



THE MOST FAKED AND ABUSED BRAND NAME IN THE UNIVERSE: REVISITED



Some 17 years ago, we wrote about the huge increase in counterfeiting around the world. All kinds of goods were being copied, patents flouted, high-end brand names being imitated. These activities were experiencing a phenomenal surge. Why was it happening? Because there was a profit to be made in copying and selling high quality items with large reputational value, and global trade was booming.

By **Wilfred Hahn**

Authorities and global agencies have since intensified their pursuit of counterfeit goods. For instance, heavy pressure has been brought to bear on manufacturers and exporters of counterfeit goods from China. China is the largest bootlegger by far, but that does not mean that counterfeiting is only limited to non-developed nations. Actually, it is found everywhere ... namely, anywhere there are willing or gullible buyers of the imitations.

Has this situation improved today? No. If anything, the "cat and mouse game" of counterfeiting and prevention has become much more sophisticated. A recent report by the OECD estimated that the value of cross border trade in fakes in 2013 amounted to \$461 billion (roughly 2.5% of all goods). That statistic only covers one kind of counterfeiting—consumer goods. If one were to include digital copying, piracy,

intellectual rights ... etc., together it is estimated to represent some 7.5% of trade.

Owning Up to Falsehood

It may seem harmless, but counterfeiting by definition is deception and has real consequences. There will always be a loser on one side of the transaction ... if not both.

I will again risk telling the story of the time that I bought a fake watch in Hong Kong. In my frequent travels to Asia, I'd often encounter street bazaars and back alley vendors that offered fake luxury goods. The real version of the watch that I bought at that time may today be worth as much as \$10,000. Back then, the fake I recall cost me \$50. I bought it obviously knowing it was a knock-off. I bought it for a gag.

My story, however, is intended to point to several facts about product piracy and bootlegging. Firstly, of course, one should not be



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aiding or participating in the business of counterfeiting. It is theft, plain and simple.

And, think about this: Imitations, by their very nature, must have an illicit or evil motive behind them. Since they are not true or the “real thing,” they can only thrive on deception.

A third observation about counterfeiting is that the most successful imitations must be, by definition, the most cleverly deceiving. In other words, they must most closely mimic the original product to be successful.

Finally, the most crucial lesson of the story, as we will show, is that there are bound to consequences if deception is involved.

Religious Hucksterism and Counterfeiting

Counterfeiting of consumer goods today is a massive enterprise. Serious as this is, it only has material consequences. The bootlegged product might cause one to lose some money. But, what about spiritual imitations? Here the damage can extend to the eternal ... and the human soul. Hence lies the great danger.

Without a doubt, Christianity is the most imitated and abused brand name in the

world today. In fact, this “brand name” is so profusely counterfeited and abused that the associative meanings that go with this word are totally destroyed. For someone to identify as being a Christian is likely meaningless. In fact, to many, this brand name holds a negative connotation, given the many imitations.

Actually, can one be blamed for not wanting to be identified with this brand these days? What does the word “Christian” really stand for? Sadly, when someone is recommended as a Christian, it no longer provides assurance of any standard of conduct or beliefs, but only raises questions and suspicions (yes, suspicions!).

The vast majority of people who consider themselves Christians today actually hold many pagan beliefs; only 4% have a Biblical worldview. According to a Barna survey, even 17% of people who value their faith and attend church regularly do not.

Yet, other sources conclude that as many as 65% to 70% of Americans consider themselves Christian. These statistics don't jive with each other. What these studies really reveal is that many people have been buying into deceptive imitations of Christianity. Its form may look golden and lustrous, as did my “knock-off” gold watch, but inside, it was fake. Where is the outcry ... where the protest?

It would be an outrage were the Chrysler car company to sell its small economy cars under the brand name of Rolls Royce. Today, there exists a nettle of patent laws and rules concerning intellectual property rights, both at the domestic and international levels. Were Chrysler to do so, it would quickly find itself sued for damages. But there exists no agency in the world that will enforce a patent or intellectual infringement case against the misuses of the “Chris-

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tian” brand name, nor to press charges of identity fraud against the many and sundry false messiahs.

There are serious consequences. As it turns out, although the exterior of the watch that I bought in Hong Kong looked impressive, it wasn't a reliable timepiece. The movements inside were rubbish and didn't last very long.

What looked to be one of the world's most reliable watch brands, ended up being useless. Even worse, it provided misleading guidance. The reputational truth of the maker was taken advantage of ... the inside movement and power source falsified.

To be able to determine the essence and foundation of any faith, one must check the movement ... the original maker's manual. The spirits must be tested. One's belief statements must be aligned with Scriptural doctrines and proofs.

False Prophets, Messiahs and Gospels

Concerned about the deceptions of false teachings, the Apostle John gave some guidelines, saying:

“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world” (1 John 4:1-3).



Why should we be on guard against counterfeit gospels? Firstly, because we are commanded to do so. Frequently, the writers of the New Testament implore us to be on guard against the counterfeiters. In fact, Christ commended the church at Ephesus for doing exactly that: “I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary” (Revelation 2:2b-3).

If anything, these warnings are timelier than ever today, for we live in the very last of the last days. Four of the writers of the New Testament epistles (Paul, Peter, James and Jude) expressly warn that apostasy would be the greatest danger to the Church in the last days. In fact, it is a mark of the last stage of the Church Age. Jesus Himself warned us to expect many imposters and



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false messiahs. Later, after the real Church is removed, it will get much worse, God Himself allowing and aiding delusions for the world.

Consider these additional two warnings about counterfeit gospels:

“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them” (Matthew 7:15-16).

The biggest inroad for counterfeit beliefs (apostasies) that directly oppose or revise Scripture today, seems to be the claimed verifications of “angelic” messengers. There is a seeming epidemic of “angelic visitations” and appearances of Jesus. But, these must be mostly (if not always) dismissed as false; for, either their message contradicts Scripture, or their prophecies are proven false. The Apostle Paul virtually pleaded with the churches under his guidance, saying: “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!” (Galatians 1:8). Real angels only have authority to speak the words of the Spirit of Jesus.

Thoughts to Ponder

Today’s world of rampant fakes, imposters and counterfeit goods provides crucial and

timely lessons. Let us not accept cheap alternatives and empty salvation, by allowing ourselves to be misled by the veneer of a masquerading brand name.

We must examine our beliefs, test the spirits and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:11). Our faith, the Bible tell us, is more valuable than gold; for the gospel “[...] is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16).

Finally, we stop to consider one last aspect of the parlous state of the Christian brand name today: In the economic world, the brands that are most vulnerable to damage by counterfeiting are exactly those where reputation is a large component of their value and appeal. These tend to be very expensive, high-quality products, allowing huge profits to the skillful imitators.

In this reputational sense, we can take confirmation from the fact that Christianity and Jesus Christ are being heavily counterfeited today. Why? It proves that they are worthy and true. No one falsifies what is already a proven fake. Why imitate a brand name that has no value or reputation? What would be the profit? As is often said, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. How many falsified versions of false religions are there? None, really.

So, we hold on to our faith, not accepting anything that is not proven true. “[...] See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he promised us— even eternal life” (1 John 2:24-25). (MC)