

EXPLANATION OF 45TH BIBLEBOOK

ROMANS 12 (April A.D. 67)

INTRODUCTION

Although the whole book of Romans is full of Christian doctrine and practice, Romans 1 to 11 emphasises *doctrine* (knowing the righteousness of God) and Romans 12 to 16 emphasises *practice* (doing the righteousness of God).

The subject of chapter 12 is *sanctification*. Romans 6 has already taught us that the basis for justification and holiness (sanctification) is *spiritual union with Jesus Christ* in his death and resurrection (6:2-7)¹. Without *the legal state of justification* and *the moral state (condition) of holiness*, we cannot grow in our personal process of sanctification! And without sanctification we can never be sure of our justification²! Because the spiritual union with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is permanent, growth in sanctification is a constant dynamic process in the Christian (6:10-11). Spiritual union with Jesus Christ means that a person has asked Jesus Christ to live in his heart and life. It means that the Holy Spirit lives in the body of the Christian³. The Holy Spirit is no one less than the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of the resurrected, ascended and exalted Lord, who now reigns in heaven (8:9-10). The practical and ethical life of the Christian rests on the solid foundation of the redemptive accomplishment of Christ. Growth in sanctification happens because the Christian belongs to Christ and Christ works the new life in the Christian through the Holy Spirit.

OUTLINE

Theme. The behaviour of the believer towards God, Christians and outsiders.

These are the concrete and practical aspects of sanctification.

- (I) 12:1-2. The behaviour towards God.
 - a. The Christian duty with respect to his body (12:1).
 - b. The Christian duty with respect to his mind (12:2).
- (II) 12:3-13. The behaviour towards Christians.
 - a. Have the right self-image (12:3).
 - b. Maintain unity with each member of the Body (12:4-5).
 - c. Use your spiritual gift (12:6-8).
 - d. Love people, hate evil (12:9-10).
 - e. Serve the Lord with zeal (12:11).
 - f. Practise hope, endurance and prayer in different circumstances (12:12).
 - g. Share with people in need and practise hospitality (12:13).
- (III) 12:14-21. The behaviour towards outsiders.
 - a. Bless those who persecute you (12:14).
 - b. Rejoice or mourn appropriately (12:15).
 - c. Practise harmony, humility and approachability with different people (12:16).
 - d. Overcome evil with good (12:17-21).

EXPLANATION

(I) 12:1-2. The behaviour towards God.

12:1. I exhort (vipa) you, therefore, brothers, in view of the mercies of God, to offer (vnaa) your bodies as sacrifices, continually living (vppa) sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, (which is) your spiritual worship.

12:2. And stop allowing yourselves to be fashioned (conformed) to the pattern of⁴ (vmpe) this (evil) age, but continue to let yourselves be transformed⁵ (vmpp) by the renewing of (your) mind, so that you may test and approve⁶ (vnpa) what is the will of God, namely, that which is good and well-pleasing and perfect⁷.

a. The Christian duty with respect to his body (12:1).

Several religions in the world depreciate the body and regard the body as evil. Their ethical ideal is to be set free from the body and its degrading influences. In contrast, the human body is very important in the Christian faith and is held in high esteem (6:6,12,13,19; 8:10,11,23)⁸. The Christian body is an important part of living the holy life (sanctification).

¹ cf. John 15:5; 1 Corinthians 1:30

² Hebrews 12:14

³ John 14:16-17

⁴ G: suschématizomai

⁵ G: metamorphoó

⁶ G: dokimazó

⁷ G: teleion

⁸ 1 Corinthians 5:3; 6:13,15-20; 7:4,34; 9:27; 15:44; 2 Corinthians 5:6,8,10

Since the creation, the body of man is an integral part of his person⁹. At the end of man's life the body dies due to sin (5:12)¹⁰. However, this is regarded as abnormal, because God's intention is to resurrect all bodies at the completion of salvation (8:23)¹¹. Because the Christian's body is a temple of the Holy Spirit¹², a Christian dedicates all the members of his body to God as instruments of righteousness (6:13,19).

A Christian offers his body as a *continual living* sacrifice to God. This means that because his body of sin (the unregenerated nature) has been destroyed (6:6) and he and his body is alive to live the new life for God (6:4), he dedicates his body *constantly or day after day* as an instrument of his regenerate nature to God's service.

He offers his body as a *holy* sacrifice to God. This means that he separates his body from whatever displeases God (i.e. the sensual lust of the world) and dedicates his body to whatever pleases God.

And he offers his body as a *well-pleasing* sacrifice to God. This means that he has no other motive than to please and glorify God in his daily life. Such offering of the body is called spiritual (or rational) worship (service). This means that a Christian consciously, intelligently and with consecrated devotion dedicates his body to Christ in contrast to the mechanical and ceremonial externalism of the Jewish and Gentile ways of worship.

b. The Christian duty with respect to his mind (12:2).

The Christian mind is the key to transformation. The Christian's pattern of thinking determines the action he takes thereafter.

In order to live the practical Christian life, a Christian must have a standard. His standard should not be the sinful world or the spirit of this age. His standard should also not be any religious leader or any religion in this world! His standard should be nothing less than God himself and God's perfect will. God revealed himself in Jesus Christ and in Christ's life of love¹³. God's perfect will is taught and exemplified in the Bible.

Romans 12:2 contains a negative and a positive command and a promise.

