

Gift, Service, and Function in the New Testament Church: A Study of 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12

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It has been suggested that a series of articles on the gospel ministry ought to include a study of 1 Corinthians 12—especially verses 4-11 and 28-31—and Romans 12:1-8. A study of these passages will suggest comparisons with the life of the church today, especially with regard to the serving activities for which the Holy Spirit still gives gifts to God's people. Our procedure will be to examine each of the three passages in turn and then to draw inferences as to what they say or do not say about the gospel ministry in the church today.

I. A Brief Study of 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

Six times in this epistle Paul begins discussion of important practical matters with the phrase "now concerning" (*περι δε* and the genitive). At 7:1 it is the question of marrying or remaining celibate. The same issue, with regard to virgins and widows, is introduced with *περι δε* at 7:25. He begins instruction regarding food offered to idols at 8:1. The collection for the saints is the subject at 16:1. The matter of Apollos' reluctance to visit Corinth at that time is dealt with in 16:12.

A sixth occurrence of *περι δε* and the genitive, introducing an important practical matter, is at 12:1. Paul wants to inform his readers *περι των πνευματικων*, spiritual things or spiritual persons. We understand the genitive plural as neuter, identifying the spiritual things with the spiritual gifts (*χαρισματα, διακονια, ενεργηματα*) which Paul will mention in verses 4-6. The understanding "spiritual persons" is less likely, since all of Paul's readers are *πνευματικοι*.

When they were pagans, "influenced and led astray to mute idols' (v 2), the believers of Corinth had not been spiritual people and had not received spiritual gifts. The worship of such idols sometimes included ecstatic utterance. This was not, however, proof of the idols power or the ecstasies' spirituality. Whatever spirit might move a person to curse Jesus, ecstatically or not, is not the Spirit of God, whose work it is to honor Jesus in and through his people. Self-evidently, a person who curses Jesus is not-truly spiritual and is not exercising a spiritual gift. Conversely, the person who confesses, "Jesus is Lord"—ecstatically or soberly, but sincerely—is prompted and directed by the Holy Spirit (v 3). Such a person is spiritual and the utterance itself is a gift of the Holy Spirit. For such persons Paul writes this letter and gives instruction regarding spiritual gifts.

12:4—*Διαιρεσεις δε χαρισματων εισιν, το δε αυτο πνευμα.*

Translation: Now, there are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.

There are three explicit reminders in this short verse that the gifts which Paul will discuss are, in fact, gifts distributed and not rewards bestowed. First, *διαιρεσεις* in its basic meaning, is "distribution." Then, with its *-μα* ending *χαρισμα* reminds us that spiritual gifts (*πνευματικα*, v 1) result from God's *χαρις*, his unmerited favor. Finally, the source is named: it is the Spirit who, in every case, makes the distribution.

Most English translations prefer to render *διαίρεσεις* in verses 4-6 with some equivalent of "differences." Not only is this linguistically allowable, it also accords with the enumeration of differing gifts in verses 8-10. Here in verse 4 *διαίρεσεις* is in emphatic position. Paul calls special attention to the variety of gifts and invites his readers to appreciate them and acknowledge the source.

V 5—*και διαίρεσεις διακονιων εισιν, και ο αυτος κυριος.*

Translation: Also, there are different kinds of services, and the same Lord.

God's *πνευματικα* (v 1) are given for service, for the benefit of others. They are not for the aggrandizement of the individual, nor for his edification alone. They come from the Lord Jesus, who himself came to serve by giving his life as the redemption price for all.

V 6—*και διαίρεσεις ενεργηματων εισιν, ο δε αυτος θεος, ο ενεργων τα παντα εν πασιν.*

Translation: Also, there are different kinds of working, but the same God is the one who works everything in all.

Here is a third aspect of the *πνευματικα* (v 1). Differing gifts are given for differing services and the services are carried out in varying operations or modes of operation. The one who enables and energizes people for all the various things that are done is God. Indeed, he is *ο ενεργων τα παντα*, the one who effects all that is done.

