

1 Corinthians 12:1-13 AM

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[0 : 0 0] If you are new to St. John's, my name is Aaron Roberts, I'm one of the ministers on staff. I know in the service sheets there it says David Short, Canon David Short is preaching this morning.

He's a bit unwell, he texted me yesterday so I'm jumping in for him. Don't feel sorry for him, he's fine, he'll be alright. So, it's not the flu or something. So we're down a canon, we've gained a bishop, I think that's a pretty good trade.

So I reckon we'll be okay this morning. Right, you've heard the reading, we're in 1 Corinthians 12. So, over the next 20 minutes we're going to get a grip on everything the Bible has to say about spiritual gifts.

It's going to be an historic occasion. We're going to learn a small amount about the spiritual gifts this morning. We know that this is a new section in this chapter.

because Paul says, now concerning spiritual gifts. Technically, actually, the word gifts is not there. It's sort of, it's more like now concerning what it means to be spiritual.

[1 : 1 0] So this now concerning is a phrase he's used before to introduce new sections. So we're into a section that's going to last a couple of chapters about what it means to be spiritual. Specifically talking about the gifts.

Now, why does Paul want to talk about these things? So let's get into some context. So the church in Corinth had a problem.

They had a problem when it came to the spiritual gifts. Paul loved this church, but they were very self-focused. And that played out in the way they thought about the spiritual gifts.

Of all of the gifts, they really liked just a couple of them. The more spectacular ones. The more dramatic ones, like speaking in tongues, for example.

Which Paul will come back to in a chapter or two to talk specifically about. And there are a couple of reasons for that. Firstly, their immaturity in the faith, their self-absorption, meant that when it came to exercising the gifts of the Holy Spirit, they wanted to do the stuff that put the spotlight on themselves.

[2 : 1 9] So the gifts became these look-at-me opportunities. The second reason they liked some gifts over others is that they believed the overtly supernatural, more dramatic gifts were extra spiritual.

So if you wanted to come across as being like a really spiritual person, you kind of really wanted these sort of showy sorts of spiritual gifts.

And this, of course, created a bit of a class system in the church there. So the Corinthian church had really gotten onto the speaking in tongues thing and then made it a bit of a status symbol.

If you spoke in tongues, you were extra spiritual. The church I actually grew up in back in the old country was a bit like this, actually. If you didn't speak in tongues, you were underachieving.

Now, of course, we hear this and we're like, oh, Corinth. This is, what an outrageous attitude. That's unbelievable.

[3 : 22] How could they be like that? We would never be like that. But let's just for a moment, just for a moment, let's ask ourselves the question, this is a thought experiment.

What would be the Christian status markers for a place like St. John's? What would those be?

I thought about it this week. And I think on our most unhealthy days, what would we value as a gift above all others?

The one gift to rule them all, so to speak. What gift would we elevate that would make others think, wow, we're pretty amazing?

And I think it's probably something like Bible teaching, isn't it? That's a big amen. Amen from over there. Right. So if somebody was like a home group leader, for example, or there are some folks that have this uncanny ability to unpack the Word of God, I suspect that we would think they're more spiritual than us.

[4 : 38] Just so we're clear, that's a terrible attitude. I'm glad a person has a gift to unpack the Bible, but that's a terrible attitude, to think they're more spiritual than somebody else.

Let's not be that kind of family. Okay. That was all context stuff. And you'll hear more about that over the next few chapters. A bit of background information. But just in summary, here it is.

One more time. For background. The Corinthian church had singled out a couple of the spiritual gifts. They'd used it to create a bit of a hierarchy in their church, within their group, the spiritual elites and the others.

Paul loves this church. He loves this church. So he writes them this letter and he gives them a couple of chapters because he wants to specifically address this issue. Does that all make sense?

Great. Let's get right into some details now. So we've got 12, 13 verses here. Rather than zooming in specifically on the speaking in tongues issue, what Paul does is he lays some groundwork for a proper understanding of what it means to be spiritual.

[5 : 45] So these 12 verses are kind of groundwork stuff. And I think it's brilliant. So what does he have to say? Really big picture. I think he says two things. He says, one, let's be about Jesus when it comes to the gifts.

Let's be about Jesus. And two, let's be about each other. Let's be about Jesus and let's be about each other. Let's start with let's be about Jesus. And what we'll do is I'm just going to walk you through the first three verses here, okay?

So verse one. Now about spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters. Family, he says, I do not want you to be uninformed. In other versions of the Bible, it says, I do not want you to be ignorant, which is the thing I say to people when they come to visit me in my office, actually.

