

1 Corinthians 12:1-13 PM

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[0 : 00] Well, you heard that reading. Thank you, Harlan. You heard that reading. In the next 20 minutes, we're going to get a grip on everything the Bible has to say about spiritual gifts.

Amazing. It's going to be a historic occasion. No, no. We're going to get a grip on a small thing, a small part of what the Bible has to say about spiritual gifts. So, you know how 1 Corinthians is broken up into sections if you've been working through it with us.

This is a new section, and we know that because Paul says, now concerning spiritual gifts, which is like Paul's way of saying, let's talk about something new. And technically, as an aside, the word gifts is not actually in the original Greek. What it actually says is now concerning being spiritual. That'll make more sense shortly. Before we crack on into some details, let's get into some context. So, some context. What's going on here? The church in Corinth had this problem, theological problem, when it came to the spiritual gifts. And Paul loved this church, but they were very self-focused. And the way that played out is, of all of the gifts, they really liked just a couple of them. They really liked the spectacular ones, the sort of the dramatic ones, speaking in tongues in particular, they really liked. And they liked them for a couple of reasons.

First, their immaturity, their self-absorption meant that when it came to the gifts of the Spirit, they wanted to do the stuff to put the spotlight on them. So, their gifts were kind of like these look-at-me opportunities. And the second reason they liked some gifts over others is that they believed the sort of overtly supernatural, dramatic gifts show that you were extra spiritual.

So, if you wanted to come across as a really spiritual person, you really wanted the very showy sorts of spiritual gifts. And of course, this created a bit of a class system in the church.

[2 : 05] So, the Corinthian church had really got a hold of the speaking in tongues thing and had made it a status symbol. And actually, the church I grew up in was, for all the wonderful things about this church, it was a bit like this, actually. If you didn't speak in tongues, you were definitely underachieving. Now, of course, we hear this, this is all context, we hear this and we're like, oh, Corinth. Oh, Corinth. Oh, what a bunch of like, oh, it's an outrageous attitude to have, right?

That's what we're thinking. We would never think like that, would we? Ever. We would never be like this. But, just for a moment, just for a moment, let's ask ourselves, this is just the thought, this is a thought experiment, Willie. This is a thought experiment.

What would be the Christian status markers for a place like St. John's? What do we think? I'll tell you, I'll tell you what I think. I've been thinking about this this week.

I think on our unhealthy days, what would we value as a gift above all the others that would sort of elevate you to sort of, you know, super Christian status? And I think it's probably Bible teaching. I think that would be one. Like, if you're a home group leader, or if God has given you this sort of uncanny ability to open up the scriptures, you know, some people are like that. They read it and they go, oh, there's three points here, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, you know. And around St. John's circles, well, that's, you know, we'd probably look at you and go, oh, you're so spiritual. Maybe we think that.

And I just want to be really clear. That's a terrible way to think. Let's not be that kind of family. Okay. So that was context stuff. A bit of background information to this letter. We're going to learn more about these details, especially the speaking in tongues thing over the next few chapters. But summary of the background, the Corinthian church had singled out a couple of the spiritual gifts, had used it to create a bit of a hierarchy in their group. There was the spiritual elites, and then there's the others. And Paul loves this church.

[4 : 21] So he writes this section of this letter to kind of sort that whole part out. All right, our passage. We've got 13 verses. And what Paul does is rather than just jumping straight on the speaking in tongues thing, he does that later. What he does is he lays out some groundwork for a proper understanding of the spiritual gifts. So that's what these 13 verses are. It's a new section. This is a bit of an introduction, and it's wonderful stuff. So what does he say? I think there's two big points. You could carve this up multiple ways, but here's a couple of big points. I think one big point is this.

He says, let's be about Jesus. Second big point, let's be about each other. Let's be about Jesus. Let's be about each other. Okay, we'll start with let's be about Jesus. And what I'm going to do is I'm going to just walk through the first couple of verses here, and then I'll kind of summarize them.

Okay, so first couple of verses. Verse one, now about spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, family, he says, I do not want you to be uninformed. So what's he saying here?

He's saying, I don't want you to live your Christian life based just on your feelings and your experiences. He says, that's what you had when you were a pagan. That'll make sense in a moment.

Verse two, verse two, and you know that when you're a pagan, somehow or other, you were influenced and led astray by mute idols. So background is that people would go to these pagan temples and they'd have these quite exciting experiences. Like they weren't boring, like they would have been quite exciting.