εν πασιν can mean "in every way" or "in all." NIV's "in all men" and TEV's "to everyone" are too inclusive, for Paul is discussing spiritual things which the Triune God bestows on spiritual people. Not everyone is a spiritual person. *πασιν* might have *ενεργηματων* as its antecedent: God is the one who works everything in all these varying operations. *πασιν* might also refer to all who have received the gifts, as they and the gifts are enumerated in verses 7-10.

The trinitarian arrangement—*πνευμα, κυριος, θεος*—is more than good rhetoric. It says that the Trinity equips believers in a cooperative effort of the three Persons, without internal competition or envy among them. That implies that God's people, the recipients of his gifts, should imitate the giver in this respect. They should acknowledge and appreciate that not all have the same gifts, not all are called to the same service, all do not carry on the same work. They should use what God has given them in a cooperative manner, without jealousy or rivalry. Paul says it more explicitly in the next verse:

V 7—*εκαστω δε διδοται η φανερωσις του πνευματος προς το συμφερον.*

Translation: Now, to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

πνευματος is a subjective genitive, a genitive of source. To each believer (*εκαστω* in emphatic position) the Spirit manifests himself. The article with *φανερωσις* is anaphoric and thus demonstrative: that aforementioned manifestation of the Spirit—whether *χαρισμα* or *διακονια* or *ενεργημα*.

There can be no thought of superiority if a person has a certain gift or of inferiority if he or she does not. In every case they are gifts: "The manifestation of the Spirit is *given*." It is given *προς το συμφερον*, for the common good. Gifts are given for the benefit of the communion of saints, not for the benefit of individual saints alone—not for self, but for the body, for the advantage of the church.

V 8—*ω μεν γαρ δια του πνευματος διδοται λογον σοφιας, αλλω δε λογος γνωσεως κατα το αυτο πνευμα.*

Translation: Through the Spirit the speaking of wisdom is given to one and to another the speaking of knowledge, in accord with the same Spirit.

Paul begins to enumerate the gifts which the Spirit gives to believers, *ω μεν* and *αλλω δε*, to one and to another, for the common good. Presumably the list includes manifestations of the Spirit with which the Corinthian Christians were familiar. It is not necessarily exhaustive.

In first position are two which involve communicating practical truth in a spiritual manner. Giving good counsel to a fellow Christian requires that the counsel-giver offer wise insight or impart accurate knowledge, or both. The same applies, of course, in the life of the church, where collective decisions must be made wisely and on the basis of reliable knowledge.

Paul uses different prepositions to describe the Spirit's activity in bestowing the two gifts. This is more than the "variety which delights." *δια* with the genitive says that the Spirit is the agent through whom a gift is given. *κατα* says that the giving is in accord with the Spirit's determination, that he determines what is given to whom. Either preposition could be used in connection with either of these two gifts or with any giving on the Spirit's part. He is the agent and he determines how the gifts will be apportioned.

V 9—*ετερω πιστις εν τω αυτω πνευματι, αλλω δε χαρισματα ιαματων εν τω ενι πνευματι.*

Translation: To someone else faith [is given] by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit.

Now a third preposition is used, *εν*. Here it denotes instrumentality. Paul's readers must see that any envy or invidious comparisons of the diverse gifts must reflect badly on the source of all these gifts, the same Spirit (v 8), the one Spirit (v 4).

Since every person who trusts Jesus has saving faith, *πιστις* here must be that special measure of faith which is exemplified by the heroes of faith whom God commends in Hebrews 11. When action for the common good is required, such faith undertakes to do heroic things.

V 10—*αλλω δε ενεργηματα θναμεων, αλλω δε προφητεια, αλλω δε διακρισεις πνευματων, ετερω γενη γλωσσων, αλλω δε ερμηνεια γλωσσων.*

Translation: To another—working of miracles, to another---prophecy, to another—distinguishing spirits, to someone else—kinds of tongues, to another—interpretation of tongues.

In the ministry of Jesus and in that of his apostles the working of miracles was a demonstration of God's power over Satan and his minions. It also attested to the truth of the gospel. Such a gift in the church at Corinth or in other churches served the same purposes.