The negative command. "Do not *continue to* be conformed to the pattern of this present (evil) age!" "Do not allow yourself to be fashioned after the pattern of the evil age." This is a continuous command! It speaks of *avoiding outward conformity* to evil people or influences. The Christian Faith is realistic and takes account of the presence of sin in the present world. Eight of the Ten Commandments¹⁴ are stated in the negative form because there is sin in the world! The first evidence of the Christian Faith is turning away from sin¹⁵! "Repent (change your thinking)¹⁶, then, and turn (right about)¹⁷ to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord"¹⁸.

Thus, there are certain things in the world that Christians must shun! For example, the Bible teaches that Christians must shun speaking offensive language, singing scurrilous songs, reading filthy magazines and books, watching immoral films, wearing tempting clothes, getting involved in questionable pastimes and following the godlessness and wickedness of so-called friends. A Christian's life should not be determined by the temporary, transient and evil age¹⁹. Instead, his plans and ambitions should be determined by the coming age! He must develop patterns that abide in the present age and will continue in the age to come!

The positive command. "Be *continually* transformed by the renewing of (your) mind!" This is a continuous command! It speaks of *inner change that leads to eternal change*. Christians should be constantly in the process of being metamorphosed by renewal of their thinking and understanding.

Thus, there are also certain things that Christians must do! For example, Christians should actively seek to change, seek God's will in the Bible, fill their minds with God's words and be willing that the Holy Spirit use God's words to change them. *They should constantly send their own conscience, beliefs and convictions back to the school of the Bible and receive instruction from the Holy Spirit. They should test whether their convictions are in accordance with the Bible.* This positive command strikes at the stagnation, complacency and pride of achievement that often characterises Christians. Paul does not simply teach an *initial* conversion experience or the beggarly idea of a *second* blessing experience. He teaches a *constant* renewal²⁰!

The promise. The translation, "You will be able to *find out (discover)* God's good and well-pleasing and perfect will" for some aspect of your life (e.g. marriage or career) is incorrect. Then it is as if you do not know God's will (from the Bible) in these areas and want to discover it by some subjective revelation (e.g. sign, dream or vision) from God.

⁹ Genesis 2:7,21-23

¹⁰ Genesis 3:19

¹¹ Daniel 12:2; 1 Corinthians 15:42-58; Philippians 3:20-21

¹² 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19-20

¹³ Ephesians 5:1-2

¹⁴ Exodus 20:1-17

¹⁵ 1 Thessalonians 1:9

¹⁶ G: metanoéo

¹⁷ G: epistrephó

¹⁸ Acts 3:19

¹⁹ 1 John 2:17; 1 Corinthians 2:6,8; Galatians 1:4

²⁰ 2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 4:18

The correct translation is, “You will be able *to test and approve* what is the will of God”. You will *approve or accept* that God’s revealed (written) will in the Bible²¹ for you is really the very best. You will become convinced that what is written in the Bible is really what God regards as ‘good’, is what pleases God and is what reaches his goals for your life perfectly! Then you will come to the point of giving your whole-hearted approval to (acceptance of) God’s revealed will and submit to it, even if it is not what your sinful heart desires. Then you will live the righteous and holy life of which Romans 6 and 8 speaks.

Paul is not speaking about finding out what is God’s will in some aspect of your life about which nothing is written in the Bible. *He is speaking of giving your wholehearted approval and commitment to what is revealed as God’s will in the Bible (God’s clear commandments in the Bible)(7:12)! In this sense God’s will never fails and is never wanting!* In this sense God’s will always reflects God’s holiness, righteousness and goodness! If what the Bible teaches and commands seems to be aimless, stagnant, fruitless, lacking in content, it is because we are not entering by obedience and experience into the richness of God’s will as it has been revealed in the Bible. You have to *taste* (by experience) and then see (become convinced) that the Lord is good²²!

(II) 12:3-13. The behaviour towards Christians.

12:3. For through the grace given (vpap) me, I say (vipa) to everyone among you not to think (of himself) more highly (vnpa) than he ought (vipa) to think (vnpa)(i.e. not to be haughty), but to think (vnpa) so as²³ to think soberly (to be of sound mind; to be reasonable; to be sensible; to recognise and stick to the limits or boundaries)²⁴ (vnpa), according to the measure of faith God has apportioned (viaa) to each.

12:4. For just as in one body we have (vipa) many members, and these members do not all have (vipa) the same function.

12:5. so we, who (are) many (members), are (vipa) one body in Christ, and with respect to each (member), one another’s²⁵ member.

12:6. Moreover, having (vppa) different gifts according to the grace given (vpap) to us, if²⁶ (a person’s gift is) prophesying, (let him use it or exercise it) in agreement with (proportion to)²⁷ the faith;

12:7. if (it is) practical service, (let him use it or exercise it) in practical service; if (he is) a teacher²⁸ (vppa), (let him use or exercise his gift) in teaching²⁹;

12:8. if (he is) an exhorter (encourager)³⁰ (vppa), (let him use or exercise his gift) in exhortation (encouragement)³¹; if (he is) a contributor (to the needs of others)³² (vppa), (let him use or exercise his gift) in generosity (and in sincerity, without ulterior motives)³³; if (he is) a leader (one going in front)³⁴ (vppm), (let him use or exercise his gift) diligently³⁵; if (he is) one who shows mercy (vppa), (let him use or exercise his gift) in cheerfulness³⁶.

