

1st Corinthians Chapters 12-13

Charles Dailey © 2023 NLT CPS
Updated 6/3/2023 Printed 6/16/2023

Introduction:

- The infant churches that developed from the preaching of Christ beginning in Acts 2 had only the *spoken word*. The *written Scriptures* were being formed out of the unfolding events of Christian living. To bridge the gap to the final Bible as we know it, God used men and women with gifts directly from the Holy Spirit.
- This had been promised by the Prophet Joel and was repeated by Peter as he presented the message of Jesus in Acts 2:

'In the last days,' God says, 'I will pour out My Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. (18) In those days I will pour out My Spirit even on My servants -- men and women alike -- and they will prophesy. Acts 2:17-18 NLT

This promise is wider in scope than just the Twelve.

- Paul now turns his attention to abuses of spiritual gifts that he had been asked about by members in the Corinthian church. Some were *using their gifts to show off* instead of *to magnify God*. This led to pride on the one hand and feelings of envy and inferiority on the other hand.
- We are not told *how* the Corinthians church acquired these abilities. Paul had established the church (Acts 18:1-18) and, as an apostle, had the power to convey the gifts of the Spirit to others (Acts 8:18).

SPECIAL ABILITIES THE SPIRIT GIVES

(12:1) Now, dear brothers and sisters, regarding your question about the special abilities the Spirit gives us. I don't want you to misunderstand this.

- They experienced the **special** gifts, but the gifts were being abused. Paul continues by showing the background of these **abilities**.

(2) You know that when you were still pagans, you were led astray and swept along in worshipping speechless idols. (3) So I want you to know that no one speaking by the Spirit of God will curse Jesus, and no one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit.

- Back when they were still pagans, they were caught up worshipping an **idol** that could not **speak**. Now that they have made **Jesus** their **Lord**, they themselves can **speak** as a special ability from **God**. It is because of **the Holy Spirit** they can announce that **Jesus is Lord**. If someone could speak on behalf of an idol, they could easily **curse Jesus**.
- The primary purpose of the special abilities is for evidence of who **Jesus** is. They were not toys for amusement and entertainment.

THERE ARE DIFFERENT KINDS OF GIFTS

(4) There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all.

- The **spiritual gifts** all originate from the Holy **Spirit**. So there is one mind behind the differing **gifts**. Some in the Corinthian church wanted a different **gift** than the one they had. The **gift** of speaking in foreign languages may have been the most ostentatious **gift**.

(5) There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord.

- There are **differences** in ministries, but the **same Lord** is served.

(6) God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us. (7) A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other.

- The **gifts** were given to believers so believers **can help each other**, not to show off or make others feel inferior.

(8) To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge.

1. **Wise Advice.** Today an adviser might turn to Matthew or Romans or James for a sentence that would prove useful to the conversation, but none of these Bible books existed yet, so the adviser needed direct guidance by the Holy **Spirit**.

2. **Special knowledge.** The adviser may need information beyond what they naturally know. The **Spirit** enables them to discover and learn.

(9) The same Spirit gives great faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing.

3. **Faith.** **Faith** describes several situations. Here it is not describing the **faith** that saves us, but the **faith** to perform miracles (notice 13:2). Judas had the **faith** that enabled him to perform miracles (Matthew 10:8), but he lacked the **faith** that would have saved his soul
4. **Healing.** Some believers could **heal** the sick. We can't tell if a person with this gift could heal a full spectrum of ills, of just certain ones.

(10) He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said.

5. **The power to perform miracles.** Beyond healing of the body, there are numerous other miracles needed among believers such as power over nature and things.
6. **Ability to prophesy.** Since there weren't any written words of the New Testament yet, where is the teacher to get his message without having the gift of **prophecy**?
7. **Ability to discern messages.** In the infant church, there was no objective test to approve of true messages from **God**. We have the Bible now, but they didn't have that luxury yet.
8. **Ability to speak in unknown languages.** These were not "unknown" or "spiritual" languages, but simply a language the speaker had not learned. It was an evidence to *the unbeliever* that God was among His people:

So you see that speaking in tongues is a sign, not for believers, but for unbelievers. Prophecy, however, is for the benefit of believers, not unbelievers.

