

Love and the Practical Graces

How the Gospel Transforms Character

1 Corinthians 13:1-7

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 (NKJV)

- Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.
- And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.
- And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (NKJV)

- Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;
- Does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;
- Does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;
- Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.



Corinth

Place of commerce

- A place of success
- Attracted resourceful, ambitious and intense people

Place of pagan idolatry

- Temple of Apollo
- Temple of Aphrodite



The Setting of 1 Corinthians

C. A.D. 53–55

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians during his third missionary journey, near the end of his three-year ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:21–22). Both Corinth and Ephesus were wealthy port cities steeped in pagan idolatry and philosophy. Corinth benefited both militarily and economically from its strategic location at one end of the isthmus that connected the southern Greek peninsula to the mainland.






Emphasis

- Achievement
- Success
- Performance
- Talents
- Ability
- Brilliance
- Glory
- Fame
- Wealth



A white telescope on a tripod is positioned in the lower right foreground, pointing towards a starry night sky. A bright comet streak is visible in the upper left quadrant of the sky. The background shows a dark night sky filled with stars and a faint horizon line with some trees.

What did the
Corinthians
look for?

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- Achievement
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1 Corinthians 12:8-10

- “For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;
- To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;
- To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:”



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The Corinthians Divided

- 1 Cor. 1:11b – “...that there are contentions among you.”
- 1 Cor. 1:12 – “Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.”



The Corinthians Discontented

- 1 Cor. 3:3 – For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?



The Corinthians Disdain

- 1 Cor. 4:6b – “...that no one of you be puffed up for one against another.”



The Corinthians' Deficiencies

- 1 Cor. 3:3 – envying / strife / divisions
- 1 Cor. 3:18 – pride and arrogance
- 1 Cor. 4:6 – puffed up one against another
- 1 Cor. 4:7 – boastful
- 1 Cor. 4:8 – rich – self-sufficient
- 1 Cor. 4:18 – puffed up
- 1 Cor. 5:1 – fornication
- 1 Cor. 5:2 – puffed up
 - Proud and haughty
 - They had tolerance towards offender
 - They had abundance of spiritual gifts

The Corinthians' Deficiencies


- 1 Cor. 6:6-8
 - brother goeth to law with brother
- 1 Cor. 8:1
 - knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth
- 1 Cor. 8:9
 - a stumblingblock to them that are weak
- 1 Cor. 11:18
 - divisions / schisms

One thing the Corinthians lacked...




One thing the Corinthians lacked...





What is inner heart character?

- Inner supernatural change in character
 - That only God can bring
 - Inner love and joy
 - 1 Cor. 13:4-7



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 - Inner love and joy
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- Inner heart character
 - Is not being gifted
 - Is not being good

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Speech

- “tongues of men and of angels”

Intellect

- “gift of prophecy”
- “understand all mysteries”
- “all knowledge”
- “have all faith”

Virtue

- “bestow all my goods to feed the poor”
- “give my body to be burned”

Tongues of men and of angels

- Mat 28:5 – “But the angel answered and said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified.”
- A term for elevated/
exalted/eloquent speech



Gift of prophecy

- Message by direct revelation from God
 - Real prophecy through the Corinthians to the world
 - God could use them as a great leaders with the spirit of prophecy – miraculous

- God could have made them great leaders in the church



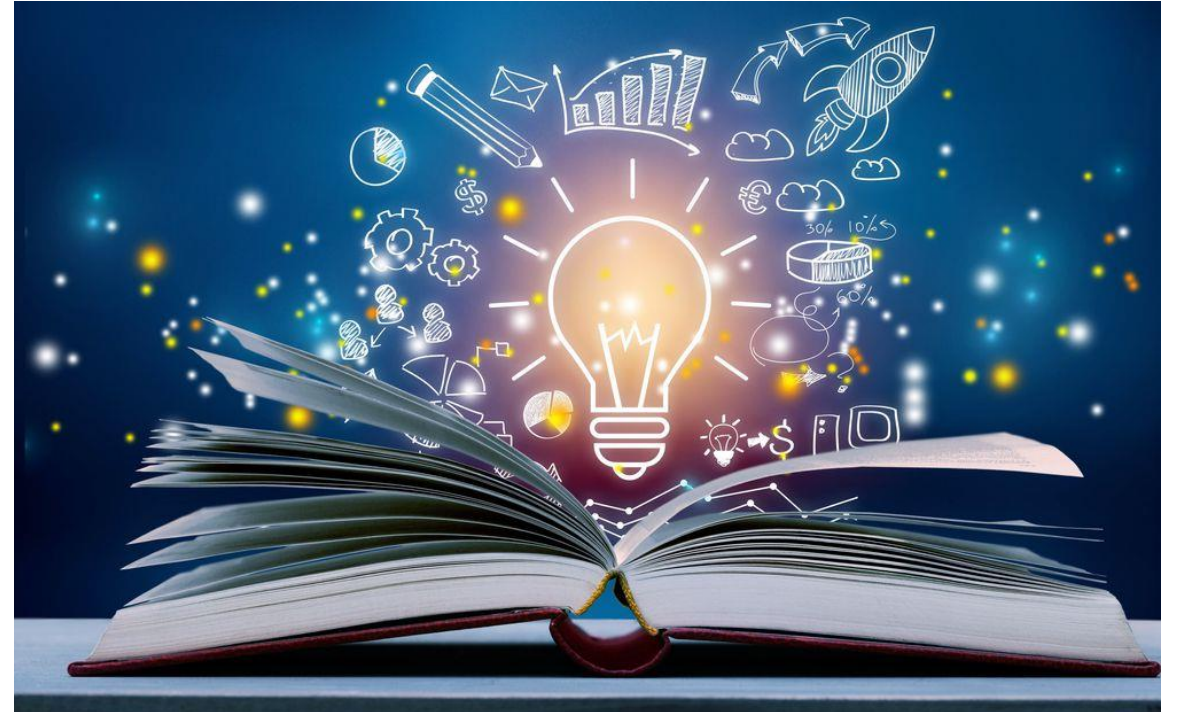
Understand all mysteries

- Col. 1:26 – “the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints.”