12:9. Love³⁷ (must be) genuine (not hypocritical). Continually abhor (despise)³⁸ (the participle expresses the force of an imperative)(vrpa) what is evil; continually cling (be attached, glued, cemented)³⁹ (vrpp) to what is good;

12:10. in brotherly love⁴⁰ (be) devoted (tenderly affectionate)⁴¹ to one another; in honour continually go before (show the way)(vrpn) one another (i.e. in showing respect outdo one another, or: as far as honour is concerned, esteem the other more highly than yourself);

12:11. in diligence (do not be) lazy (slothful, indolent, idle, irked by demands); continually be aglow (boil) (vrpa) with the Spirit; always serve (vrpa) the Lord;

12:12. in hope always be joyful (vrpa); in affliction always be enduring (vrpa); in prayer always be persistent (be faithful, spend much time)⁴² (vrpa);

12:13. always share⁴³ (vrpa) in the needs of the saints; always pursue (vrpa) hospitality (love for strangers)⁴⁴.

²¹ Deuteronomy 29:29

²² Psalm 34:8

²³ G: eis to

²⁴ G: sóphroneó

²⁵ G: allélón

²⁶ G: eite

²⁷ G: analogia

²⁸ G: ho didaskón

²⁹ G: didaskalia

³⁰ G: ho parakalón

³¹ G: paraklésis

³² G: metadidómi

³³ G: haplotés

³⁴ G: ho prohistamenos

³⁵ G: spoudés

³⁶ G: hilarotés

³⁷ G: agapé

³⁸ G: apostugeó

³⁹ G: kollaomai

⁴⁰ G: philadelphia

⁴¹ G: philostorgos

⁴² G: proskartereó

⁴³ G: koinóneó

⁴⁴ G: philoxenia

a. Have the right self-image (12:3).

Paul speaks with apostolic authority and grace about the differences that exist among believers in the Church.

The grace God gave to Paul is his apostolic commission (1:5; 15:15-16).

Paul is now going to speak about the three differences among Christians in the Church:

- Christians have been given *different measures of faith* (12:3)
- Christians have been given *different functions in the Church* (12:4)⁴⁵
- Christians have been given *different spiritual gifts* (12:6)⁴⁶.

These differences among believers exist due to God's sovereign reign and sovereign distribution of his grace⁴⁷. These differences also determine the direction of the sanctification and service of each Christian.

Pride or exaggerated self-esteem is sin. "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought". God warns the Christian against the sin of over-estimating their importance in the Church. Pride consists in coveting or exercising a right that does not belong to him. No one is immune to exaggerated self-esteem. He, who covets a higher position (i.e. leadership) or another field of action (i.e. teaching instead of serving) in the Church and is not content with what corresponds to the measure of faith given to him, is engaged in wilful self-exaltation. For example: pride is coveting or exercising a spiritual gift or a function (office) in the Church which one does not possess.

False humility is sin. "Continually think soberly". A Christian should make a sober and humble assessment of himself. He must not think that he possesses a spiritual gift that he does not possess. Exaggerated self-esteem or wilful self-exaltation is sin. And he must not refuse to acknowledge that he possesses a spiritual gift that he possesses. False humility is also sin.

The measure of faith. A Christian ought to evaluate himself, not according to his own standards, but according to the measure of faith which God once-for-all has given to him. The word 'measure' refers to the result of measuring: to either a certain *quantity* or a certain *kind* that has been measured out. It may refer to the quantity of faith that God has measured out to him. But the emphasis is more on the kind of faith, that is, the kind of spiritual gift or the kind of function that God has measured out to him.

Paul refers to the different ways in which Christians are a blessing to other Christians and to the Church by using their spiritual gifts or functions in combination with their faith in view of the diversity of tasks that exist in the Church. Each Christian receives his own measure, that is, as a member of the Body of Christ each Christian receives a specific place in the Church, an ordinary or extraordinary gift or function (office)(12:6-8)⁴⁸ and a corresponding faith by which he must exercise his gift or function (12:3). Every Christian should express or exercise his faith or trust in God by serving God with his assigned spiritual gift or function in the Church. The fact that spiritual gifts or functions in the Church are 'measured'⁴⁹ means that every spiritual gift has *limits* as to the type of function, as to the area in which the gift or function should be exercised and as to the kind of faith that would be needed to exercise that gift or function.

Faith. Faith is based on what God has said (10:17)⁵⁰ and on what God has given (12:3)⁵¹. Faith is not only needed for salvation, when we become members of the Church. Faith is also needed for service, when we perform our different functions (tasks, offices) as members of the Church. All spiritual gifts or functions can only be exercised properly by faith in Jesus Christ (12:3)⁵² and by love towards others⁵³.

b. Maintain unity with each member of the Body (12:4-5).

There is one body, but with many members with different functions. People are not merely individuals on earth, but belong to a family, to a congregation, to a town community, to a society, to a county and to the world. Christians have property in one another and therefore property in one another's graces, gifts and functions. This is not political communism that destroys property, but spiritual communism that recognises the different gifts and jealously maintains that distinguishing individuality.

This means that Christians should serve one another with the spiritual gift or function that they have received⁵⁴. The human body has many different members and each member has a different, yet necessary function in the human body. Likewise, all Christians together form the Body of Christ⁵⁵ and every Christian is a member in that Body with a necessary function.

c. Use your spiritual gift (12:6-8).

