

## On Being Honestly & Sincerely Wrong

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by Bill Crews

In October of 1997 an Associated Press article out of Tampa, Fla. told a tragic tale. An 88-year-old man traveled from his home near Los Angeles, California to Tampa, Florida to claim the \$12,000,000 he was convinced he had won from one of those promoters of magazine subscriptions. The large print had his very name in it:

**“ \_\_\_ HAS WON IT ALL AND WILL DEFINITELY RECEIVE \$12 MILLION CASH GUARANTEED!”**

But the small printed added: “If you have and return the top winning entry...” And, of course, everyone across America who received one of those “sweepstakes” mailings also had his very own name on it with the very same words. Every single one was told that he had won millions. The poor old man honestly, sincerely and fully believed he had won, and his faith led him to travel thousands of miles to claim his prize. But he was honestly and sincerely wrong. His envelope did not contain “the top winning entry.” His faith was without substance. He had won nothing. (POSTSCRIPT: The same 88-year-old man did it again! Just three months later he made another plane trip to Tampa to claim a prize he had not won, still honest, still sincere and still wrong.)

In the Bible, Jacob honestly and sincerely believed that his adolescent son, Joseph (he was about 17 at the time, Gen. 37:2ff), was dead, slain by some wild animal. After all, Joseph’s older brothers presented Joseph’s coat of many colors, torn and bloody, to their father and a deceptive tale to go along with it. Some twenty or more years would go by before Jacob would learn that Joseph was not dead and what really happened to him (Gen. 41:46 -- 46:34).

Obviously we can be honest and sincere in believing something that is false, and all of our honesty and sincerity will not turn that which is false into that which is true. Our faith, in that case, is misplaced; the evidence that produces it is insufficient. However, many think that all of these things are so, **except in religious matters**. Somehow, when it comes to things religious, these truths do not apply. Being honest and sincere is seen as more important than being right. Being honestly and sincerely satisfied with what you believe are regarded as more important than being certain that what you believe is the truth. Reader friend, does the Bible teach that what you believe and practice are not important? that if you are honestly wrong, God will overlook it? that being honest is more important than being right?

Proverbs 14:12 and 16:25 both say: *“There is a way which seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death.”* Moses had warned the Israelites against *“every man doing whatsoever is right in his own eyes”* (Deut. 12:8); yet, in the days of the judges that is exactly what they did do (Judges 17:6 and 21:25), and it got them into trouble. Through Isaiah God warned, *“not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words”* (Is. 58:13). Said Jeremiah, *“O Jehovah, I know that the way of man is not in himself, it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps”* (Jer. 10:23) That he might depend upon and look to God for instruction and guidance, man is told, *“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts”* (Is. 55:9).

Naaman, the captain of host of the Syrian army, came into Israel hoping to be miraculously healed of his leprosy. As he approached the house of the prophet Elisha, he was thinking (how honestly and sincerely I don’t know), *“He will surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of Jehovah his God and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy”* (2 Kings 5:11). When, instead, Elisha sent his servant out to meet the great man and to tell him to go to the Jordan river and dip seven times with the promise that he would then be healed, Naaman was wroth, protested this requirement, and went away in a rage. But not until he humbled himself and did as he was told was he healed (verses 12-14).

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