

We have all heard the expression, 'Beauty is only skin deep.' When I was growing up, I took this as a warning that I should not be fooled by mere 'surface' beauty. Real beauty is that which penetrates completely to the heart of a person; and it is the only beauty that is worthwhile.

There are many things in life which, though they are not really worth much, are given an attractive surface so that they might look valuable and be sold for a profit. Many things today are made from a cheap material and then plated with a precious metal to make them look expensive. Much of our furniture is only press-board with a veneer covering which imitates a particular woodgrain.

The same sort of thing exists in the realm of human behavior. There are those who attempt to conceal their real character with a veneer of 'good works', though their heart has not been touched by God's love. Theirs is only a 'surface religion'; its beauty is only skin deep. Proverbs 26:23 tells us that the wicked are like a clay pot with a silver coating on it. Jesus warned in Mt 7:15 of those who 'come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.' They may dazzle momentarily with 'flashy' works, but their real fruit will become obvious, for beneath the peel the core is rotten. Jesus further condemned those who cleaned the outside of the cup, but left the inside filthy with their selfishness, Mt 23:25. And he continues by saying that some are gaily whitewashed on the outside, but full of corruption and death within. This kind of person expects their 'shell' to protect even their souls from the eyes of God. But in Jer 17:10, God says: 'I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.'

How can we escape being so shallow and artificial? The key is to let the love of God penetrate deep within us, beyond our selfish surface, and to be moved to action by the feelings which respond to that love. We must open our hearts, install our faith there, and act as sincerely as we can in obedience to his word. Is your religion only skin deep?