⁴⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:5

⁴⁶ 1 Corinthians 12:4

⁴⁷ 1 Corinthians 12:11; Ephesians 4:7

⁴⁸ cf. 1 Corinthians 12:7-11

⁴⁹ Ephesians 4:7

⁵⁰ Hebrews 11:7-8

⁵¹ cf. 2 Peter 1:1

⁵² Philippians 4:13

⁵³ 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

⁵⁴ 1 Peter 4:10

⁵⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

Spiritual gifts.

Definition of a spiritual gift. A spiritual gift is a special God-given desire, ability or function. According to 1 Corinthians 12:4-7 it is a manifestation of God's power, wisdom or grace through the Christian and expresses itself in different kinds of service.

The purpose of spiritual gifts. The four distinct purposes of spiritual gifts are *to serve* one another⁵⁶, *to build up* the (worldwide) Church⁵⁷, *to equip* Christians for works of service⁵⁸ and ultimately *to glorify* God in all things⁵⁹!

The authority of spiritual gifts that function like offices. Christ has given to his one world-wide Body five spiritual gifts that function like offices: apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers⁶⁰. The function of these offices is "to build up the Body of Christ (the Church)". However, all Christians, whether they have ordinary spiritual gifts (e.g. teaching) or spiritual gifts that function like offices (e.g. teacher), must function under the supervision of the body of elders, because Christ has given the leadership of every congregation (church) to its body of elders⁶¹ and not to specific individual offices like apostles⁶², prophets, evangelists, pastors or teachers! *The New Testament does not speak of any individual apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor or teacher that leads a congregation! Every congregation must be led by a body (council) of elders*⁶³.

The kinds of spiritual gifts (12:6a). 1 Corinthians 12:28 teaches that the most important spiritual gifts or functions in the Church are: *first* apostles, *second*, prophets and *third* teachers⁶⁴. They must function under the leadership of the body of elders. Romans 12:6-8 mentions prophecy first, because there was no apostle in Rome (15:15-29). The apostle Paul did not build on the foundation of another apostle (15:20).

However, in Romans 12:6-8 no rank in the spiritual gifts or functions is intended. The first four spiritual gifts are concerned with the field of action and influence in which the gift or function is to be exercised. They are: prophesying, serving, teaching and encouraging. The last three spiritual gifts are concerned with the disposition (inclination, affection) of the heart and the will with which the service is to be rendered: contributing to the needs of others should be done generously; leadership should be done with diligence; and showing mercy should be done cheerfully.

The Christian gift of prophesying (12:6b).

Prophecy in the Bible. The word *prophecy* means *to speak forth*. Prophecy is the special ability or function of communicating revelations of truth from God⁶⁵. In the Old Testament the prophet was an organ of revelation – he was God's spokesman and could say, "Thus says the Lord God!" John the Baptist was the last Old Testament prophet⁶⁶. Jesus Christ is the Greatest Prophet of all times⁶⁷. He is the Spirit that spoke through the Old Testament prophets⁶⁸ and New Testament apostles⁶⁹. He is the Prophet who speaks God's last and final word⁷⁰! The Old Testament prophets occupied a position of priority that is not accorded to the New Testament prophets⁷¹!

Prophecy in the Early Christian Church. In the Early Christian Church, when the New Testament Books were still being written (from A.D. 44- 98), there was a real need for New Testament prophets. Christians in many places did not possess the written New Testament and therefore God used New Testament prophets to proclaim his truth to them and to build up his Church⁷².

The apostles possessed the prophetic gift, but the prophets were not apostles! The New Testament prophets especially revealed how God wanted Christians to live the Christian life in the present⁷³. Only in a very few instances they revealed what would happen in the future of some Christians⁷⁴.

The Christians addressed had to weigh carefully what was said by the New Testament prophet⁷⁵ and had to make their own decision what God wanted them to do with the knowledge they received from the New Testament prophet⁷⁶! The

⁵⁶ 1 Peter 4:10-11

⁵⁷ 1 Corinthians 12:7; 14:12

⁵⁸ Ephesians 4:12

⁵⁹ 1 Peter 4:11

⁶⁰ Ephesians 4:7-12

⁶¹ Acts 20:17,28; 1 Timothy 3:1-7,15; 4:14; 5:17-22; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-4

⁶² cf. 1 Peter 5:1

⁶³ G: presbyterion. 1 Timothy 4:14

⁶⁴ cf. Ephesians 4:11

⁶⁵ Acts 2:16-17; 21:10-11

⁶⁶ Matthew 11:13

⁶⁷ Acts 3:22-26

⁶⁸ 1 Peter 1:10-12

⁶⁹ John 16:13-15

⁷⁰ Hebrews 1:1-2

⁷¹ Numbers 12:6-8; Deuteronomy 18:15-19; 1 Peter 1:10-12

⁷² Ephesians 2:20

⁷³ Acts 15:32; 1 Corinthians 14:3

⁷⁴ Acts 11:27-28; 21:10-14

⁷⁵ 1 Corinthians 14:29

⁷⁶ cf. Acts 21:10-14

history of Christianity shows that these New Testament prophets continued to exist until the recording of the New Testament was completed.

The New Testament prophet had to use prophecy ‘according to the measure (analogy, agreement) of (his) faith’. It could mean that the New Testament prophet had to proclaim the truth in agreement to the *objective* Christian Faith (the teachings of the apostles, the teachings in the Bible). He had to interpret Scripture with Scripture and his revelations should never conflict with existing revelation⁷⁷. The criterion by which people are to judge the claim and the message of a New Testament prophet is always the Bible⁷⁸.

