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John Gill's

A BODY OF PRACTICAL DIVINITY

Book 1—Chapter 21

OF GODLY SINCERITY

Sincerity stands opposed to hypocrisy; than which nothing is more detestable to God; and nothing is more agreeable to him than uprightness and integrity: this is called "godly sincerity," ειλικρινεια θεου, "sincerity of God" (2 Cor. 1:12), which God requires, approves of, and is a grace he bestows upon his people. What is sincere is pure and unmixed, and what retains its native colors especially white, as milk, pure and unmixed; hence we read of the "sincere milk of the word" (1 Pet. 2:2), and fine flour without any bran, or any leaven in it; hence the phrase of "unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor. 5:8 the Latin word "*sincerus*," from whence our English word "sincere," is composed of "*sine et cera*;" and signifies "without wax;" as pure honey, which is not mixed with any wax. The Greek word ειλικρινεια, signifies properly, a judgment made of things by the light and splendor of the sun; as in business men hold up goods they are buying to the light of the sun, to see if they can discover any defect in them: some think there is an allusion in it to the eagle, who holds up her young as soon as fledged to the sun, and if they can bear the light of it without winking, she retains as her own; but if not, she rejects them as a spurious brood. Light makes everything manifest; and such who are truly gracious and sincere, their principles and practices will bear the test of light, for the day declares them what they are; nor do they shun it: but they whose doctrines and deeds are evil do not care to come to it, lest they should be discovered: and herein lies a principal difference between sincerity and insincerity; see (John 3:19-21).

1. I shall consider this grace of sincerity as it is truth in the heart; as it regards the truth of particular graces there; as it is concerned in doctrine professed or preached; as it has to do with divine worship; and as it appears in the walk and conversation of the saints.

1a. First, as it is truth in the heart; for that seems to be meant in (Ps. 51:6). "Thou desirest truth in the inward part," sincerity, integrity, and uprightness of soul: hence we read of a "true heart," which is sincere and upright in all its concerns with God; which is the same with a "clean heart," and a "right spirit" renewed in a man; which David prays for (Ps. 51:10), and such who are possessed of this grace of sincerity in their hearts, are described as such who,

1a1. Are "pure in heart." The apostle Peter wrote his second epistle to the saints, "to stir up their pure minds by way of remembrance" (2 Pet. 3:1), it is in the Greek text, their "sincere mind;" a sincere mind and a pure heart are the same; not that any man's heart is so pure as to be free from sinful thoughts, inclinations, desires, and affections; yet, though not perfect, may be sincere; and none are more ready than they, ingenuously to confess and lament the impurity of their hearts; nor any that more "love pureness of heart," and desire it, which shows their sincerity; and that there are such it is certain, since our Lord pronounces them blessed; "Blessed are the pure in heart;" who, though not perfect, are yet sincere and their hearts are right with God.

1a2. They are said to be "sound in heart," in doctrine and practice; "sound in the faith," in the doctrine of faith; using "sound speech," and embracing things which become "sound doctrine," such are the "wholesome words" of our Lord Jesus Christ: and sound in practice, who have a sincere regard to the ways and worship, ordinances and commands of God; have a cordial affection for them, and observe them in reality, and truth, and heartily, as to the Lord; for this David prays, "Let my heart be sound in thy statutes" (Ps. 119:80), that is, sincere in the observance of them; see (Prov. 14:30).

1a3. The same are described as single hearted, having a single eye to the glory of God in all they do; and stand opposed to "a double minded man," who is "unstable in all his ways;" and to those who have "a double heart, a heart and a heart," as it were two hearts; or at least, whose hearts, words, and actions, do not agree; they are not sincere in what they say or do; speak one thing and mean another; so do not sincere persons (Jam. 1:8; Ps. 12:2).

1a4. Sincere persons, who have truth in their hearts, are the same with "the upright in heart," who are hated and persecuted by wicked men; but "loved" by the Lord, and to whom he is good, and does good to them (Ps. 11:2; 125:4), who have right spirits renewed in them, new hearts and new spirits given them; whose intentions, desires, and views are upright.

1a5. Who like Jacob, are "plain men," or "plain hearted;" such a man as Job was (Job 1:1), where the same word is used of him as of Jacob; and is the character of all true Israelites; as of Nathanael, said to be an "Israelite indeed," one of Jacob's genuine sons, "in whom was no guile" (Gen. 25:27; John 1:47).

