

Just Who Do You Think You Are?

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Over the past 12 years I have met a lot of people. I have heard some of the craziest things about lives before incarceration and some of the most absurd claims concerning what people have and who they think they are. I have met “true convicts,” “kingpins,” “millionaires,” people with “connections” to everything imaginable and those professing to be true “prophets,” “apostles,” “ministers,” (and every other biblical title) of God. Some, I am sure, were what they claimed. Most, I am sure, were not.

The tip-off that someone isn't what they claim is usually the timing in which they reveal themselves. When someone comes at you with “My name is (whatever), I'm a 'Real O-G' (or other title of distinction),” you might want to question your new friend's integrity. An original gangster, or a true convict isn't ever going to use either of those terms to describe themselves. A true Christian will know to “Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips.” If they have to tell you what they are, they are probably not that thing.

Now, if you consider yourself one of the terms I have listed, don't get bent out of shape. Just know that the world expects you to walk the walk, not talk the talk. Everyone tries to be exactly what they think they should be, and if they can't succeed then they claim to be what they want to be. But not everyone is what they claim.

Old-school criminals never bragged about crimes they committed. They didn't drive flashy cars, wear outlandish clothing, or intentionally give themselves readily identifiable marks. Those who dealt with this type of person in the flesh knew who they were and what they were capable of. They didn't have to tell you, you saw it.

True Christians aren't out to impress you with their righteousness. If you know them personally you see it. Many have the religious speech down pat ... but anyone can talk that way. Just because I know Ebonics doesn't make me a homeboy. You can buy Fila and gold chains at the downtown pawn shop, just like you can in Beverley Hills. Putting a big gold cross

around your neck doesn't put Jesus in your heart.

Who Does it Hurt?

So what's the harm in pretending? It's bad in both directions. People who claim to be a hardened criminal eventually get challenged. When they go down, everything they claimed is tarnished. No one wants to be in a gang whose members keep getting beat up.

Posers in the Church get questioned too. When they don't know the book they profess to believe they regurgitate some churchiness they learned (and they're loud when they do it). The questioner is often someone who doesn't know any better and thinks the pretender represents the Church. The louder they speak the more followers they deceive; by reason of whom the way of truth gets slandered.

The ear-splitters are usually the ones with the most nonsense to spew. “Fake it till you make it” isn't always the best route. Psychologists will tell you that if you keep saying you are something, eventually you will believe it and act on it (or act on it to save face with those you've been lying to). Either way, when you imitate a false idea you become a caricature – a bad joke on the real thing.

What You Really Are

It's impossible to fake good character – either you have it or you don't. Even those with a good reputation can be imposters. Reputation is only what others think you are. Character is what you really are. It comes from experience, not acting. Deceiving yourself and others is only temporary, no matter how good you are at it.

Even criminals used to have a degree of character. “Honor among thieves” may not exist anymore, but the saying came from somewhere. Even when these guys were conning you out of your cigarettes, you could rest assured they'd do what they said. The convict's word was “bond,” now it's hit-and-miss.

And where do you think this degree of character came from? It was the result of growing up in a Christian society. Even the

psychopath is influenced by his environment. It used to be basic parenting to teach children not to lie, not to steal, to respect authority (even if not the authority figure). Now the popular message is, “the world is your oyster,” “you deserve a break today,” “have it your way.” Everyone thinks they deserve something from the world, they're special, unique. Self esteem without justification (quality performance, work), is a delusion. No one owes you anything.

With the influence of Judeo-Christian values under attack in this country, you can bet the underlying morals of society are bottoming out. If you can't see it, then you never learned what they truly are. Christians aren't people to take advantage of, they are imitators of God. And God will take away your toys if you don't know how to play nice.

The criminal and the Christian have been confused many times throughout history. Both have spent a lot of time in prisons for what they believe, both have had society try to eradicate them, both have been cast out, and both have founded countries as a result (Australia and America). But their motivation for going against societal norms is completely different. The criminal (convict, gangster, O-G, etc.) is out to “get what's mine,” the Christian is out to “freely give” to those who are His.

It's all about your motivation. The fakers on both sides are trying to get things for themselves they don't deserve: respect, power, money, (read contraband, drugs, etc.) influence, favor, whatever they desire. Pretenders want what they don't have, they think they deserve it and no one else does. Even criminals who are true to their character are still motivated by self interest.

True Christians desire the same materials. They use the things of this world to reach others with the one message, from the one true God, which can change the character of men. They are not going to ask for your help. They are not going to con you out of your stuff. They are not going to sell you “a bag of goods.” But they will tell you the truth, when you are ready to hear it. Because their intention is for *your* good, which is His will, and He is the One who pays the bills. He is the only One who knows for sure who you really are. *MR*