Prophecy in this Epistle is "speak[ing] to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort" (14:3). It also convinces an unbeliever or inquirer "that he is a sinner" (14:24). Prophecy in the sense of "foretelling" is not necessarily precluded. Prophecy in the sense of communicating direct revelation is included (14:30). Preeminently, however, prophecy is the preaching of law and gospel. In Corinth this gift and this activity were not limited to one man (14:29-32).

In 14:32 Paul writes: "The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets." Such control would require διακρισεις πνευματων, distinguishing among or between spirits. When various gifts are exercised, especially when law and gospel are proclaimed, the ability to differentiate between what comes from the Holy Spirit and what comes from an evil spirit is of the greatest importance. Where no one is able to judge between truth and error, to evaluate whether law and gospel are being rightly distinguished and appropriately applied, sects and cults will proliferate. Church history and current events bear this out.

There must be a reason why Paul uses *ετερω* instead of *αλλω* with *γενη γλωσσων*. Is the reason that, among all the various gifts by which the Spirit manifested himself in the Corinthian congregation, this one was a particular source of trouble, mainly because it did not serve to communicate clearly to all present (14:2), did not edify unless there was also interpretation (14:5)? Most likely. Here, at its first mention, Paul already singles out glossolalia with the distinctive pronoun *ετερω*.

The interpretation of tongues made intelligible for the assembly what was otherwise unintelligible to all or most. For this reason Paul later calls for interpretation by the tongues-speaker himself, or by others (14:5,13,27f).

V 11—παντα δε ταυτα ενεργει το εν και το αυτο πνευμα, διαιρουν ιδια εκαστω καθως βουλεται.

Translation: But all these the one and the same Spirit works, distributing to each individually according as he wills.

δε is the mild adversative here, following the demonstration of diversity in verses 8-10 and introducing the thought of the essential unity of all the gifts because of their one source. The gifts are many and various, but the source is one. This verse restates or recapitulates what Paul said in verses 4-7, but with added emphasis: *το εν και το αυτο* and *ιδια*.

The gifts are not generated by human genius or effort. They are from the Spirit. There can be no thought of superiority or subordination on the part of those who receive these gifts, certainly not on the basis of human achievement. Not all gifts are held by all in common, but they are all for the benefit of all in common. They are not allotted according to our plans, preferences, or imagined deserts. Rather, the Spirit acts *καθως βουλεται*. In distributing his gifts, he does not exercise his sovereignty in an arbitrary manner, but graciously: they are *χαρισματα*. There is no reason to be jealous of the gift he gives to another or to boast of what he has given us. Furthermore, to selfishly "hoard" or "bury" what he has given me to use for the common good is unthinkable.

II. A Brief Study of 1 Corinthians 12:27-31

With the extended analogy of the human body and its members Paul stresses the importance of mutual respect and cooperation in the church of Christ (12:12-26). He reminds us that "we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink" (v 13). He sets forth the reality which corresponds to the analogy with a series of indicatives and interrogatives (vv 27-30), and saves his single imperative for the last (v 31).

V 27—*Υμεις δε εστε σωμα Χριστου και μελη εκ μερους.*

Translation: Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.

The absence of the article with *σωμα* reminds the Corinthians that they are not the whole body of Christ: they are a part of it, sharing its quality and character. The possessive genitive *Χριστου* says that this body differs from all others, even though the analogy of verses 12-26 is applicable to it.

Now, we are related to this organism as members and to one another as coordinated organs within the organism. We are individuals, differentiated *μελη*, each with our particular capabilities and functions. None of us, however, is independent or autonomous relative to the whole body. Although it is not Paul's point here, it goes without saying that none of us is independent or autonomous in relation to the Head, either.

Some practical implications of the reality, "one body, members individually," already appeared in the foregoing analogy (vv 12-26). Some examples: No member can say to another, "I don't need you" (v 21); the *μελη* should have equal concern for each other (v 25); and especially, "if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it" (v 26).

V 28a—*και ους μεν εθετο ο θεος εν τη εκκλησια πρωτον αποστολους, δευτερον προφητας, τριτον διδασκαλους,*

Translation: That is, God appointed in the church first some apostles, second some prophets, third some teachers . . .

