



When Fraud Knocks on the Door

Fraud, plagiarism, cheating, embezzlement, lying, deception, and breach of copyright are periodically topics of news items. When investigative journalism chronicles an exposé of deceit, frequently a pattern of misrepresentation emerges that characterizes the life of the individual.

When prior generations struggled with fraud, a specific vocabulary emerged describing some of the common occurrences. Snake oil, counterfeit money, and “smoke and mirrors” used by charlatans were vogue expressions a century ago. In the twenty-first century, technology enhances fraudulent opportunities. Consequently business scams (online auctions, bogus invoices, slamming, prize promotions), telemarketing schemes, counterfeit drugs, and internet fraud are part of our experience today.

Internet fraud is criminal, rather than a harmless prank. Internet crime is defined by the Internet Crime Complaint Center (www.ic3.gov) as:

... [A]ny illegal activity involving one or more components of the Internet, such as websites, chat rooms, and/or email. Internet crime involves the use of the Internet to communicate false or fraudulent representations to consumers. These crimes may include, but are not limited to, advance-fee schemes, non-delivery of goods or services, computer hacking, or employment/business opportunity schemes.

According to the National Fraud Information Center (NFIC) web site (www.fraud.org), Internet fraud in the early months of 2005 reflected a dramatic increase from the prior months in 2004. In 2004, the average reported fraud scheme to the NFIC resulted in a consumer loss of almost \$900, while the reported frauds in the first six months of 2005 reflected an average consumer loss of \$2,500. During the first six months of 2005, the top ten reported Internet scams listed by the NFIC in descending order of occurrences were: online auctions (44%), sales of general merchandise (30%), Nigerian money offers (7%), fake checks (5%), phishing (4%), lotteries (3%), information/adult services (2%), work-at-home plans (1%), computer equipment/software (1%), and prizes/sweepstakes (1%).

In my role as a biology professor at Eastern Mennonite University, I encounter plagiarism by students who are writing term papers. At times it occurs through ignorance or not understanding what constitutes plagiarism; other times it seems intentional. I have worked at the issue with my students by clarifying the use of information from

other sources versus from one’s personal “idea bank.” Requiring a major paper to be developed in stages through a thesis statement, outline, preliminary drafts with current bibliography, prior to writing the final document draft, helps direct students through an appropriate writing process. In a few cases, however, I awarded an “F” to the term paper writer for work that was obviously plagiarized.

As editor of *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*, I occasionally encounter authors who submit manuscripts that contain either plagiarized sections or directly quoted paragraphs or sentences that they “failed to cite.” These “errors” are typically caught by vigilant peer reviewers who have expertise in the manuscript’s topic and are familiar with the literature. If the noncited sentence is short and not a major part of the manuscript, I typically advise the author that this citation is missing and he or she should revise the manuscript with the appropriate citation. If large sections or major ideas are not cited but are passed off as the author’s own ideas, I tend to suspect fraud and reject the manuscript. Fortunately, that has been a rare occurrence. A related editorial issue is copyright infringement when diagrams, illustrations, or published works owned by another is used without permission or payment. Again modern technology—copy machines and “cut and paste” computer technology—readily contribute to such violations.

More recently, fraud in science has reared its vigorous head again in the falsification of research data. Most notorious during the past months has been the example of Dr. Hwang Woo-suk, who resigned from Seoul National University after fabricating cloning research data. The prestigious journal, *Science*, retracted Hwang’s stem cell articles that had been published earlier.

The Psalmist, describing a wicked person, says: “The words of his mouth are wickedness and deceit; He has ceased to be wise and to do good” (Ps. 36:3 NKJV). A lying tongue is number two on the list of seven things that God hates (Prov. 6: 16–19). Consequently, it behooves us as followers of Jesus, who said, “I am the ... Truth,” to be careful that our life and work is characterized by honesty and integrity. To fail in that endeavor is to experience catastrophe! Let’s resolve that when we hear the knock of fraud, we will turn a deaf ear to its illusionary appeal.

aveo veritas,

Roman J. Miller, Editor