

A friend of mine has a very expensive car. The car goes so fast that it comes with a factory-installed radar detector. This means he can travel at twice the speed of sound and never get arrested, as long as his radar works.

Now, be honest, most of us don't think anything about this, right? Even if we don't have radar detectors, we pretty much know where to expect the speed traps to be. Often other drivers help us watch out. If oncoming cars spot a police car, they flash their lights to warn us we'd better slow down, or we'll become another statistic.

I don't mean to imply this is a great crime, but let's just examine it for a moment. For most of us, speeding is a game. We'll do it if we think we can get away with it, because if we can get away with it, we figure it's OK. It's only wrong when we get caught. And then we pay the fine.

But, how far can we take this logic? If speeding is a crime only if we get caught, is the same true of embezzlement, adultery, physical abuse? How do you make the distinction?

Jesus draws a distinction between what comes from within and what comes from without. He's responding to a question about food--what you can and can't eat. And he says it's not the food that's impure, it's your intention about eating it. It's not what's outside that matters, it's what's inside that counts.

This lesson seems so obvious, but it's one we still struggle with. The temptation is to quickly judge our moral actions by what's outside, not by what's inside. Did I get caught speeding? That's a question about what's outside. Did I rush needlessly? Did I take on more than one day can hold? Did I risk my life and the lives of innocent people? Those are questions about what's inside. It's there where we judge the morality of our actions.

Many people fall into crimes of the heart figuring, "I know people say this is wrong, but it isn't going to hurt anybody, and I'll never get caught, so I'll go ahead and do it." Or they say, "Well, if anyone is hurt by this it will be me, so I can do it," as if it's OK to hurt ourselves. Besides, the question about who gets hurt is a question about what's outside. What's inside is the more important question: What's my intention? Am I putting my pleasure ahead of others'? Is my selfishness designed to hurt someone, or to jeopardize their peace?

To find out if we have committed a sinful act, it is more important to ask about intentions rather than results, about what's inside, not what's outside. Sometimes we go too easy on ourselves. Our actions are often worth more than the innocence of playing a game.