All knowledge

- Revelatory knowledge
- Not knowledge gained by study



Faith that could remove mountains

- Not saving faith
- Not faith exercised day to day
- Matt. 17:14-21; 21:17-22
- The faith that was necessary to operate gifts of healing and miracles



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Without love



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- It is possible to serve but no special saving work of the Spirit in the heart

Matthew 7:21-23



- "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.
- Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?
- And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

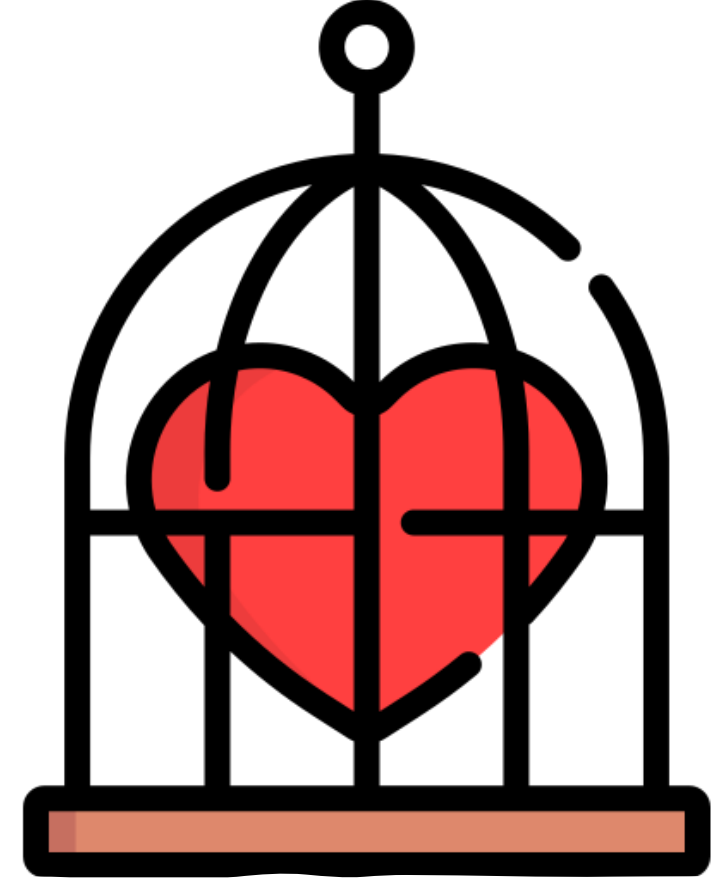
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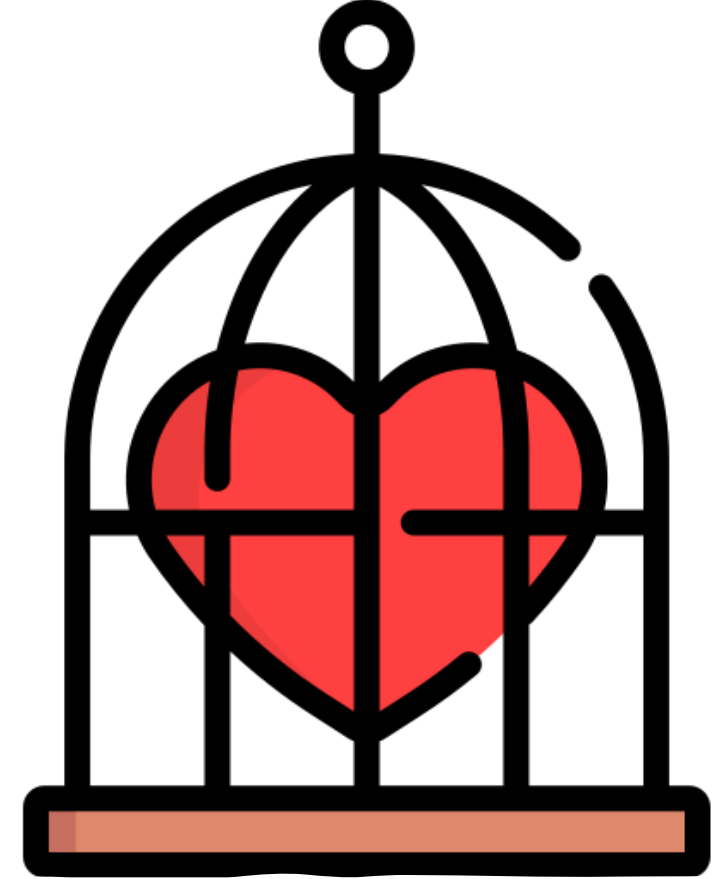
Inner heart character is not being Gifted

- Difference
 - Talents and gifts vs. supernatural grace and character growth from the heart



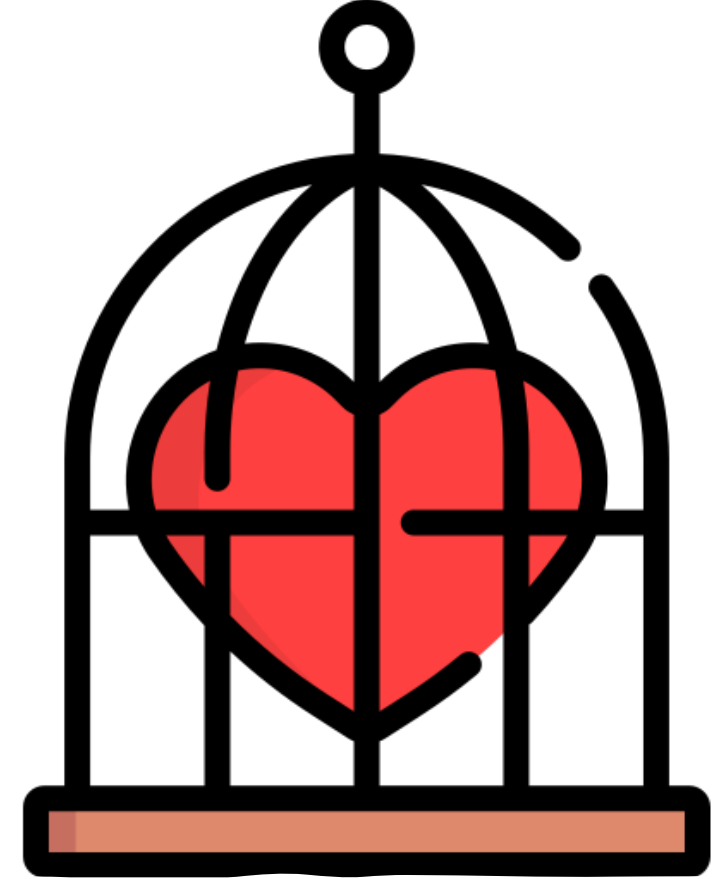
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- Possible to do **miracles** and be an incredibly weak Christian
- Possible to give **talents** to the service of God and **not give** our hearts
- Possible to do great **deeds** but **never surrender** our heart and will in faith and trust



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- **Service** does not mean **spiritual growth / grace / character**



How is it possible?