1 Corinthians 14:22 NLT

9. **Ability to interpret** what #8 is saying. **Paul Butler** says:

The main purpose of the phenomena of speaking in a language unknown to the speaker was the manifestation of a miracle (see I Cor. 14:22). At the same time, however, getting the message of the “unknown” tongue to the audience was so important, Paul’s instruction to the Corinthian church was, “if there is no one to interpret, let each of them (tongues speakers) keep silent in the church.”

(11) It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have.

- One difficulty in understanding this portion of Scripture is that the gifts were temporary and local.

THE BODY OF BELIEVERS IS DIVERSE

(12) The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ.

- Our **human bodies** model what is happening in the **body of Christ**.

(13) Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit.

- The members of the **body** came from diverse backgrounds. A few were **Jews**. Probably the majority were **Gentiles**. **Some** were **slaves** and **some** were **free** citizens. The one event they shared in common was their **baptism** and the measure of the **Spirit** that every immersed believer receives.

(14) Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part. (15) If the foot says, "I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand," that does not make it any less a part of the body.

- It would be foolish for the largely unnoticed **foot** to claim that it was not part of the **body** because it was not dexterous like a **hand**.

(16) And if the ear says, "I am not part of the body because I am not an eye," would that make it any less a part of the body?

- The **eye** is a marvelous camera and much more sophisticated than an **ear**, but both are part of the **body**.

(17) If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything?

- The **eye** camera depends on the **ear** and both depend on the services of the **nose**.

(18) But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where He wants it.

- **God** constructs **our bodies** and **God** constructs the church **body**.

(19) How strange a body would be if it had only one part!

(20) Yes, there are many parts, but only one body.

- For a piece of meat to be called a **body**, there must be a complete choir of **body** parts. A creature with 14 feet and nothing else is ineffective.

(21) The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you."

- **The eye** cannot spurn the **hand** and the **head** cannot spurn the **feet**.

(22) In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary.

- Our kidneys and heart are absolutely essential while we can get by without an arm.

(23) And the parts we regard as less honorable are those we clothe with the greatest care. So we carefully protect those parts that should not be seen, (24) while the more honorable parts do not require this special care. So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity.

- Some of our body part are **less honorable** so we **clothe** them. Our sexual apparatus is an example here.

(25) This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. (26) If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad. (27) All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it.

- Paul stresses the simultaneous unity and diversity of our physical body and compares that to the **body of Christ**.

THE BODY OF BELIEVERS IS HARMONIOUS

(28) Here are some of the parts God has appointed for the church: first are apostles, second are prophets, third are teachers, then those who do miracles, those who have the gift of healing, those who can help others, those who have the gift of leadership, those who speak in unknown languages.

- Ranking *within* the **church**:
 1. **Apostles**. Jesus had not written a word on paper. They have authority directly from Jesus and are His spokesmen. There were only Twelve of them on earth at any given time. (By this time, Paul was one of them.) Their authority among the churches was universal.
 2. **Prophets**. These were the inspired men who preached the message of Jesus to the public and to the church. They were *forthtellers* more than *foretellers*.
 3. **Teachers**. The teachers were not inspired, but they worked long and hard to present the message of the risen Lord to the newly forming church. **McGarvey** says "that those having prophetic gifts (#2) did not always fully understand the import of their own words."
 4. **Miracle Workers**. A broad category of believers who could perform beyond the ordinary. They were *not speakers* in the sense of apostles, prophets and teachers, but *were doers* who ministered to the needs of others.
 5. **Those who heal**. Wherever there are people, there are those needing **healing**. It was not a major emphasis of the church any more than it was a major emphasis in the ministry of Christ.
 6. **Those who can help others**. Like the **miracle workers**, these believers were *doers* rather than *speakers*. They provided help and relief to those needing it such as the

care of the poor, the sick, care of strangers, care of widows and care of children.

