

Avoiding Counterfeit Violins

Letters from John, Part 9

1 John 2:26-27

In an episode of the History Channel's reality show about a pawn shop, a man brought in a violin and asked for an appraisal. According to the man's story, he had recently purchased a piece of property that included a house and an old barn. Shortly after his purchase, while inspecting the barn, he opened an old chest and discovered the violin safely tucked inside. As he dusted off the violin – still in pristine condition, he found the word, "Stradivarius" clearly inscribed on the violin. He assumed – and hoped – that the violin would be worth several million dollars. It was a fake, hardly worth the price of a used violin.ⁱ

The trouble is there are so many fake instruments out there – many of them forged with the name of Antonio Stradivarius.

In fact, just months ago a millionaire dealer was caught in one of the most far reaching scams related to Stradivarius violins and cellos.

He was renowned as one of the world's leading authorities on the value of cellos and violins – including those built by Stradivarius. He was trusted by individuals and institutions and had offices in Chicago, New York, Tokyo, Zurich and Vienna. He was believed to be the final word.

But then, just 24 months ago he was discovered to have defrauded his clients by selling both genuine and imitation instruments.

In one instance, 30 instruments that he authenticated and sold to a major American philharmonic were proven to be run of the mill and it nearly bankrupted the orchestra.

On another occasion he sold a cello for \$300,000 when it was discovered later to be worth around \$2,000 dollars.

After decades of dealing, he was finally caught red handed. But not until after he had bilked clients out of more than 100 million dollars, lived in a renovated castle in Austria and had become the toast of high society and the music industry as the final word on Stradivarius.ⁱⁱ

Frankly, there isn't any scheme more opulent – with more potential clients to be deceived and defrauded annually – than the schemes of Satan, all in the name of God.

Around the world today, religious investors seeking spiritual answers are sold spiritual imitations, look-a-likes, and fakes along with trainloads of empty promises.

Dealers nearly blanket the globe convincing prospective clients that the name on the label is not forged.

"It's the genuine item . . . it will connect you to God . . . it will take you to heaven . . . Jesus signed it . . . look, Jesus made it."

The truth is, the 21st century is really no different than the 1st century.

So much so that the Apostle will warn the church of counterfeit ministers, counterfeit gospels, counterfeit doctrines and counterfeit Christians.ⁱⁱⁱ

The average Christian might be left to worry – "How can I tell the difference in a world spiritual counterfeits – I'm not a theological expert – I never took Cults 101 or How to Spot a Spiritual Deceiver 102.

What kind of equipment can I possibly have to enable me to tell the genuine item from a forgery . . . a cheap imitation?

How can I avoid an imitation violin, in the spiritual world?

Pick up your letter of First John and you catch it clearly in chapter 2.

In fact, one of the reasons the Apostle John was inspired by God to write this letter into existence was to tell you about the internal forensic equipment designed to detect and discern counterfeit spirituality.

Notice *verse 26. These things I have written to you – in other words, here's one of my purpose statements for this letter – now notice, concerning those who are trying to deceive you.*

The word deceive can be translated to seduce. False teachers are going to try and seduce you into being led astray – literally seduced to wander after them.

Some of them have charming personalities – some are scholarly; others are sophisticated and well connected – they have followers from Chicago to Tokyo to Vienna; they are silver-tongued orators possessing powers of persuasion.^{iv}

John has already identified them earlier in this chapter as antichrists – **verse 18. And these antichrists** – these ones against Christ, who want to give you something instead of Christ, who want to replace Christ – antichristos – have, you remember, **already left the church – verse 19.**

They’ve left the church but they just won’t leave the church alone?

Why?

Because that’s where the list of potential clients are. They want at the flock.

I’ll never forget several years ago telling a woman in our congregation that she couldn’t return to worship with us until she repented and apologized to a number of people she had been slandering. Division just swirled at her feet.

She refused to repent and apologize and make things right. A couple weeks later, she showed up at the church one afternoon and asked the receptionist for the church directory. That was back in the days when we printed them.

I just so happened to come by at just that moment and I overheard her request . . . I walked into the reception area and told her she couldn’t have our directory and that she was to leave the building immediately.

She demanded a directory. I said no again. She turned and stomped out of the lobby, but not before turning back to me and delivering a few key words and phrases that I had never heard in church before – I was pretty sure they weren’t in the Bible.

She wanted access to the assembly so she could influence others – which is exactly what church discipline prevents, by the way, as it safeguards the flock.

These false teachers were interested in doing even greater damage . . . they were selling gospel forgeries.

And although they had withdrawn from the assembly, they still wanted to retain all their contacts with the people so they could continue to influence the faithful and lead them astray.^v

And so John warns the body of the threat of spiritual deception.

So how does the ordinary Christian handle this kind of threat?