We understand the *και* as explicative. In what follows (vv 28-30), Paul explains and elaborates on the *μελη εκ περους*. Not only in Corinth, but also in the church at large God appointed "some." Out does not have an antecedent and is not a standard relative pronoun here. Rather, it is distributive, anticipating the enumeration of those whom God has appointed.

εθετο has as its objects all the persons and gifts enumerated in verse 28. It does not say God put all of those people and gifts, with all their functions, in every church, at all times. The apostles, to be sure, belong to the whole church through all time. As witnesses to the Lord's resurrection they proclaimed—orally and in writing—the gospel by which the church is gathered, equipped, renewed, and guided even today. Their writings still serve the church today.

The church at Corinth had a number of prophets, who were proclaimers of law and gospel (cf the comments at v.10). Whether or not they ever functioned as seers or bearers of special revelation, it was their function to proclaim God's Word. There seem to have been itinerant as well as local prophets.

It has been suggested that the teachers were "living books," that they imparted the facts of Jesus' life and work at a time before the Gospels were written or available. "Catechists" might be a close modern equivalent to the function they performed.

The enumeration, "First. . . , second . . . , third," probably ranks these persons as to their importance for the gospel work and as to their authority in the church. It may also rank them as to the order in which they typically appeared in a mission field. It cannot be establishing a permanent hierarchy of offices. The apostles, at least, were unique to the first generation.

V28b—*επειτα δυναμεις, επειτα χαρισματα ιαματων, αντιληψεις, κυβερνησεις, γενη γλωσσων.*

Translation: . . . then miracles, then gifts of healing, helpful deeds, leadership abilities, kinds of tongues.

Paul moves in mid-sentence from persons who performed a service to services which they and others were gifted to perform. We know that the apostles also had those gifts. Paul, at least, could speak with tongues. Perhaps prophets and teachers typically did, too. But so did others. The listed gifts are not numbered and so, presumably; they are not listed in order of importance or appearance. The mention of glossolalia in last place is, however, probably significant. All gift: mentioned in verse 28b are also objects of *εθετο*. God provided also these in the church.

The apostle is not presenting a constitution or plan of organization for the church, not even for the Corinthian congregation. He simply reminds them of what they have received from God.

V 29,30—*μη παντες αποστολοι; μη παντες διδασκαλοι; μη παντες δυναμεις; μη παντες χαρισματα εχουσιν ιαματων; μη παντες γλωσσαις λαλουσιν; μη παντες διερμηνευουσιν;*

Translation: Not all are apostles, are they? Not all are prophets, are they? Not all are teachers, are they? Not all are miracle workers, are they? Not all have gifts of healing, do they? Not all speak with tongues, do they? Not all interpret, do they?

These seven questions all require the answer "No" (*μη*). The body of Christ, as Paul has stated (v 27), has many members. Their capacities and functions are diverse. What the body needs in its members is not selfish autonomy or "ragged individualism," but harmonious cooperation. No part of the body should aspire to perform functions for which it is not gifted. There should be no jealousy on my part of those who have gifts and functions for which I am not suited.

The list here does not correspond exactly to the lists in verses 8-10 and verse 28. That means Paul is not prescribing offices and gifts prerequisite for a healthy, lively church. Nor is he establishing a hierarchy. Nor is it necessary to regard this or any other list as exhaustive as to the gifts the Spirit has given or might give to Christ's church.

V 31—*ζηλουτε δε τα χαρισματα τα μειζονα. Και επι καθ' υπερβολην οδον υμιν δεικνυμι.*

Translation: But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way.

While *ζηλουτε* might be an indicative, characterizing the Corinthian believers' attitudes and activity in the matter of spiritual gifts, the imperative seems to follow well upon a long section of instruction on spiritual

gifts and how they ought to be regarded. Paul has been stressing the harmonious functioning of the body. That being the case, he is urging believers to seek the greater gifts, not so much for themselves individually as for the body of believers.

What are the greater gifts? In each grouping (vv 8,28,29) Paul has given first mention to the functions and gifts that involve clear and understandable communication of God's Word, law and gospel (cp 14:4,12). In every age, the gift and function of communicating God's truth are indispensable for the church's life and mission.