7. **Leadership Skills.** These saints had the ability to organize, do business, set up meetings and generally direct the affairs of the entire church.
8. **Those who speak in unknown languages.** Some at Corinth believed this was #1 instead of *at the bottom of the list*.
9. Not listed but still implied. See verse 30.

(29) Are we all apostles? Are we all prophets? Are we all teachers? Do we all have the power to do miracles? (30) Do we all have the gift of healing? Do we all have the ability to speak in unknown languages? Do we all have the ability to interpret unknown languages? Of course not!

- **Apostles.** This group was part of the foundation of all of the churches, but they were *temporary* in that they were not replaced. (Ephesians 2:20). (A movement in the United States claims to replace the Apostles.)
- **Prophets.** This group extended the teaching of the **apostles** to other locations because the Scriptures were not yet written. Their work was *temporary*.
- **Teachers.** Even after the permanent Word was written and distributed among the churches, their work was needed. However, there wasn't a miraculous component to their work. (Galatians 6:)
- Paul continues through his list, stressing that believers don't each have all of the **gifts**.

(31) So you should earnestly desire the most helpful gifts. But now let me show you a way of life that is best of all.

- Some of these **gifts** were to bridge the gap until the written Scriptures were completed and distributed. Then they would no longer be needed.
- Instead of a **gift** coming as a package to make believers look good, there is something that believers can have that is far, far superior, but they need to build it into their lives. That is love and Paul explains it.

These Corinthians had all of the miraculous gifts available (1:7), but still they ended up as the most carnal church described in the New Testament.

LOVE CAN BE LEARNED BY EVERYONE

(13:1) If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

- **Speaking in all of the languages of earth** is nothing compared to **loving others**. The premier gift in the minds of some at Corinth was **speaking in languages** they had not learned. It was a fun gadget to show off. Paul pictured it as a **noisy gong** or a **clanging symbol**. There was no melody at all. His spiritual gift would be useless. (The heathen religions had **gongs** and **symbols**.)
- The Apostle Paul uses only *agape* **love** in this chapter. It is a choice of the will.

Paul Butler writes:

Agape is a love called out by a realization of the value of the object loved. It is not an emotion or passion, since it can be and is commanded in the scriptures. It has been defined as intelligent good will toward all men. Christianity took the word from pagan uses and enlarged, ennobled and inspired it. Because it is used of the love God had for the world in Christ it has something of the idea of sacrificial devotion to others in which self is forgotten.

- **C. S Lewis** is quoted in *The Four Loves* as saying that it is **love** that enables man "too love what is not naturally lovable: lepers, criminals, enemies, morons, the sulky, the superior and the sneering."

(2) If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing.

- If Paul had the **gift of prophecy** or the gift of miracle-working **faith** but lacked **love for others**, he wouldn't have anything worthwhile. They would just have spiritual trinkets.

(3) If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn't love others, I would have gained nothing.

- If Paul completely emptied his pockets for the **poor** and in some way **sacrificed** his own **body**, he still would not have **gained** anything. There was no lasting value here for believers -- without **love**.

LOVE DESCRIBED

(4) Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud (5) or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged.

- **Love is patient and kind**, even towards our children.
- **Love** does not flare up in anger. It has no back-files and remembers very poorly. Such a phrase as "You always . . ." does not inhabit its vocabulary.

(6) It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out.

- "He deserved it" is unknown to one who **loves**.

(7) Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

- **Love** is tenacious. It doesn't start to make a move and then quit when opposition arises.

