

Counterfeit Christianity

In the previous messages we have spoken of the low points that David observed which are designed to draw God's people into serious and desperate prayer and then use the answers to those prayers to deliver them.

Ps 107:4-6

- 4 They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in.
5 Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them.
6 Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses.

Ps 107:11-13

- 11 Because they rebelled against the words of God, and contemned the counsel of the most High:
12 Therefore he brought down their heart with labour; they fell down, and there was none to help.
13 Then they cried unto the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses.

Ps 107:17-19

- 17 Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted.
18 Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat; and they draw near unto the gates of death.
19 Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he saveth them out of their distresses.

Ps 107:25-28

- 25 For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof.
26 They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble.
27 They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end.
28 Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses.

Ps 107:39-43

- 39 Again, they are minished and brought low through oppression, affliction, and sorrow.
40 He poureth contempt upon princes, and causeth them to wander in the wilderness, where there is no way.
41 Yet setteth he the poor on high from affliction, and maketh him families like a flock.
42 The righteous shall see it, and rejoice: and all iniquity shall stop her mouth.
43 Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the LORD. KJV

We are at one of those low places that David observed and, as he pointed out by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, "Whoever is wise, let him heed these things and consider the great love of the LORD." (NIV)

It is the lovingkindness of God that has brought us to where we are so that He might rescue us, but unless we know where we are we cannot sensible pray about our circumstance.

There is a reality which was mentioned by almost all of the writers of the NT and it began to be manifest in the earliest days of the church. It has continued to this day.

Jude is maybe the clearest of those who mentioned it.

Jude 4

4 For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. KJV

The situation in which we find ourselves is not the result of being lost in a wilderness or being at sea in a storm. I would submit to you that it is the result of God's people accepting Counterfeit Christianity as if it were legitimate Christianity. This is the dilemma, this is the tragedy, this is the storm and the desert we are facing.

What I see in scripture is that there are two types of religious error into which people can fall. One is outright false religion and the other is *the preliminary phase of false religion*, that which ultimately leads to abandonment of Truth, and I am calling it Counterfeit Christianity.

By that I mean that process which begins by one coming in the garment of a true servant of God, with all of the seeming credentials of a real representative of True Christianity. He 'creeps' in, as Jude says, not setting off any alarms whatsoever, even among genuine Christians. But he is not legitimate. He is one who has been cast off and condemned by God, one for whom there is no hope of rescue or salvation. He was "before of old ordained to this condemnation."

Parenthesis-----

As an aside let me say that I have no interest in debating the topic of 'double predestination' or even undertaking to discuss it here. I see nothing in scripture that suggests that all of the unbelieving are in this condition, but at the same time, I observe what Jude says here and accept it concerning these about whom we are speaking, the counterfeits.

End Parenthesis-----

The distinction that I am making here is between the ones mentioned by Jude and those spoken of by Paul in Gal 1 who come obviously with "another gospel" who are clearly identified by even the **immature but genuine** believer. They deny justification by Grace through Faith. They deny Christ alone but preach Christ plus works. Or maybe they deny the Deity of Christ or the reality of the Trinity. They teach that the Work of Christ was insufficient in and of itself to save but must be mingled with the acceptance of some formula, some ritual, or of some other set of doctrines than, as Jude says, "the faith once delivered to the saints." These are for sure **enemies of the gospel** with their agents which must go between man and God and facilitate the transfer of

grace to the convert. But these are not nearly so dangerous as the Counterfeit.

The Counterfeit is **the one most likely to be received**, sometimes even by sincere and godly men. The most notorious of them was, without doubt, Judas Iscariot, the betrayer of Christ.

I have always been struck by the fact that when Jesus revealed that one of the 12 would betray him, after the group having spent 3 ½ years together, no one turned and look at Simon's son. Even John who was the closest one to Christ, had no clue that he was the traitor. Judas had traveled with them, eaten with them, prayed with them, preached with them, even apparently done miracles with them and yet no one had any suspicion of him whatsoever. Each was rather willing to suspect himself than the one whom Jesus called, "diablolos."

He may have been the best Counterfeit that ever lived, I don't know. I have often wondered if he was the best preacher of the 12. But for sure he shows us what is possible. I am absolutely positive that if Jesus had suggested that last day that they all lay hands on Judas and ordain him for a special mission, they all would have complied without qualms. Apparently the fact he was a thief was only discovered and revealed later.

You will recall that years later Peter and Barnabus would receive and endorse Counterfeits who came to Antioch with a deviant message and would need to be rebuked by Paul to correct their errors, that even the church at Jerusalem considered them of such standing as to be allowed to debate Paul on the floor of the church concerning the doctrine of Justification by Faith alone.

The church at Corinth would receive men whom Paul designated as demon possessed messengers of the devil and count them as true ministers of the gospel.

2 Cor 11:13-15

- 13 For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.
- 14 And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.
- 15 Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works. KJV

These were people trained by Paul who accepted these men and allowed them to carry on their false ministry, individuals who at one time knew by experience and by example what true ministry was and is.