Now Paul turns their (and our) attention away from individual gifts, services, and operations. Important as these gifts, given by the Triune God, are for the church there is something better yet, something that is best of all. Paul turns us to the most excellent way, the way of love (13:1-3). When it is operative, spiritual things (*πνευματικά* v. 1) will be understood, evaluated, appreciated, and eagerly desired in their true significance as gifts for the common good.

III. A Brief Study of Romans 12:1-8

The language of 1 Peter 2:5,9 is the source of the familiar expression "priesthood of believers." Verse 5 identifies those chosen in Christ as a "holy priesthood." It characterizes their lives as "offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Christ Jesus." Verse 9 speaks of believers as a "royal priesthood," God's chosen people, whose purpose is to "declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." John Brug has demonstrated in a recent article in this journal that already in the Old Testament the entire body of believers were such priests (WLQ 91:2, Spring 1994, p 177ff).

The descendants of Aaron exercised this priesthood in a representative way for all of Israel. Their office was instituted by God and its activities were prescribed by God in the Law of Moses. Theirs was the "public" priesthood. All Israel, however, was called to offer spiritual sacrifices and to declare the praises of the LORD.

The Apostle Paul introduces the same concept in Romans 12:1 that his fellow apostle teaches in 1 Peter 2. To be sure, the word "priest" does not appear, but the priestly functions of sacrificial offering and worship do. It could be said that the rest of the Epistle to the Romans (12:2-16:27, especially chapters 12-15) is instruction in the exercise of that priesthood. We are especially interested in 12:1-8 because of what it says about the functions and gifts with which believer-priests render service in the church.

Romans 12:1—*Παρακαλω ουν υμας, αδελφοι, δια των οικτιρμων του θεου, παραστησαι τα σωματα υμων θυσιαν ζωσαν αγαιν ευαπεστον τω θεω, την λογικην λατρειαν υμων.*

Translation—I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God: Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—your spiritual worship.

The inferential particle *ουν* looks back to all that Paul has written to this point. He has expounded the righteousness of God which is ours through faith, the new life in Christ, the wonder of the Lord's dealing with Israel and the nations. He has concluded with the majestic doxology of 11:33-36, acknowledging God's sovereign grace as manifested in all his marvelous works. In view of all God's gracious acts he admonishes, encourages, and exhorts his readers to a life of priestly activity.

The basis of his urging is the mercies of God, the compassionate goodness which God has showed in Christ to all sinners, as related in detail in chapters 1-11. The sacrifice he urges, the offering to be presented, is

not a sin-offering. Christ has made that sacrifice for all, once for all time. Again, it is not to be a sacrifice of slaughtered animals. Rather, he calls for our bodies as a living sacrifice, a thank-offering.

Paul used the verb on which the aorist infinitive *παραστησαι* is built in chapter 6, where he speaks of the new life in Christ. At 6:13 he writes: "*μηδε παριστανετε* the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather *παριστησατε* yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and [offer] the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness." At 6:19 we read: "Just as you *παριστησατε* the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now *παριστησατε* them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness."

Present your parts (*μελη*, members, 6:13), yourselves (6:13), your bodies (12:1). Why "your bodies" here? In part, perhaps, to distinguish the offering from dead animal carcasses. In part, perhaps, as a reminder that God has created, Christ has redeemed, the Spirit has sanctified the whole person. Especially, however, because it is in and through our bodies that the holy life, pleasing to God, is lived as an offering to him.

The last phrase, *την λογικην λατρειαν υμων*, is in apposition to *θυσιαν* and characterizes it. KJV's "your reasonable service" probably owes something to Luther's *euer vernünftiger Gottesdienst*. Vulgate has *rationalem cultum*. What justifies the rendering "spiritual" (RSV, NIV, GWN)? One could simply say that Paul speaks of the "logical" way for "spiritual" people to act, and that it would be close to the mark, even if it is not good philology. A better suggestion is that *λογικην* means "corresponding to the spiritual nature of the *λογος*," that the incarnate *λογος* and the apostolic *λογος* elicit spiritual worship. Also, there is the parallel thought of 1 Peter 2:5, where the apostle speaks of priests who offer *πνευματικας θυσιας*.