- For people
 - to be incredible leaders
 - to have gift of prophecies
 - to do incredible things in others' lives



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- **We mistake talent/gifts/service for character**
 - Mistake a gift operation from an operation of grace / fruit / holiness in the heart
 - Mistake gifts for grace
 - Mistake talents/achievements for character



Possible to do everything and be nothing



Possible to do everything and be nothing

- Am I **hiding** behind my abilities and talents?



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- Am I **hiding** behind my abilities and talents?
- Underneath – joyless, feeling slighted, ego is no different, impatient, irritable, keep record of wrongs

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- So natural for us to **mistake** gifts for **grace** and talent for **character**

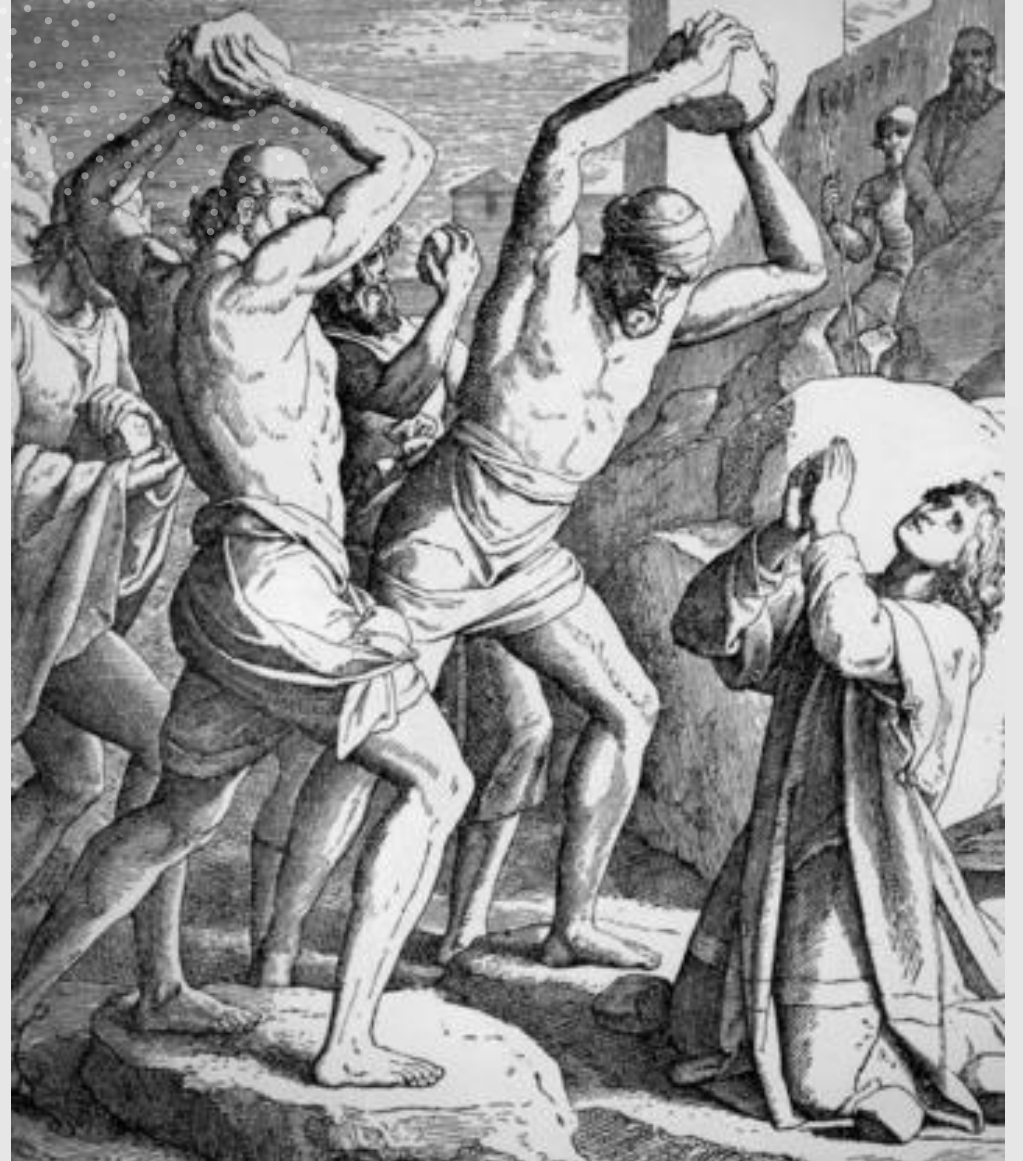
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Bestow all my
goods to feed the
poor



Give my body to
be burned



What about virtue?

- v. 2 – Gift list
- v. 3 – Virtue list
 - Give all to the poor
 - Surrender body to flames

What about virtue?

- v. 2 – Gift list
- v. 3 – Virtue list
 - Give all to the poor
 - Surrender body to flames
- Paul is like adopting a different voice
 - v. 3 – like answering a different kind of person
 - What if what we really need is not talent, but moral virtuous behaviour?

Morally virtuous behaviour?

- Generosity
- Integrity



Morally virtuous behaviour?

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- Integrity
- Give all to the poor
 - A person willing to live a thrifty life, discipline, simple, self denying
 - Body to the flames



Morally virtuous behaviour?

