

Application of the Gifts

Romans 12:9–18

Romans 12 begins the practical application of living the Grace life. This section takes everything we learned from Paul in Romans 1—11 and applies that into every-day living. This is the experiential side of being a Christian and walking in the Spirit. A believer who is living in the center of God's will will naturally look out for the needs of other believers.

Notice that Romans 12 begins with the assumption that we are believers, and as believers we need to renew our minds. We are not capable of pleasing the Lord unless we change our natural, worldly thinking to a supernatural, spiritual way of thinking. This is the transforming power of Scripture combined with the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Unbelievers are capable of reading Scripture, but they do not have the indwelling Holy Spirit to activate the word of God and transform their thinking. It is impossible for unbelievers to please God because they are enemies of God (Romans 5:10; Colossians 1:21).

When we are renewing our minds, we are transformed, able to think in a sober manner and capable to discern what God's will is. This is the work that God's word performs upon the believer through the Holy Spirit. Thinking soberly is being able to think the way God thinks (1 Corinthians 2:16) instead of walking in the futility of our old nature (Ephesians 4:17). Our thinking should be about what we have learned in Romans 1–11. This information will establish us firmly in the doctrine that will shape and mold our actions toward one another. As members of the Body, we are to think about the needs of one another and how we can build up each other in the faith.

Love

Each time Paul speaks of the gifts and using them to edify the Body of Christ, he brings up the topic of love. Romans 12:6–8 tell us that God has given gifts to the Body for the edification of the Body members, and beginning with verse 9 Paul tells us that love is to be genuine, without pretense. He then continues in the following verses to describe how love will manifest itself.

The same formula is presented in 1 Corinthians 12–13. Chapter 12 speaks of the gifts given to individuals for the common good of the Body (1 Corinthians 12:7), followed by chapter 13 which teaches that these spiritual gifts are worthless unless put to use in the context of love. This is also evident in Ephesians 4. Paul first explains that God has given people with special abilities to the Church, the Body of Christ, for its edification and growth, all in the context of love (Ephesians 4:16).

We will not be able to use our abilities for God's glory unless we use them out of love for other believers. Love is not a squishy internal feeling, but an act of putting others ahead of yourself. Love is a commitment to do what is best for other people. If we love those around us, we will look out for their needs and take steps to meet those needs. Love will drive us to act when we become aware of a need. God showed His love for us by sending His Son to die for us while we were sinners (Romans 5:6–8; Ephesians 2:4–5). Love does not just see a problem, but brings a person to take steps to meet those needs. God knew man would need a savior. If He did nothing to save us from our hopeless condition, it could not be said that He loves us. Love is always demonstrable. Seeing a need, feeling sorry for a person, having compassion for someone in need is not love. Love is taking action to help someone. As we grow in Christ and become more Christ-like, we will naturally love others and become more skilled at seeing the needs of others. As we learn to walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16, 25) we will naturally produce the fruit of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance (Galatians 5:22–23). This goes right back to transforming our thinking so that we will have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16). We will be able to think as God wants us to think and therefore we will be able to do

what God wants us to do. The body goes where the mind directs it, so if the mind is infused with godly, spiritual thoughts, we will exhibit that kind of thinking with proper actions.

Demonstration of love

The rest of Romans 12 shows us the outward manifestation of love. When we love others, we will think of others and how we are to properly interact with them. Verse 9 says that we are not to have a fake, showy demonstration of love, one that appears like love but is done to fool people into thinking you love them. Instead, we are to have a genuine love for each other. When we truly love others, we will be devoted to one another, giving preference to one another (verse 10). This is to be done with diligence, being fervent in the spirit of serving the Lord (verse 11). The word fervent has the idea of a boiling hot pot. We are to be boiling hot in loving others. It is not something that is to be put on the “back burner.” We are not to serve ourselves, but to serve each other out of love (Galatians 5:13). As a side note, Peter admonishes the Jewish Kingdom believers to do the same thing (1 Peter 1:22). What Paul is telling us is cross-dispensational.

Verse 16 tells us to have the same mind toward each other. In other words, don't treat people differently based on their position. We are to treat each other as equals, since we are all members of the Body of Christ and every one of us is important to the Body. This means that if we see a need within the Body, regardless of who it is, we are to reach out to that person to help. This is what it means to have the same mind toward each other. It does not mean we will think the same thing, in agreement, but that we treat each other equally. This includes not thinking more highly of yourself than you think of other people.

Be at peace

After showing how we are to think equally of all people in the Body, Paul concedes that there will probably be personality clashes within the Body. In spite of having a new nature and showing us how we are to renew our mind and think of the needs of others, Paul knows that there will be disagreements and contention between believers. Even if one believer is walking in the Spirit, another believer who is allowing the old nature to take control can cause much hurt, frustration, anxiety and distress within a group. If that happens, we are not to lash out in anger—a tooth for a tooth mentality. We are not to take revenge on those who are causing problems, but we are to allow the Lord to take vengeance, because God is the only Being who is capable of fairly meting out proper vengeance to the offender. We are incapable of doing that because we are so limited. Our natural reaction is to get even with the person who offended us, but the godly reaction should be to remedy the situation and fix the relationship. As Paul says in verse 18, as much as is possible we are to live in peace with all men. Paul adds the phrase, “as much as is possible” because he knows that it takes two people to make that happen. You might reach out to someone who has offended you, in an act of making peace, but the offender is unwilling to accept your offer. You did what you should do, but they refused to do what they should do. You would be walking properly in spite of the other person failing to do so. It is imperative to evaluate your actions in light of Scripture and the understanding which comes through the Holy Spirit. You must make sure you are truly doing what you should in order to make peace.

Romans 14:19 gives us additional information on living in peace with each other. Paul warns the believer that he will be judged (Romans 14:10). In that context, he says that we are not to judge believers concerning eating certain foods, a real problem for Jews who believed the Gospel of Grace in Paul's day. They were no longer under the Mosaic Law, but many found it difficult to put those rules aside. Paul says that we are not to judge them, but to love them, live in peace with them and concentrate on building each other up.

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