Paul warned the Ephesians concerning the Counterfeits, even after he had bestowed so much labor upon them and they had seen such marvelous working of God throughout all of Asia.

Acts 20:29-30

- 29 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.
- 30 Also **of your own selves** shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

It is not clear as to whether Paul suspected some of those already in the church or was looking forward to a time when others would come into it.

I am sure that there on the beach as they were weeping and confronting the reality they would never see Paul again, not one of them would have truly believed that their church would ever receive a Counterfeit as a minister in the church, but that is exactly what Paul said would happen.

So, how does the Counterfeit work?

From what we have already seen, it is obvious that the Counterfeit works on the level of profound deceit and I say that because there is literally a science to what is going on in our day.

Before we explore that, let us look at how the NT describes what was going on in the First Century.

2 Cor 11:3

3 But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

2 Cor 11:3

3 But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ NASU

It is to lead the mind astray, to corrupt it, to somehow get hold of the thoughts, emotions, and even reasoning of the saint and alter it so that the thinking concerning Christ is moved and Paul even had a specific picture of the effect of that movement, away “from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.”

But this deception is always a deliberate thing, not an accident, not a result of happenstance, incompetence or stupidity. It is a conscious effort to maneuver the minds of other people, something that does not and cannot happen without intention and purpose.

Look again at 11:13 which we have already mentioned. These false entities, “transform themselves.” This is not accidental either, but the purposeful labor of evil itself.

The ultimate effect of such work is described in v.20.

2 Cor 11:20

20 For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face. KJV

2 Cor 11:19-20

20 For you tolerate it if anyone enslaves you, anyone devours you, anyone takes advantage of you, anyone exalts himself, anyone hits you in the face. NASU

God’s people are brought to the place of being brought into slavery to the Counterfeit. They allow him to devour them, suck up all of their energy so that nothing is left for the service of God. They ‘take’ from the saints, stealing their money. They exalt themselves, claim undue and unbiblical authority over genuine Christians so that those people, even ones trained by Paul,

might tolerate being physically assaulted. Or the assault may be a metaphor picturing an attack upon their character.

But it is obvious, or should be, that no one gets from v.3 to v.20 overnight. It is a process that begins by the Counterfeit slipping in, quietly merging with the group as any sincere and repentant soul might.

Peter's words were, as you know, very similar to Jude's.

2 Peter 2:1-3

- 1 But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who **privily** shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.
- 2 And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.
- 3 And **through covetousness** shall they **with feigned words make merchandise of you**: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not. KJV

They “secretly introduce destructive heresies” (NAS). Their efforts at the beginning are not open and obvious. They keep hidden that their real agenda is “sensuality” (NAS), an assault upon the Doctrine of Repentance, which was the core message of Jesus Christ Himself and still is.

And, of course, Jude mirrors that same line of thought, as we have already mentioned.

Jude 4

- 4 For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, **turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness**, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. KJV

Both Peter and Jude mention sensuality and lasciviousness. Paul mentioned minds **being corrupted** and both Peter and Jude describe their effect as being a direct assault upon Jesus Christ.

On first take it may seem somewhat obscure to us as to what exactly was going on but a little thought and a little observation both of history and of the day in which we live may help us shine some light on the real issue.

The central issue of the message of Christ was repentance, as it had been with John, as it also had been with all of the prophets. When Jesus sent out the 12 in Mark 6, they preached that men should repent. In Luke's account of the Great Commission Jesus said, “that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” Luke 24:47 KJV

When Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost he command men to repent and so did Paul on Mars Hill. He included that in his defense of himself before Agrippa.

Acts 26:19-20

19 Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision:

20 But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. KJV

So, how does one bring an assault on Christ which also brings sensuality? How does one turn “the grace of our God into lasciviousness” so subtly that the saints do not notice? I hope you are already ahead of me and are realizing that this is done by attacking the doctrine of Repentance and suggesting that God really does not call for profoundly holy behavior from His people.

There are a number of different ways to attack Biblical Repentance and we have seen them all in our time. It ranges all the way from profoundly sophisticated theological arguments to the outright toleration of immorality in the name of ‘love.’

But it is not only the commitment to **moral purity that flows from Genuine Repentance** that is under assault.

The commitment to **Biblical purity** has also been under assault for a long time, again brought in by those who crept in unawares. Our confidence in the Word of God has been challenged and sometimes shaken by people whom we presumed to be and have accepted as Orthodox.

The commitment to **Doctrinal purity** has been and is under assault by those who otherwise profess a sound theology but who have embraced the lies of the Charismatic movement that glossalalia is a sign of the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

The commitment of **Biblical unity** has been and is under assault by some who under the banner of Orthodoxy and Doctrinal Purity have erected barriers and divisions within the fellowship of Christ not honoring the appeal of the apostle to “endeavor to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of Peace.”

Now I want to stop and move slowly and be clearly understood here. The assault on biblical unity exists within the ranks of those who consider themselves believers in Sovereign Grace and Reformed Theology. There are those who choose to make secondary issues tests of fellowship and presume to write “Ichabod” over the names of sincere and true saints. They refuse to labor for unity as Paul commanded which is a manifestation of pride and a refusal to repent of it along with a refusal to obey the Word of God.

