

Worksheet 10: 1 Corinthians 12:1–13:13

Introduction: Chapters 12–14 introduce a new topic for Paul. This new topic, the role and exercise of spiritual gifts within the local assembly, evokes intense discussion today because of the rise of the Charismatic movement during the early twentieth century. All present-day concerns aside, however, this passage addresses a significant concern for the Corinthian church. It is our duty, therefore, to seek to understand (as much as possible) the nature of the original situation and the question which Paul seeks to address.

Paul introduces the question by quoting from the Corinthian letter in 12:1, “Now concerning the spiritual [gifts/ones]...” (lit.). Because of the ambiguity of Paul’s Greek here, we can infer two possibilities for the Corinthian’s original question. One commentator aptly describes the options: “Either the Corinthians want to know, ‘Which spiritual gift is the highest and best?’ or some are touting their own spiritual gift as ‘the highest and best.’” He goes on to explain that “from Paul’s perspective, the basic issues are, What does it mean to be spiritual? and How are Christians to exercise their spiritual gifts in the church?”¹ Paul drives toward an answer to these questions in chapters 12–14, summarizing his conclusions in 14:37–40.

The statements of chapter 13 are frequently lifted from their context by well-meaning Christians. To properly understand this chapter, we must see Paul’s point that the exercise of the spiritual gifts is regulated by love for our brothers and sisters in the local church. This is not to say that the chapter does not teach anything about “Christian love” on its own sake, but that Paul’s primary purpose is to describe it so that the Corinthians could exercise spiritual gifts in a loving way.

Abbreviated Outline² (current passage in bold):

- I. Introduction (1:1-9)
- II. Response to Oral Reports (1:10-6:20)
 - A. A Proper Perspective on Christian Ministers and Ministry (1:10-4:21)
 - B. Immorality in the Church (5:1-13)
 - C. Disputes Between Believers (6:1-11)
 - D. Limitations on Freedom in Christ (6:12-20)
- III. Responses to a Letter from the Corinthians (7:1-16:4)
 - A. Matters related to Sex and Marriage (7:1-40)
 - B. Matters related to Idol Feasts (8:1-11:1)
 - C. Matters related to Christian Worship (11:2-34)
 - D. Matters related to Spiritual Gifts (12:1-14:40)**
 - 1. Diversity of Gifts, Unity in the Body (12:1-31)**
 - 2. The Supremacy of Love (13:1-13)**
 - 3. Prophecy and Tongues (14:1-40)
 - E. Matters related to the Resurrection (15:1-58)
 - F. Matters related to the Relief Offering (16:1-4)
- IV. Conclusion (16:5-24)

¹ David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 558.

² The complete outline is available on the Meadowlands Baptist Church website (www.meadowlandsbaptist.ca). Adapted from Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, The Cross, and The Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville, Tenn: B & H Academic, 2009), 482–483.

Interpretation: *Read through the passage, and then review and make notes under the questions below.*

1. Complete this phrase, using statements from chapter 12 (include references), “It is loving to use one’s gifts...”

2. Complete this phrase, using statements from chapter 13 (include references), “It is loving...”

3. What is a “spiritual gift”? Consider 12:1, 4, 7, 9, 28, 30, 31 and 14:1.

4. What three things are different in 12:4–6?

5. How many spiritual gifts does an individual receive, according to 12:7–11? Who decides which spiritual gifts an individual receives (12:11)?

6. Restate 12:31b in your own words and explain how Paul is transitioning to his point in chapter 13.

7. According to 13:1–3, what is most important—which gifts you have, what mysteries you understand, how much faith you have, or something else? Why?

8. How should believers seek to live, according to 13:8–13?

Application: *Take time to reflect on the implications of this passage for your own life today.*

9. What does this passage mean for your walk with the Lord?

10. How does this passage challenge the way you think about situations in daily life? What should you do about that?
