



Word: 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

¹ If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Pseudo-Transformation vs. Morphing

When our lives are not marked by genuine, God-directed spiritual change, we tend to look for substitute ways to distinguish ourselves from those we consider to be less spiritual. We adopt boundary markers—highly visible, relatively superficial practices intended to quickly separate the “insiders” from the “outsiders.” These boundary markers may include conformity to specified forms of dress and speech, adherence to certain rules of behavior, participation in prescribed activities, and so on. They provide a false sense of security and superiority. The religious leaders of Jesus’ day focused a great deal of their attention on boundary markers. Many of their conflicts with Jesus occurred because Jesus took a radically different approach to assessing spirituality. Instead of focusing on visible indicators of spiritual transformation, Jesus focused on what was happening in the heart. His concern was whether or not people were being transformed and growing in their love of God and love of people. His concern was whether or not they were “morphing” into the masterpieces God created them to be.

The primary goal of spiritual life is human transformation—real change in the essential nature of the person. God is in the business of transforming ordinary people like us so that we express his character and goodness in our whole being. This is real transformation from the inside out—learning to think as Jesus would think, to feel what he’d feel, to perceive what he’d perceive, and therefore to do what he would do. It is a far cry from pseudo transformation, the adherence to external rules or behaviors intended to identify us to others as “transformed” people.

The Impact of Pseudo-Transformation

We might be tempted to wonder if morphing makes any practical, daily-life differences as opposed to pseudo-transformation. Consider the perspective author Sheldon Vanauken offers in his critically acclaimed book *A Severe Mercy*: The strongest argument for Christianity is Christians, when they are drawing life from God. The strongest argument against Christianity? Also Christians, when they become exclusive, self-righteous, and complacent.



Discussion:

1. (*Open your bible to Matthew 23*) Consider, too, the warning signs of pseudo-transformation that appear in Matthew 23, where Jesus denounced the religious leaders of his day for their lack of true spiritual life. *As you identify these warning signs, think about the ways these signs show up among Christians today and if you identify with any on them.*

Matthew 23 Warning Signs of Pseudo-Transformation

Verses 1–4: Demanding obedience from others, but not practicing what they preach; burdening other people with the pursuit of exhaustive, external rules and practices yet not helping to bear the burden.

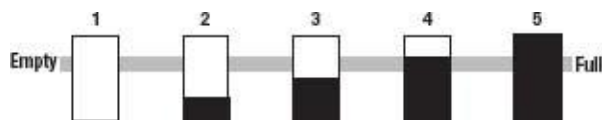
Verses 5–8: Doing their spiritual duties so that other people will notice and honor them; expecting others to honor them; taking pride in their knowledge, position, and influence.

Verses 13–15: Making it difficult for other people to enter (and in some cases preventing people from entering) God’s kingdom; refusing to enter the kingdom of heaven themselves.

Verse 23: Following the letter of the law but violating the spirit of the law such as by tithing every little thing to God, yet neglecting justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

Verses 24–29: Preoccupied with appearing to be spiritual; cleaning up the outside, but doing nothing to clean the mess on the inside; being hypocritical.

2. What standard do you use to evaluate your spiritual condition?
3. Sometimes our spiritual tanks are full to overflowing. At other times we feel spiritually depleted as if we are running on fumes. Which tank below reflects how full your tank is today and what has brought you to this point?



4. What fills your tank and gives you fuel for authentic spiritual growth? What causes your tank to empty? What can you do in the coming week to make sure your tank is being filled for authentic Christian living, and who will keep you accountable in this growth area?
5. What are healthy and Christ-honoring measures of our spiritual health?