



Have you ever purchased an item believing it was something it wasn't?

While traveling, if I spot an antique store, I enjoy stopping to peruse old-timey objects, and I wonder about the lives of those who used them. However, let shoppers of antiques beware—not every item displayed as “antique” is truly vintage. The world abounds with replicas created to deceive the innocent and separate them from their money.

Unfortunately, human beings can likewise appear to be something they're not. Christians aren't immune. The fact that someone has prayed the sinner's prayer and attends church doesn't guarantee all is genuine beneath the surface. There's even a chance that you, dear reader, are showing the world a mask that isn't quite reality.

Yearning for Admiration

Scripture warns against donning a religious facade to win admiration. Do you recall why Christ said that hypocrites two thousand years ago loved to pray “standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets”? Simply so people would see them (Matthew 6:5). How ironic that prayer—conversation with Almighty God—would be performed mainly to impress earthly onlookers. Well, if that's all they wanted, Christ concluded, “They have their reward.”

In the book of Acts, Ananias and Sapphira likewise fell into the trap of coveting human admiration. They noticed how certain believers had sold property and donated all the proceeds to benefit the needy among them (Acts 4:34–37). Evidently, Ananias and Sapphira envied the esteem given those donors. So this couple did something similar. They sold a plot of ground, but when Ananias laid their donation at the apostles' feet, he secretly kept a chunk of the money while publicly claiming he had sacrificially given all. That lie backfired. The stunt meant to win praise cost Ananias and Sapphira their lives (Acts 5:1–10). To this day, we remember them as hypocrites. Those two may have been believers, but they were neither honest nor as generous as they pretended. To some degree, their commitment to Christian living became a sham.

Pyrite People

A teacher friend told how she and her husband drove West on vacation. While photographing scenery, they discovered a mountain stream, where another couple had removed socks and shoes and were excitedly pulling rocks from the water.



“What are you doing?”

“Look—we’ve found gold!”

Sure enough, certain chunks in the stream glittered with a yellowish tint. Struck with gold fever, the teacher and her husband waded in too. Before sunset, they accumulated a glittering pile of their own. However, the next morning they examined their treasure more carefully. The “gold” turned out to be the mineral pyrite—worthless “fool’s gold.”

Of course, pyrite has no brain. It doesn’t attempt to deceive with its glitzy appearance. Christians, on the other hand, like all people, can wear a false front and pretend to be shinier than they are.

Reflecting on this truth, a friend posed a rhetorical question. Although we recognize honesty, sincerity, and integrity as virtues, she wondered why it’s so easy to slip into less noble behavior. The fact is, no one is born with integrity, but everyone is born with a desire to please self. In time, we realize not everything that pleases self lies within the boundaries of what’s right or respectable. While we live in bodies of flesh, bone, and blood, we’ll be tempted to please self, even with secret dishonorable thoughts and conduct. In other words, we’ll be tempted to become living pyrite—pretty to behold, but not the real deal. Yet faking pure devotion to God reveals a grave lack of the fear of God.

Living with Authenticity


“But nobody’s perfect,” some will point out. “Don’t we all fail from time to time?”

Both statements are true. In Antioch, even the apostle Peter got carried away with a bit of hypocrisy until Paul publicly rebuked him (Galatians 2:11–14). Still, there’s a difference between an impulsive lapse into a sin that can be repented of (1 John 1:9) and daily allowing self a pass to quietly sin in secret. An authentic believer might stumble into a mudpuddle, but he won’t stay down and wallow in muck.

Neither is the Christian life a matter of “fake it until you make it.” Our joint goal as God’s children is to grow in godliness and in humble imitation and adoration of our Heavenly Father. We wish to glorify Him with our lives. How do we do that?

Authentic Christianity agrees with God that what He loves is good and what He hates is evil. We strive to live as friends of God not of the world. We aim to be peacemakers not troublemakers. We practice honesty and faithfulness in paying bills and other obligations.

When temptation comes knocking (an event guaranteed to happen), sincere Christians don’t toy with it or build a private mental playground for it. Genuine faith resists it from the start.



The believer who strives to live a pure life for God has a heartfelt, underlying desire to think clean, upright thoughts and to control his tongue and speak only words acceptable to God (Psalm 19:14). That mindset leads to earnest aspirations of an upright lifestyle, not the fabricated pretense of one.

The wise believer understands there are no vacations from being a child of God. He or she simply does not remove any spiritual armor (Ephesians 6:13–18) for a relaxing wade in worldliness. After all, “The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Proverbs 15:3). His are the eyes that matter most. The more you grow in love for God, the more you grieve over sin and seek to live according to His will.

Authentic, but Not Flawless

A few years back, a friend named Carl spotted a classified ad for an older vehicle. Interested, Carl telephoned for the address. The owner confirmed the car was still available, so Carl said he’d come later. However, he ended up dropping by earlier than expected.

When the owner didn’t respond to the doorbell, Carl decided to check the backyard. There he found not one but several used cars sporting “For Sale” signs. The owner’s legs dangled outside the driver’s door of one while he lay beneath the dashboard, using a drill to roll back the mechanical odometer.

“I’ll never buy any car from that shyster!” Carl declared.

The problem wasn’t the car’s age or condition. Carl hadn’t expected a pristine, showroom condition. As a mechanic, he’d been ready to do any repairs himself. However, in attempting fraud, the seller destroyed his own credibility.

As we live the Christian life, there’s no need to commit fraud by posturing ourselves as immaculate specimens of spiritual maturity. We’re human. We can get tired and let slip a harsh word, or respond with wounded pride, or lose our patience. Confessing, repenting, apologizing, or requesting prayer for personal struggles demonstrates humility and transparency. Such authenticity is far better than false spirituality, which only perpetuates immaturity. ■

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