

# That Which Is Spiritual

by H.J. Vine

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*The true condition of every believer in Christ is spiritual, characterized by the Holy Spirit, and marked by fruitfulness, restoration, lowliness, and discernment.*

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 2:14

**Topics:** "Spiritual Growth", "Holy Spirit"

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## Description

H.J. Vine preaches about the importance of understanding and embracing spiritual life as designated by the Spirit in Scripture. He emphasizes the distinction between the natural, carnal, and spiritual states of believers, cautioning against fleshly desires hindering spiritual growth. The sermon delves into the significance of being truly spiritual, characterized by the Holy Spirit, and the need to discern spiritual things with wisdom and grace. It highlights the spiritual possessions, blessings, discernment, and understanding that believers can experience, guiding them towards spiritual growth and fruitfulness in Christ.

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## Transcript

The true condition of every believer in Christ in the present dispensation is designated by the Spirit in Scripture as "spiritual." The house of God, too, of which he forms part, is also called spiritual. The food which he assimilates and the drink which he appropriates are likewise termed spiritual. Moreover, the praises which he offers to God, the sacrifices which he gives to Him, the songs which he sings, are all spoken of in the Word of God as spiritual. It is important, therefore, to seek understanding from God as to this, for we live in days when it is despised by some, misunderstood by others, and carried too far by many.

Now, though the true and normal condition of each believer is spiritual, yet we see that brethren in Christ may become fleshly for we read of those who heard the Gospel through Paul at Corinth, and were in the assembly in Christ there, becoming such; therefore, the apostle writes to them thus, "I, brethren, have not been able to speak to you as to spiritual, but as to fleshly, as to babes in Christ, . . . for ye are yet carnal" (1 Cor. 3:1-3). Let this, therefore, weigh well with us. It is not enough to say, "I believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and confess His Name." These brethren at Corinth did that; but the fleshly lusts which war against the soul had hindered their progress in spiritual things, and emulation and strife and dissension among themselves rose high through their exalting special men, boasting in them and their peculiar teachings, and through ordering their walk according to them and not according to the fellowship of God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom all faithful servants point, and whose glory the Spirit of God is here to bring

before us.

### Natural, Carnal and Spiritual

It is the carnal mind which opposes the spiritual. The natural is not that which is in itself antagonistic so much, but rather is it unable to enter into that which is spiritual. We read, "The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God . . . he cannot know them, for they are spiritually discerned." Spiritual things are above him and he is incapable in himself of entering into them. Carnality is altogether against them. The natural mind may be educated, adopting too as its religion Christianity (as it is often termed), yet without the Spirit of God, it may also despise low practices and the failures even of true believers, it may be zealous for human righteousness and honourable behaviour, nevertheless it is still natural. Often it freely admits it does not, and has no disposition to appreciate spiritual things. Natural things and natural affection are rightly and ably appreciated, it may be, but not the spiritual. The latter may not be opposed, but the natural man lacks the necessary ability to discern spiritual things, whereas that which is carnal bitterly wars against that which is spiritual.

Just a word before leaving this. It is important to remember that if the natural is not in itself against the spiritual neither is the spiritual against the natural, but its abilities are supernatural and above it, and when one is truly spiritual he will view that which is natural from a higher standpoint than the other, and bring into his own natural relationships a heavenly grace to which the purely natural man is a stranger. This we see in the closing exhortations of such epistles as Ephesians and Colossians. To be "without affection" is an awful mark of apostasy from that which is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 3:3). We do not become unnatural by being spiritual, but carnality is to be fled from as a foe to all true progress.

Even the law in itself is not against what is purely natural. It is against the fleshly man. Indeed, the law, being given of God, must itself be spiritual, and its fullness is love. The man in Romans 7 says, "The law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin" (v. 14).

### What it Means to be Spiritual

It may be asked, What is exactly meant by that which is spiritual? Through wrong teaching as to this many sincere souls have been led astray! Often it has been contrasted with that which is material, and a state of mind has consequently been produced of a most harmful nature. Scripture does not so speak, for the Spirit tells, that the body which the saints will have in the resurrection will not only be incorruptible and immortal but also spiritual. When He rose from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ said to His disciples, "Handle Me and see, for a spirit has not flesh and bones as ye see Me having" (Luke 24:39); nevertheless His body was spiritual although still "flesh and bones," and the body of the believer will be the same in resurrection; it will be "a spiritual body" (1 Cor. 15:44).

Some, too, have said, That which is spiritual is neither seen nor heard! but "the house of God" is formed of all true believers, on Christ, the Living Stone rejected by men, and that house is spiritual, and it is seen. Moreover, the praises which they offer to God are spiritual and their songs are called "spiritual songs," and they are heard. The believer himself in his right condition and character is spoken of as spiritual--"ye which are spiritual"--and he is both seen and heard, and as he behaves himself accordingly even unconverted men are made conscious that he acts and speaks from a standpoint to which they are strangers.

In a bad sense we read of certain forms of evil being spiritual, of "spiritual wickedness" (Eph. 6:12), and of Jerusalem, when it presently becomes dominated by Antichrist, being "the great city which is called

spiritually Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified" (Rev. 11:8). In both these cases we have that which is characterized by Satan--by the evil spirit.

To be spiritual therefore in the true sense is to be characterized by the Holy Spirit of God who has been given from our ascended Head and Lord. We do not, therefore, find this condition in the Old Testament, Hosea 9:7 being wrongly translated. We read of men doing mighty acts by the power of the Spirit, such as Samson, but their own state could not be described as spiritual. Extraordinary things, too, have been done in later days by men who have not been marked by true spirituality, nor by the fruit of the Spirit which is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness and self-control. Not simply power but grace and truth will mark those who are truly spiritual, for they will be characterized by the Holy Spirit; and, as we have said, even the believer's mortal body will be eventually so characterized, for it will be quickened by the Spirit at the coming of Christ and be subject to mortality no more.

