

# Spirituality

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the necessity of spirituality for true growth and maturity in the Christian life, contrasting it with the dangers of carnality.*

**Scripture:** 1 Corinthians 2:12, 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, 1 Corinthians 5:6-7, 1 Corinthians 6:1-2, 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, 1 Corinthians 13:13, Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 4:15-16

**Topics:** "Spiritual Growth", "Love in the Body of Christ"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the theme of spirituality in his sermon, addressing the spiritual immaturity of the Corinthian church as a significant issue. He explains that true spirituality is characterized by being governed by the Holy Spirit, contrasting it with carnality, which hinders spiritual growth. Sparks identifies several marks of carnality, including reliance on natural wisdom, selectiveness based on personal preferences, and a lack of moral sensibility, all of which prevent believers from maturing in their faith. He concludes that the essence of spirituality is love, which transcends spiritual gifts and is essential for true growth in Christ. The sermon serves as a call for believers to pursue a deeper, Spirit-led life that reflects Christ's love and unity within the Body of Christ.

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## Transcript

Reading: 1 Corinthians 2

We now pass to the first letter to the Corinthians, and you will notice that the point in the letter marked by chapter 3 begins with the definite statement that the trouble at Corinth, the inclusive trouble, was spiritual immaturity. They were babes, when it was time they had passed out of babyhood. That was the trouble at Corinth.

The Spiritual Man Constituted of God

So the whole letter deals with the causes of too long delayed maturity, and with that which is the basic factor for such people with regard to spiritual growth. We can at once state what this factor is. It is the key to this whole letter, and is "spirituality". Being the key to this letter, it is, therefore, in all these circumstances, the key to full growth. Spirituality is, of course, set over against carnality. Spirituality is essential to full growth. The second chapter is full both of the fact and of the necessity. If we ask what spirituality is, that chapter will answer the question by telling us that it is a life wholly governed, taught, illumined and led by the Holy Spirit; but not as from without. This is just where we need to recognise a

difference. Here it is not a matter of the Holy Spirit as an objective person or power coming along and, so to speak, putting His hand upon us and telling us things and turning us about, and giving us direction of that kind. What the apostle clearly shows in this part of his letter is that it is the kind of person we are. He speaks in this chapter of two kinds of beings, the one whom he calls the natural, or the soulical man, the other the spiritual man; one, the man who is governed by his own soul in every way, the other who is governed by the Holy Spirit through his spirit, and thereby becomes a spiritual man as over against the soulical man. So that the spiritual man here is a kind of person, and that kind of person has particular and peculiar kinds of capacities, powers, abilities. He has faculties which are not possessed by the other kind of man, the soulical man, the natural man, and he is, therefore, endowed with capacities which take you far beyond the highest range of the natural man in apprehension, in knowledge, in understanding, as well as in accomplishment.

That point must be made perfectly clear, because some people have a kind of mentality that to be wholly Spirit-governed means that the Holy Spirit in some way does all the turning about and governing, and directing, almost objectively, as from the outside. The spiritual man is not here represented as being in that position at all, but rather as having been constituted a kind of being in whom the Holy Spirit is. He is constituted a spiritual man of spiritual intelligence, who is able, by spiritual faculties and endowments, to come into a wonderful knowledge of, and fellowship with, God Himself. That is spirituality, and that is the very heart of full growth.

It is wonderful how the chronological order of these letters is entirely upset in favour of a spiritual order. In Romans you have the foundation of righteousness by faith; then comes 1 Corinthians, and it is as though you got right to the heart of the Person concerned, and having set Him in a position, you begin to constitute something in Him, to build up in Him. So that you find that it is a matter now of having been placed in Christ by faith; Christ is in you, and that is the beginning of everything, if Christ is to be fully formed. And that is the meaning of spirituality.

It is seen in this letter, on the contrary, that carnality is a mark of immaturity, and, more than that, it is a positive hindrance to spiritual progress. With that you move through the letter and you see the many marks of carnality which are marks of immaturity. We might note some of them, and this will help us to come to an understanding of what spirituality really is.