How to Love Others

1st Corinthians 13

By Charles Dailey 2023-- *New Living Translation*

Love:	A Sample:	Scripture:
<i>In 4:</i> Is Patient	Make allowances.	Ephesians 5:2.
Is Kind	Required conduct.	Ephesians 4:32
Not Jealous	Jealousy forbidden.	Galatians 5:26
Not Boastful	Patience is better.	Ecclesiastes 7:8
Not Proud	Not trying to impress	Philippians 2:3
<i>In 5:</i> Not Rude	<i>Not Dishonoring others (NIV).</i>	Isaiah 3:5
Not Demanding own way	"Only my way"	1 Corinthians 10:24
Not Irritable	Not controlling others with our anger.	James 1:19
Keeps no record of wrongs done.	Jesus ignored the past of the woman.	John 8:10-11.
<i>In 6:</i> Does not rejoice in Injustice.	Don't talk about other's failures	1 st Peter 4:8
Rejoices when Truth wins	Focus on other's successes.	Romans 12:9
<i>In 7:</i> Never Gives up.	Share other's burdens	Galatians 6:2
Never loses faith	Losing faith is possible	2 nd John 1:8
Always Hopeful	Hope begins with our salvation.	Romans 8:24
Endures	Faith and love are life-time projects for us.	Matthew 10:22
<i>In 8:</i> Lasts forever.	Love changes us forever.	1st Corinthians 13:13

(8) Prophecy and speaking in unknown languages and special knowledge will become useless. But love will last forever!

- The Corinthians wanted the gift of **speaking** in tongues they hadn't learned or the gift of **prophecy**. These will soon become **useless**, but **love** that we develop and use will last **forever**.

(9) Now our knowledge is partial and incomplete, and even the gift of prophecy reveals only part of the whole picture!

- Paul is extolling **love** because the special **gifts** will become **useless**. They were not intended to be a long range part of Church life.

THE FUTURE OF LOVE

(10) But when the time of perfection comes, these partial things will become useless.

- **The time of perfection.** Paul Butler addresses this **perfection**:

The Greek word *teleion* is a noun in the neuter gender. It should not, therefore, be translated to mean, “when Christ comes again.” The word *teleion* is not referring, either grammatically or contextually, to a person, but to some thing. The word *teleion* means, “that which has reached its goal; that which has matured or come to its fulfillment.” It does not mean that which is sinless.

Lee Turner comments on this in his treatise entitled *A Tale of Two Mirrors*:

Clearly, the gifts will have passed away long before the coming of Christ. They were to cease when “when that which is perfect is come.” 1st Corinthians 13:10. Note also that it was to be when *that which* was perfect had come, not *when he who* is perfect had come. That which is perfect is “the perfect law of liberty.” (James 1:25)

(11) When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things.

- In verse 11, Paul sees a time they will put away childish things. A time was ahead shortly where they would have the finished Scriptures and then they would have the route to being spiritually mature. Jude spoke of it.

Dear friends, I had been eagerly planning to write to you about the salvation we all share. But now I find that I must write about something else, urging you to defend the faith that God has entrusted once for all time to His holy people. (Jude 3 NLT)

The message from God had been completely delivered by the time that Jude wrote his one chapter book.

C. Ermal Allen writes:

So the church, without the New Testament, needed the constant care of the apostles; note how Paul kept going back to the churches – in person, in letter, through personal envoys – he had already established. With the New Testament, however, the churches should be able to walk in maturity without continual new revelation. (Teachers are still needed, but not for new revelation.)

(12) Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely.

● **Paul Butler** writes:

Paul is saying that as soon as the completed apostolic revelation had been written down, the church would see the whole scheme of redemption and sanctification - it would no longer be enigmatic and the church would grow and mature through agape-love, and the temporary, partial manifestations of the Spirit would cease to exist for the church. When the faith was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3) the church could distinguish true from false, good from evil, by the completed apostolic word (I John 4:1-6).

(13) Three things will last forever -- faith, hope, and love -- and the greatest of these is love.

We have limited our discussion of spiritual gifts to just what the Corinthian text says. There is much more in the New Testament, but we are limited here by space requirements.