

A Review Of: When Sincerity Is Not Enough by Bill Stephens

The following appeared in The Harmony Hill [Baptist Church, Lufkin, TX] Herald (Vol. 22, No. 8, Nov. 1998).

We're living at a time when people seem to think it doesn't matter what a person believes about God, sin, salvation, life, death and eternity so long as he's sincere. The only requirement God supposedly has for taking a person into Heaven is for him to be sincere in what he believes.

It doesn't matter if what he believes is false; God will supposedly overlook his error--or the falsehood he's embraced--and take him into Heaven, providing he's sincere.

According to this type of reasoning, God supposedly cares more about sincerity than he does about truth. God sent Jesus Christ into the world to die an agonizing death so he could forgive our sin without compromising his holiness. It's all right with him, however, if we reject his Son because we're too busy having fun to care about what he did for us on Calvary; or because we'd rather give our allegiance to some bogus or imaginary saviour whom God never ordained or sent.

The widely held concept, that God will make allowances for the rejection of his Son and take a person to Heaven so long as he's sincere in what he believes, is false. When, pray tell, did God decide sincerity is more important than truth?

We can't have it both ways. if God is a God of truth and the Bible which we have is correct, then the widely held concept that there are many ways to Heaven is false.

If the Bible is clear on anything it is clear on this: Jesus Christ is the only Saviour God ever gave and is, therefore, the only way to Heaven that there is. Jesus himself said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me." Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, said. "Neither is there salvation in any other for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

I'm aware this makes me sound like a narrow-minded bigot. It must be remembered, however, that I'm not expressing my opinion. I'm merely explaining what scripture says about the matter.

If Jesus is not the only way to God, if there are many ways to Heaven and it doesn't matter which one a person takes, someone needs to explain why Jesus said he was the way, the truth, and the life, and that no one could come unto the Father but by him. Was he lying with the intent to deceive? Was he misguided about his own identity, or was he speaking the truth?

If Jesus was speaking the truth when he said he was the only way to God, if Peter was speaking the truth when he said Jesus was the only Saviour there is, the individual who plans on getting-into Heaven by some other means isn't going to succeed.

Whether you agree or disagree with what I'm saying isn't the issue. The only thing that matters is whether or not it is TRUE!

I don't want to belabor the point, but truth has fallen upon hard times recently and someone needs to call for its correction. Sincerity is important, to be sure. There's one thing, however, which sincerity cannot do. Sincerity cannot turn error into truth. No matter how strongly I believe something is true, if it's false no amount of sincerity is going to change it.

The most important thing about my beliefs is not whether I hold them sincerely, but whether or not they are true. Of what value are sincerely held beliefs if they're false?

Jesus was a firm believer in truth. "I have come to bear witness of the truth," he said. "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." Christ didn't say if you're sincere in what you believe your salvation will be assured whether you're a Christian, a Hindu, a Muslim, or an atheist. He said, "He that believeth on the Son (on himself) hath everlasting life and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." If Jesus was speaking the truth (which I'm convinced he was), he's the only Saviour that there is (John 3:36; 8:32; 18:37).

Truth stands on its own. A thing is true because it is true, or false because it is false. What you or I believe, or fail to believe, has nothing to do with it.

Some time ago a group of individuals out west believed a U.F.O. was following a comet which was visible to our eyes. They believed if they took their lives they could hitch a ride on it into some blissful never-never land.

If their misguided belief wasn't able to create the U.F.O. which they imagined would be there for them, what about the concept which is so widely held today which asserts that if we believe something strongly enough it will become truth to us? How illogical can we be? If we believe what is false, no amount of sincerity will make it true.

The dreams of those misguided souls didn't fail for lack of sincerity. They failed because their beliefs were false. The most important thing about our beliefs is not whether we hold them sincerely, but whether or not they're true.