[5 : 59] Sometimes people would have had these kind of ecstatic experience, fun times. And Paul says, remember those times and all the fun times you're having, but the thing you were worshiping was mute.

It had no intelligence. It was a non-thing. You were following a nothing. No doubt you had fun times, but don't import that way of being spiritual into your Christian journey now. Now look at verse three.

What's 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. Right? So the phrasing is a bit sort of odd here, but basically it says the only way you can say Jesus is Lord and mean it is if the Holy Spirit is in you. You need a super, so you need a supernatural revelation from God to be able to say that with conviction. Okay. So those are the first three verses. If we mushel that together, all those ideas together, what's Paul getting at? He's getting at this. He's saying the way you used to do your religion when you're a pagan, that's not how it works now. That's a world away from the Christian faith. You want to have these amazing experiences because that's what you were going for when you're a pagan in these temples and you think that's what it looks like to be spiritual.

And so how did it play out? How did it play out for the Corinthians? Well, we'll find out later that the Corinthians were trying to establish the idea that the test, the test for knowing that you were filled with the Holy Spirit was speaking in tongues. Having this kind of really crazy sort of experience of speaking in tongues. And Paul says, no, the test that you have the Holy Spirit in you is that you believe Jesus is Lord. So let me put it this way. If we ask the whole Bible, what is the main job of the Holy Spirit? It's to make Jesus known. It's to glorify Jesus.

And it's really important the Corinthian church heard this because they were using the gifts of the Holy Spirit to make themselves known. It's like, look at me. The culture that they existed in was all about fame and self and all of that. And they sort of imported that into the church.

[8 : 10] So when it came to these gifts, it's like, look at me. I can do crazy stuff. I'm awesome. The focus is on me, not Jesus. And Jesus wants to correct that attitude in them. All right. Hold, hold, hold, hold, hold. Pause on this train of thought for a moment because I'm conscious that we're talking about the gifts of the Holy Spirit. And some of you may not know what we're talking about. So I started with the first three verses. I'm going to jump down to sort of like basically the bottom half now and tackle those before coming to the middle, because that's the bottom half when it actually kind of talks about the gifts. So the end verses, verses eight to 10, to one is given the Spirit, the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge, to another by faith, to other gifts of healing, to another miraculous powers, another prophecy, another distinguishing spirits, another speaking in tongues, and still another interpretation of tongues. Okay. I've read it. And now I'm going to make some very interesting points about it. Are you ready? These are really great. This is good stuff. This is good stuff. You ready? First point, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, what are they? They are enablings that the Holy Spirit gives you.

They are enablings the Holy Spirit gives you. So one way to think about it is this. It's the characteristics of Jesus that the church is supposed to manifest so we can live them out now. That's the first point. Second point, this list in 1 Corinthians 12, it sounds brilliant, doesn't it? It mentions nine gifts. This is not a complete list. This is just like he's just thrown out some examples. He's just thrown them out. Here's a few examples. Here's a few examples.

There's a different list in Ephesians 4. Romans 12 has a whole other list. And if you go to that list, there's some crossover. It talks about prophecies. There's some crossover. But it also talks about being encouraging. It talks about showing mercy. It says one of the gifts is giving. One of the gifts is serving, which literally just means practically helping. Just being practically helpful around the church. So the gifts of the Spirit are not these nine things. The Holy Spirit enables us in many, many, many, many, many, many ways. Third, third important point to make about that list, about this particular list in 1 Corinthians 12. Notice where Paul puts the gift of speaking in tongues.

He puts it dead last. The gift that they liked the most, which we'll discover later, he puts it dead last on this list. There's no mistake there. See, do you see what he's trying to communicate? The Spirit gives us gifts. This is no ladder to climb. There's no ladder to climb to get. It's not like a video game. It's like a video game. It's like playing Zelda or Fallout or whatever you're playing. You know, like it's kind of like where you unlock greater gifts.

If you have the gift of helping, you have the gift of administration, speaking in tongues, these are no less signs of the Spirit's work than what I'm doing right now. So as I'm preaching, so here's a great example. As I am preaching right now, there are people downstairs setting up for Soup Sunday. That's the Spirit's work in their heart.

[11 : 42] That's the Spirit working through them, manifesting itself in their life. An outsider could come in here and they could say, well, Aaron, you're doing the real stuff. And they're just kind of like, I don't know what they're doing. No, we don't make distinctions like that. They're both manifestations of the Spirit working in people's heart. This is really important. The gifts of the Spirit do not need to be spectacular to be considered legit. It's very, very important. Corinthian church had this very wrong. Okay, let's keep going. That was the first point. The second one's a lot shorter.