Most probably Romans 12:6 means that the New Testament prophet had to exercise his gift of prophecy within the limits of his *subjective* personal faith and restrict it to the field of action which God had assigned to him. He must never go beyond what is written in the Bible⁷⁹ and he must not withhold truth which God commissioned him to disclose⁸⁰. A New Testament prophet may not dictate what another Christian should do.

Prophecy after the close of the Canon. After the close of the Canon of 66 books of the Bible, no prophet may claim that his visions and dreams are revelations of God. “False prophets speak visions, dreams and delusions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD”⁸¹. No prophet may go beyond what is written in the Bible⁸²! No new holy books may be added to the Bible as some false religions and cults do⁸³. A Christian with the spiritual gift of prophecy should *speak forth* the Word of God as it has been revealed in the Bible, whether it has reverence to the past, the present or the future. He should *proclaim or preach* the Word of God with the conviction, wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit. All other Christians must weigh and judge the claims and messages of Christians with the gift of prophecy by the standard of the written Bible⁸⁴.

The Christian gift of serving (12:7a). ‘Serving’ is the special ability to detect and meet needs (15:31; Acts 6:1; 11:29; 12:25)⁸⁵. Those who possess this spiritual gift are able to observe needs quickly. They are willing to bring personal sacrifices to meet these needs. They get involved in different kinds of service⁸⁶ and are generally practical in their approach. It could include the ministry of being a deacon⁸⁷. It definitely is the ministry of mercy to the poor and the sick. Because it is concerned with material and physical benefits, other Christians may underestimate this gift and regard it as unspiritual. Nevertheless, 1 Timothy 3:13 teaches that “those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ”.

The Christian gift of teaching (12:7b). ‘Teaching’ is the ability and function to explain the truth of the Bible to people. The person with this gift studies the Bible in detail in order to validate the truth, digs out the facts and gathers and systematises the biblical truth. Then he teaches the truth of the Bible to Christians, He does this with authority and without loss of meaning or original intention. He helps people to understand the truth, vindicate the truth and apply the truth. While the prophet communicates the truth but does not expound it, the teacher expounds the Word of God but is not an organ of revelation. The teacher expounds the meaning of that which is revealed.

The Christian gift of encouraging (12:8a). ‘Encouraging’ (exhortation) is the ability to stimulate Christians to do what the Bible teaches. The person with this gift counsels and guides Christians in the area of personal growth and service. He shows how the teachings of the Bible should be applied to character development and daily living. He urges Christians to pursue a particular course of action or encourage them to take steps of faith, for example, to spur people on to love and good deeds and not to give up meeting together⁸⁸. He also consoles those in affliction and urges them to be patient and to persevere. This gift is directed to the heart, conscience and will of Christians.

The Christian gift of contributing (12:8b). ‘Contributing’ or ‘giving’ is the ability to use temporal possessions for the highest good of people and to the greater glory of God. The person with this gift plans his personal business in order to gain assets. Then he entrusts his assets to other Christians for the furtherance of their ministry in God’s Kingdom.

Paul urges people with this spiritual gift to give generously (liberally)⁸⁹ or to give with sincerity (without ulterior motive)⁹⁰. Because private funds and possessions are intended, sincerity of motive and purpose is most pertinent.

The Christian gift of leadership (12:8c). All leaders should lead with diligence, eagerness or zeal. There are two kinds of leadership gifts:

⁷⁷ Deuteronomy 13:1-5; 18:20-22; 1 Corinthians 14:37; 1 John 4:1-6

⁷⁸ Acts 17:11; 1 Corinthians 4:6

⁷⁹ Jeremiah 23:21-22; 1 Corinthians 4:6

⁸⁰ Acts 20:27

⁸¹ Jeremiah 23:16-40

⁸² 1 Corinthians 4:6

⁸³ Revelation 22:18-19

⁸⁴ Acts 17:11; 1 Corinthians 14:29

⁸⁵ 2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:1,12,13

⁸⁶ 1 Corinthians 12:5

⁸⁷ Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8,10,12,13

⁸⁸ Hebrews 10:24-25

⁸⁹ 2 Corinthians 8:2; 9:11,13

⁹⁰ 2 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 6:5; Colossians 3:22

- **To lead by walking in the front.** The first spiritual gift of leadership is mentioned here in Romans 12:8 and is the ability to *lead people by walking in the front of them*⁹¹. It is the ability to *give direction by example* to specific matters. It is the ability to govern, manage and have oversight of what is happening.

The men chosen to be elders in the local church should be an example of this kind of leadership in their own families⁹² as well as in the congregation. Their specific functions are to watch over one another as elders, to watch over the congregation⁹³, to shepherd the members and to oversee the activities of the members of the congregation⁹⁴ and to teach and preach God's Word⁹⁵. A congregation should never appoint one single leader, because the word 'elders' are always in the plural⁹⁶!

- **To lead by steering from behind.** The second spiritual gift of leadership is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:28 and is called administrations⁹⁷. It is the ability to *lead people by steering or guiding them* (from behind). It is the ability to *give direction by wisdom* applied to specific matters. Like a steersman on a ship in turbulent waters, those who possess this gift guide the congregation through difficult and problematic situations.

The Christian gift of mercy (12:8d). 'Showing mercy' is the ability to identify with other people's needs and then to comfort and help them. The person with this gift quickly understands the situation, thoughts and feelings of needy people. He is able to empathise with their misfortunes and misery. He has a special ability to console and help people in need.