We can't have it both ways. Either Christ was telling the truth about himself when he said he was the only way to God, or he was lying. Either he was the Son of God or he was misguided about his identity. If he was lying or if he was misguided about who he was, he certainly wouldn't be someone in whom you'd want to place your faith. If he was-telling the truth, he becomes a matter of life or death as far as eternity is concerned.

Jesus had no misgivings about his deity. He said: "Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true; for I know whence I came and whither I go." Jesus went on to say, "I'm not the only one who bears witness of myself. My Father who sent me bears witness of me." Twice during his earthly ministry a voice from Heaven said: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

Every person has to decide for himself in whom he is going to place his trust. I've chosen to place my trust in Christ. [All emphasis mine, sfd. The article went on to give reasons why the author believed in Jesus as the Christ].

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We agree with the author. A Muslim, Buddhist, Jew, etc., though sincere, is lost. Like Saul (Paul), many men and women have been sincerely wrong (Acts 8:1; 9:1-2; 23:1). The author clearly expresses the fact that a person must believe on the deity of Christ, that is, Jesus is Lord and Savior. He bases this on what the Bible says (cf. Jn. 3:16; 8:24). Amen! He also mentioned sin, salvation, life death, and eternity. We wonder,

though, does the author, or those who printed and promoted his article, really believe that sincerity is not enough when it comes to salvation and eternity? We plead with them to take a close look at themselves (2 Corinthians 13:5). For the purpose of this study and reflection, we wish to change just a few things in Mr. Stephens' article and see if he (and others like him) will accept the consequences.

We're living at a time when people seem to think it doesn't matter what a person believes about God, sin, salvation, INCLUDING BAPTISM FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS, life, death and eternity so long as he's sincere. The only requirement God supposedly has for taking a person into Heaven is for him to be sincere in BELIEVING JESUS IS THE CHRIST (cf. JOHN 12:42-43).

It doesn't matter if what he believes ON ANYTHING ELSE BESIDES THE MESSIAHSHIP OF JESUS is false; God will supposedly overlook his error--or the falsehood he's embraced--and take him into Heaven, providing he's sincere.

According to this type of reasoning, God supposedly cares more about sincerity than he does about truth. God sent Jesus Christ into the world to die an agonizing death so he could forgive our sin without compromising his holiness. It's all right with him, however, if we reject his Son'S COMMANDS because we're too busy having fun to care about what he HIMSELF AND HIS INSPIRED APOSTLES AND PROPHETS COMMANDED; or because we'd rather give our allegiance to some bogus or imaginary MESSAGE OF SALVATION WHICH God never ordained or sent FORTH, LIKE FAITH ONLY (MATTHEW 28:19-20; MARK 16:16; ACTS 2:38; 22:16; cf. GALATIANS 1:6-9; JAMES 2:14-26).

The widely held concept, that God will make allowances for the rejection of HIS SON'S COMMANDS and take a person to Heaven so long as he's sincere in what he believes, is false. When, pray tell, did God decide sincerity is more important than truth?

We can't have it both ways. if God is a God of truth and the Bible which we have is correct, then the widely held concept that there are many ways [BAPTIST WAY, METHODIST WAY, PENTECOSTAL WAY, ETC.] to Heaven is false.

If the Bible is clear on anything CONCERNING HOW ONE MAY ENTER CHRIST, IT IS CLEAR THAT THE ONLY WAY IS THROUGH BAPTISM (GAL. 3:27). Jesus himself said: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved;

but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16). Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, said. "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

I'm aware this makes me sound like a narrow-minded bigot. It must be remembered, however, that I'm not expressing my opinion. I'm merely explaining what scripture says about the matter.

If BAPTISM is not the only way INTO CHRIST, if there are many ways to ENTER CHRIST and it doesn't matter which one a person takes, someone needs to explain why THE HOLY SPIRIT SAID THAT BAPTISM WAS THE WAY INTO CHRIST. Was he lying with the intent to deceive? Was he misguided about THE WAY TO FELLOWSHIP WITH THE MESSIAH, or was he speaking the truth?

