

### Skin Deep or from the Heart?



Isn't this a **beautiful apple**? The skin is so red and shiny. Just look how smooth it is. It has a beautiful shape and I don't see any spots that look like the bugs or worms have eaten into it. Here, let's shine it up a bit. Yes, this is a really good apple.

Oh, I know what you're thinking. You're thinking, "**You can't tell if an apple is good by looking at the outside.**" You have to look on the inside to know if it is a good apple. Well, perhaps you are right. Let me tell you a story.

One day, while walking through an orchard, a man stopped under an apple tree. It was loaded with big beautiful apples just waiting to be eaten. The man picked what he thought looked like the best apple on the tree. He couldn't wait to eat it. He took out his pocket knife and cut it open for a taste. To his surprise, **the apple was rotten to the core.**

Unfortunately it is **sometimes the same with people.** Some people go to church every Sunday. They carry their Bibles, they bring their offering, they sing every hymn, they listen to every word the preacher says, but it **doesn't change anything in their heart.** **They look good on the outside, but their goodness is only skin deep.** Their worship is for appearance only and not from the heart.

This isn't anything new. Jesus faced the same problem in his day. One day some religious leaders complained to Jesus that they had seen some of his disciples eating without first washing their hands. Religious laws and traditions were very strict about washing your hands before eating. The religious leaders asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples follow our customs? They eat without first performing the hand-washing ceremony."

Jesus answered, "You are nothing but a bunch of hypocrites. The prophet Isaiah must have been talking about you when he said, 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts

are far from me. Their worship has no meaning because they have replaced God's laws with their own traditions."

Those religious leaders were very concerned about clean hands, but Jesus was more concerned about a clean heart. We should be too!

Dear Father, help us to be as concerned about being clean on the inside as we are about being clean on the outside. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Gary Monesmith shared the following “laws” with me via email. Perhaps you’ve heard of some of these.

**Law of Gravity** - Any tool, nut, bolt, screw, when dropped, will roll to the least accessible place in the universe.

**Law of Probability** - The probability of being watched is directly proportional to the stupidity of your act.

**Law of Random Numbers** - If you dial a wrong number, you never get a busy signal; someone always answers.

**Variation Law** - If you change traffic lanes, the one you were in will always move faster than the one you are in now. This is also true when you change checkout lines at Walmart, K-Mart and the grocery store.

**Law of the Bath** - When the body is fully immersed in water, the telephone will ring.

**Law of the Result** - When you try to prove to someone that a machine won't work, IT WILL!!!

**Law of the Theatre & Hockey Arena** - At any event, the people whose seats are furthest from the aisle, always arrive last. They are the ones who will leave their seats several times to go for food, drink, or the toilet and who leave early before the end of the performance or the game is over. The folks in the aisle seats come early, never move once, have long gangly legs or big bellies and stay to the bitter end of the performance. The aisle people also are very surly folk.

**Law of Physical Surfaces** - The chances of an open-faced jelly sandwich landing face down on a floor are directly correlated to the newness and cost of the carpet or rug.

**Law of Logical Argument** - Anything is possible IF you don't know what you are talking about.

**Law of Public Speaking** -- A CLOSED MOUTH GATHERS NO FEET!

**Law of Commercial Marketing Strategy** - As soon as you find a product that you really like, they will stop making it OR the store will stop selling it!

As you can see, there are all kinds of laws. Jesus says that the human-made laws sometimes upstage and even replace God's laws if they have been made to the of benefit humans. He warns, "You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition. . . . You honor me with

your lips, but your hearts are far from me.”

Whenever we say one thing and do another, we are “abandoning the commandment of God.” St. Augustine, when he was a nominal Christian (probably because his mother was a believer), told about sneaking into a pear orchard with friends and stealing juicy, ripe pears. They didn’t even eat the fruit, but enjoyed the thrill of misbehavior. Augustine wrote, “The malice of the act was base and I loved it – that is to say, I loved my own undoing. I loved the evil in me.” (Brett, "Augustine and evil," *Backyard Philosophy Blog*,

<http://backyardphilosophy01.com>, September 8, 2013. Retrieved March12, 2015. Reprinted from [www.homileticonline.com](http://www.homileticonline.com))

Even as the Pharisees and scribes criticized Jesus and his disciples for not keeping the letter of Jewish law, they themselves were breaking the spirit of God’s law by following the intrusive intricacies of the creation of humans. These laws were made to show who could “really” be a good Jew and who wasn’t, so that judgment might be passed on those who didn’t follow the laws as closely. Jesus, in effect, says, “Nonsense. These pots and pans laws and handwashing laws are not what is important. The law of God is important, the 10 Commandments. Keep your heart focused on these laws and you will refrain from evil of all kinds. Check the heart and not the lips to determine a good person, for s/he will honor God with

actions as well as voice.” As James says, “Be doers of the word and not merely hearers, who deceive themselves.”

I love this quote from George Rutler. “Hatred bangs drums. Lust bangs the pulse. Anger bangs the fist. But complacency slides into the soul, unmurmuring, uninvited and unnoticed, with a warm and quilted aura of coziness.” (George William Rutler, *The Seven Ages of Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 94, in

[www.homileticonline.com](http://www.homileticonline.com)) How easily we become complacent, content, even self-righteous. It sneaks up on us like extra pounds if we don’t monitor ourselves, if we don’t look in a mirror and ask, “Am I honoring God, loving God, serving God – or am I just content, cozy with how I’ve become, excusing myself and my sinfulness so as not to disturb my coziness?”

Dennis Sanders reminds us about Lance Armstrong and Bill Cosby. “We love to look at people and judge them on the basis of what we see. This person is good, that person is bad. We looked at Lance Armstrong and saw a guy who beat cancer and won 7 Tour de France titles. Then we learned that he cheated his way to those wins. We saw Bill Cosby as a barrier-breaking comedian and father figure. Then we learned of the allegations of sexual assault. Not everything is what it seems.” (Sanders, *Christian*

*Century* August 19, 2015, p. 21) Nor are we. We can polish the outside of our “apple” all we want, but there’s still some rottenness inside, if sin is within

everyone. If our hearts are right, we will confess our sin and turn from it; we will be “doers of the word and not hearers only.”

During our family trip to Gettysburg, I re-learned some things about men *doing* what was in their hearts. Bravery was the order of the day, living what was in their hearts. One man, on either side of a skirmish line, might say, “I won’t be coming back, so tell my mother I love her,” and rush headlong into hand-to-hand combat. Jesus isn’t talking about combat but having the courage of belief to do what is in our hearts and not to be content or complacent.

If our heart is in the Lord, our voices cannot help but show it. If our heart is in the Lord, our courage to share him will follow.

Let us pray. Guide our ways, dear Lord, to keep *your* statutes. Grant us grace to do your will. Amen.

The Rev. Robert E. Mitman