I said I'd have two points. Let's be about Jesus, not ourselves. Let's not make it about you. Let's be about others. So that's the second point. Let's be about others. Okay, verses four to seven. That should come up, pop up behind me there. There are different kinds of gifts, the same Spirit, different kinds of service, the same Lord, different kinds of working, the same God, who works them all in all people. Now to each one, the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. What's Paul's big idea here? One, very obviously, the source of the gifts is God.

And Paul, do you notice how Trinitarian is here? You know, how Trinitarian he is. It's the Godhead. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit gives these gifts, which means we can't take credit.

We can't take credit for these things. They're not self-generated. They come from God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Two, the massive diversity in how the Spirit works in us. There are gifts, there are service, there is workings. Paul is trying to undermine the Corinthian emphasis on just a few gifts there. Third, look at who receives the gift in verse seven. Who? All of us.

Now to each one, we are all recipients of the manifestations of the Spirit. Manifestations. It means the invisible Spirit of God made concrete in a time and a place through us.

[13 : 40] Now for centuries, it was assumed that the minority of Christians had spiritual gifts. The clergy. The clergy had the gifts. That's what everyone thought. That was called clericalism.

Now we are, that's not what we believe now. We're through that period, thank goodness. This clearly says, we all have something to offer. We all have something to contribute to the family of God. So we can't say, well, I've got nothing to offer. I've got nothing to offer.

We all have something to offer. Verse six, God works all of them in all people. God gifts all of us. Just practically what this means for you. Honestly, folks, just throw your hat in the ring.

Just throw your hat in the ring. Opportunities are going to come up. Throw your hat in the ring. You might discover God has gifted you in something. Kids ministry, hospitality, production team, reading up the front. Just a little bit of advice. Don't get too caught up in like, what am I good at?

I want it to be a perfect fit. I mean, that's fine to think about that. But honestly, like mostly just best to think about what the opportunities are. You might discover you have a gift of something. And if we look at verse seven again, what have we learned? What have we learned?

[14 : 54] The Godhead gives a huge variety of gifts to everyone. But why? And I think this is the big point here. Why? To each is given the manifestations of the Spirit for the common good. For the common good.

The Corinthian church used the gifts for grandstanding, for being showy, for bringing attention on themselves. And Paul says the purpose of the gifts was to make Jesus known and to help others.

The gifts were for the common good. Not status markers. Not to improve your reputation. Not to climb some spiritual ladder. They were for the common good. Because we need each other, don't we?

To say it as simply as possible. We need each other. I am incompetent when it comes to many, many things that happened around here.

During the vestry, for example. If you go to the vestry, they hand out the financial reports. I don't understand these things.

[16 : 06] I don't understand what's going on. But I feel like, because, you know, I've got a collar, I should, I should, so I just fake it. I come to these meetings, and I open up the page, and I literally just run my finger down the page when the guy is talking.

And I'll stop at a number every now and then, and I'll sort of like, do kind of like a furtive list. Oh, it's very good. I see the securities have performed very well this year.

The securities. I literally don't know what a security is. But I'm sitting there, I'm sitting next to Willie. There's wonderful news about the securities, isn't there? No, literally, I have no idea what those things are.

But I'm really grateful that other people do. Other people know this stuff. This is how the body of Christ works.

Isn't God clever? Isn't God wonderful? Isn't God good to us? Gathers a group of people. Equips us all in different ways. Some of them up front. Some of them behind the scenes.

[17 : 12] This is how God does it. You could say it like this, and this is cheesy, and maybe you've heard this before. The family of God is not a cruise ship. But you have 10% of the people doing all the work.

We're a battleship. Everyone has a job. There's plenty to do. Come and talk to us. Let me finish up here super quick. The church in Corinth had some really pretty wacky ideas around what it meant to be spiritual.

What it looked like to be a spiritual person. And the way that presented is that it had this unhealthy focus on one or two particular spiritual gifts. And so Paul here, he's laying out the groundwork for correcting that.

And he says, the Holy Spirit gives gifts to everyone. The source of the gifts, it's God. So you can't take credit for it. You're not given to promote your status.

Like I said, the folks downstairs sitting up for Soup Sunday, that is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. What I'm doing right now is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. These gifts, we don't value these gifts based on how spectacular they are, how public they are.

[18 : 17] We value them because they honor Christ and because they support other Christians in the community. Amen. Amen. Amen.