Please come in. Please come in, ignorant person. So what he's saying is this. He's saying, I don't want you to live your life just on your feelings and your experiences.

That's what you had when you were a pagan. And then he sort of unpacks that a little bit more with verse two. Verse two says, and you know that when you were pagan, somehow or other, you were influenced and led astray by mute idols.

[7 : 00] So people would go to these pagan temples and they'd have these quite exciting experiences, sometimes ecstatic experiences, fun times. And Paul says, remember those idols that you're worshipping and having fun times.

They were non-things. Remember that, right? They were mute. There was no intelligence behind those statues, behind those things. You were following a nothing. No doubt you had a good time there.

But don't import that way of being spiritual into your Christian journey now. Verse three.

What is Paul getting at here? Therefore, I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, Jesus is cursed. And no one can say, Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit.

So it's kind of, the phrasing's a bit odd, I know. But basically he's saying, the only way you can say, Jesus is Lord and mean it, is if the Holy Spirit is in you. You need a supernatural revelation from God to be able to honestly say, yep, Jesus is Lord.

[7 : 59] Okay, so those are the first few verses. If you mush all those together, what is Paul trying to get at in these introductory verses? He is saying this.

The way you folks used to do your religion, that's not how we do it now. That's a world away from Christianity. You want amazing experiences now because that's kind of what you had in the old pagan days.

In the old pagan days, you had this idea of what it looked like to be spiritual. And how does it play out for this church in Corinth? Well, we'll find out later. But basically, the Corinthians were trying to establish the idea that it was all about exciting, supernatural, crazy stuff.

And Paul is saying, no, the test of whether you have the infilling of the Holy Spirit, it's not whether you speak in tongues or not because that's the idea they had.

The test is if you believe that Jesus is Lord. Let me put it this way. What is the main job of the Holy Spirit? It is to make Jesus known.

[9 : 05] It's to glorify Jesus. And it's really important this church in Corinth understood that. Because they were using the Holy Spirit to make themselves known. And their culture, you'd understand their culture.

It was all about fame. It was all about getting well known. It was all about self. And they sort of imported that into the church. So when they got the whole speaking in tongues thing, they're like, look at me. I can do crazy stuff.

This is amazing. I'm awesome. The focus was on me, not on Jesus. And Paul needed to correct that error. Okay, I'm just going to pause that train of thought for a moment because I'm conscious that in talking about the gifts of the Holy Spirit, some of you may not know what I'm talking about.

So we're going to skip the middle section. And we're going to jump to verses 8 to 10, which specifically talk about these gifts. And let me read them for you just to remind you again.

To one who is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom. To another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit. To another faith by the same Spirit. To the other gifts of healing by the one Spirit.

[10 : 09] To another miraculous powers. To another prophecy. To another distinguishing between spirits. To another speaking in different types of tongues. And still another the interpretation of tongues. Okay.

Now I'm going to make a couple of very interesting points. Here we go. First. The gifts of the Holy Spirit. What are they?

They are enablings that the Holy Spirit give you. They are enablings that the Holy Spirit gives you. One way to think about them is this. They are like characteristics of Jesus that the church is supposed to manifest.

So we can live out Jesus' life and ministry now. So that's my first point. They are characteristics of Jesus that the church empowered by the Holy Spirit is supposed to manifest.

Second point. The list in 1 Corinthians 12 mentions nine gifts. This is not a complete list. These are just examples. There's a different list in Ephesians 4.

[11 : 07] There's another whole list in Romans 12. And in Romans 12 there's some crossover. It talks about prophecy in the Romans 12 one. But it also includes things like being encouraging. And giving. And serving.

Which literally is just like being helpful. Another gift in that list is showing mercy. So the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It's not just these nine things. The Holy Spirit enables us in many, many, many ways to help each other.

To serve each other. Third. Third. Third thing I want to say about that list there. That particular list in 1 Corinthians 12. Notice where Paul puts the gift of speaking in tongues.

He puts it dead last. So the gift that the Corinthian church had elevated to be the most important. He puts last. And that's no mistake. Do you see what Paul is trying to communicate here?

The Spirit gives us gifts. There's no ladder to climb to like. It's not like a video game where you unlock better gifts as you go along.

[12 : 12] You know. If you have the gift of healing or administration. That's no less a sign of the Spirit's work than what I'm doing right now. Like as I'm preaching there are people in that back room there sitting out chairs.