#### Six Marks of Carnality as Seen in 1 Corinthians

##### 1) Leaning to natural wisdom

Here in chapters 1 and 2 especially you see that carnality is a leaning towards, and being governed by, what is natural, what is of account according to man's own natural estimate. These Corinthians evidently had a great admiration for human wisdom. They were in a centre of human wisdom, and their national life was marked with much of this admiration for the wisdom of men. They were much occupied naturally in philosophical pursuits and speculations, and so it was a part of their very nature. It was Corinthian to be always leaning toward the superiority of human wisdom, and the Corinthian believers were evidently indulging in that kind of thing. We are still very greatly influenced by the strength, the power of human wisdom -- and, of course, that carries power with it! With the Corinthians knowledge was power. That was their philosophy of life. The more human knowledge you have, the more you come into a place of ascendancy in this world. It is a thing which puts you in a position of advantage. Human knowledge is a real vantage ground for success in this world.

The apostle strikes some very hard blows at that natural and, at the same time, carnal thing. It is natural, but when it comes into the life of a believer it is a carnal thing. The carnal is something more positive than the natural. We are what we are by nature, but when you begin to take up what we are by nature in the realm of what we are by grace, and make something of nature in the realm of grace, then you have become carnal: and that is evil. So these two chapters are very largely occupied with a tremendous unveiling of the utter foolishness of the very thing in which these believers were glorying, and the utter weakness of it all. Knowledge? Power? Getting an advantage in this world? Very well! The world in its wisdom, and in the wisdom which it called its power, crucified the Lord of glory. What do you think of that? They did it blindly. That is ignorance!

We are not going to pursue that line further. We indicate it, because it shows us a state of mind. It was the appraising of values according to natural and worldly standards, and they were influenced by that, and that for them was carnality, and therefore immaturity. That very thing was the hindrance to their spiritual growth. Now, apart from the thing itself, the principle is this, that a leaning toward that which is natural, and, in so leaning toward it, making it a factor in our lives as the children of God, is a mark of spiritual infancy, babyhood, immaturity; but moreover, it is a positive hindrance to anything else. You may say it is hardly necessary to stress that amongst the people of God today, but I am not so sure. You know, as well as I do, that this is one of the failings of the human heart in principle. We may be perfectly convinced that the Corinthians were all wrong and that Paul was perfectly right, that it was utter foolishness in this wise world to crucify the Lord Jesus, an altogether false idea of wisdom, of knowledge, and of strength: well, we may be quite convinced of that, and it may be that we might not fall quite in that way, but in principle this thing is found in all of us.

There is a tremendous amount of trying to win a way for the Gospel, for Christ, for the Christian life by being even with the world in some way. A young man, for example, thinks that if he has something of a sportsman's training, and his achievements in the sporting world are known, that he can use that as an advantage to win men for Christ. So he does it, and he plays that off to try and win the respect, the esteem, the hearing, the ear of men, and in a way he is all the time going onto their ground and thinking that he is going to win converts in that way. It is this same thing in principle. If men can only be won along such lines they are not worth winning; you will not get the right thing. The only ground upon which a man may be really saved is upon the ground of such a need in his own heart, and recognised by him, that he will come to Christ as a matter of life and death. If he has to be won by your putting up something which appeals to him on his own ground, there will be a permanent weakness in his Christian life. Let us be careful that even in our eagerness we do not compromise a little, do not step over onto natural ground, which for us would be sheer carnality. That is Corinthian ground; it does not get beyond babyhood, the standards of men, the world's values of things; wisdom, and power, and such like.

That was the first thing in this whole matter of spirituality. Spirituality has nothing to do with that. What does Paul really mean? What does he say, in effect? He says: After all, you may go down to men, with all your worldly wisdom, and try to win them for Christ, but the natural man cannot understand the things of the Spirit of God; he is labouring under an absolute ban. Before a man can understand the things of the Spirit of God he has to be born again, and be a spiritual man in the very beginnings of his new life. He must have something that no man outside of Christ has. You are in a hopeless position if you try to get down there onto his ground: "...we received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is from God; that we might know the things that were freely given to us of God" (1 Cor. 2:12). These Corinthians had the spirit of the world, and were trying to be Christians with the spirit of the world; therefore they were

limited in their knowledge, their understanding, their apprehension, and remained like little babes who had never yet come to any kind of personal knowledge. All that they had was what they had been told.

