

Introduction

Story of Frank Bourassa (see end of notes)

1. Today we are going to see two contrasting ideas, both of which revolve around the concept of counterfeiting
  - a. The first is we are going to see counterfeit signs and wonders contrasted with genuine signs and wonders
  - b. The second is we are going to see counterfeit faith contrasted with genuine faith
2. When we refer to counterfeiting something, we are referring to creating a fraudulent imitation of something with the intent to deceive (e.g. counterfeit bill)
3. So, in the case of Frank Bourassa, he was creating fraudulent, fake \$20 bills and passing them off as real
4. We are going to see something similar in our passage today when it comes to both the performing of signs and wonders, as well as demonstrations of saving faith

A. In the first portion of our passage, we see the counterfeit signs and wonders of Simon contrasted with the genuine signs and wonders of Phillip (8:9-13)

1. Luke begins by introducing us to a man named Simon who performed counterfeit signs and wonders (READ 9-11):
  - a. Simon was a sorcerer:
    - 1) The Greek word translated magic here was used in two different ways in the ANE
      - a) One referred to the pursuit of knowledge through reputable sciences like astronomy—e.g., the Magi who visited Jesus when he was a toddler
      - b) The other referred to what we would call sorcery or performing what appear to be supernatural acts through the use of incantations, spells, charms, and even demonic spirits
    - 2) Simon falls into the latter category, a sorcerer, and he was apparently very good at it and quite popular:
      - a) The people were **“astonished”** by him—Luke uses this word twice and it means they were amazed by what he could do
      - b) Luke tells us that went about **“claiming to be someone great”**
      - c) He had a huge following—Everyone from **“the smallest to greatest”** throughout all of Samaria paid attention to him
      - d) They even gave him a divine title: **“the Great Power of God”**—it’s unclear if this title meant they viewed him as God or simply an agent of God
      - e) And, this had been going on for a **“long time”** as he continued to astonish people with his **“magic arts”**
  - b. Sorcery was fairly common in the ANE:

- 1) You might remember the time Moses faced off against the Pharaoh's (READ Exodus 7:10-13)
  - 2) It was banned by the OT (Deuteronomy 18:10-12)
  - 3) OT prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel and Malachi all warned against it
  - 4) Paul not only warned against it (Galatians 5:19-21) but also had his own encounter with a sorcerer (READ Acts 13:6-12)
- c. There are many reasons why God condemns sorcery, including its connection to demonic spirits, but another is that the signs and wonders performed through it are counterfeit—meaning they are fraudulent imitations of divine power designed to deceive or mislead, and that was certainly the case with Simon
2. Luke contrasts the counterfeit signs and wonder of Simon with the genuine signs and wonders performed by Phillip:
    - a. To get the full picture here we need to start back up in v. 5 (READ 5-8)
    - b. Now, jump down to vs. 12-13 (READ)
    - c. Like Simon, Phillip had garnered substantial attention among the Samaritans, in part due to the signs, wonders, and miracles he was performing—however, there are some significant differences:
      - 1) One difference is that the source of Phillip's power was the Holy Spirit:
        - a) Luke doesn't state this explicitly in the text but it is implied throughout the book of Acts whenever signs and wonders are performed by leaders in the early Church
        - b) We also see the Spirit's activity in speaking to Phillip in v. 29 and snatching him away in v. 39
      - 2) Another difference is that Simon used counterfeit signs and wonders to promote himself as some great man (and possibly God), while Phillip used genuine signs and wonders to authenticate the Gospel and point people to Jesus Christ:
        - a) V. 5: "**[he was] proclaiming Christ to them**"
        - b) V. 12: "**...preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ**"
      - 3) A third difference is that Simon's acts drew attention to himself for his own self-promotion, while Phillip's miraculous acts drew people to Jesus
  3. Takeaway:
    - a. The first takeaway is that there are all kinds of counterfeits in our world today
      - 1) There are counterfeit philosophies and religions
      - 2) There are counterfeit religious leaders
      - 3) There are even counterfeit gospels and counterfeit forms of Christianity
      - 4) All of them are designed by the enemy to look like the real thing, but ultimately to deceive and lead people away from the One True God and the only way of salvation, Jesus Christ
    - b. The second takeaway is that Phillip's miracles by themselves isn't what caused the people to abandon Simon and start listening to Phillip:
      - 1) Notice that Luke starts v. 12 with "but"—the Samaritans had been seduced for years by Simon but now they were listening to Phillip instead

- 2) And, while the signs and wonders Phillip was doing that caught their attention, it was his preaching of the Gospel that opened their eyes---they were “**giving attention to what he said**” and “**they believe Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ**”
- 3) They recognized the counterfeit because they were presented with the Truth

B. In the second section of our passage, we see Simon’s counterfeit faith contrasted with the genuine faith of the Samaritans (8:14-24)