- Generosity
- Integrity
- Give all to the poor
 - A person willing to live a thrifty life, discipline, simple, self denying
 - Body to the flames
- Integrity to live for my values even if it costs me my life
 - Social justice
 - Dying for the faith



Inner heart character is not being Good



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 - Takes the virtue list and dismisses it the same way as the gift list



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Inner heart character is not being Good

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 - Takes the virtue list and dismisses it the same way as the gift list
- Gifts do not matter
 - Does virtue/goodness matter?
- Paul is going deep
 - Courage, liberality, modesty, justice, prudence
 - All the virtue list
 - Still not down to the heart level



Possible to do everything and be nothing



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- Am I **hiding** behind the good things I am doing for people?

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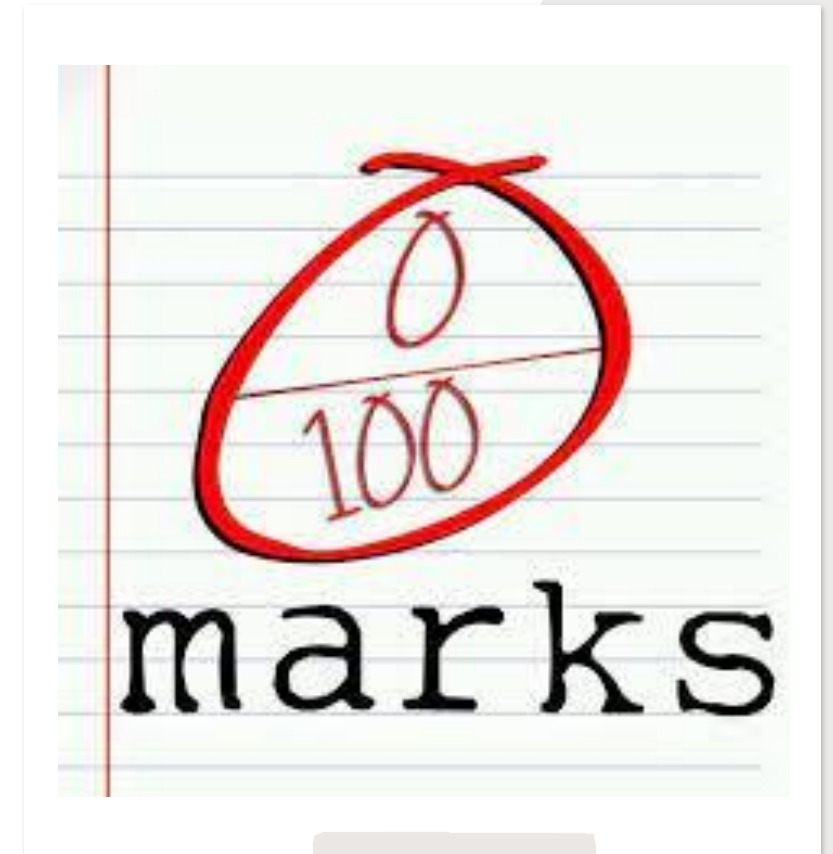


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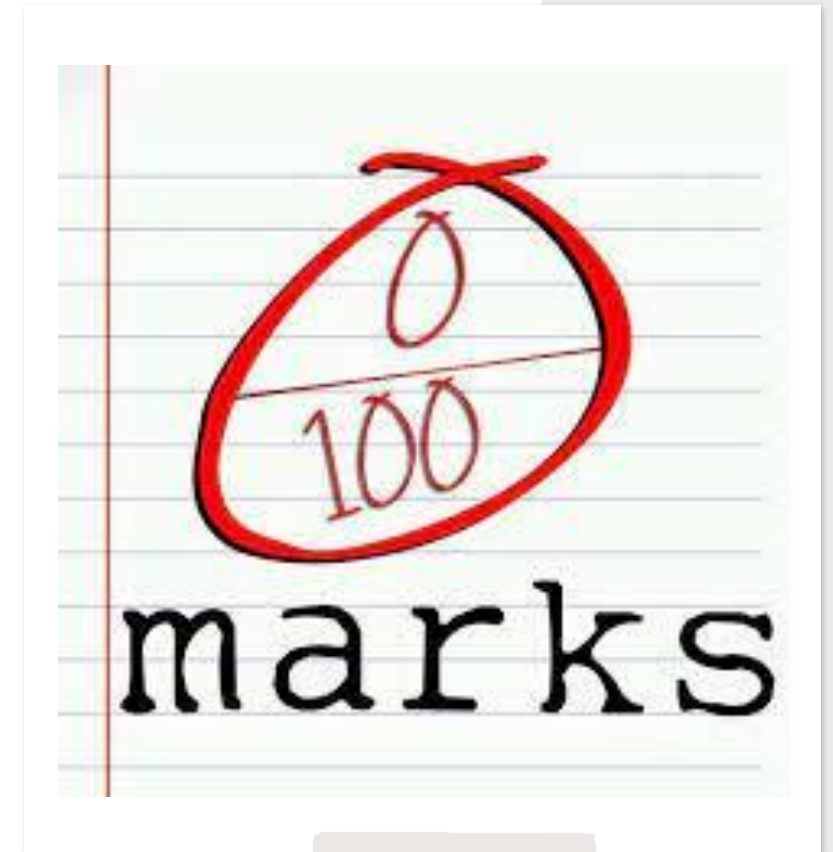
Heart Motives

- Possible – incredibly virtuous, sacrifice time, money, life
 - Commitment
 - And still be nothing
 - How could that be?



