

# Romans

## Bible Study

### The Gifts

#### Romans 12:3–8

Beginning with Romans 12, Paul teaches practical application concerning everything he taught previously in the book of Romans. The emphasis is on the edification of the Church, the Body of Christ, and the role we all play in accomplishing that. We first need to transform our thinking by renewing our minds (Romans 12:1–2). We do this by taking in God’s word and allowing the Holy Spirit to change us from the inside out. When we are walking in the Spirit, we are in God’s perfect will. It is at this point that we are able to reach out to edify believers around us. We do this through the “gifts” given to us.

In order to understand the gifts listed in Romans 12, it is important to look closely at the context. It is also beneficial to examine the passage on spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 and contrast it with what Paul wrote in Romans 12.

#### **Spiritual gifts or just gifts**

Note how Paul calls the enablements in 1 Corinthians 12 spiritual gifts while in Romans 12 he calls them gifts. In fact, 1 Corinthians 12 is the only place they are called spiritual gifts. Calling the gifts listed in Romans 12 spiritual gifts is a man-made designation. It is important to carefully read what Scripture says and not bring in the traditions of men.

1 Corinthians 12 focuses on supernatural spiritual gifts to the individual believer. They were active before Scripture was complete. It was the Holy Spirit who distributed these spiritual gifts to individuals as He saw fit (1 Corinthians 12:11). In contrast, Romans 12 is written with the Body of Christ in view, not individuals. The gifts were given to the Body. Each member of the Body is playing a different role, but the focus of each gift is upon the edification of the Body, not on individual giftedness.

Most teachers make Romans 12 all about individual spiritual gifts, when the passage is actually about gifts (not spiritual gifts) being used for the building up of the Body of Christ. In other words, Paul is not writing about how God made me gifted, but about me using my gifts (talents, abilities) for the edification of the Body, all for His glory. Contrary to most teaching, Paul was not giving us a list of spiritual gifts so that we could spend time learning our specific abilities. Instead, his purpose was to raise our sights beyond our little world to look out for the needs of others. Paul was showing how God has distributed gifts throughout the Body of Christ and that these gifts are to be used for the benefit of the body.

#### **Proper use of the gifts (Romans 12:3)**

Every person born is more gifted in some areas and less gifted in others. Believers have a special focus, to use their giftedness for the good of the Church, the Body of Christ. It is possible for a believer to use an area of giftedness to their own advantage. For instance, a teacher could excel as a professor in a secular college and bring notoriety to himself in his field of study. An administrator could use his gift to build up a company and secure a place of prominence in the business world. Instead of using our gifts with a selfish focus, believers have been given the mandate to use our God-given gift(s) only for the building up, nurturing and encouragement of other believers. We are able to do this properly through the enablement of the indwelling Holy Spirit. It is important to remember that in all of our activities, we are to do them as if we are doing them for the Lord (Colossians 3:17; 1 Corinthians 10:31).

Since we have done nothing to be gifted in certain areas, there is no reason for us to be proud of our capabilities. As Romans 12:16 says, we are not to be wise in our own estimation. Instead of thinking of ourselves, we are to think about others and about how we can meet their needs. We are to love others honestly, without hypocrisy, as we use our God-given gifts for the good of the Body.

### **The listed gifts (verses 6–8)**

There are seven specific areas of giftedness listed in Romans 12:6–7. Every gift is given for the development of the Body. I believe the listed gifts are general categories and not an exhaustive list of every gift God has given the Body. Only the believer is capable of using these gifts (abilities) properly, since the Holy Spirit empowers their use for the good of the Body.

#### **Prophecy**

There are two ways of looking at this gift of prophecy. The first is as a spiritual gift given to a person by the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. A person with the gift of prophecy received special information directly from God, and they would be expected to pass this along to whomever God wanted to hear His message. Simply put, the prophet spoke forth God's word. The second way of defining a prophet is as one who speaks forth God's word without being supernaturally endowed by the Holy Spirit; a forth-teller, not a fore-teller.

The problem with this second view is that a prophet is always shown to be a person through whom God supernaturally communicates, not one who reads scripture and then proclaims its truths. When Paul lists prophecy as the first gift given to the Body of Christ, the spiritual gift of prophecy was still active because all of Scripture had not yet been revealed. This gift of prophecy was to cease, I believe, with the completion of Scripture (1 Corinthians 13:8–10). The gift of prophecy was specifically given to edify the church (1 Corinthians 14:4), which is why Paul included this gift in Romans 12.

#### **Ministry (Service)**

This gift is all about looking for a physical need and fulfilling it. Service can be about helping out at church, or helping another believer with something they are struggling with like a household project or car repair. The person who is specially wired to serve is able to see practical needs easily.

#### **Teaching**

Those with the gift of teaching enjoy studying and learning new things. They diligently analyze Scripture and are able to carefully and clearly instruct others in doctrine.

#### **Exhorting (Encouraging)**

The gift of exhorting is manifested by those who come alongside people needing encouragement, especially in the area of following God's word. Those who are going through hard times and questioning God's workings are often the focus of those with the gift of encouragement. They often encourage those who are weaker in the faith to be strengthened by bringing them to Scripture and motivating them to be obedient to what God says.

#### **Giving**

People with the gift of giving have the ability to see a need and then fill that need whether it is giving of their time, money or talents. They look for ways to use their resources to make the greatest difference. They are careful with their resources but very generous when they see a genuine need.

#### **Ruling (Leadership)**

The person who is able to rule is able to organize projects by bringing people and materials together to accomplish a particular goal. The leader excels at creating a plan of action and delegating duties to accomplish activities for the benefit of the Body.

#### **Mercy**

Those with the gift of mercy are especially sensitive toward people who are hurting or suffering within the Body of Christ. They are able to easily identify those with needs and then reach out to comfort them.

The important take-away in Paul's list of gifts is not that we are to go out and find our specific gift or gifts, but that when we see a need within the Church, the Body of Christ, we are to meet those needs using whatever gift is necessary to edify one another.

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