Paul begins his long elaboration of living sacrifice, of spiritual worship:

V 2a—*και συσχηματιζεσθε τω αιωνι τουτω, αλλα μεταμορφουσθε τη ανακαινωσει του νοος...*

Translation: That is, do not conform any longer to the pattern of this age, but keep being transformed by the renewing of your mind . . .

If the Epistle began here we would have to say that this commands the impossible. The imperatives, however, build on all that Paul has written about the righteousness of God through faith and the new life in Christ. Taken together, the two imperatives are a call to daily repentance. They come from the Holy Spirit to people in whom the Spirit resides. He empowers and enables us to do what he commands.

Both imperatives are present tense. The NIV captures the continuative sense of *συσχηματιζεσθε* with, "Do not conform any longer." No longer shape your actions to the pattern of those whose concerns are only with the temporal.

Regrettably, the NIV does not reflect the sense of continuing action in *μεταμορφουσθε* in a similar manner. Being transformed is a continuing process, a life-long process.

Transformation takes place by the renewing of the mind. *ανακαινωσει* is built on the root *καινος*, new in the sense of something different, a departure from and an improvement on the old. That means the mind of the

Old Adam is not reformed. Rather, a new kind of mind replaces the old. Paul, of course, is not speaking of the organ of intelligence but of a new mind-set, a completely new way of understanding life.

V 2b—εις το δοκιμαζειν υμας τι το θελημα του θεου, το αγιον και ευαρεστον και τελειον.

Translation: . . . so that you can test and approve what is God's will: the beneficial and pleasing and perfect.

The old mind-set which conforms to the pattern of this age is not capable of testing and approving what God wills. Only the Spirit's creation, the new mind-set, equips us to test and approve what is beneficial and pleasing and perfect. That is the intended result (εις with the infinitive) of the ανακαινωσις.

Note that the object of δοκιμαζειν is τι, not το θελημα. We do not presume to test and approve God's will. We test and approve whether our thoughts, words, and actions are in accord with God's will, what he wants us to do as beneficial to others, pleasing to him, and tending to our perfection.

The adjectives are made substantive by a single το and are thus a unit. το αγιον here is not so much the morally good as the thing which is good because it is beneficial to self or others. το ευαρεστον is that which is pleasing to God (v 1). το τελειον is that which will aid in our pursuit of the goal of perfection—not attainable in this life, but nonetheless pursued in the fear and love of God.

A believer's priesthood is a most challenging, full-time, lifetime career!

V 3—Λεγω γαρ δια της χαριτος της δοθεισης μοι παντι τω οντι εν υμιν μη υπερφρονειν παρ' ο δει φρονειν, αλλα φρονειν εις το σωφρονειν εις το σωφρονειν, εκαστω ως ο θεος εμερισεν μετρον πιστεως.

Translation: For I, by virtue of the grace given me, say to everyone of you: Do not think above and beyond what is fitting to think. Rather, do your thinking with the goal of thinking soberly, as God has apportioned faith's portion to each one.

Here yap connects what follows with what preceded, as a consequence. The general exhortation of verses 1 and 2 will now be explained in more detail. In verse 1 Paul wrote, παρακαλω...αδελφοι δια των οικτιρμων του θεου—Christian to Christian. Now he writes in a "more apostolic" vein: "by virtue of (δια) the [special] grace given to me." That grace is his apostleship (1:5). It is by the gift of the grace of God that Paul is Jesus' servant, that he has been given the grace to preach the gospel to the nations (Eph 3:7f).

Every believer in Rome (and elsewhere, always) needs the apostolic instruction on how the renewed mind (v 2) functions. To cherish an exaggerated estimate (υπερφρονειν) of oneself, one's capabilities, one's importance would be conforming to the pattern of this age. The one who has been transformed by the renewing of the mind will try to think his way to (εις) a sane and sober estimate (το σωφρονειν) of himself, as part of proving God's will for him. Paul's fourfold use of φρονειν and compounds thereof is a model of interesting style to highlight weighty content.

εκαστω individualizes the παντι τω οντι. Its emphatic position commands the attention of "each one." The emphatic position also stresses that God has given "each one" the πετρον πιστεως.