## 2) Selectiveness on natural grounds

The next phase of this carnality is seen in chapter 3 and chapter 4. There you have selectiveness on natural grounds. It is another phase or form of the leaning toward what is natural. One says, I am of Paul; and another says, I am of Apollos; and another says, I am of Peter; and another says, I am of Christ. The apostle deals drastically with it in these two chapters. Carnality is set forth as that kind of thing where you lean toward your own natural likes and dislikes amongst men, amongst teachings. I like Paul as a man! I like Apollos as a man! I like Paul's line of teaching! I like Apollos's wonderful eloquence! I like Peter's line! They were, according to their natural likes, selective on natural grounds, dividing up the Lord's servants and the Lord's Body. Who will be bold enough to say that he himself has never fallen into that failure? It is quite natural to have such likes and dislikes. It very often means that we have to put something to death in us to listen to some people, to have anything to do with them. We have to take ourselves in hand, and say: I must seek if there is not something there that is of the Lord, and for the time being shut my eyes to the other that offends. It is quite natural to say: I like so-and-so, and I would go anywhere to hear so-and-so, but as for the other man I cannot get on with him at all. That is carnality. "For whereas there is among you jealousy and strife, are ye not carnal, and walk after the manner of men? For when one saith, I..." -- Oh, we need not go further! That is the heart of the matter, "I". It ought to be "Not I, but Christ". Is there anything of Christ here in these men? That is what we should be after. The vessel may trouble me, may sometimes give me bad times, but my natural inclinations are not the point in question at all in such a matter; that is carnality for me. It is all right for some people who do not profess to be the Lord's, but for me it is carnality, a bringing of the natural into the realm of the spiritual, and making it a governing thing. Spirituality means that I am after whatever is of Christ, no matter in what vessel it is brought to me. Again and again it is clearly to be seen in the Word of God that, had men taken account of the means by which God came to them, they would have lost the blessing, and some were dangerously near that, and some did lose it.

Israel lost the blessing for that very reason. They were offended with the Man Christ Jesus. "Is not this the carpenter?..." Had He been some glorious potentate from heaven they would have received the message! Let us be careful. God tests us very often as to the reality of our hearts, as to whether they are set upon Himself, by bringing us a great blessing wrapped up in a very unacceptable wrapping.

Spirituality is the opposite of leaning toward natural selectiveness, likes and dislikes. If you and I desire to go on to full growth, this is one of the things that has to be recognised and dealt with. It is a case of just setting aside our natural life in the interests of the spiritual. Such an opportunity is with us every day. Spirituality is determined by how far we are ready to be led.

## 3) Lack of moral sensibility

We pass on to chapter 5. It is a terrible chapter. Carnality is here shown to us in a defectiveness of moral sensibility. We are not going to stay with it, and yet we should not just ignore it. Spirituality must work out in real moral sensibility, sensitiveness, in such a way that there is a mighty reaction in us from those tendencies of nature that are downward in the moral sense. We are not talking about not being tempted. Everyone is tempted. The very fact that we carry with us a nature which is not wholly purged from the roots and fibres of sin and the fall, constitutes a ground upon which temptation comes to us. There is no

sin in temptation. At times there may be some weakening; we may be more open for various reasons to weakness than at other times, but the point is this, that spirituality represents in us a revolt and a reaction that in the presence of moral weakness turns round, reacts against that. That is the work of the Spirit of God in us, making us spiritual. At Corinth there was not only the one who defaulted (we are not going to judge that one), but what the apostle was troubled about was that the assembly had not sufficient moral sensitiveness to deal with that thing, and he had to write them a strong letter to pull them up sharply upon moral grounds, to cleanse the assembly. They did not do it until Paul practically made them do it. There was a low and inadequate moral sensitiveness about the assembly; there was not a sufficient measure of spirituality to react violently to that thing, and say: We are defiled, we must put this away; we must purge ourselves; we must stand before God without judgment in this matter. They did not do it; they tolerated it, they let it go.

We are not applying this in any assembly way just now, but are just saying that spirituality means a strong reaction to the encouragement of anything unclean. I do not know how necessary it might be to say a thing like that. There are various forms of low moral sense, but in a spiritual person, and in a spiritual assembly there will be something which reacts against that, in conversation, in talk, in looseness of any kind. Spirituality lifts onto a much higher level. That again, then, is carnality, and no individual life and no assembly of the Lord's people can grow to the fullness of Christ without that spiritual sensitiveness which feels bad in the presence of anything morally loose.