1. We just saw in vs. 12-13 that not only did large numbers of Samaritans believe Phillip’s preaching and get baptized, but Luke says Simon did as well
2. It’s clear throughout the passage that the Samaritan’s faith was genuine—from their belief, to their rejoicing, their baptism and their receiving of the Holy Spirit; there’s no question about it
3. However, there is disagreement among Bible scholars as to whether Simon expressed genuine saving faith:
  - a. There are a couple things that lean in favor of seeing his faith as real saving faith, rather than a counterfeit faith:
    - 1) The first is that Luke says in v. 13 that Simon “**believed**” and was baptized
    - 2) The second is that he “**continued on with Phillip**” for a while
  - b. However, there are some things that suggest his faith may have been counterfeit—meaning that it looked like faith but ultimately wasn’t saving faith:
    - 1) The first thing you will notice is that the Samaritans didn’t immediately receive the Holy Spirit when they believed and were baptized (READ 14-17):
      - a) Instead, it wasn’t until Peter and John came down from Jerusalem, prayed for them, and laid their hands on them that they received the Holy Spirit
      - b) The normative pattern is to receive the Holy Spirit upon conversion so this is clearly out of the norm; the question is, Why the delay and why through the hands of Peter and John?
        - Luke doesn’t say, but one possibility is that the Lord used this event to demonstrate to the Apostles, through the personal eye-witness accounts of Peter and John, that the Samaritans—who were considered outsiders and unworthy of inclusion in God’s purpose and plan—were now indeed part of God’s plan
        - We see something similar in Acts 9 when Peter witnesses the Holy Spirit being poured out on the first Gentile converts and uses that eye-witness account to prove to the other Apostles that Gentiles were also part of God’s plan
    - 2) After this brief description, Luke returns to Simon and this is where we get our first indication that his faith might not be genuine (READ 18-19):
      - a) As Simon is watching others receive the Holy Spirit as Peter and James lay their hands on them, he immediately becomes envious and offers to pay Peter and John for the ability to bestow the Holy Spirit on others with his own hands
      - b) Clearly Simon didn’t understand the dynamics of what was happening and it appears he was thinking only in terms of how such an ability might bring him further fame and fortune

- c) It interesting that Luke never describes Simon receiving the Holy Spirit himself, but only that he was witnessing Peter and John laying hands on others as they received the Spirit
- 3) We get further evidence that Simon’s faith might have been counterfeit in Peter’s response (READ 20-23):
- a) He rebukes Simon
  - b) He states Simon has **“no part or portion in this manner”** because his heart wasn’t **“right before God”** (e.g., Simon was not a part of the Holy Spirit being poured out)
  - c) Therefore, he calls on Simon **“to repent of this wickedness”** and pray for forgiveness because he was consumed by envy and still in caught in the **“bondage of iniquity”**
- 4) Simon’s response is the final bit of evidence from this passage that suggests his faith might have been counterfeit (READ 24):
- a) Notice: Simon doesn’t repent or pray for forgiveness
  - b) He doesn’t even show any remorse
  - c) Instead, he begs Simon to pray to God that none of what Peter said would come upon him (likely a reference to Peter’s comment in v. 20 that Simon’s silver should perish with him)
4. Takeaway:
- a. There are many today who have a counterfeit faith—they claim to believe in Jesus and may have even been baptized, but like Simon they have no portion in the Body of Christ because their hearts are not right with God, they refuse to repent of their iniquity, and they are still in bondage to their sin

72% of the faculty at Seattle Pacific University, a 130-year-old Christian university in Washington state, cast a vote of “no confidence” back in April because the board upheld the Biblical teaching on sexuality in the school’s employee handbook and in its hiring practices

- b. Many churches today are preaching a counterfeit Gospel and promoting a counterfeit Christianity by either ignoring or directly rebelling against the second half of what Jesus commanded in the Great Commission: **“and teaching to obey all that I have commanded you”**
- c. Those who fall prey to a counterfeit faith will be in for a rude awakening because Jesus Himself said, **“Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.”**

## Frank Bourassa

- Considered to be one of the most prolific and successful counterfeiters in U.S. history because he counterfeited over \$250,000,000 in \$20 bills
- Born and raised in Canada, started dabbling in crime at the age of 12 by selling stolen high-end goods to students at his 2000-member school
- At one point he started his own business making brake pads for cars and dabbling in the illegal marijuana trade, he decided to start counterfeiting U.S. money
- He spent the next 1.5 years learning the process of printing money from scratch, mainly by relying on official U.S. government websites which detailed all the security features of our currency
- The first obstacle he had to overcome was the paper because U.S. currency uses a unique paper made up of 75 percent cotton and 25% linen, and it also has special security features built into it like the small security strips that say things like “USA Twenty” and watermarks which reflect the portraits of the presidents when you hold it up to the light. After contacting dozens of European companies, he found a paper mill in Germany that could make the paper and agreed to do the printing. He then found a Polish company that could make the etching machine that could produce the watermark and had it shipped to the paper mill. He was ultimately able to convince the German paper mill to produce the exact paper he needed with a security strip reading “USA Twenty” and a watermark of President Andrew Jackson all without suspicion by convincing them that his company made bonds.
- The second obstacle he had to overcome was finding the right software and setting up his printshop so he could start printing the bills.
- After investing \$300,000 he had the paper, the software and the printers and spent the next five months working 16-hour days printing \$250,000,000 in \$20 bills
- The last obstacle he had was distribution and this is where it got him into trouble. He initially started selling his \$20 bills to small criminal organizations outside the U.S. in batches of anywhere from \$100,000 to \$1,000,000 for 30% of their face value (e.g. \$30,000 for \$300,000 in fake bills). However, at that pace it would have taken him longer than he wanted to get rid of the \$250,000,000 so he lined up another, larger customer but it happened to be undercover police offer and he was ultimately busted.
- When he was arrested, the police only found about \$1,000,000 of the bills. He had already sold \$50,000,000 of the fake bills, but the police didn’t know he still had almost \$200,000,000 hidden away in a secret location.
- Initially, he thought he would only be tried by the Canadian courts, but after learning he was going to be extradited to the U.S. and was facing a 60 year prison sentence, he revealed that he had another \$200,000,000 million in bills and agreed to turn them over in exchange for a plea deal.

- Ultimately, the U.S. was concerned that the \$200,000,000 might be released into circulation so they agreed to a plea deal and Bourassa turned over the printing press and remaining \$200,000,000 fake bills and in return received no jail sentence and paid only a \$1350 fine in Canadian currency, and that was for the drugs found in his car during the police raid.