I mean, how do ordinary believers stand a chance in detecting clever, impressive, spiritual forgeries – especially when they come with certificates of religious authenticity?

One of my treasures framed and hanging on the wall just outside my church office door is a piece of

paper with writing on it in black ink. It’s a piece of paper from one of Charles Spurgeon’s sermon manuscripts, preached in the late 1800’s. The sheet of paper is dated and has attached an affidavit of authenticity, along with the date he preached that particular sermon and the text of scripture he used.

What makes that piece of paper all the more valuable to me is that according to his custom, on Mondays, he would come into the office, take his manuscript and with a pen – using purple ink – which was his favorite color because he said it reminded him of the royalty of Christ, he edited his manuscript. Only after he made all his changes in purple was the manuscript sent to the newspaper for publication.

And there on that sheet of paper, framed just outside my office door, is that manuscript sheaf, with several phrases marked out and handwritten notes, added in the margins, in what is still clearly purple ink.

You can see it if you like – I’m selling tickets in the lobby.

Now who knows . . . it could be a forgery . . . it might not be real. And listen, if it isn’t real, and you found out after I died that it was a forgery – I would not be in hell because of it.

But you get the gospel wrong . . . you get the wrong Jesus . . . you settle for spiritual counterfeits and your eternity is at stake.

Which is why John the Apostle is so passionate about providing the believer with forgery detecting equipment – notice the next verse – **verse 27. As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him.**

This anointing that abides in us isn’t an education; it isn’t a mystical power – it’s a Person.

John already disclosed this in **verse 20 – you – every believer – have an anointing dwelling within you.**

Jesus promised the indwelling Holy Spirit who would teach the believer and guide them into the truth (**John 16**).

And this was still rather stunning news to the early church.

In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit was reserved for kings and prophets and occasionally for ordinary people whenever the Lord wanted to accomplish something extraordinary. It wasn’t

permanent indwelling, but temporary overshadowing.

That's why you read of the Spirit coming upon some Old Testament character and then leaving him – as He did with King Saul or Sampson.

The idea that the every believer would be permanently anointed/indwelt by the Spirit of God was unthinkable – one author wrote – it was an unbelievable extravagance of which no one was worthy. And the disciple's heads must have been spinning.^{vi}

Now if we back up a moment or two, and put the pieces together, we discover this third-Person member of the Godhead who is either overly emphasized or pathetically underappreciated.

The Holy Spirit.

He just so happens to be the divine equipment – better yet, the divine Equipper, for faith and life.

John informs us here that every believer has ***been anointed*** – not just the really spiritual Christians who never miss church or lose their temper.

No, every believer.

In fact, let's take some time to revel in several activities of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer – and hopefully, Lord willing, we'll walk outta here more committed to listening to and walking with not just God the Father and God the Son, but God the Spirit.

Keep in mind that each member of the Godhead is attributed certain functions – all working in perfect harmony together. Some functions overlap and some are shown to be more specific activities of Father, Son or Spirit.

We're given several functions of the Holy Spirit that effectively enables us to serve our Triune God as well as protects us from deceivers who would sell us fake instruments.

First of all, The Spirit:

1. Equips us for every aspect of service

His work in us is so comprehensive – He is referred to as:

- The Spirit of truth (John 14:17)
- The Spirit of grace (Hebrews 10:29)
- The Spirit of life (Romans 8:2)
- The Spirit of glory (I Peter 4:14)

Every aspect of the Christian's life and service intersects with truth and grace and holiness and life and glory – and we're told the indwelling Spirit of God will tutor and equip us in this reformation.

These are His genuine signatures upon our hearts and lives – truth, grace, life, and glory.

Secondly, the Holy Spirit not only equips us for service:

2. He leads us into holy living

Paul reminded the Corinthian believers that they were now the living temple of the Holy Spirit. (*1 Corinthians 6:19*).

Every believer is permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

But then Paul writes to the Ephesian believer to be filled with the Holy Spirit (*Ephesians 5:18*)

How can you be filled with someone already indwelling us? Isn't that a contradiction?

No, the word Paul used for filling, in *Ephesians 5:18 – Be ye filled with the Holy Spirit* – is the word for ***controlled***. You could render it, “Be dominated – be under the controlling influence of the Holy Spirit.”

To be filled by the Spirit is to be led by the Spirit.

And since we're talking about the Holy Spirit, you can rest assured that if He's doing the leading, He will be leading you into living holy lives.

One of the marks of deceivers is hypocrisy – they lead rebellious and often immoral lives.

The letter of Jude describes false teachers as ***those who follow after their own lusts, speaking arrogantly, flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage – they are worldly minded, devoid of the [Holy] Spirit. (Jude 16)***

The true work of the Holy Spirit leads His redeemed into living holy lives. That's the genuine signature of the Holy Spirit in someone's life.