#### 4) A spirit of variance

We are not going to take up this next point at length, but we notice that Paul in chapter 6 comes to that kind of carnality which shows itself in wronging one another, and then trying to obtain one's rights by lawsuits. He commences by speaking of the lawsuits in verse 1, but he gets behind that as he goes on and says that they are robbing one another. Any kind of suit before the world, or in the church, ought to be rendered unnecessary by the getting rid of this wronging of one another. What a low level amongst the Lord's people is revealed when they rob one another.

There are more ways than one of robbing the Lord's people, but it is the principle that is in view, the failing to recognise the rights of the Lord's children. If it is wrong for a child of God to stand up for his rights, and to fight for them, it is equally wrong that the rights of the Lord's people should be ignored or set at naught. There is an honouring of one another, and that of which Paul speaks elsewhere, a looking of everyone, not upon his own things, but upon the things of others; that is, taking into account that others also have a right to be honoured, to be respected, to be given a place. It seems that the spirit here at Corinth was that of the individual seeking to have the advantage, even at the expense of another believer. It is the spirit of the thing that is the trouble behind it all. Spirituality would be just the opposite of this, that even if one were wronged one would not fight for one's rights, especially before the world. Spirituality would mean, in an assembly and amongst the Lord's people, and on the part of each individual, a mutual recognition and holding in honour because -- as Paul leads this whole thing out, as we shall see in a moment -- we are members one of another, members of the Body.

I like the wisdom of the Holy Spirit through His servant Paul, as this whole matter is headed up to chapter 12. Just imagine one member of the Body going to law against another member of the same Body! What sense would there be in one hand fighting the other hand, or in my fist assailing any other part of my body? That is perhaps a crude way of putting it, but Paul now applies the point in that way and says: You are all members of one Body, and you are all interdependent, you cannot do without another, and that

member that will go to law with another is but robbing himself. It is so foolish, so senseless, so weak! All such things are evidence of a poor level of spiritual life. Spirituality will show itself in recognising the value of every member, and, rather than in doing a member harm, in respecting and honouring that member, because of the necessity for that one. We need one another, and therefore it is the utmost childishness in a spiritual sense to be at variance with one another. Spiritual maturity will never condone that course. If we did but know it, our attitude towards another child of God comes back upon ourselves, and becomes our attitude towards ourselves. That is how God orders it, because the Holy Spirit is the Spirit who governs and balances the whole Body.

I think there is no realm in which the laws of God operate more immediately and directly than in the Body of Christ. "He that soweth unto his... flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth unto the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap everlasting life". "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap". Within the church of God those laws operate in a very immediate and direct way. Spirituality takes all that into account and says: I am not going to injure my own spiritual growth by doing harm to another member of Christ; I am not going to be robbed of God's end for me by failure to recognise that another also should be helped towards that end.

#### 5) Failure to discern the Body

In chapters 10 and 11 we come to the failure to discriminate (discern) the Lord's Body. It is all wrapped up in the long discussion of things offered to idols, and that point where one thing ends and another thing begins. The Lord's Table in the apostolic days was not like our Table of the Lord. We gather to the Lord's Table and there is something quite distinct, quite by itself; there is no mistaking what that represents. In apostolic times they took their meal together, and at a certain point in their meal time they stopped and worshipped, and for the purpose took of the same food as they had been eating and drinking; they turned their ordinary meal into a corporate worshipping of the Lord. The apostle here says, You may come in hungry to your meal, and sit down and eat heartily, and just overstep the line, and in so doing confuse the two things and make that which represents the Lord's Body and the Lord's Blood a part of your feasting to the gratification of your own appetite. We are not in the same position to fall quite into the same snare, but there is a principle bound up with it upon which the Lord through His apostle puts His finger.