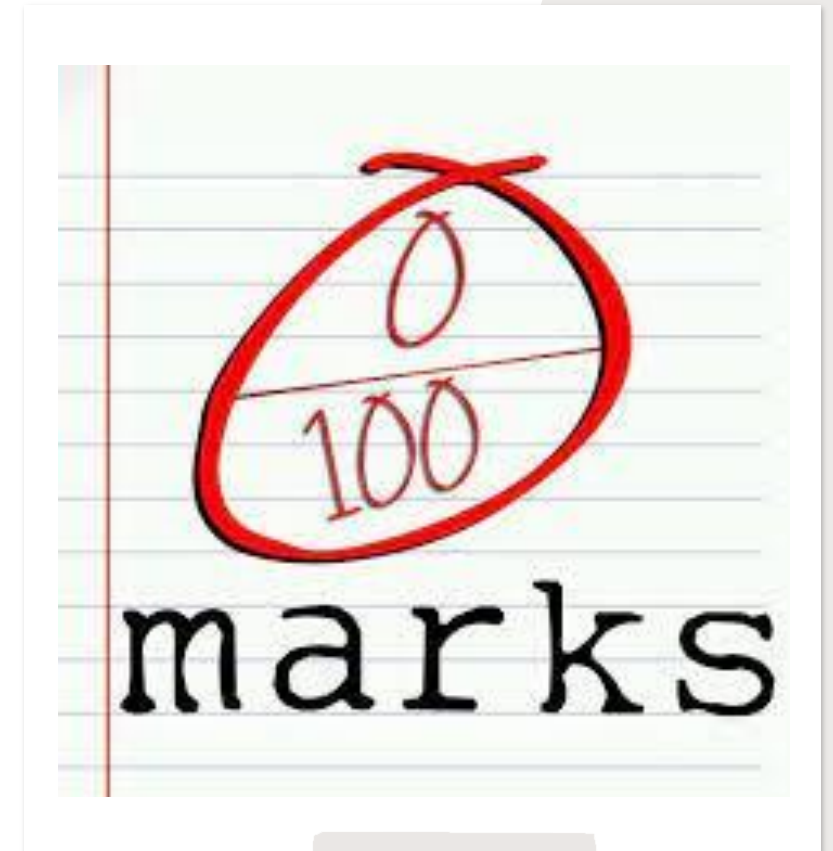
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- “Profits me nothing”
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 - Gain
 - To “count” / merit / earn
 - Could give your body / die / sacrifice life / money
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 - Could give your body / die / sacrifice life / money
 - Without love
- Could be done for 2 very different kind of heart motives



Motive #1:

- If we do good things, behaviourally loving things
 - Loving things in the sense of:
 - Loving people
 - Serving people
 - Ministering to people



Motive #1: To get a Sense of Worth

- If we do good things, behaviourally loving things
 - Loving things in the sense of:
 - Loving people
 - Serving people
 - Ministering to people
 - If we do good things to get a sense of worth/identity (to count / to be somebody)
 - They are worthless!
 - Does not please God / enhance our character



Motive #2: Genuine Love

- Love
 - Common sense definition – to serve other people instead of ourselves



Motive #2: Genuine Love

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 - Common sense definition – to serve other people instead of ourselves
 - If the reason we are kind / generous
 - If we are doing it to count
 - If we are doing it so that God will love me
 - So that I am a good person
 - People will see me as a loving / kind / generous person



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- Romans 12:9a – “Let love be without dissimulation.”





1 Samuel 16:7

- “But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the **LORD looketh on the heart.**”

A close-up photograph of two hands clasped together in a supportive grip, resting on a rustic wooden surface. The hands are positioned centrally, with fingers interlaced. The wood grain is clearly visible, adding a natural and textured background.

Philippians 2:4

**“Look not every man on his own things,
but every man also on the things of
others.”**

Deeper than Rules

- Not another list of do's and don'ts
 - That's the 10 commandments
- This is character (more subtle)
 - This is stuff below the rules
 - This is stuff below behaviour
 - This is stuff you are with people in private



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- Give money away / honouring all the rules / incredibly good person in so many ways
 - Am I impatient, irritable, harsh, vain, self-centred, always getting feelings hurt



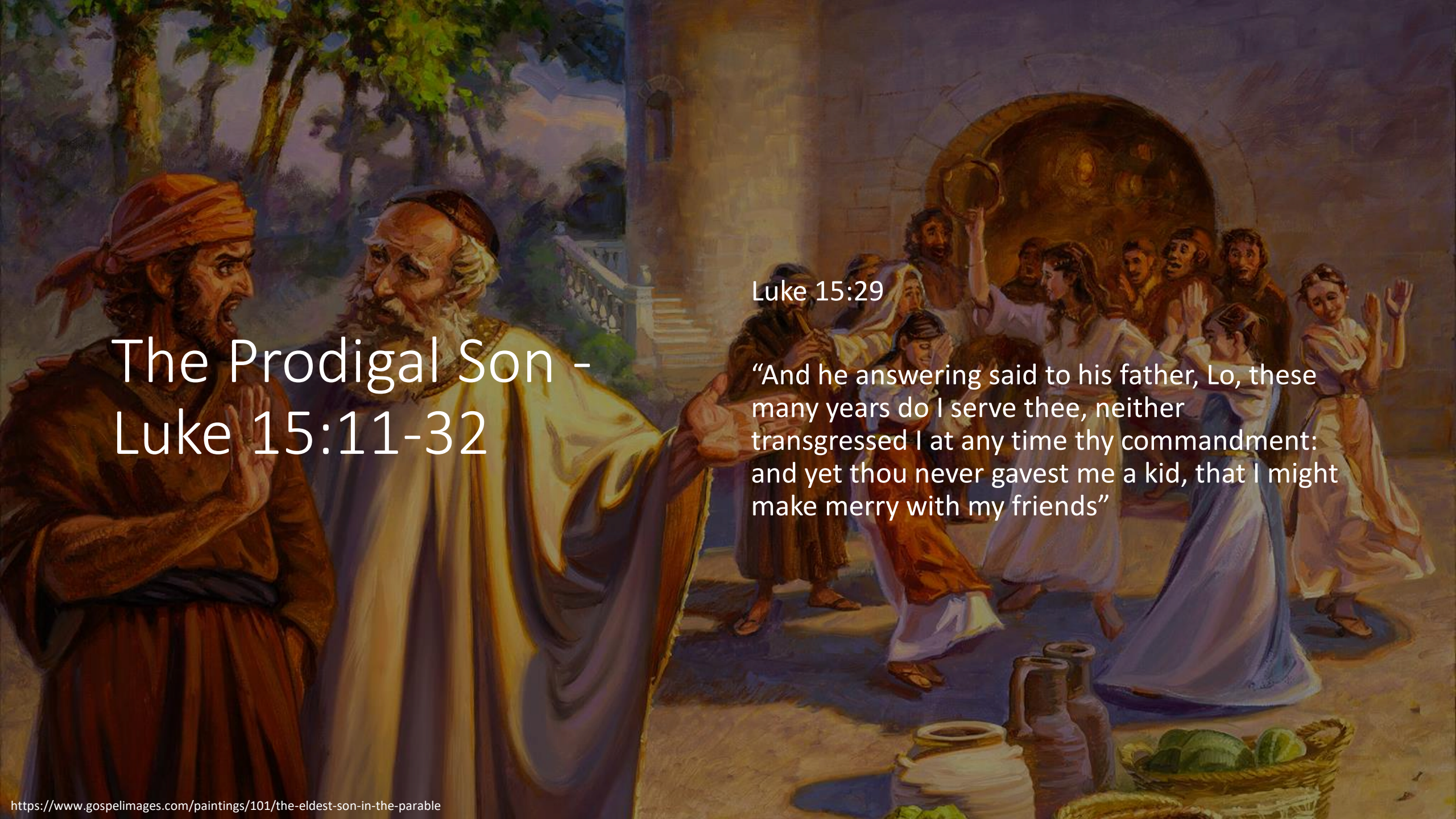
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- It is all about me!
 - Service not driven by love
 - Moral virtue not driven by love