So, the Holy Spirit not only equips us for service and leads us into holy living, but:

3. He provokes in us genuine worship.

Now when John writes here in *1John 2:27 that the Spirit abides in you and you don't have need for anyone to teach you – but He'll teach you all things*, keep in mind the context here of false teachers – deceivers.

John isn't promising the believer here that he doesn't need a Sunday school teacher or a pastor to teach us; or even an Apostle to write an inspired letter that we spend hours studying – obviously John himself is teaching us here.

What the Apostle John is referring to specifically is the fact that the Holy Spirit within you will protect

you from false teaching that denies Jesus as the anointed Messiah.

Remember back at *verse 22 of this chapter – Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ – the anointed One? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.*

In other words, here's how you'll spot the counterfeit – you'll detect a deceiver by how he seeks to draw your heart away from Jesus as the only true and living God incarnate – God in the flesh.

You'll spot a counterfeit gospel and a counterfeit religion and a counterfeit preacher and a counterfeit author or teacher by the fact that they will talk about God but they won't talk about His equally divine Son, the Lord Jesus.

They won't lead you to worship Jesus.

In his commentary, D. Edmond Hiebert illustrated this by retelling an incident where Dr. Ironside – the pastor of Moody Church back in the early 1900's. Ironside was in Los Angeles one day and he came across a man preaching in the street. As he listened he soon recognized that the speaker was actually preaching a heretical view of Christ, held by a well-known cult. But then he noticed a man on the other side of the crowd attentively following the preacher. Every so often he smiled to himself. Dr. Ironside suddenly felt sorry for that man being misled by this cultist deceiver. He made his way over to him and when the preacher was finished, he struck up a conversation with him, finding out that this man was a Christian. So he asked him, "Well, what did you think of what that preacher said?"

The old man responded, "Well, I don't know if I could clearly answer all his arguments, but I do know that as he was preaching, something inside me was saying, "It's a lie, it's a lie, it's a lie."^{vii}

That would be the Holy Spirit.

In his Gospel account, the Apostle John tells us that the signature work of the Holy Spirit ultimately glorifies Jesus Christ and exalts Him as more than a man, but God the Son – the God/man.

In fact, Jesus Himself said to His disciples that after He ascended the Spirit of God would descend and glorify the Son (**John 16:14**).

And that incorporates divine scripture as well – not only the living Word, but the written word delivered by Christ and through His Apostles.

A few years ago a bestseller basically deceived a lot of pseudo spiritual people – it became just what they wanted to read to bolster their unbelief in the

uniqueness of the Bible and the Lord Jesus as the way, the truth and the life.

It was entitled, Conversations with God. And it sold nearly 3 million copies. The author said that one day he simply started writing down his direct conversations with God. (That alone should have given people a warning, right?)

Well, the God that this author evidently spoke to on several occasions wasn't exactly the Christian's God, and He didn't identify as any major religious sovereigns either –

He was basically suitable for any and every religion – no surprise there . . . listen in as Walsch, the author, writes of one of his conversations with God.

God speaks: I cannot tell you my truth until you stop telling me yours.

Walsch: But my truth about God comes from you.

God: Who said so?

Walsch: Others.

God: What others?

Walsch: Leaders, Ministers, Rabbis, Books, The Bible, for heaven's sake.

God: Those are not authoritative sources.

Walsch: They aren't?

God: No.

Walsch: Then what is?

God: Listen to your highest thoughts. Listen to your experience. Listen to your feelings.

Whenever any one of these differ from what you've been told by your teachers, or read in your books, forget the[m] . . . forget their words.^{viii}

The Holy Spirit will never lead you to say – Listen to your feelings and forget this Savior and forget this Book.

According to this Book, in **John's Gospel chapter 16**, we're told that the true gospel and the true Spirit of God with whom you can talk to through prayer – that Spirit will exalt – literally, glorify, the Son.

That word for glorify is the word *doxa* – to think correctly; to vindicate, to reveal in a good way.^{ix}

The false teachers discredit Christ. The Holy Spirit vindicates Christ.

The false deceivers diminish the deity of Christ. The Holy Spirit exalts the glory of Christ.

False religions will rob worship from Christ. True religion will promote the worship of Christ.

There's one more ministry of the Holy Spirit I'll briefly address:

4. Fourthly, the Holy Spirit serves as God's promise of heaven

Paul wrote to the Corinthians that the Holy Spirit is God's earnest payment given to them. Paul writes, "***God also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge.***" (2 Corinthians 1:22)

The word, translated pledge is a word that related to a down payment . . . we would call it earnest money.

It's a pledge and a promise with a tangible token.

I like to think of it as an engagement ring because of the cost to the giver and the message communicated by the recipient.