1a6. Such may be said to have truth or sincerity in the heart, the desires and affections of whose hearts are after God; as the church's (Isa. 26:9), and who, as David, pant after the Lord, after more communion with him, and conformity to him; and express their strong and hearty affections for God, as Asaph did (Ps. 42:1; 73:25).

1a7. Who approve themselves unto God, and are desirous to be searched and tried by him, if sincere or not, as David did (Ps. 139:23,24).

1b. Secondly, sincerity may be considered as it regards the truth of particular graces in the heart, which it is connected with, and concerned about. "Sincere" is an adjective, and must have something put to it to explain it; there must be a sincere something, and that something may be bad as well as good, wrong as well as right. Saul was a sincere Pharisee, and really thought that touching the righteousness of the law he was blameless; yea, a sincere persecutor, for he thought verily he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus; as many others, who thought they should do God good service in killing the disciples of Christ. So that sincerity is to be judged according to what it is applied; and it seems not to be a distinct grace of itself, but to go through, and be an ingredient in every grace; which proves the genuineness of it. As,

1b1. Repentance; for there is a feigned repentance; as in Judah (Jer. 3:10), such was the external humiliation of Ahab, which was not in reality, only in outward show and appearance; yea, many tears may be shed, and yet no true and sincere repentance; as in Esau (Heb. 12:17), and in others who pretend to repentance; their tears may be only what are called crocodile tears. But when repentance is from the heart, and sorrow is after a godly sort and sincere, it produces such like effects the apostle mentions in (2 Cor. 7:11).

1b2. Faith is a grace also which is distinguished by its sincerity; for there is a faith that is feigned, as was that of Simon Magus, who professed to believe, but truly did not; that is a sincere faith which is "with the heart unto righteousness;" or is a believing "with all the heart," as was required of the eunuch, previous to his baptism; and is called "faith unfeigned" (1 Tim. 1:5; 2 Tim. 1:5).

1b3. Hope, by the sincerity of it, is distinguished from the hope of the hypocrite, which is as the spider's web, and is of no avail at death; but a hope that is sincere is fixed on a good foundation; not on man's riches or righteousness; but upon the person, blood, and righteousness of Christ; and is lively, and he that has it purifies himself as he is pure.

1b4. Love, both to God, if true and genuine, is "with all the heart, with all the soul, and with all the strength;" and love to Christ is from the heart, and "in sincerity" (Eph. 6:24). The church always describes Christ her beloved, even when she was in a disagreeable frame and posture; "Him whom my soul loveth!" And love to the saints, when right, is not in "word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth," that is,

hearty and sincere (1 John 3:18), and is called "unfeigned love of the brethren" (1 Pet. 1:22).

1c. Thirdly, sincerity may be considered as it regards doctrine professed or preached. "The sincere milk of the word," unmixed and unadulterated, as desired by truly newborn babes; and by all such who have "tasted that the Lord is gracious;" they desire, as it is promised them, to be fed "with the finest of the wheat," with the pure bread of the gospel, without the bran of human mixture, without the chaff of man's inventions; for "what is the chaff to the wheat?" they cannot live on husks, which swine do eat, but upon the kernel of divine truths, and cannot be satisfied, but "with honey out of the rock," pure and unmixed; hence the church's lips, expressive of her profession, are said to "drop as the honeycomb," pure virgin honey, sincere and without wax; and "honey and milk" are said to be "under her tongue," pure and sincere doctrine, received, retained, and spoken by her (Song of Sol. 4:12), for with the same sincerity the mouth confesses as the heart believes; whereas, an insincere man will not openly profess Christ and his truth, loving the praise of men more than the praise of God; as the Pharisees did. So the faithful and sincere ministers of the word do not "corrupt the word of God," adulterate it, mix it with the doctrines of men; as hucksters mix their wine with water, or other liquors, to which the allusion is (2 Cor. 2:17). "Renouncing the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth," in the most upright manner, "commending" themselves "to every man's conscience in the sight of God:" and then do they appear to be sincere, when their word, their doctrine, is not "yea and nay," contradictory, and inconstant, but uniform, and all of a piece; and when the gospel trumpet, as blown by them, does not give an "uncertain sound" (2 Cor. 4:2; 1:19; 1 Cor. 14:8).