The Prodigal Son - Luke 15:11-32



The Prodigal Son - Luke 15:11-32

Luke 15:29

“And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends”



Zacchaeus – Luke 19:1-10

Luke 19:2-9

- And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich.
- And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature.
- And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycomore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way.
- And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house.
- And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully.
- And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.
- And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.
- And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham.”

Inner heart character is being **Graced**

- Inner character comes from a complete change in the way we approach God

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Inner heart character is being Graced

- Inner character comes from a complete change in the way we approach God
- Sounding brass / cymbal
 - Paul is talking about the Corinthians
 - Pagan gods – how they were worshipped
 - The gods had to be impressed
 - The gods' attention / favour had to be attracted / merited



Inner heart character is being Graced

- Paul is saying **it is possible to do Christian-like things**
 - Prophesying / fathom mysteries / pray / read study Bible / lead / obey God's commandments



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 - Read your Bibles, go to your bible studies, talk to other people about the Lord Jesus



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- As a way of clanging a cymbal and sounding a gong
 - Read your Bibles, go to your bible studies, talk to other people about the Lord Jesus
- It is possible to look like a Christian and yet **not be a Christian**
 - Christianity is different fundamentally from every other religion in how we approach God



Matthew 6

- Alms
- Pray
- Fast



Mar 12:38-40

- And he said unto them in his doctrine, Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the marketplaces, And the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts: Which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation.



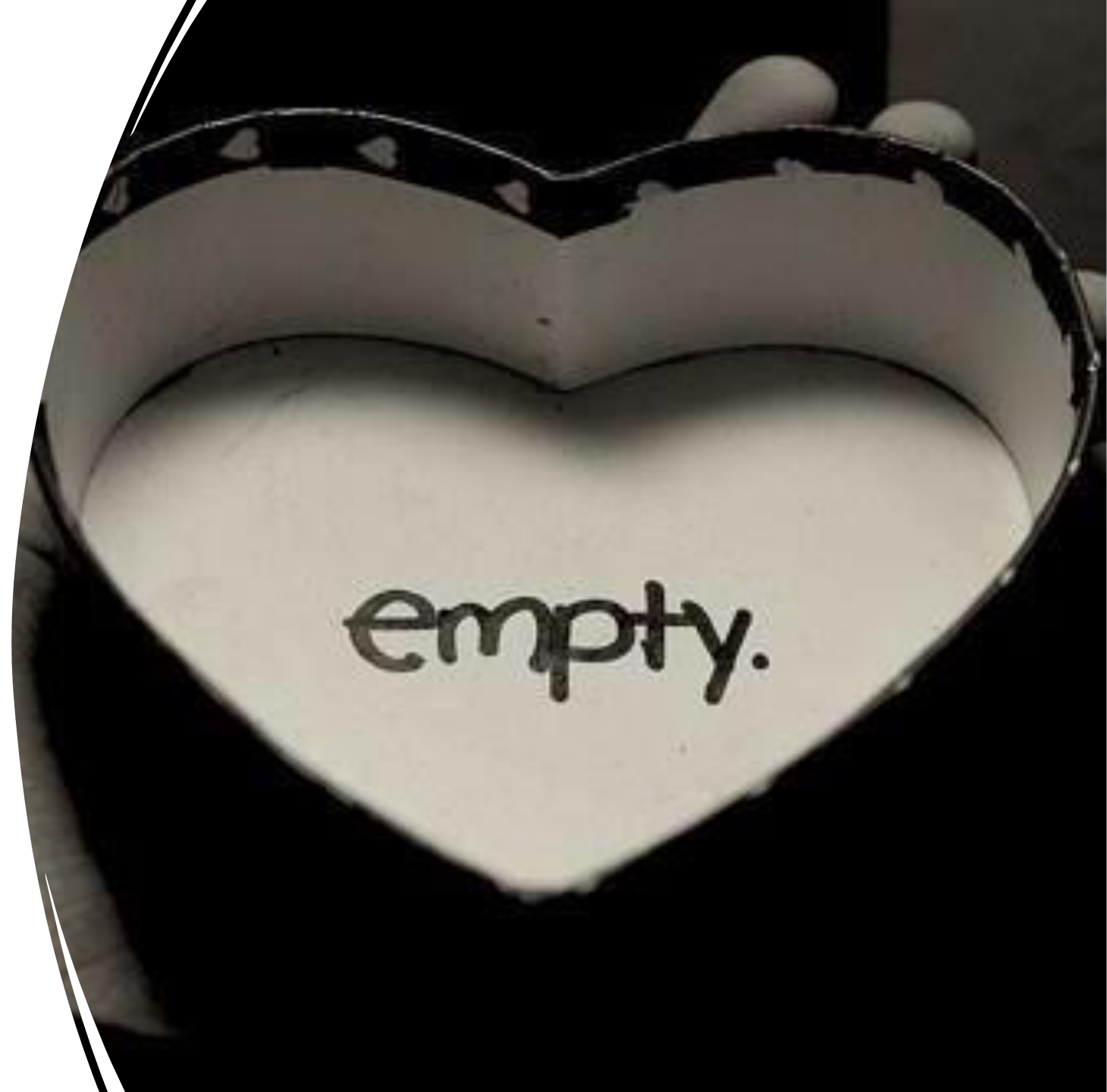
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 - Which **devour** widows' houses,
 - and for a **pretence** make **long prayers**:
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Matthew 15:8

- “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.”



