

Beware of Counterfeits

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It happens quite frequently when buying lunch or dinner at a fast food restaurant: the cashier checks the money you pay in order to make sure it is not counterfeit. It made me wonder, just how much counterfeit money is in circulation? Though there are estimates, it turns out this is actually a hard number to quantify, because no one really knows how many new counterfeit bills are put into circulation on a daily basis. However, counterfeiting is not limited to currency.

The headline of a July 8, 2016 online article for CNBC.com read: *Amazon's Chinese Counterfeit Problem is Getting Worse*. The article discussed how a number of Amazon sellers were seeing their products being copied by Chinese counterfeiters and being sold for a fraction of their price. Other online sites like eBay have seen the same problem. Warnings can be found on eBay regarding various products from China, like guitars for example, that are most likely fakes. Major guitar manufacturers like Fender, Gibson, and Martin have been taking legal actions to help stop the problem. As one would expect, they do not like seeing consumers fooled by seeing brand names falsely placed on products that are inferior to the quality of the genuine articles.

Counterfeiting is a serious problem in many an industry. People are fooled into thinking they are getting the real thing at a fraction of the price. It could be a Fender guitar, a Rolex watch, or an autograph from a superstar athlete. Sadly, many later discover that they have been scammed.

Of course, counterfeiting is nothing new. People have been fooled by fakes for thousands of years. In terms of the practice of one's faith, people are also fooled by counterfeits. Jesus warned us to beware of counterfeits:

"Beware of the **false prophets**, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

Matthew 7:15 (Emphasis Mine)

Later, Jesus warned His disciples again to beware of counterfeits:

Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There He is,' do not believe him. For **false Christs and false prophets** will arise and will show great signs and wonders, **so as to mislead**, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you in advance. So if they say to you, 'Behold, He is in the wilderness,' do not go out, or, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' **do not believe them**.

Matthew 24:23-26

The apostle Paul rebuked the Galatians for falling for a counterfeit gospel:

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for **a different gospel**; which is really not another; only **there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel**

of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!
Galatians 1:6-8 (Emphasis Mine)

Today, there are still those who offer a counterfeit gospel, and there are still those who fall prey to their deception.

People fall for counterfeit products such as jewelry, guitars, sports memorabilia, or whatever it might be, because they are not familiar with the genuine article. The same reason applies to those who fall for a false representation of the gospel: *They do not know the genuine article well enough to spot the fake!*

The apostle John encouraged us to "test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1 John 4:1). However, to accurately test any teacher, we must first know the word of God (cf. 2 Tim. 2:15; Heb. 5:12ff). Consider the following short list of common counterfeit teachings that many people have come to believe:

The Sinner's Prayer: There is not one example in Scripture, this side of the cross, of anyone being saved by simply saying a prayer! Because people are not familiar with the genuine article, they fall for this counterfeit teaching. Just think of the numbers of people the devil has scammed with the "sinner's prayer" who believe they are saved!

Baptism is Not Necessary for Salvation: In spite of an abundance of Scriptures that say otherwise (Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 8:12; 8:26; to name but a few), vast numbers of people, not knowing the genuine article, have fallen for a counterfeit gospel.

The Role of Women in Leadership: In various religious groups, women are serving as ministers, elders, worship leaders, and other roles for which there is no New Testament authority for their participation. Once again, if people would study the genuine article, they would be able to spot that which is counterfeit.

That was obviously just a short list. As Christ's church we are to be the pillar and support of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). We are to contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). Let us do what we can to expose the counterfeiters, by helping others to see the genuine article: The Inspired Word of God (cf. John 17:17).