Terrible things resulted from that in the Corinthian church: for this cause many were sick, and not a few died. There was this other element, as we have noted, that a good deal of what they were eating and drinking in the ordinary way had already been offered in the shambles, and had already been offered to heathen gods, and they were not discriminating. But the principle underlying is this, that this loaf, this cup speak of two things. Firstly, they speak of the covenant relationship with the Lord, in which everything in our lives is for the Lord, and in which the Lord is everything to us; we have gone out, and Christ has come in, and for us Christ is the centre and the sphere, the sole object of our lives. They also speak of this, that Christ's Body, the church, has taken its place in our interest as that upon which the love of Christ is set, even unto death. "Christ loved the church, and gave himself up for it." It is "the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood". Again, it is written, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it; that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing..." The attitude of the believers toward the church is to be the attitude of Christ toward the church. Spirituality is that which, on the one hand, gives Christ His place over all that is personal, and enables us to subordinate everything to His interests. There was a failure in this respect at Corinth, and a yielding to personal gratification, instead of glorying in the Lord. Spirituality is just the opposite of that, and

so spirituality is a mark of growth. We shall never come to full growth spiritually if we are just going to be governed by our natural appetites.

Then, on the other hand, spirituality is marked by love of all the Lord's people. At Corinth, again, there was failure to recognise Christ's love for His church. Their attitude one toward another was therefore anything but that of Christ for His own, and so they did not discern the one Body as represented at the Table. Paul says, "The loaf which we break, is it not our common participation in the body of Christ? Seeing that we, who are many, are one loaf, one body: for we all partake of the one loaf." The Lord's Table is the Body in representation. We must recognise that Christ's object of love and devotion is His church, and have the same love and devotion to His people and for His people as He had. Let us put that quite simply. A truly large spiritual life is marked by a great devotion to the Lord's people, to the Body of Christ, as over against an undue measure of individualism.

#### 6) The coveting of spiritual gifts for personal ends

The last feature of carnality which we will note is that which comes up in chapter 7 in connection with spiritual gifts. It is strange that this matter should come up into the realm of carnality and spiritual immaturity, and yet it does. I do not see how we can get away from the fact, if we honestly read this chapter, that the apostle was dealing with this very matter of spiritual gifts from the same standpoint as he was dealing with the other things at Corinth. What was the trouble? It is one which perhaps we think we need not fear. The first part of chapter 12 indicates where the trouble was. We cannot stay with verses 1-3, to consider them in detail, but there is a great deal there that it would be very much to our good to recognise. On the face of it there is this: these Corinthians before they came to the Lord were pagans to this degree that they were occupied with spiritism, and in spiritism (often termed "spiritualism") there is a definite system of counterfeit Holy Ghost activity. Spiritism as we know it today can produce speaking in tongues, and all the other things, such as powers, miracles, and so on. The whole system here is counterfeited in spiritism. I believe that spiritism is going to be the great ally of Antichrist, the counterfeit of Christ, and the Holy Spirit, and thereby many will be carried away. The paganism of these Corinthians is seen in their being carried away to those dumb idols, and in connection with idol worship there were spirit manifestations, and they came under a false Holy Spirit (if we may use that term). The Greek is striking there, and it is perfectly in keeping with the thought of coming under a spiritual power, so that you act and speak as under control. The apostle is here using it concerning people who are under the control of a power. If you are under the control of an evil spirit you will not say, "Jesus is Lord". The evil spirit will not say that.

The point is this, that there was not amongst these people at Corinth a clear discrimination between spiritism and the Holy Spirit. Here you have come to the heart of the trouble. They had been in the false thing, and had now come into the true thing, and were not discriminating. Why were they not discriminating? Because they were so taken up with experiences, manifestations, demonstrations, sensations, that which is apparent evidence of something. That is the danger. The danger is of wanting an experience, wanting a proof, wanting to have a sensation. That is carnality, and you will mix the Holy Spirit up with spiritism if you are not careful along that line, and multitudes are doing it. The devil is getting his advantage along that line in many people. They think it is the Holy Spirit when it is a false thing, simply because they want something. That is why the apostle goes so steadily at this matter. He says in effect: "Be careful; do not put things in their wrong place; do not give importance to things which are not so important as you think they are. Speaking in tongues is not so important as you are making it out to be. It is one of the least of the gifts."

Do you see the point? You have to recognise the meaning of these first three verses in chapter 12. It was failure to discriminate between the true Holy Ghost and the false.