What we learn here is that there are effective ways to manipulate the minds of people, even God’s people, to believe things and do things that are contrary to His Word.

We see the apostles using words like ‘beguile,’ ‘bewitched,’ and ‘seduced’ to describe the operations of the Counterfeits.

When the Holy Spirit is refusing to be in operation because there is corruption in spiritual leadership, some other means of directing the minds of people so as to obtain the desired results become necessary.

In some cases there will undoubtedly be demonic cooperation. I have experienced that personally.

And, though demonic influence may be somewhat universal in places where error replaces the gospel, there are also skills that people can learn to have powerful influence over their audiences. Hank Hanegraaf, in his book 'Counterfeit Christianity,' shared a story from his attendance at a performance of a so-called 'magician' that sounded almost exactly like some performances of false religionists. He did it deliberately to demonstrate that audiences can be manipulated where the Spirit of God is not present in power.

But understand that the tactics of manipulators appear in situations far more subtle to the genuine believer than a Kenneth Copeland performance.

Tony Robbins, who is a motivational speaker and a coach for people who want to change their behavior or their thinking processes, can tell story after story of how he caused people's mind to change about important things sometimes even when they did not want to change. It is possible and it is a skill that can be mastered.

Bring that into the realm of spiritual things and one has the recipe for 'successful ministry' separate and apart from the declaration of truth by the aid of the Holy Spirit. This is the counterfeit that is plaguing what little is left of genuine Christianity in our day. (And, yes, I know that God has faithful souls reserved to Himself who may be invisible to us.)

This is the Day of Manipulation when the ability to get people to make religious decisions and commitments has replaced the dependence upon the Holy Spirit of God.

Some people have thought that the way to combat this is to study the Counterfeits and come up with skillful arguments to confront them. But this is not the answer that Jude suggested.

Jude 3

3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. KJV

The way to recognize and identify a counterfeit is to learn all you can know about the original and force everything you examine into a brutally honest comparison with it. The person who can recognize a counterfeit \$100 bill is the person who is absolutely and completely familiar with a genuine bill, how it looks, how it feels, even what it smells like.

Brethren, our remedy for Counterfeit Christianity is absolute and determined faithfulness to original Christianity, that which was once-for-all delivered to the saints, without addition, subtraction or admixture. Our task is to reproduce First Century Christianity (absent the apostles) to the degree it is possible at the fullest stretch of our abilities. We are to do what they

did, not what we think needs to be done.

But one cannot “earnestly contend” for that which he does not know and he had best not do it for that which he only *presumes* to be the truth.

We have the truth and we have promises concerning the Work of the Holy Spirit.

However, we are not apostles and none of us had an apostle lay hands on him so miracles are probably going to be rare.

But that does not mean that our duty is in anyway less than what Jude urged upon his audience.

Let us also remember that there is a “simplicity” in Christ.

2 Cor 11:3

3 But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. KJV

I am not anti-intellectual nor do I scorn education and good books. But the secrets of Christianity are not hidden from the ordinary believer in books written by intellectuals and pseudo-intellectuals who seek to make Truth a mystery only understandable by their ciphers.

I want to remind you that God has hardly ever used the intellectuals and the elites either of Israel or of the Church to lead awakenings.

He used shepherds and men of no status nor reputation, farmers and common folk. The elites were those who pretended to minister to the needs of the people but it was a shame.

Jer 6:13-14

13 For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely.

14 They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace.

There is plenty that is plainly written in the scriptures we have to keep us all busy for a lifetime. Let us earnestly contend for *that* and seek God’s empowering upon us as we proclaim it.

So, what happened to bring us to this place?

After Civil War, movement from farm to city began.

People became workers in factories and all of the businesses that support them.

The population became more and more consumers of manufactured goods.

Those manufacturers were in competition with one another.

And so advertising and salesmanship began to flourish and tactics were discovered to pressure people into purchasing that which the selling agents wanted them to buy.

To keep and maintain sales staff, motivational techniques were developed to cause employees to produce what the employers wanted.

Unscrupulous men like Finney and his agents began to borrow the techniques of the salesmen and motivators in order to cause people to respond to their messages.

When the Holy Spirit pulled back from the Last Awakening around the turn of the 20th century no one noticed because men had learned to produce counterfeits of His moving so clever that many of the true believers were deceived.

Unscrupulous men continued to perfect their skills and the church continued to decline until no one any longer could discern that they were counterfeits.

As salesmanship and motivationalism grew and developed, so did its use in Christianity as a whole.

Until now we have what we have in Christianity, a great engine of Salesmanship, Marketing, and Motivationalism. But no Holy Spirit and to an ever growing degree, no Truth.

But, again, the greatest danger is that which is closest enough to the true servant of God to be almost impossible to recognize.

He will ultimately be known by his assault on the Doctrine of Repentance in some form or fashion.

Our hope is to defend the original faith and settle for nothing less, rejecting anything which attacks the doctrine of Repentance.