That's the work of the Spirit in their heart. The gifts of the Spirit do not need to be spectacular to be considered legit.

That's really, really important. And this is where the Corinthian church had it so wrong. Okay. Let's keep moving here. I said at the start of the sermon I had two points. First one is let's be about Jesus, not ourselves.

Let's not make these things about ourselves. Second point. Let's be about each other. And we'll look at that point quickly now. Okay. Verses four to seven.

So we're in the middle chunk. We've done the start. We've done the end. Let's look at the middle here. There are different kinds of gifts but the same Spirit. Different kinds of service. The same Lord. Different kinds of working but the same God works.

[13 : 10] All of them and all people. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. So what's Paul's big idea here? Well he's got a number of things.

But one of them is this. The source of the gifts are God. And Paul is very Trinitarian. I'm sure you saw that. The source is the Godhead. So we can't take credit for the Spirit's giftedness in us.

These gifts are not self-generated. They come from the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit. Two, there's massive diversity in how the Spirit works in us. It talks about gifts and service and workings.

And here again Paul is trying to undermine the Corinthian emphasis on just a few of the gifts. Three, the other idea. Look at who receives the gifts. Verse seven.

To each one. Each one. Everybody receives gifts. We are all recipients of the manifestations of the Spirit.

[14 : 14] Manifestations means like the, it's like the invisible Spirit of God is made concrete in something that you do in a time and a place through us.

Now for centuries it was assumed that only a minority of Christians had the gifts, which is clergy, of course. It was called clericalism. Priests did everything.

Folks did, other folks just did nothing. Fortunately, we're out of that era now. That era is nonsense. This clearly says we all have something to offer and contribute to the family of God.

So we can't say, oh I've got nothing to offer, I've got nothing. We all have something to offer. Verse six, God works all of them in all people. God gifts all of us.

Folks, very practically, when an opportunity comes up to serve, throw your hat in the ring. You might discover you have a gift. Kids ministry production team.

[15:10] Reading the Bible up front. Hospitality. Chat to Marion. She's got tons of jobs for people. Don't get too caught up in thinking like, oh, what am I good at? Because that could be a different thing.

Honestly, best just to, when the opportunities come, throw your hat in the ring. You might discover you have a spiritual gift. That God is going to give you a special propensity for something. Now look at verse seven again.

So, what have we learned? The Godhead gives a huge variety of gifts to everyone. But what's the goal? And this is my main point. What's the goal here? Verse seven. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

The source is the Godhead. The goal is the common good. The Corinthian church used the gifts for grandstanding. And Paul says, the purpose of the gifts was to make Jesus known and to be helpful to others in the church.

The common good. And why is that important? Because we need each other. You know that, right? We really, really need each other.

[16:15] I am incompetent when it comes to many, many things we do around here in this place. Like during the vestry, you know when they hand out the financial reports?

I don't know. I don't understand what's happening. Like I go to the page. You go to page 12 now. I go to page 12. Like I run my finger down the paper.

Like I'll pick up the thing and I'll just run my finger down the sheet. And I'll stop every now and then and look furtive. You know. Securities are doing very well this year.

I don't know what a security is. I honestly have got no idea. I'll lean over to the person. It's wonderful about the securities, isn't it? Just wonderful.

Who would have thought? I don't know what's happening. But do you know what? Lots of you know. This is how the body of Christ works.

[17:17] Isn't God wonderful? Isn't God amazing? He brings us together, equipping us in lots of different ways to serve each other. You could say it like this. This is a bit cheesy. You may have heard this before.

The family of God, we are not a cruise ship. We're 10% of the people do all the work. We're a battleship. Everybody has a job. And there's plenty to do. Come and talk to us. So I'm going to finish up here super quick.

The church in Corinth had some really wacky ideas around what it meant to be spiritual. What's a really spiritual person look like? And one of the issues was they had an unhealthy focus on just a couple of the gifts.

Very showy gifts. And Paul lays the groundwork here to correct them. He says the Holy Spirit gives gifts to all of us. This is not a complete list here.

The source of the gifts is God. So you can't take credit for this stuff. And they're not given to promote your individual status in the church. Tonight we have soup.

[18:24] We have a soup meal after the service this evening. Whilst I'm preaching, there's going to be some wonderful folk downstairs setting up the soup. That is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit in them.

That they would be humble enough to miss most of the service to do that. What I'm doing right now, this is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit as well. Spiritual gifts aren't valued at how spectacular they are.

How upfront they are. They're valuable because they honor Christ. They make Christ known. And because they support one another. Amen.