The work of mercy is often disagreeable and liable to be done grudgingly or in a perfunctory way (merely for the sake of getting through the duty). Therefore Paul urges people with this gift to exercise their gift cheerfully, with gladness.

d. Love people, hate evil (12:9-10).

Love. Love is not something from this earth, because God is love and love comes from God⁹⁸. God pours his unique kind of love into the hearts of Christians through his Holy Spirit (5:5)⁹⁹. This kind of love loves first¹⁰⁰, loves self-sacrificially (5:6-8) and loves for ever¹⁰¹. This kind of love can only be defined with characteristics that belong to God: it is patient, kind, generous, modest, humble, courteous, unselfish and sincere¹⁰². This kind of love fulfils God's commandments: it does no harm to anyone – i.e. it protects the virtue of women and men, and the life and possessions of people (13:8-10). Such love is always unfeigned, sincere, the opposite of hypocrisy. Love always abhors evil; shrinks from evil and avoids evil¹⁰³. Love always clings to what is good, thinks of what is good and does good to all men, especially to other Christians¹⁰⁴.

Brotherly love. Brotherly love means tender affection to one's friends and brothers. Tender affection and intimacy are especially reserved for Christian brothers and can never be the same for non-Christians.

Honouring one another. Because there are different measures of faith, different kinds of spiritual gifts and different kinds of functions (offices) in the Church, it could lead to comparing yourself with other Christians. When you think that you are better, you would develop an inflated self-esteem. But when you think that you are less, you would develop a low self-esteem. The best attitude amidst all these differences is to think of yourself with sober judgement (12:3).

Philippians 2:3 says, "Consider (count) others better than yourselves" or "Lead others in bestowing honour." Paul counted himself as 'the least apostle'¹⁰⁵, as 'the least of all believers'¹⁰⁶, as 'the worst sinner'¹⁰⁷ and as 'nothing'¹⁰⁸. And yet he asserted his prerogatives as 'an apostle of Christ'¹⁰⁹. This is an example of sober judgement (12:3).

Every Christian has a contribution to make. Every Christian will have at least one area of strength or ability. But no Christian will have all the strengths and all the abilities. No Christian is good in every area of service. Christians need one another's spiritual gifts or functions. Therefore, Christians should respect one another's spiritual gifts or functions and honour one another for their unique spiritual abilities and strengths that are better than their own.

This means that Christians should appreciate others for their strengths and the special contribution they make to the Church. Nothing is more destructive in a congregation than criticising one another or thinking little of what other

⁹¹ G: prohistamenos

⁹² 1 Timothy 3:4-5

⁹³ Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:17

⁹⁴ Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-2

⁹⁵ 1 Timothy 3:2; 5:17; 2 Timothy 4:2-4

⁹⁶ Acts 15:2,4,6,22,23; 16:4; 20:17,28; Titus 1:5; Hebrews 13:7,17; 1 Peter 5:1-4

⁹⁷ G: kubernésis

⁹⁸ 1 John 4:7-8

⁹⁹ Galatians 5:22

¹⁰⁰ 1 John 4:19

¹⁰¹ Jeremiah 31:3

¹⁰² 1 Corinthians 13:4-8

¹⁰³ 1 Thessalonians 5:22; Jude 23

¹⁰⁴ Galatians 6:10

¹⁰⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:9

¹⁰⁶ Ephesians 3:8

¹⁰⁷ 1 Timothy 1:15

¹⁰⁸ 2 Corinthians 12:11

¹⁰⁹ Ephesians 1:1

Christians do in the congregation. But when Christians encourage one another and appreciate one another's strengths and abilities, then the congregation will grow and be built up.

e. [Serve the Lord with zeal \(12:11\).](#)

Christians should know that their sinful human nature resists spiritual growth and spiritual service. Therefore they should be aware that there is always the danger that they forsake their first love for Christ¹¹⁰. They should be aware that serving in God's Kingdom often meets opposition from the side of Satan and non-Christians, or difficult circumstances and brings discouragement. Discouragement causes the spirit to grow faint and makes Christians lose interest in furthering God's Kingdom.

Therefore Christians should never become lazy with respect to showing diligence and enthusiasm in the cause of Jesus Christ. They should not allow their own heart to grow cold, nor allow outward circumstances to discourage them. Every Christian should be actively involved in some Christian service and diligently serve God within that function. He should make the most of every opportunity¹¹¹. Every Christian needs to be part of an accountability group, discipleship group or team in order to continually encourage one another and stimulate one another to be diligent. Serving the Lord in such a group or team is the best protection against laziness on the one hand and against over-zealousness on the other hand.

f. [Practise hope, endurance and prayer in different circumstances \(12:12\).](#)

Worldly hope is merely a wish that something might happen. But Christian hope is a very sure expectation that something definite is certainly going to happen! It is the expectation with regard to the future reality that determines the attitude toward present tribulations and persecutions on the one hand and the steadfastness of prayer on the other hand. The Christian must never have his horizon bounded by what is seen and temporal. The Christian fixes his eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, for what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal¹¹².

Hope is the ground of rejoicing. The Christian does not merely endure tribulations passively, but actively perseveres in God's way amidst his tribulations¹¹³. The measure of his perseverance in the midst of tribulations is seen in his diligence or persistence in prayer. The word 'persistence' means to persevere, to be faithful or to spend much time: for example in 'the teaching of the apostles'¹¹⁴ and in (meeting together) with one mind and purpose¹¹⁵.

g. [Share with people in need and practise hospitality \(12:13\).](#)

The Christian ought to identify himself with the needs of other Christians and make them his own. When he has a share in the blessings of the spiritual gifts of other Christians (12:5), he also has a share in the needs and difficulties of other Christians (12:13)!