Many of you guys can remember the day you proposed to your wife. If you can't remember, you just might wanna nod your head and play along.

I was old fashioned – I wanted the ring with me when I proposed, so that when she said yes, I could put that ring on her finger.

That ring was my pledge that a marriage ceremony was coming.

And it told the world that although the wedding might not have taken place yet – she was effectively mine. We were pledged to each other . . . and that ring was a message to everyone out there that she was off limits.

I can tell you that ring helped prove to her that I meant what I said – that I loved her and wanted to marry her.

And from the way I remember it, when she agreed and slipped that ring on her finger the clouds parted and the sun appeared and I could hear angels singing the Hallelujah Chorus

That's how it was for all you fellas, right? Just nod your head.

Listen, the Holy Spirit has been given to us because the Father loves us and the Son is going to effectively reveal us as His eternal Beloved.

He has proposed and we have accepted and the Holy Spirit is our token pledge.

We not only tell the world that we belong to a soon coming Bridegroom; but we're reminded daily that we're heading toward the marriage supper of the Lamb – the eternal glory of face to face communion with Christ as His everlasting bride.

The Holy Spirit is the pledge – the down payment – the token ring, given to us by our Bridegroom that one day He will come and take us to His Father's house.

And in the meantime, John writes here, "This Spirit teaches us all things – literally, He translates

for us what we need to confirm about the truth of Jesus Christ."

And notice the *middle part of verse 27* – what the Holy Spirit teaches ***is true and not a lie***

In other words, He's translating to our hearts the truth of Christ.

Kent Hughes in his commentary on this verse told the story of why it's so important to make sure who your translator is.

He wrote, Jorge Rodriguez was a Mexican bank robber who operated along the Texas border around the turn off the century. He was so successful that the Texas Rangers assigned an extra posse to the Rio Grande to stop him.

Late one afternoon one of the special Rangers saw Jorge slipping across the river, and he trailed him all the way back to where he had been hiding out. He watched as Jorge first mingled with the townspeople and then went over to his favorite cantina to relax. The Ranger slipped into the cantina and managed to get the drop on Jorge. With a pistol at his head, he said, "I know who you are, Jorge Rodriguez, and I have come to arrest you and get all the money back you've stolen from the banks in Texas. Unless you tell me where it is, I'm authorized to shoot you right here and now."

But there was a problem – Jorge didn't speak English. And the Texas Ranger didn't know Spanish. They were at a verbal impasse.

About that time, a villager who had been standing nearby volunteered, "I'm bilingual. Would you like me to act as a translator?" The Ranger gratefully nodded, and the village proceeded to put the words of the Ranger into terms Jorge would understand. Jorge knew he was caught – the Ranger's gun with the trigger cocked was aimed and ready at his head. Jorge answered, "Tell the Ranger that I have not spent any of the money. Please tell him that if he will go to the town well, face north, count down five stones, he will find a loose stone. Pull it out, and all the money is there in a sack behind that rock. Now, please, tell him quickly so he'll spare my life." The enterprising translator, with a very solemn expression on his face turned to the Ranger and in perfect English said, "Jorge Rodriguez is a brave man. He says he is ready to die."^x

John says, the Holy Spirit will translate who Jesus is – and He will not tell you any lies – in fact, He more than any of us can ever conceive, knows it's a matter of life and death.

So John ends the verse by writing, “***You abide in Him.***”

He’s not telling us to make some kind of effort to stay connected – to stay saved. In fact, the verb here ***to abide*** is in the present tense indicative mode meaning, “You *do* abide in Him.”

You do!

So abide!

In other words, don’t ignore Him . . . don’t forget Him . . . don’t go through a day without talking to

Him . . . depend on Him . . . make much of Him . . . listen to His word . . . take note of the promptings of His warnings and encouragements.

He is the divinely given equipment to help you detect imitation violins . . . counterfeit spiritualities. . . and to glorify Christ as the divine Son, the living Lord, the anticipated Bridegroom, the Savior of all who believe, the coming reigning King.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 4/28/2013 by Stephen Davey.

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i *Pawn Stars*, History Channel (2-7-07)

ii The Independent, April 4, 2013, “Dietmar Machold: The renowned violin dealer who duped clients with fake Stradivarius”

iii Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Real: First John* (David C Cook, 1972), p. 94

iv John Phillips, *Exploring the Epistles of John* (Kregel, 2003), p. 81

v D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistles of John* (BJU Press, 1991), p. 121

vi Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on John* (Zondervan, 2010), p. 275

vii Hiebert, p. 122

viii Neale Donald Walsch, *Conversations with God* (Putnam, 1996) www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2004/july/15454.html

ix Swindoll, p. 277

x R. Kent Hughes, *The Gospel of John* (Crossway Books, 1999), p. 376