1d. Fourthly, sincerity may be considered with respect to worship; which ought always to be performed in a sincere and upright manner, as Joshua said to the people of Israel; "Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth" (Joshua 24:14).

1d1. Worship in general is sincere, when it is performed "in spirit and in truth;" in a spiritual manner, with the whole heart and spirit, and under the direction and influence, and by the assistance of the Spirit of God, and according to the truth of the divine word, and with truth in the heart; for "God is a Spirit," and must be worshipped in such a manner; and such worshippers, and such only, are agreeable to him; but as for those who draw nigh to him "with their mouth, and have removed their heart far from him," or are insincere worshippers of him, he despises and rejects (John 4:23,24; Isa. 29:13).

1d2. Prayer in particular is to be put up to God with a true heart; that is, with a sincere one, with which men should draw nigh to God; for he is nigh to them that "call upon him in truth;" that is, in sincerity; it is the prayer which comes, "not out of feigned lips," that God hears; it is "the prayer of the upright," that is, the sincere

man, that is "his delight:" when such who, as the hypocrites, pray in synagogues and in corners of the streets, to be seen of men, are treated with contempt and abhorrence.

1d3. And then sincerity appears in the observance of ordinances; when men, like Zacharias and Elizabeth, walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless; and keep the ordinances, as they were delivered, without any innovation and corruption; and when they keep the feast, particularly that of the Lord's Supper, not "with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor. 5:8).

1e. Fifthly, sincerity may be considered with respect to the walk and conversation of the saints; "Blessed are the undefiled," or the perfect and sincere "in the way;" in the way of God's commandments, walking according to the rule of the divine word, and as becomes the gospel of Christ (Ps. 119:1), and it is with respect to such an external walk before men that the apostle says, that "in simplicity," in the singleness of his heart, "and godly sincerity," such as God requires and approves of, "we have had our conversation in the world" (2 Cor. 1:12), and they act the sincere and upright part, who,

1e1. Desire not so much to be seen by men, as to be approved of God. The Pharisees, hypocrites, did all they did to be seen of men; they gave alms, they prayed, and zealously observed the traditions of the elders; and all to get applause of men: but the sincere believer labours, that "whether present or absent he may be accepted of God," and approved by him; for not he that commends himself, and seeks the praise of men, "is approved," but "whom the Lord commendeth" (2 Cor. 5:9; 10:18).

1e2. "Who have respect to all the commandments of God, and esteem all his precepts, concerning all things, to be right" (Ps. 119:6,28), and are careful not to break the least of his commandments; who omit not the weightier matters of the law, or the more important duties of religion, and yet neglect not lighter and lesser ones.

1e3. Who make conscience of committing lesser as well as greater sins; but abstain from all appearance of evil; who desire to be cleansed, and to be preserved from secret sins, as well as to be kept back from presumptuous ones; who are as severe upon their own sins as on those of others, and even spare not right eye and right hand sins, those they are the most inclined unto; and are as careful to remove the beam out of their own eyes, as to observe the mote in the eyes of others.

1e4. Who do not seek to cover, palliate, and extenuate their sins; as Job says, "If I cover my transgressions as Adam," and sought excuses for them as he did, such do not act sincerely; "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper" (Job 31:33; Prov. 28:13).

1e5. The man who walks according to the rule of the word, makes that the standard of his practice, and walks uprightly according to the gospel; and walks as he has Christ for an example, as in the exercise of every grace, so in the performance of every duty; and walks, not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

1e6. Who has the glory of God, and the good of others in his eye, in all that he is concerned; who does whatever he does in things civil and religious with a view to promote the glory of God, and the interest of true religion, and the good of immortal souls; who naturally cares for the spiritual and eternal state of men; and whose concern throughout the whole of his own conversation is, that others, beholding his good works, may receive some benefit to themselves by his example, and glorify his heavenly Father. I go on to observe,

