

INTRODUCTION

In this world there are people who make a living by lying and cheating. Counterfeit products have a huge market. In 2017, 1.2 trillion US dollars' worth of fake goods were sold globally. They range from clothing, footwear, cosmetics, handbags, and watches. There is a common saying: "If something is too good to be true, then it probably is." If you can buy a name-brand product at a very low price then you have to wonder if you are getting the authentic stuff. Why is there such a market for fake goods? It is a simple Economics 101 principle of demand and supply. Some sneaky businessmen want to cheat people's money. Then there are two types of consumers who buy bogus merchandises. Some people know clearly that they are buying counterfeits. They may want to feel good and show off but they cannot afford the name-brands. Besides, there are some other customers who think that they pay for the real stuff. They are fooled by the crafty sellers. In 1999 when I first went back to Hong Kong, I saw some high-end stores crowded with mostly Chinese customers. Later I learned that some of those people are quite rich. They could have bought the same goods in China. But they wanted to make sure that they were getting the real things. Therefore, they would rather spend more money and went to Hong Kong to shop. Counterfeits look and feel like the genuine products because they imitate the name-brand goods. Similarly, counterfeit religions look and feel like genuine faith. False gods are created after the real God. In our message today, the apostle John warned his readers about fake faith. We can discern falsehood only when we have a close fellowship with the true God.

EXPLANATION

1. Deflect from the Faith 背離信仰

John mentioned that there were some people who were deflected from the Christian faith. Let us look at **verse 18** again: Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. We need to understand the meaning of two phrases in this verse. First, it is "the last hour." It is an alternative term for "the last days" used throughout the New Testament. It denotes the time between the first and second coming of Christ. Therefore, ever since Jesus entered our world, we are in the last hour. Jesus came the first time as a baby and died on the cross to save us. The Bible clearly tells us that He will come in the future as a King to judge the world. Another word we need to know in this verse is "antichrist." In its singular form, the antichrist refers to a supernatural being who will appear when Jesus' return is imminent. But John told us that even before then, many antichrists have showed up. Those antichrists are humans who are under the influence of the evil spirit to oppose the truth. One example is in **2 Timothy 4:3-4** – 3 For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. 4 They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. The apostle Paul told us why false teachers have their faithful listeners. They preach whatever their audiences like to listen. There is the so-called "health and wealth gospel." Most people do not

want to hear topics such as sin, the cross and judgment. They do not like to know that they will face hardship in life and they have to sacrifice for their faith. Instead, they want to hear that because God loves them, He will grant whatever wish they have. Some seeker-friends think that it is good for everyone to have a religion. Yes, but why? Some people look for a security blanket when they worry about lives. Other people come to the church to look for friendship or business clients, or they come because of family tradition. But if we do not have a heart to know God, love and serve Him, then we enter the wrong doors. The antichrists intend to lead us astray. We can see their influence in the world. However, John told us that they were also active in the church. **Verse 19** reads: They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us. The people who spread the wrong doctrines may at one time be church participants. Although they used to be active in the church, they are not truly saved. They do not have an eternal relationship with the Lord. When they leave more than likely they will drag some believers away too. Some people left unhappily because they do not get the things or relationship I mentioned earlier. However, there are certain people who are upset for a good reason. Once a Jehovah's Witness knocked on my door to share his beliefs with me. (I will say more about why their doctrines are against the Bible later.) He told me that he once attended a Christian church, and also studied a few other religions but he did not find the answer. People like him are misled by falsehood. Why do some people cannot find the truth in a Christian church? I am not trying to condemn anyone or over-generalize the situation. But could it be because they cannot see faith lived out in our lives? They cannot find the love and compassion, humility and kindness the Bible teaches. Instead, they see a huge gap between what we say we believe and how we conduct our lives. People deflect from the faith when they cannot find what they are looking for in the church.

2. Define the Faith 定義信仰

Having cautioned his readers about people who had deflected from the faith, John went on to define what genuine Christian faith is. First, he pointed out the source of our faith in **verse 20**: But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. The same word “anointing” also appears in verse 27. The process of anointing with oil in the Old Testament symbolizes that a person is set apart for God's service. Here, John borrowed the picture to illustrate the receiving of the Holy Spirit when a person accepts Christ. Here we can find the sixth proof of Christians: believers are those who have **received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit**. Among other functions of the Holy Spirit, John highlighted that the Holy Spirit helps us understand the truth. Any educated person can read the Bible, but only with the help of the Holy Spirit can we be able to discern the meaning behind the words. The Holy Spirit is the source of our faith. In **verses 22-23** John went on to state a core doctrine that defines the Christian faith: 22 Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist - he denies the Father and the Son. 23 No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also. The central doctrine that separates Christianity from any false religion is that Jesus is the Christ. That is the seventh proofs of Christians: believers are those who **admit that Jesus is the Christ**. “Jesus” was a common Jewish name in the first century. “Christ” is the Greek form for the Hebrew title “Messiah.” The Old Testament prophesied that the Messiah would come from the line of king David. This King is not a political leader, but a spiritual ruler God established. To say that Jesus is the Christ, it means that Jesus is

