

Sincerity

There are numerous qualities we admire in people. Their work ethic, intellect, happy disposition, friendliness, and others. One which belongs in this list is "sincerity." Our lesson this morning is about Cornelius and Peter in Acts 10. I thought of both men and how the events in our text challenged their sincerity. We want to first think about what sincerity means, what it demands of us, and how we exhibit it.

Sincerity and being sincere combines characteristics such as honesty and virtue. A sincere person is not always right but they desire to be doing what is right. Cornelius in Acts 10 desires to be devout, God fearing, charitable, and prayerful. Looking at this man we see a good person but he was not a Christian. Peter was an Apostle and inspired but he was a Jew, obedient to the law of Moses, including the dietary requirements of that law. A Law which was to the Jews a dividing wall between the Jews and Gentiles.

What do you and I do when we find out we might be wrong? Question the source of our new information? Get angry and dig in our heels? Or do we listen and think about the word of God and change when we find change is necessary?

An angel appeared to Cornelius with a message. "Now send men to Joppa, and send for Simon whose surname is Peter." (Acts 10:5). Cornelius did exactly what he was told to do. He had no idea what Peter was going to say upon his arrival but the Roman soldier knew what he had been told to do.

Peter while praying received a vision which applies to the dietary part of the Law of Moses. "10 Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance 11 and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. 12 In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. 13 And a voice came to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." 14 But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean." 15 And a voice spoke to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." 16 This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again." (Acts 10). Never being under the Law of Moses we might miss the implication of this vision. If the dietary requirements of the Law were done away with, then the whole law has no effect. If the Law of Moses was no longer in effect, then the Gentiles were no longer a separated people. The law of Christ was for everyone. Going to a Gentile's house to preach to them had to be uncomfortable to

Peter. But he did what he was told.

Sincerity demands we be honest with ourselves, others, and primarily with God. One of the greatest criticisms of Jesus had about the Pharisees was their hypocrisy. Honest demands we make correction when we see we are wrong. This reminds me of a story. A man and woman bought an old country store and ran it for many years. Eventually they died and their son took over the business. One day, a man from the department of weights and measurements came by. He checked the meat scales to make sure they were right, the gas pumps to make sure they were accurate. About ready to leave he noticed two nails on the counter and asked about them. The son replied those two nails are a yard apart and used to measure material when it is sold. The official took out his tape measure and found the nails to be thirty-four inches apart. The government official then told the owner he was going to have to move one of those nails two inches to make them 36 inches apart. But the son replied, "I can't do that. If I did then people will think my mom and dad were cheating them all of these years." Upon which the official said, "I don't know if they intentionally did this or not but I do know that if you don't change those nails, you are knowingly cheating them." A sincere person changes their nails to make things right.

Cornelius and Peter were both learning new things in Acts Ten and 11. They both had to make changes. What about you and I?

Finally, Cornelius heard Peter tell him what to do to be saved. At Peter's arrival to Cornelius' house we read, "So I sent to you immediately, and you have done well to come. Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God." (Acts 10:33) Peter then says, "34b "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. 35 "But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him." (Acts 10:34-35). Both men recognized they were accountable to God and needed to change. Cornelius was commanded to be baptized into Christ. Peter was to make no distinction between Jew and Gentile.

There may be times in our lives we learn something different. Sincerity demands we be honest in our examination of God's word and obey it. – Dennis Tucker