The saints in Galatia had fallen under teaching which made them think they were hyper-spiritual, but in reality they were brought into bondage to "beggarly principles," and the apostle, seeing their danger, has to say, "If ye bite and devour one another beware that ye are not consumed one of another" (5:15). What a state for saints of God to get into even when apostles were on the earth, ill-treating each other through wrongly directed zeal! Again he writes, "Brethren, if even a man be taken in some fault, ye who are spiritual restore such an one in a spirit of meekness, considering thyself lest thou also be tempted" (6:1). This restoring grace and lowliness is a mark of spirituality. Is restoration very much in evidence today? It would be, were there more true spirituality.

We are also exhorted to "follow after love and desire spiritual gifts" (1 Cor. 14:1). The blessings, too, which are ours in Christ Jesus are spiritual (Eph. 1:3), and as we rightly enter into and possess these blessings they will give character to us. Our discernment, then, will be clearer, for "the spiritual discerns all things and he is discerned of no one" (1 Cor. 2:15).

The faithful servant of Christ seeks to impart spiritual benefit to those who hear him--"some spiritual gift to establish you" (Rom. 1:11)--that such may participate experimentally in "spiritual things" (15:27), and these things cannot be imparted in a merely natural way; "not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, communicating [or expounding] spiritual things by spiritual means" (1 Cor. 2:13); and the apostle Paul, who thus served the Lord, could add, "if we have sown to you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?" (9:11). Many look at the latter--giving to servants of our Lord Jesus Christ--as the "great thing." That is a mistake! The giving of spiritual things is what is truly great, and the other but a right and ordinary return. The labourer must be supported, and it is not well for those who benefit by his service to neglect the one who sows spiritual things lest spiritual poverty follows.

In the case of the Colossian saints we find the apostle praying that they may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, so as to walk worthily of the Lord unto all well-pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work (Col. 1:9). This fruitfulness is another mark of true spirituality: evidence is thus borne as to our condition. Bad fruit witnesses to a bad condition. No fruit shows a faulty condition. "Fruit in every good work" evidences a truly spiritual condition, along with a true knowledge of God in Christ.

### Spiritual Possessions

When God redeemed Israel He gave them earthly possessions, but to those who have redemption in Christ today are given "spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). These are possessed at

the present time in faith in the power of the Spirit, and in them the believer may stand victoriously against all the attacks of the powers of darkness and against spiritual wickedness, strong in the Lord and clad in the panoply of God. Ephesians 6:10-17 shows this.

As we are therefore characterized by the Holy Spirit of God, that is, as we are characteristically spiritual, this triumph and victory will be ours in spite of all the outward failure in the assemblies. Provision has been divinely made that we may stand in our glorious possessions, so that with gladness and praise filling our hearts, like the apostle to the Gentiles we may exclaim, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has thus blessed us."

But not only do we read in the epistles of spiritual persons possessing spiritual "blessings," raising spiritual "songs," offering spiritual "sacrifices"--the sacrifice of praise--in a spiritual "house," but of such spiritual persons having spiritual "discernment," receiving and rejoicing in spiritual "things," increasing in wisdom and spiritual "understanding," having spiritual "food" to sustain them in divine energy, so as to be well-pleasing to the Lord. As we have said, the faithful servant seeks to impart spiritual gain to the saints, to feed them with spiritual food.

When Israel journeyed onward to the land, we are told that they were types of us, and "all ate the same spiritual food, and drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank of a spiritual Rock which followed them; and that Rock was Christ" (1 Cor. 10:4). Here then we find the secret of being kept in vigour on our way to the Father's house, where we shall see our Lord Jesus Christ face to face. Fleeing from fleshly lusts we appropriate the food provided for us, and press onward to our heavenly goal. When here on earth Jesus Himself could say, "As the living Father has sent Me and I live on account of the Father, he also who eats Me shall live also on account of Me"; and, again, "I am the bread of life: he that comes to Me shall never hunger, and he that believes on Me shall never thirst at any time" (John 6:35). He is our food, our drink, our all.

As we thus make this gracious provision our own we shall find strength and spring in our steps heavenward, we shall be renewed day by day in the inner man. Long ago it was said, man shall not live by bread alone but by every word of God. As Christ is therefore appropriated we shall be encouraged and invigorated on our homeward way!

The body--the outer man--may become less agile, and we may be conscious of increasing feebleness as age tells upon the present tabernacle; the earthly house may prove itself to be as the apostle said a "body of humiliation," and weakness may be evident in its various chambers and compartments; many testings and trials, snares and temptations, along with ups and downs, may beset the path which we tread, but the end of it will be an "UP." The last step taken, and we shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air! All the besetments of the way will be left behind in the twinkling of an eye and we shall be for ever with the Lord!

Then we shall possess our possessions in bodies of glory; not simply as now in faith, but as glorified with Christ. The mortal body of the saint will have put on immortality, and this corruptible will have put on incorruptibility. No longer earthly it will be heavenly; no longer in dishonour, it will have been raised in glory; and no more in weakness it will have been raised in power; the Lord will then have quickened it, and each saint will possess for ever "a spiritual body." Conformed fully to the image of God's beloved Son we shall then surround Him as His brethren in His Father's house and be to His eternal praise.

"And now Thy love is waiting

Thy saints like Thee to raise.

Firstborn of many brethren,

To Thee be all the praise."

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