the Savior of the world. Once Jesus asked His disciples whom they thought He was. **Matthew 16:16** recorded: Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus was not a teacher like one of the Rabbis of His days. Jesus is God. Later in **Acts 2:36**, the same Peter proclaimed: “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” Peter was telling his fellow Jews: “Folks, the man you nailed on the cross was the Christ. He is God.” We can only be saved if we acknowledge Jesus as God. John emphasized that a person who accepts the Son also accepts the Father. Believers have fellowship with Jesus and with the Father. Both the Son and the Father are equal in their status and glory. The belief that Jesus is God separates Christianity from the cults. The Jehovah’s Witness and the Mormon, two of the major cults both deny that Jesus is God. Their followers may claim to be Christians. Counterfeits may look like the real thing. The Jehovah’s Witness teaches that Jesus was actually the archangel Michael. Jesus was created by God. When Jesus was on the earth, He was only a human. He died on the cross only as a great model of love. Jesus did not rise from the dead. They came up with their own Bible version called the New World Translation to support their false doctrines. For example, in John 1:1 they rendered that Jesus was only “a god.” If the doctrines of the Jehovah’s Witness look different from what the Bible says, the teachings of the Mormon are even more bizarre. According to the Mormon, Jesus was the first son from the union of the Heavenly Father and Mary, who was one of His many wives. Before Jesus came into the world, He progressed through obedience to the Father to attain the status of a god. The Mormon church teaches that followers who have completed specific secret temple rituals will become gods of their own planet after they die. They will have multiple wives and will continue to reproduce. This is not sci-fi movies. This is what the Mormon teaches. Humans can be exalted to become gods. Doesn’t that sound familiar? Satan tempted Adam and Eve into believing that they could turn into gods, making their own standards of right and wrong. Even Satan himself rebelled against God because he wanted to be a god. Where do all these weird teachings come from? The Bible tells us that God’s Word is the only truth. Not a word can be added or deleted from the Bible. It contains the complete knowledge that we need to know about God, and His will for us. Any doctrine that is not based on the Bible is lie.

3. Defend the Faith 保守信仰

Not only that we need to define the faith, but we must also defend the faith. We do so by staying close to God. John said in **verse 24**: 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. The key word in this verse is “remain.” It is the same word that Jesus used in John 15 when He described His relationship with believers like the vine and branches. The branches can only bear fruit when they remain, in other words, when they are connected to the vine. Without such connection there is no supply of nutrients and dead branches are only good for firewood. We are connected to God through His Word. We have to read and practice God’s Word. In **verse 10** of the chapter Jesus drew an equal sign between obeying His Word, loving Him and remaining in Him: “If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love.” When kids are small, they treat their parents as the ultimate authority. They love their parents by following their instructions. Gradually, when kids grow up, they realize that their parents are in fact limited in many ways. They complain: “Mom, how come you don’t know how to use Facetime or dad, why are you so slow?” They switch their admiration to their teachers, sports stars and YouTube celebrities. As Christians, we remain in God when we obey His Word.

There are some Bible passages that are more difficult to understand. That does not mean that there are errors in the Bible. We should not conclude that this book written a few thousand years ago is no longer relevant to our modern life either. We must hold on to the authority of God's Word and humbly ask the Holy Spirit to give us wisdom in understanding the truth. We can defend our faith because the Holy Spirit lives in us. John told us in [verse 27](#): As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit - just as it has taught you, remain in him. We said earlier that "the anointing" refers to the Holy Spirit. When John said we "do not need anyone to teach" us it does not mean that we no longer need to study the Bible, attend fellowship and Sunday school or listen to sermons any longer. What John meant is that since we have the Holy Spirit living inside us, we should rely on Him, rather than any human teacher as the ultimate source for understanding the Bible. Since the Spirit is the spirit of truth, He will defend us from falsehood. Many years ago, when I was still a new Christian two Jehovah's Witnesses knocked on my home to share their beliefs with me. I told them that since I had accepted Christ, I did not need to hear the gospel again. Afterward for some reason I found their sharing and the printed material they gave me a little different from what I learned in the church I attended. Now as I looked back, I am quite confident that it was the Holy Spirit working in my heart to alert me of their false doctrines. Counterfeit teachers will claim that their understanding of the Bible is the highest authority. Nowadays, there are tons of resources on the internet. How do we know that which ones are good? We need to ask how those people drew their conclusion. Did they quote any Bible verse as support? Did they agree with other reliable scholars? You have to be cautious when they begin a sentence by "I think." When you come to our church, do not believe in every word I say simply because "Pastor Choi said so." I may be anxious if my English or Mandarin pronunciation is inaccurate. But I am scared to death if my teachings lead you astray. Go study God's Word for yourself. Please come back to me any time if I did not explain anything clearly enough, or if your understanding is different from what I preached. Even though I am an old man, I am still learning to understand God's Word. The position I held twenty years ago on certain passages may change. Truth can never change, but my knowledge expands when I study more. Bible teachers are always students of God's Word.

CONCLUSION

We learn from this passage that we can discern falsehood only when we have a close fellowship with the true God. When we spend time to explore what is real, then we can easily catch what is fake. Recently, the issue of fake news has become a hot topic. Not too long a high school student from Kentucky appeared in news headline when there was an alleged confrontation between him and a native American. When I watched the video clip, I jumped to a conclusion in my mind: "Here we go again! An immature Caucasian boy intimidated a person of different skin color." I believed that the young man was at fault. Even the school condemned the student immediately. Then there was an uproar of accusation from the media and some celebrity figures. It turned out that the footage only covers part of the story. There were other things happened beforehand that led to the incident. The young man was in fact innocent. Some people who made the wrong judgment later issued their apologies. They admitted that they committed a mistake because they did not spend time to investigate the facts. The same principle also applies to spiritual matters. The Bible is the truth not because we believe it to be so. It is true because the message originates from the one true God, and we can verify it with human means.