
How to Recognize That Which Is Counterfeit

I have heard it said that those who learn to identify counterfeit money spend most of their time studying real money. Once they become entirely familiar with the real money, when something fake passes through their hands, they have the ability to recognize it because something does not seem right. The one who said this was talking about the necessity to know the truth of what the Bible teaches (good theology) so that when we encounter bad theology, we can be quick to recognize it.

Some would propose that we also need to expose ourselves to counterfeit money from time to time so that we can know what is real. About three quarters of a century ago, a professor from a Christian college was fired because he was seen attending the movie theater, something that was strictly forbidden for Christians at that time. He explained that as a professor he had to know what was out there so that he could be a more effective teacher. His argument did not convince the board of the college, and he was let go. This college professor did know beforehand what the consequences of engaging in worldly behaviour might be, but he tried to argue that being exposed to the teachings of the world would be a benefit to himself and others.

It's not that we should not expose ourselves to other ideas and teachings, for there can be a benefit in that. One of seminary professors (not from Calvin Seminary) advised that we read at least one book that we knew we would disagree with so that we could better understand the truth. Incidentally, he was a follower of Arminius, and when he explained the difference between Arminianism and Calvinism, trying to convince us to believe like him, I became a much stronger Calvinist because his argument did not convince me. For me, it was beneficial to hear the other side because it helped me understand my own.

Truly there is an advantage to being exposed to something that is false because seeing what is false will help us better understand what is true. Something may look white until we place it beside something that is truly white, for only then will we see that what appeared to be white is actually quite yellow or beige. Being exposed to false teachings may help us better understand the importance of the truth, but we have to be careful that we limit our exposure so that we do not become unaware of that the truth is. If someone who was learning about counterfeit money only looked at examples of counterfeit money, they would not learn what real money looked like. To know what real money is, we have to be able to see it and touch it.

At the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church a few weeks ago, the mandate of the denominational church publication was changed. The Banner, which is the monthly publication of our denomination, was meant to be a place where we could listen to each other, and where people could express a variety of opinions, challenging each other to think through the issues of the day. That mandate likened The Banner to a kitchen table where family members can gather to talk and where they feel comfortable to express themselves freely. The problem with this mandate, some said, is that there were too many opinions being stated that were not in line with the teachings of Scripture. They asked that the mandate be changed so that the monthly magazine would express the teachings of our denomination and become, not a kitchen table, but more of an educational magazine, helping readers navigate the issues before us from a biblical

stance. Synod agreed with this concern, and changed the mandate of The Banner so that what is printed in it will fall in line with what the Christian Reformed Church understands to be biblical teaching. This does not mean that there is no room for differing opinions; it simply means that when opinions are given, those who express themselves must root themselves in God's Word. And, through this all, we must be guided by the creeds and confessions which give us a framework within which we can study God's Word.

Some lamented disappointment because of the change, and I understand their disappointment. It seems that the ability to listen to and express a diversity of viewpoints was taken away, and it was. At the same time, I also understand the desire to have a magazine which will guide us in what is true rather than show us options that might or might not be contrary to the teachings of Scripture. Many expressed concern that we are exposed to so much that is counterfeit that we need to have something we can trust that will help us to understand what is good and right.

The problem in the larger Christian church at present is that we are being exposed to counterfeit ideas. Because of that, there is much theology that runs counter to what the Bible teaches. We do not have many opportunities to hear the truth nowadays, and that is lamentable. We also see many, many examples within the Christian church of people believing more what the world teaches than what Scripture teaches, to the point that Scripture seems foreign to them. (Medically Assisted Suicide is one example of this, for the right to employ a doctor to take one's own life has become so accepted that many Christians see no great problem in considering this route. Thankfully synod also addressed this, unanimously agreeing that because life is given to us by God, we do not have a right to take it ourselves.) Still, for many, biblical teaching in this area seems almost foreign because we have spent more time with counterfeit ideas rather than hearing Scripture.

I am somewhat saddened that The Banner will no longer be like a kitchen table. Something significant has been lost. But it is a necessary loss, in my opinion, for what the church needs more now than ever is good, solid teaching which will help us understand the truth of God's Word. In other words, we need to study and study and study what is real so that when something counterfeit comes before us, we are quick to recognize it. I am hopeful that in the future, we can make The Banner a kitchen table magazine again, but, for now, it is becoming what it needs to be: a magazine which helps us understand the truth so that we will be better equipped to detect what is false. It might be okay to read one book with which we know we will disagree, but better far to read 100 books that guide us to the truth so that we will be able to recognize falsity when it presents itself. In this way, hopefully, the church will be strengthened and good biblical teaching will be recognized by all.

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