

▶ DAY 5: AVOIDING THE COUNTERFEITS

Things that have great value are often counterfeited. There will always be a market for fake diamonds and counterfeit money. It is the same with intangible things—love, friendship, loyalty, and integrity. There will always be people who choose the counterfeit over the real. Sadly, a counterfeit knowledge of God also exists.

When we speak about the knowledge of God, our enemy will not whisper to us in our church pews: “Why bother? Who wants to know God anyway?” Instead, the temptation will come in a more subtle form. Maybe it will sound something like this: “Knowing God . . . that’s a good thing. But remember, there is more than one way to know God. You might want to consider a way that doesn’t require so much of you.” So, like other valuable things, the knowledge of God is counterfeited. It is like shopping at a street market in a large city. You can find knock-offs of name-brand luxury items (maybe a “Rolex” watch for your spouse)

for a fraction of the price that you would pay for the real thing. It looks like the real thing. People will give it the same kind of compliments. But it will never *be* the real thing, and it will not *work* like the real thing. That describes many people's knowledge of God. It is counterfeit. It is inexpensive. It looks similar to the real thing, but it is not genuine. It will never impact their lives like the real thing.

In the video lesson this week, you will hear about three counterfeits of the knowledge of God. We will carefully consider them today before going any further in this study. After all, you don't want to spend twelve weeks pursuing something that you later find out was merely an impressive forgery.

These counterfeits might be described in a number of ways, but various authors have mentioned three:

1. Knowledge by Hearsay

Thomas Carlyle wrote: "What this country needs is a man who knows God other than by hearsay." Knowledge by hearsay is counterfeit knowledge, made up only of things others have told us about God. Such knowledge might come through years of listening to sermons or reading good Christian books. These are beneficial, but they can become a substitute for personally walking with God. We end up only knowing Him by hearsay.

2. Textualism

This is a deadly counterfeit that thrives in conservative churches that still defend the truthfulness of Scripture. A. W. Tozer describes the textualist as a person who assumes that because he affirms the Bible's veracity, he automatically possesses the things of which the Bible speaks.¹ For example, if he agrees with the biblical definition of faith found in Hebrews 11, then he assumes that he already possesses such faith, even if all of his choices in life prove otherwise. If he agrees with the words of Paul, then he is sure he possesses the reality of Paul's words. If he accepts every word of Paul as inspired, then every experience that Paul describes in the Christian life must already be his. In other words, the textualist lives as if affirming the words of the Bible is equivalent to having their reality in his own life.

3. True Truths

Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote: "Truths . . . are often considered as *so true* that they lose all the power of truth, and lie bed-ridden in the dormitory of the soul, side by side with the most despised and exploded errors." This is nowhere more obvious than in the basic truths we have been given in the Bible concerning

The many false and counterfeit appearances which we meet, instead of proving that there is no religion in the world, not only prove that there is, but that it is extremely precious, otherwise it would not be counterfeited.

— Edward Payson

God. Reflect on how little God’s omnipresence (dwelling everywhere at once) has affected the way you dressed, ate, drove, spent money, and responded to family members today. You will admit that God is present everywhere; it is a very different thing to live on it. By the way you treat this truth, it may be difficult to distinguish it from things you know to be bold-faced lies. The Easter Bunny myth was exploded long ago for us. Therefore, we do not think about the Easter Bunny, and his nonexistence does not affect our lives. How tragic to allow the glorious truths of God to lie “bed-ridden” in our minds alongside such myths. This is another counterfeit type of knowing God—having a mind crammed full of right words that lie dormant, not affecting your life any more than the things you know to be lies. A. W. Tozer gave this advice: Take them out of the back room of your mind, dust them off, reacquaint yourself with those truths, and live on them.

TEST yourself. What truth about God can you dust off and begin to live upon?

If there is one fact, or doctrine, or promise in the Bible, which has produced no practical effect upon your temper or conduct, be assured that you do not truly believe it.

— Edward Payson

GOOD NEWS!

If there are counterfeits, then there must be something worth counterfeiting. An individual can know the living God. Knowing God is worth any price or effort. See how two seventeenth-century authors defined theology (the study of God):

William Perkins wrote:

Theology is the science [study] of living blessedly forever.

William Ames wrote:

Theology is the study of how to live unto God.

Are these accurate? Can you really take the descriptions of God in the Bible, live on them, glory in them, and find happiness in that kind of life? A more authoritative guide in this matter is found in the Apostle Paul’s writings to the Ephesians. In this letter, Paul includes a great deal of theology and doctrine. Chapters 1–3 are full of doctrine. These form the foundation of the ethical commands (duties) of the Christian life that are found in chapters 4–6. Notice the way Paul keeps doctrine from becoming a collection of dry, dead sayings. At the end of chapters 1 and 3, Paul prays. For what does he plead? He is praying that God will enable the Christians to grasp all that doctrinal truth, internalize it, and live on it. **It is this application of doctrine to our hearts that forms the bridge between right thinking about God and right living with God.**

READ EPHESIANS 1:15–22 and list below the things that Paul asks God to do for the believers in order for the doctrines to become a part of their everyday living.

READ EPHESIANS 3:14–21 and list below the things that Paul asks God to do for the believers in order for the doctrines to become a part of their everyday living.

Everything that men do in their own strength and by means of their own abilities is done for time alone; the quality of eternity is not in it.

— A. W. Tozer

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

All three elements—right living, built upon right doctrine, planted deeply in your heart by God—are inseparable. They cannot exist in isolation from one another. If your life lacks one or another, in truth it does not have any of the three.