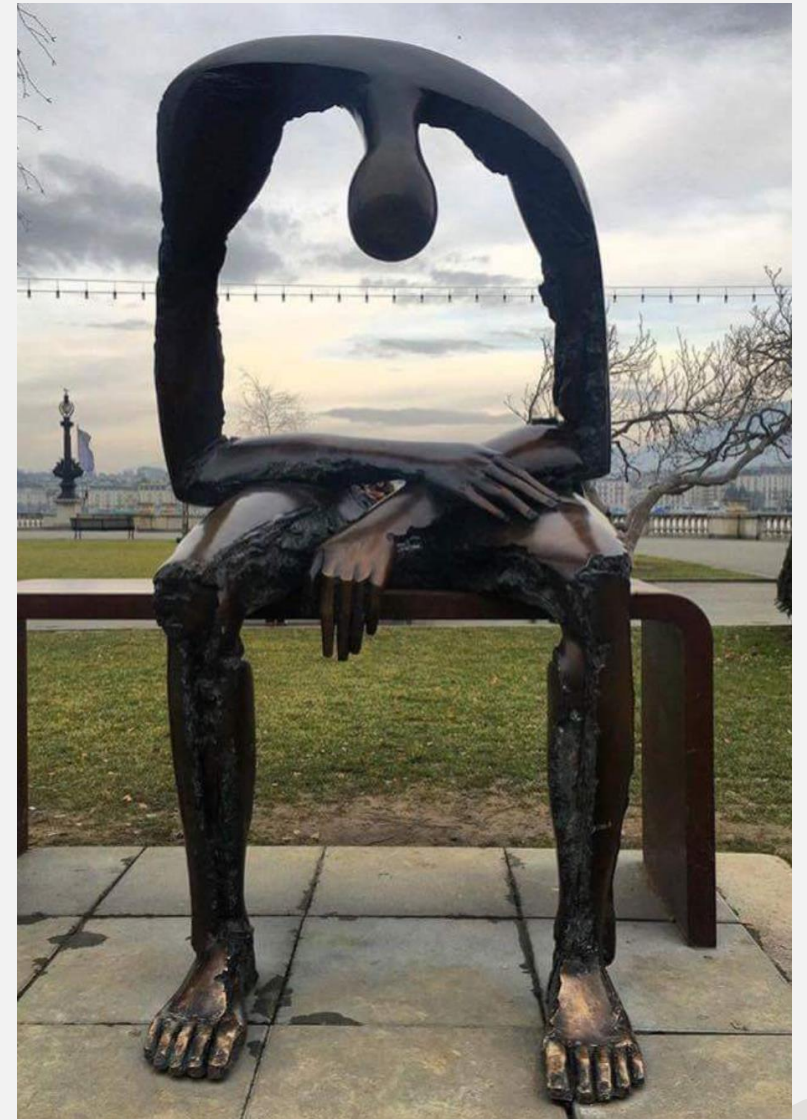
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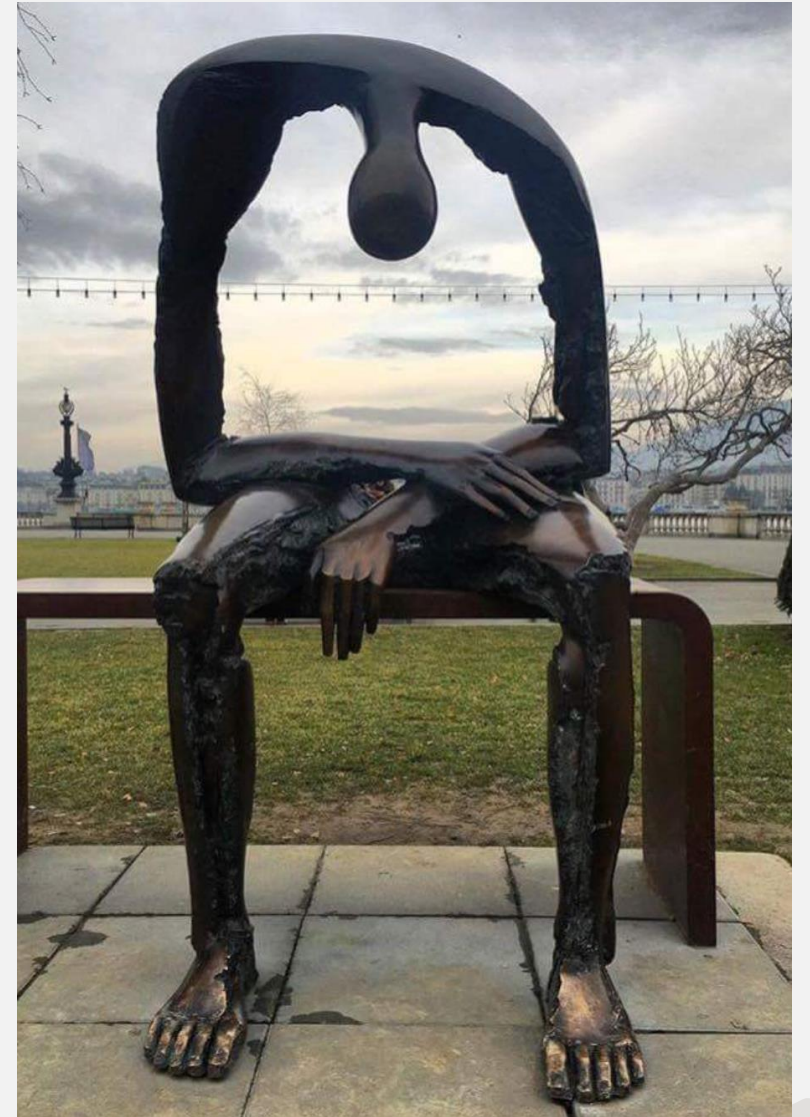
Inner Vacuum vs Inner Fulness

