

Our Spiritual Journey: The Gifts of the Spirit

Scripture Reference: Romans 12:1-21

So far, we have briefly covered the presence and power of God's Spirit from the creation of the universe until the new creation, when people are transformed by the new birth and made members of God's family and Christ's kingdom. It was the Spirit of God that gave us awareness of God and His goodness. The Spirit also made us aware of our sinfulness, our need for forgiveness, and our need of a personal relationship with God. Through the work of the Gospel, God's Spirit caused us to believe that there is a heaven to gain and a hell to shun. He also convinced us of our helplessness to gain forgiveness and acceptance with the Father, except through the wonderful grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. As we repented, believed, and called upon the Lord for salvation, the Spirit of God came to indwell us. The bond between us and Him created graces – character change that we call “the fruit of the Spirit.” See Galatians 5:22-23 (previous two lessons). God's Spirit is continually working in us to have the character qualities of Christ, so that we can live fruitful, productive lives. To give us more fruitfulness in our efforts to serve the Lord, the Spirit of God also gives us special ministry gifts. These gifts work best when we are working in harmony with other members of Christ, who have different, but complimentary gifts. Together, fellow Christians discover, develop, and deploy these spiritual gifts. As the twelfth chapter of Romans implies, our spiritual gifts must be used with the fruit of the Spirit in control of them.

Romans twelve and the gifts of the Spirit

The gifts mentioned in the twelfth chapter of Romans are not a comprehensive list, but it sets the stage for a positive and proper understanding and attitude towards the gifts of the Spirit:

- We are to be mindful of God's mercies, so that we are not proud, but humble and grateful in our use of the spiritual gifts (Romans 12:1).
- We are to yield ourselves physically in God's service. Spiritual gifts need to be used outwardly, for others. This is also to be done corporately, for “*your bodies*” is plural. “*A living sacrifice*” is singular. “*Many members in one body*” implies that the local church is the proper environment for our spiritual gifts to become a working part of our life and ministry (Romans 12:1,4-6a).
- As we yield our bodies, this is done as a reasonable, rational, spiritual form of worship and service. The Greek word “*logikos*” describes “*that which pertains to the mind, spirit, and inner man.*” See Romans 12:1.

- The world will try to pour us into its mold, like wet cement, and conform us to its values and agenda. Therefore, we must stay under God's control with the mind of Christ – discerning and demonstrating God's perfect will for us (Romans 12:2 cp. Philippians 2:1-16).
- The flesh may tempt us to be proud of our spiritual gifts, but serious and humble thought will remind us that these are special gifts from God, to be used for the benefit of others and for God's glory. Spiritual gifts are not mere natural talent. They work through the operation of faith (Romans 12:3 cp. John 3:27; I Corinthians 4:6-7; II Corinthians 5:7; Galatians 2:20; Hebrews 11:6).
- God's Spirit adds people to the church and gives them their spiritual gifts, along with responsibilities to handle them properly (Romans 12:4-6a; Acts 2:47; Ephesians 2:19-22; I Corinthians 12:4-7 – more about I Corinthians 12 will *be explained later*).
- In Romans 12:6-8, Paul gives a sample of the spiritual gifts and the responsible way in which they are to be handled (*as per the fruit of the Spirit – Galatians 5:22-23*). Paul is basically telling us to find our spiritual gifts and focus on using them well.

Prophecy – The early church had some who could foretell future events. A prophetic gift today is focused on declaring God's Word boldly – warning and exhorting (*again, more about this will be discussed later, in I Corinthians 12*). This gift was to be handled in a spirit of faith – depending on God's Spirit, not human intellect, or wisdom (I Corinthians 2:1-5).

Ministry / Serving – This refers to a variety of practical ways to minister or to serve others. It is similar to the gift of "helps" (I Corinthians 12:28). This, too, must be done in a spirit of faith, or rather, in a spirit of faithfulness.

Teaching – Those with this gift must be faithful to carefully prepare themselves and be ready to edify others.

Exhorting – This gift is the ability to encourage, motivate, and lead people into action. The word "*exhort*" means "*to call others alongside you.*" Again, the instruction is to be faithful about using this gift.

Giving – This involves more than the giving of money or material things. Paul often referred to the importance of giving of ourselves (Ephesians 4:28; Acts 4:32; 20:31-35; I Timothy 6:17-18; I John 3:17; Romans 1:9-12; I Thessalonians 2:8). This gift is to be used generously and cheerfully – with joy, not out of mere duty / obligation (II Corinthians 9:7).

Ruling – To manage, maintain, administrate. This gift is to be done diligently / carefully.

Mercy / Compassion – To notice the needs of others and to be kind, gentle, and supporting. As with the gift of giving, this must be done cheerfully and patiently.

Romans 12:9-21 gives more practical instruction, so that we can use our spiritual gifts without distraction. Gifted people have been sidelined by character flaws and getting sucked into unprofitable activities. Using **Galatians 5:22-23** and **Ephesians 5:8-10**, let's look at the fruit of the Spirit, while examining the rest of Paul's instruction in Romans chapter twelve. The fruit of the Spirit will protect our ministry from distraction and destruction, which could render our spiritual gifts useless – even unused. *[The fruit of the Spirit will be enclosed in brackets].*

Romans 12:9 – Love and Purity

Love must be genuine / unhypocritical *[Love]*. We must practice hatred of evil and the constant pursuit of truth and goodness *[All Goodness, Righteousness, and Truth]*.

Romans 12:10 – Love and Respect

Relationships in the body of Christ should be saturated with kindness, brotherly affection, honor, and respect *[Gentleness, Kindness, and Meekness]*.

Romans 12:11-12 – Persevering and Faithful

Christian living should be marked by industriousness, along with a faithful, cheerful, hopeful, and prayerful spirit *[Joy, Longsuffering/patience, faith/faithfulness, temperance/self-control]*.

Romans 12:13-14 – Grace and Hospitality

Christians should keep themselves in a “blessing mode.” Whether they are dealing with the spiritual family, strangers, or enemies, they are to be givers and helpers to others *[Love, Goodness]*.

Romans 12:15-16 – Sensitive and Involved

Christians are to be noticing and caring about others. With humility, we take the time to make other people's lives and feelings important to us *[Love, Gentleness, Meekness]*.

Romans 12:17-20 – Mercy and Testimony

Christians operate in a field of mercy and forgiveness because that's how God has and always will operate with them. Whether it be curbing vengeance, or keeping yourself above reproach, seek the ways of peace *[Love, Peace, Longsuffering/Patience, Gentleness/Kindness, Goodness, Temperance/Self-control – All Goodness, Righteousness, and Truth]*.

Romans 12:21 – Victorious Overcoming

Faith in Jesus Christ is the victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4-5). Though we are promised the victory, we have to work that out – day-by-day, play-by-play (Romans 12:1-2) *[Longsuffering/patience, Goodness, Faith/Faithfulness, Meekness, Temperance/Self-control]*.

Like a boat in water – 10 feet, 50 feet, 100 feet – it doesn't matter, as long as the water stays on the outside. So, it is with the evil in the world. May God help us to have fruitful lives that will liberate the development and use of our spiritual gifts!