If THE HOLY SPIRIT was speaking the truth when he said BAPTISM was the only way INTO CHRIST, if Peter was speaking the truth when he said BAPTISM WAS FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS, the individual who plans on getting-into Heaven by some other means isn't going to succeed.

Whether you agree or disagree with what I'm saying isn't the issue. The only thing that matters is whether or not it is TRUE!

I don't want to belabor the point, but truth has fallen upon hard times recently and someone needs to call for its correction. Sincerity is important, to be sure. There's one thing, however, which sincerity cannot do. Sincerity cannot turn error into truth. No matter how strongly I believe something is true, if it's false no amount of sincerity is going to change it.

The most important thing about my beliefs is not whether I hold them sincerely, but whether or not they are true. Of what value are sincerely held beliefs if they're false?

Jesus was a firm believer in truth. "I have come to bear witness of the truth," he said. "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." Christ didn't say if you're sincere in what you believe your salvation will be assured whether you're a BAPTIST, a METHODIST, a PRESBYTERIAN, or an EPISCOPALIAN. He said, "HE THAT BELIEVETH AND IS BAPTIZED SHALL BE SAVED; BUT HE THAT BELIEVETH NOT SHALL BE DAMNED" (MARK 16:16). If Jesus was speaking the truth (which I'm convinced he was), BAPTISM IS ESSENTIAL TO SALVATION (JOHN 3:3-5; ROMANS 6:3-4; COLOSSIANS 2:11-12).

Truth stands on its own. A thing is true because it is true, or false because it is false. What you or I believe, or fail to believe, has nothing to do with it.

Some time ago a group of individuals out west believed a U.F.O. was following a comet which was visible to our eyes. They believed if they took their lives they could hitch a ride on it into some blissful never-never land.

If their misguided belief wasn't able to create the U.F.O. which they imagined would be there for them, what about the concept which is so widely held today which asserts that if we believe something strongly enough it will become truth to us? How illogical can we be? If we believe what is false, no amount of sincerity will make it true.

The dreams of those misguided souls didn't fail for lack of sincerity. They failed because their beliefs were false. The most important thing about our beliefs is not whether we hold them sincerely, but whether or not they're true.

We can't have it both ways. Either THE HOLY SPIRIT was telling the truth about BAPTISM when he said IT was the only way to ENTER CHRIST, or he was lying. Either BAPTISM IS ESSENTIAL TO SALVATION or he was misguided about ITS IMPORTANCE. If he was lying or if he was misguided about BAPTISM, he certainly wouldn't be someone in whom you'd want to place your faith. If he was-telling the truth, BAPTISM becomes a matter of life or death as far as eternity is concerned.

THE HOLY SPIRIT had no misgivings about BAPTISM. He said: "Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true; for I know whence I came and whither I go." JESUS SAID, "VERILY, VERILY, I SAY UNTO THEE, EXCEPT A MAN BE BORN OF WATER AND OF THE SPIRIT, HE CANNOT ENTER INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD" (John 3:5). ELEVEN TIMES IN THE BOOK OF ACTS PEOPLE WERE BAPTIZED (ACTS 2:38-41; 8:12-13, 36-38; 9:18; 10:47-48; 16:15, 33; 18:8, 25; 19:3-5). ANANIAS SAID TO SAUL AFTER HE HAD BEEN IN SORROW FOR THREE DAYS (FULL OF REPENTANCE), "AND NOW WHY TARRIEST THOU? ARISE, AND BE BAPTIZED, AND WASH AWAY THY SINS, CALLING ON THE NAME OF THE LORD" (ACTS 22:16).

Every person has to decide for himself in whom he is going to place his trust--GOD AND HIS INSPIRED WORD OR MAN AND HIS FALSE DOCTRINE. I've chosen to place my trust in Christ AND HIS TRUTH (MARK 8:34-38).

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