- We are supposed to count and know we count with God before we serve



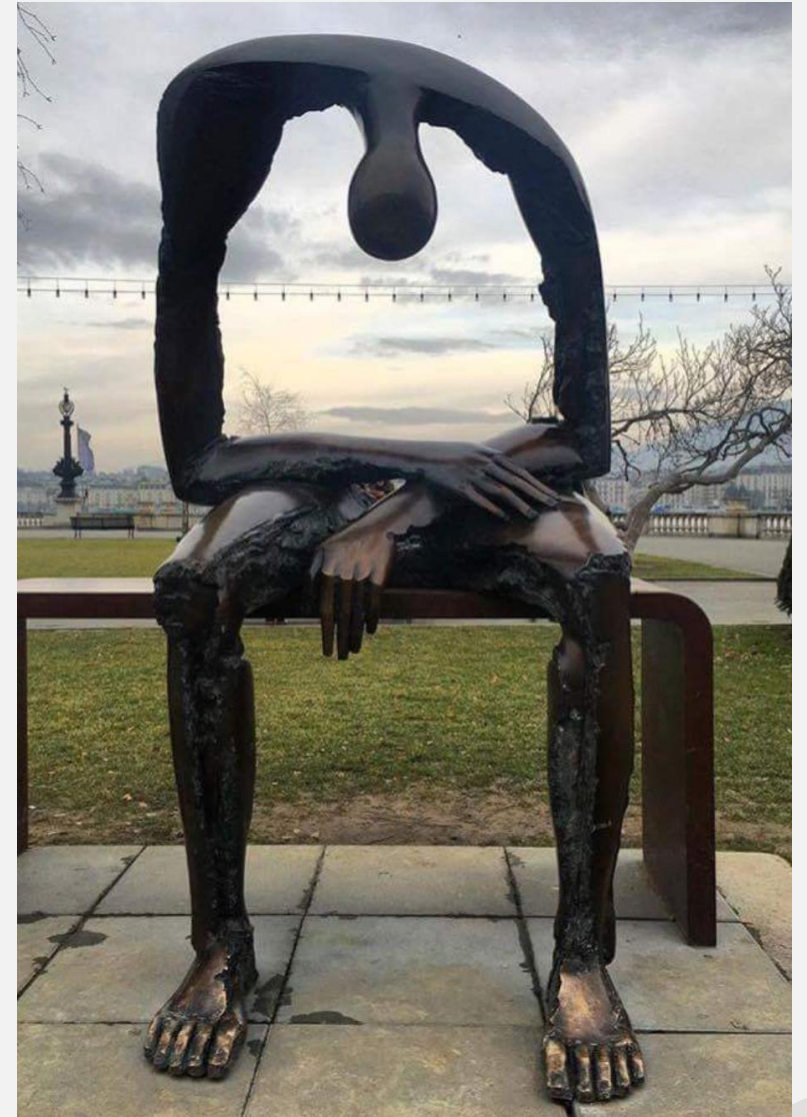
Inner Vacuum vs Inner Fulness

- We are supposed to count and know we count with God before we serve
- Not supposed to be out there helping other people
 - As a way of meeting an inner vacuum/emptiness
 - But as a response to an inner fulness



Inner Vacuum vs Inner Fulness

- We are supposed to count and know we count with God before we serve
- Not supposed to be out there helping other people
 - As a way of meeting an inner vacuum/emptiness
 - But as a response to an inner fulness
- How do we do that?
 - The answer is v. 4-7



1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (NKJV)

- “Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;
- Does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;
- Does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;
- Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

Paul Personifies Love

- Love suffers a long time with patience
- Love shows kindness
- Love does not burn with envy
- Love does not get inflated with its own importance
- Love is never rude and ill mannered
- Love joyfully celebrates truth
- Love gives all kinds of support
- Love never loses faith
- Love never exhausts hope
- Love never gives up



Set of Rules?

- Gal. 3:11 – “But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.”
- We will never be loving if it is a set of guidelines that you have to pick up and follow / breathe life into
 - Love is a personal living active power that has to get a hold of you and breathe life into you
 - Has to come into you, encounter you, come upon you
- This love cannot be produced, but can only be passed on



Paul is pointing to Someone

- In the beginning of 1 Corinthians
- Dealt with all the terrible character flaws
 - Fighting, jealousy, envy, strife, bickering
 - They are forgetting the cross!



Paul is pointing to Someone

- In the beginning of 1 Corinthians
- Dealt with all the terrible character flaws
 - Fighting, jealousy, envy, strife, bickering
 - They are forgetting the cross!
- We are never going to be loving by living up to a list of behavioural descriptors
 - Think of the cross!



Paul is pointing to Someone

- If we are angry, spiteful, impatient, fighting
 - We have forgotten that the cross humbles me
 - How can I be proud when it took the death of the Son of God to save me?



Paul is pointing to Someone

- If we are angry, spiteful, impatient, fighting
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- The cross lifts me up
 - Why should I be so emotionally needy?
 - Why do I care what people think?
 - Why do I need acclaim?
 - When the Son of God Himself died for me



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- If we are angry, spiteful, impatient, fighting
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 - Why do I care what people think?
 - Why do I need acclaim?
 - When the Son of God Himself died for me
- From the beginning of 1 Cor.
 - The only way to deal with our character flaws is to look at the cross
 - 1 Cor. 13 – Paul not mentioning the cross at all?



Love suffered patiently

*“My God, my God, why hast
thou forsaken me?”*

—Matthew 27:46



Love suffered patiently

Hebrews 12:2a – “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him **endured** the cross...”

Hebrews 12:3a – “For consider Him that **endured** such contradiction of sinners against himself...”



Love kept no records of wrong

- “Father forgive them for they know not what they do” – Luke 23:34



A clay chalice stands on a dark wooden surface. To its right are several pieces of flatbread. In the background, a crown of thorns is visible. The scene is lit from the side, creating strong shadows.

Love did not give up

- “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.” – Luke 22:42

Summary

- It is possible to live a completely ethical life
 - Without any love at the root of it
 - But rather, fear, pride and power
- We need to live a life
 - That's not just morally restrained externally
 - But supernaturally changed from the inside
- Inner heart character is
 - Not being gifted
 - Not being good
 - Being graced

As I Have Loved You

- John 13:34 – “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; **as I have loved you**, that ye also love one another.”





HYMN

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

BY ISAAC WATTS

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

When I survey the wondrous cross
on which the Prince of glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
save in the death of Christ, my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them through his blood.

See, from his head, his hands, his feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled down.
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were a present far too small.
Love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all.