**" (Judges 9:16 & 19) "**Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of *sincerity* and truth.**" (1 Corinthians 5:8) "**For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly *sincerity*, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly towards you.**" (2 Corinthians 1: 12) "**For we are not many who corrupt the word of God: but as of *sincerity*, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.**" (2 Corinthians 2:17) "**I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the *sincerity* of your love.**" (2 Corinthians 8:8) "**Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in *sincerity*. Amen.**" (Ephesians 6:24) "**...that you may approve things that are excellent; that you may be *sincere* and without offence till the day of Christ...**" (Philippians 1:10) "**The one preach Christ of contention, not *sincerely*, supposing to add affliction to my bonds...**" (Philippians 1:16). "**In all things showing yourself a pattern of good works: in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, *sincerity*...**" (Titus 2:7) "**As newborn babes, desire the *sincere* milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.**" (1 Peter 2:2)

The Hebrew word used is *tamim* and the Greek words are *adolos* (1 Peter 2:2), guileless, pure; *gnesios* (2 Cor. 8:8), true, genuine, sincere; *eilikrines* (Phil.1:10), pure; *hagnos* (Phil.1: 16) denotes with pure motives; *eilikrinia* (1 Cor. 5:8; 2 Cor. 1:12; 2:17) denotes sincerity, purity; *Aphtharsia* (Eph. 6:24; Titus 2:7), incorruption.

THE PHILIPPIAN CHURCH

Paul's epistle to the Philippians is one of my favourite books of the Bible. I once spent a whole year studying it, which involved an analysis of every word and the reading of many commentaries. How Paul loved this congregation! Of course, Philippi is where Paul and Silas were thrown into prison (Acts 16:9-40). Two notable converts there were Lydia, the seller of purple, and the actual keeper of the prison. By the time Paul wrote his epistle to the Philippians, he was again in prison, this time in Rome. Paul looked for sincerity in the lives of his Philippian brethren (1:8). What exactly was he looking for? He wanted to see lives that did not have hidden faults glossed over; lives that were free from hypocrisy, deceit and trickery; saints who could be examined in the full glare of sunshine and who would meet the test when scrutinised and investigated.

SINCERITY / HYPOCRISY

So we see that sincerity is the antonym of hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is something Jesus condemned again and again during his ministry. A hypocrite is a stage-player, one who puts on an act. He is one who goes in for play-acting goodness, while all the time he conceals an evil heart. He thinks he can get away with it, but forgets that God sees his inner being, his very thoughts and motives. Jesus could condemn hypocrisy because he was the sincerest person who has ever lived. There was no sham or pretence about Him. For, after all, he was the perfect one, the sinless one, the Son of the living God. We must, therefore, take Him as our supreme example. We must strive to remove all hypocrisy from our lives and lead lives that are pure, holy and sincere.

To live such lives today will bring us into conflict with many in the world. But we must never forget that the standards of the world are not the standards of God. People might well laugh at us and think we are weak, fragile and feeble. But we soon learn that this is, in fact, a good description of our opponents. We in Christ are the ones who, in the end, can prove to be morally and spiritually strong, healthy and robust. We possess the Spirit of Christ and He is able to carry us through the trials and temptations that will inevitably come our way. Satan, of course, is out to destroy us. He wants to turn us from purity to wickedness, holiness to sinfulness, sincerity to hypocrisy. He will try everything to achieve his ends. He will pull out all the stops to win us back to his dark and damnable kingdom. But we will have none of it. We know that greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4) Satan's days are numbered and hell is prepared for him and his angels (Matthew 25:41).

So, when we next write to someone and close by saying "sincerely yours", may we all think of the actual meaning of the adverb. Let us pray to God that we may **"be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God."** (Philippians 1:10b – 11)