2. From whence this grace of sincerity springs.

2a. Not from nature; it is not from descent and by birth; indeed, our first parents, previous to their fall, were in a state of simplicity, not as that signifies folly, but singleness of heart, integrity, and uprightness; such was the case of Eve, before she was beguiled, and corrupted from her simplicity by the serpent. "God made man upright," innocent, holy, and harmless; but he sinned, and lost his integrity, "and sought out many inventions," and excuses, to palliate and cover his sin; what an insincere and disingenuous part did Adam act, when he would have thrown off the blame of eating the forbidden fruit from himself, and cast it upon his wife? and of the same disposition are all his sons and daughters naturally; there is none upright among men; the most upright are sharper than a thorn hedge; and this is true, not of some particular nation only, and of some particular persons in it, and in some certain age and period of time; but of all the descendants of Adam; who, be they good or bad in the event, are transgressors from the womb, and go astray from thence, speaking lies; there is no truth in their inward part; yea, "their inward part is very wickedness;" not only wicked, but wickedness; yea, very wickedness, extremely wicked; the same is meant when the heart is said to be "desperately wicked," irrecoverably such, but by the grace of God; hence flow all that dissimulation, deceit, hypocrisy, and falsehood which are in the world.

2b. But sincerity is from the grace of God; though it is not a distinct grace of itself, as before observed, yet belongs to, and is an ingredient in every grace; and is what distinguishes true grace from that which is counterfeit; it is "the grace of God in truth," in sincerity; it is every grace with that; and it is by the grace of God alone that men become sincere and upright; without this men are double hearted, double tongued, and deceitful: there may be a show, an appearance of sincerity and uprightness, where there is none in reality; as in the scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, who appeared outwardly righteous to men, but within were full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

2c. Wherever true sincerity is, it is of God; and is therefore called, "Godly sincerity," or "sincerity of God," that which has God for its author, who is the God

of all grace; he that is the maker of the heart, the searcher of it, and sees what is in it, can only make it sincere and upright; who made a profane Esau, and a plain hearted Jacob to differ, but God by his Spirit and grace? and these fruits of the Spirit, grace, uprightness, and sincerity, are only found in regenerate persons, new creatures, who have "put on the new man, which is created in righteousness and true holiness, or holiness of truth," that which is in sincerity and reality, and not dissembled and feigned (Eph. 5:9 4:24). Wherefore,

2d. Since it is of God, and him only, it is to be asked of him; he desires truth in the inward parts; he requires it, saying, "Thou shall be perfect," or upright, or sincere, "with the Lord thy God," before him, in his sight (Deut. 18:13; see Gen. 17:1). It is he only that can give a new heart and a new spirit, and create it in the new man, therefore to be prayed to for it by all sensible of their need of it; hence these petitions of David; "Renew a right spirit within me, and let my heart be sound in thy statutes" (Ps. 51:10; 119:80). And so the apostle prays for the Philippians, that they might "be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ" (Phil. 1:10). And the rather,

2e. This should be sought for, since it is so much approved of by God, who sees and searches the heart; "I know also my God," says David, "that thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness" (1 Chron. 29:17). "His countenance doth behold the upright" (Ps. 11:7), he smiles upon him, and takes delight in him. What an approbation of Job does he express? and what a testimony does he give to him, because of his sincerity and uprightness, and his perseverance therein? (Job 1:1,8 2:3). Which will still more fully appear by considering,

3. The happiness of such who are possessed of this grace.

3a. The light of spiritual joy and gladness is provided for such persons; and is in this life, at least at times, bestowed upon them (Ps. 97:11; 112:4).

3b. All the blessings of grace and goodness are not only wished for, but given unto them: "Grace," the blessings of grace, are described to be "with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity;" and both grace and glory are given to, and "no good thing will be withheld from them that walk uprightly," that is fit and proper for them (Eph. 6:24; Ps. 84:11).

3c. Such are protected and defended from all evil, and from every enemy: the Lord himself "is a buckler to them that walk uprightly; yea, his eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect," or sincere, "towards him" (Isa 33:15,16; Prov. 2:7; 2 Chron. 16:12).

3d. Such who "walk uprightly, walk surely," on good ground, in a good path, and by a good rule, and "shall be saved; the way of the Lord," in which they walk, "is strength unto the upright," they grow stronger and stronger (Prov. 10:9,29; 28:18).

3e. Those enjoy the presence of God now; "The upright shall dwell in thy presence" (Ps. 140:13). "The pure in heart shall see God," and be with him for ever; "The upright shall have the dominion" over the wicked, in the morning of the resurrection; and as for the sincere and perfect man, his "end is peace," everlasting peace and happiness (Matthew 5:8; Ps. 49:14; 37:37).