There is a difference between sharing with God's people who are in need and showing love to strangers. Practising hospitality is not simply to give (contribute money or help) from a distance to *the needs* of people, but is to personally give to *the needy people* themselves! Hospitality first of all sees the needy person and then his specific need.

Christians in situations of persecution¹¹⁶ and ministry¹¹⁷ often need a place to stay. The Christian must remember that he should not only share the benefits of one another's spiritual gifts, but also share in one another's needs and difficulties.

Hospitality literally means 'to love the stranger'. Christians must love the stranger, the foreigner, the refugee and the homeless, especially when such a person is persecuted for Christ's sake or when he is serving Christ in your neighbourhood.

(III) [12:14-21. The behaviour towards outsiders.](#)

12:14. You must *always* bless¹¹⁸ (vmpa) those who *continually* persecute (vppa) you; you must *always* bless (vmpa) and you must *never* curse¹¹⁹ (vmpn).

12:15. You must *always* rejoice (the infinitive expresses the force of an imperative)(vnpa) with those who rejoice (vppa); you must *always* weep (the infinitive expresses the force of an imperative)(vnpa) with those who weep (vppa);

12:16. *always* think (the participle expresses the force of an imperative)(vrpa) the same thing towards one another; *never* think (vrpa) high (exalted) things (i.e. be snobbish); *always* be swept along (like in a flood) together¹²⁰ (vrpp) with the people of low position (the poor, the undistinguished, the humble) (i.e. associate with them). You must *never* become (vmpn) wise in your own estimation (i.e. conceited).

¹¹⁰ Revelation 2:4

¹¹¹ Ephesians 5:16

¹¹² 2 Corinthians 4:18

¹¹³ Acts 14:22; Revelation 7:14

¹¹⁴ Acts 2:42

¹¹⁵ Acts 2:46

¹¹⁶ 2 Timothy 1:16-18

¹¹⁷ Hebrews 13:1-2; 1 Peter 4:9

¹¹⁸ G: eulogéō

¹¹⁹ G: kataraomai

¹²⁰ G: sunapagomai

12:17. Never repay¹²¹ (vrpa) anyone evil for evil; always think ahead about (be preoccupied with)¹²² (vrpm) what is right in the sight of all people;

12:18. if possible, as far as it depends on you, always live at peace¹²³ (vrpa) with everyone;

12:19. never take revenge¹²⁴ (vrpa), beloved, but you must give (vmaa) place for the wrath (of God), for it is written (virp): “Vengeance¹²⁵ (belongs) to me; I will repay¹²⁶ (vifa)”, says (vipa) the Lord.

12:20. On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry (vspa), you must *again and again* feed him (vmpa); if he is thirsty (vspa), you must *again and again* give him to drink (vmpa); for, by *continually* doing (vppa) this, you will *certainly* heap¹²⁷ (vifa) coals of fire on his head”.

12:21. You must *never* be overcome (vmpp) by evil, but you must *always* overcome (vmpa) evil by good.

a. Bless those who persecute you (12:14).

The situation seems to be one of unjust persecution and malicious maltreatment¹²⁸. To curse is to call God’s judgement down upon one’s enemies¹²⁹. To bless is to call God’s salvation and goodness down upon one’s enemies and persecutors¹³⁰.

b. Rejoice or mourn appropriately (12:15).

‘Weeping’ means showing sorrow, pain and grief of heart. The natural bent of man is to harbour negative feelings and attitudes¹³¹. But a Christian should rather identify himself with the joy and sadness in his Christian community¹³². It is part of the Body to which he belongs that suffers¹³³. He should show empathy and give help.

c. Practise harmony, humility and approachability with different people (12:16).

Practise harmony. The expression means ‘to have the same mind’, ‘to be in agreement with one another’ or ‘to live in harmony with one another’ (15:5)¹³⁴.

Practise humility. The proud person or snob has puffed-up ideas about himself, pursues vain ambitions and grasps positions of power and honour for himself. The humble person is content with a lowly estate and humble tasks¹³⁵. There should be no aristocracy in the Church, no cliques of the wealthy as over against the poor, no pedestals of unapproachable dignity for those on the higher social and economic ladder or for those who are in the leadership office of the congregation¹³⁶.

Practise approachability. An opinionated person has no regard for anyone else’s judgement and is not willing to listen or accept advice¹³⁷. There should be no intellectual autocrats in the Church! But wisdom makes it easy for others to approach you, to entreat you or to share their thoughts¹³⁸.

d. Overcome evil with good (12:17-21).

Christians may never take revenge. While the government should punish evildoers (13:4), individual Christians may not take the law into their own hands and punish evildoers¹³⁹! For example, God regards the so-called ‘honour-killing’ in some cultures as murder and this is absolutely prohibited¹⁴⁰. When Christians suffer wrongdoing or injustice, they may never take revenge (12:19)¹⁴¹. They may not even take the wrongdoer to the worldly court¹⁴²!

Christians must always do what is right. Christians should be pre-occupied with what is right in the eyes of everybody¹⁴³. They must not only consider what is appropriate in the eyes of God¹⁴⁴, but also consider what is appropriate in the sight of non-Christians¹⁴⁵! When Christians violate these rules of conduct, they bring public reproach on Christ!