Then as to the rest of the chapter, we see from verse 12 to verse 27 that they were not recognising the relatedness of gifts. That is the safeguard, to recognise that. There are the gifts of the Holy Spirit, real, genuine, and true; we are not going to put them aside because of false gifts. At the same time we have to watch the balance, we have to have spiritual understanding, spiritual wisdom in this matter. The Corinthians were taking the things as personal, in a detached and individual way, and making something of them because it was a wonderful and marvellous experience: and with them it all ended there. Why did Paul write the whole of that section on the Body of Christ, and why did he come into it so livingly? "There are diversities of gifts, BUT (now comes the check -- everyone is glorying in that phase of the diversity that has come to them) the same Spirit..." "There are diversities of ministrations, but the same Lord". "There are diversities of workings, but the same God who worketh all things in all". You need to weigh every fragment -- it is "the same God who worketh all things" in all the members, in all the Body -- "To each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit to PROFIT WITHAL". Then when you have enumerated the gifts you come to this statement: "For as the body is one... so also is the Christ." The article is used there. You have got to the heart of things. Spiritual gifts? Yes! What for? For me to glory in, to be gratified by, to talk about MY experience? Ah, this is the test. Is the whole Body profiting? Is the one Lord being glorified? Is this whole matter related and working out to mutual increase? This is a corporate matter, not an individual matter at all. If you detach it and take it out of its relatedness, you divide its end, which end is the building up of the whole Body and the mutual increase. What is the result at Corinth? They have made this whole thing an individual, personal matter, unrelated, in which they themselves glory. They came perilously near to a most awful sin in failing to discriminate between spiritism and the Holy Ghost, all by reason of their desire, their love for something that brought a sense of satisfaction to themselves, pleasure to themselves, gratification to themselves. That is carnality. That is immaturity.

All that may be in a measure instructive or enlightening, but you see how strongly this letter comes down upon the need for real spirituality, and what spirituality is. Spirituality does not hold anything of the Lord's for itself, and never makes anything from the Lord the ground of its own pleasure and gratification, and personal, individual, unrelated glorying. Spirituality holds everything in relation to all saints, unto the increase of Christ. It sees no value in anything apart from that. So the apostle goes on with his corrective.

Two things stand out when you have taken the whole of this letter.

#### The Natural Man Wholly Put Away in the Cross

First of all right at the beginning the cross sets aside the natural man absolutely. "I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ, and him crucified". Paul acted upon the principle of the cross when he said, "I was with you in weakness and much... trembling..." There was nothing in Paul naturally, had he desired to come on to that ground, that would have enabled him to be amongst them in anything other than of weakness and fear and much trembling. But he was acting on the principle of the cross. He says it was deliberately done in order that their faith might not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. What they needed to know was the difference between natural power, wisdom, and all that is of nature, and the true power of God in the Holy Ghost. The cross sets aside the whole life of nature, and opens the way for spirituality and full growth.

#### The Essence of Spirituality is Love

Secondly, when all has been said, the essence of spirituality is love (chapter 13). "Though I speak with the tongues of men (terrestrial voices) and of angels (tongues not known amongst men, heavenly language), and have not love" -- I am a most spiritual person? Not at all! -- I have made a great deal of progress in spiritual life? Not at all! I am what? "I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal." So much, then, for an entire want of spirituality, even though you may have tongues. Paul writes the word "nothing" over a great many things that we naturally would think were very important: faith to remove mountains, the giving of the body to be burned, and so on -- he writes "nothing" over every one of them. Not that they are of no account in themselves; these things are of account in their place, and in their connection, but if they are without love they are "nothing". The essence of spirituality is not the gifts, it is the grace. We are not going to choose between gifts and graces, between gifts and love. That is not the point of all. The apostle does not intend us to take this attitude: Oh well, give me love; I do not want gifts. I let go of all the gifts if you will only give me the love. Paul is trying to make it clear that these things in themselves can be held carnally. Really to reach the end for which God gives them they must be held spiritually, and the essence of spirituality is love. It covers everything.

We go back to the beginning now, and start again: Wisdom, strength, divisions, schisms, lusts, all of them go out when love comes in. So he closes thus: "The grace of the Lord Jesus and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." That is what you Corinthians need. Undoubtedly the apostle summed it all up in what we call the "Benediction".

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