¹²¹ G: apodidómi

¹²² G: pronoeó

¹²³ G: eiréneú

¹²⁴ G: ekdikeó

¹²⁵ G: ekdikésis

¹²⁶ G: antapodidómi

¹²⁷ G: sóreuó

¹²⁸ 1 Peter 3:13-17

¹²⁹ cf. Psalm 10:15; 69:22-28

¹³⁰ Luke 6:27-28; 1 Timothy 2:1-4

¹³¹ Galatians 3:20-21; Titus 3:3

¹³² James 5:13

¹³³ 1 Corinthians 12:26b

¹³⁴ 2 Corinthians 13:11; Philippians 2:2; 4:2

¹³⁵ Philippians 4:11; 1 Timothy 6:8-9; Hebrews 13:5

¹³⁶ 1 Peter 5:3

¹³⁷ Proverbs 11:25; 3:7

¹³⁸ James 3:17

¹³⁹ Proverbs 20:22; 24:29

¹⁴⁰ Genesis 9:6; Matthew 26:52

¹⁴¹ 1 Thessalonians 5:15; 1 Peter 3:9

¹⁴² 1 Corinthians 6:1-8

¹⁴³ 2 Corinthians 8:21

¹⁴⁴ Matthew 5:20-48; Luke 6:27-37

¹⁴⁵ 2 Corinthians 4:2; 1 Timothy 3:7

Christians should live in peace with everybody. This is not always possible, due to the attitude of the other person. Sometimes higher considerations, such as “not sharing in the sin of others”¹⁴⁶, may cause others to reject you and hate you. Christians may not allow immoral, impure, greedy and disobedient people to deceive them with empty words, because God’s wrath will certainly come on them. Therefore Christians must not be partners with any kind of evil people¹⁴⁷.

Christians also have the duty to rebuke the sin of other Christians¹⁴⁸ and avoid to associate with them when they persevere in their evil behaviour¹⁴⁹. Christians must oppose the proclamations of false prophets¹⁵⁰ and teachings of false teachers¹⁵¹.

But with God’s help, every Christian can and should live at peace with others. To live at peace with those that do wrong against you means the following: do not quarrel with them, but try hard to heal the broken relationship with them; “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you”¹⁵².

Christians should leave judgement of non-Christians to God. The right to judge non-Christians belongs only to God¹⁵³. And the right to punish non-Christians belongs only to God and to those people to whom God has delegated the authority to punish:

- According to the Bible, the government has the authority to punish wrongdoing in the country (13:3-4). However, the authority of every government in the world is limited and may not be extended for example to persecute law-abiding Christians in their country¹⁵⁴.
- Parents have the authority and responsibility to punish the wrongdoing of their immature children¹⁵⁵. However the authority of parents is also limited. Fathers may not exasperate and not embitter their children¹⁵⁶. Parents must let go of their adult children and stop to rule over them¹⁵⁷. And if parents refuse to let go of their adult children, the adult children must leave their parents¹⁵⁸.
- The congregation has the authority and responsibility to exercise church discipline towards those Christian members and leaders who persevere in wrongdoing¹⁵⁹ and to judge disputes between believers¹⁶⁰. However, the authority of the elders is also limited. Elders have no authority to determine the calling and ministry of believers, or to demand how they give towards God’s work. But they have authority to oversee that everything is done in a fitting and orderly way¹⁶¹.

All personal injustice that Christians suffer at the hands of others should be replied with unexpected kindness¹⁶². The urge to retaliate should be left at the feet of God who judges justly¹⁶³. When people hurled their insults at Jesus Christ, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead he entrusted himself to him who judges justly¹⁶⁴!

Christians should overcome evil by doing good. Christians should not get discouraged when other people heap evil on them. On the contrary, by well-doing they are to be God’s instruments of quenching animosity and stopping the ill-doing of those who persecute and maltreat them. In this way they will heap burning coals on their head¹⁶⁵. ‘The coals of fire’ are a symbol of the change of mind and attitude which takes place in the offender as a result of the Christian’s deed of love. Either such an enemy will be softened by kindness, or, if he is so ferocious that nothing may persuade him, he will get a burning sense of shame and remorse due to the kindness the Christian showers on him.

¹⁴⁶1 Timothy 5:22

¹⁴⁷ Ephesians 5:7

¹⁴⁸ Luke 17:3

¹⁴⁹ 1 Corinthians 5:12-13

¹⁵⁰ Jeremiah 23:9-40

¹⁵¹ Titus 1:9-14; 2 John 9-11

¹⁵² Luke 6:27-28

¹⁵³ Matthew 7:1-2; 1 Corinthians 5:12-13

¹⁵⁴ Acts 4:19-20; 5:29; cf. Revelation 13:1-10

¹⁵⁵ Proverbs 3:11-12; 13:24; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15,17; Hebrews 12:5-11

¹⁵⁶ Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21

¹⁵⁷ Matthew 19:5-6; Mark 3:31-35

¹⁵⁸ Mark 3:31-35; Ephesians 5:31

¹⁵⁹ 1 Corinthians 5:12-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6,14-15; 1 Timothy 5:20; Titus 3:10

¹⁶⁰ 1 Corinthians 6:1-8

¹⁶¹ 1 Corinthians 14:40

¹⁶² Matthew 5:38-41

¹⁶³ 1 Peter 2:21-23

¹⁶⁴ 1 Peter 2:23; cf. Psalm 37:5-13

¹⁶⁵ Proverbs 25:21-22