How shall each believer attain to healthy thinking about self, capability, and importance? Let it be done "as God has apportioned faith's portion." Much of the difficulty in understanding the phrase *μετρον πιστεως* is removed by taking *πιστεως* as a possessive genitive, and by understanding *μετρον* as the portion measured out rather than the measure used to determine the size of the portion. Faith's portion, the portion that belongs to faith, is what God apportions to each when he calls believers to faith and nurtures them in the life of faith. What he apportions are gifts: "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us" (v 6). God gives one or more gifts to each one. The gifts are not identical or equal in all believers. "To each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it" (Eph 4:7).

Understanding *μετρον πιστεως* in this way we do not need to think of the amount of saving faith (which is always great enough because the Savior is its object). We do not have to think of heroic faith. We do not have to make faith mean something other than trust in the Savior. We don't have to make *μετρον πιστεως* mean "the standard established by faith" (subjective genitive, genitive of source).

Sober thinking says: When God called me to faith he gave me a portion of gifts—not all gifts—for spiritual worship (v 1). I must not overestimate or underestimate them. Not all members of Christ's body have the same function (v 4) and each member (with faith's gifts) belongs to all the others (v 5).

V 4,5—*καθαπερ γαρ εν ενι σωματι πολλα μελη εχομεν, τα δε μελη παντα ου την αυτην εχει πραξιν, ουτως οι πολλοι εν σωμα σεμεν εν Χριστω, το δε καθ' εις αλληλων μελη.*

Translation: For just as we have many members in one body but all members do not have the same function, so also we all are one body in Christ, one by one, members of each other.

Only at Matthew 24:12 and 2 Corinthians 2:17 does *οι πολλοι* mean less than "all." Here, too, it is inclusive. It is inclusive of all who are in Christ, who are included because they are in Christ. Paul does not say here that the body is Christ, but that we are one body. He does not say that we are like a body, but that we are a real organism, an organism which lives *εν Χριστω* (dative of sphere). Christ is the life and support of this body.

The point of the comparison (*καθαπερ...ουτως*) is not so much the unity of the body as it is the interrelatedness of all the parts with all their diversified functions (*πραξεις*). We do not all have the same repays because we do not all have the same *πετρον πιστεως* (v 3) or the same *χαρισματα* (v 6).

καθ' is distributive here and calls for the accusative, but *εις* is undeclined, a peculiarity of idiom. The meaning is "one by one." With *αλληλων* Paul's thought expresses the mutuality and reciprocity of all the members as opposed to a selfish autonomy. Each member of the body is called to serve the others in a spirit of cooperation rather than competition.

V 6a—*εχοντες δε χαρισματα κατα την χαριν την δοθεισαν ημιν διαφορα,*

Translation: Since we have gifts which, according to the grace that was given to us, are different. . .

The participle is circumstantial and we translate it as an indicative in a section (vv 6-8) which has no indicatives (or imperatives): "Since we have." Among the functions which Paul will list as gifts of grace there are none which we normally think of as "supernatural." They are, rather, gifts of mind and energy which are now set apart by a gracious God for service to him, in the interest of his church.

Paul characterizes these gifts as "given to us according to grace." We did not, do not, procure them by earnest effort. He further characterizes them as "different," or "differing." Not all are qualified for every task in the life of the church.

In what follows (vv 6b-8) Paul will not describe the gifts or compare them. He will simply indicate what some of them are, urge their use, and direct how they are to be used. He does this without the use of any indicatives or imperatives. In every case the verb must be inferred, the thought must be completed from the activity and from the qualifying prepositional phrase. In the translation of verses 6b-8, the inferred hortatory or imperative will be bracketed. In every case εἴτε will be translated with "if."

V 6b—εἴτε προφητειον κατα την αναλογιαν της πιστεως,

Translation: If we have the gift of prophecy, [let us prophesy] faithfully.

We understand προφητεια here essentially as in 1 Corinthians 12:10, the proclamation of God's Word with exposition and application. Some commentators regard prophecy as the only "extraordinary" or "supernatural" gift among the seven which Paul mentions in verses 6b-8. The fact that the others are "natural" and "ordinary" strongly suggests that in this case prophecy is, too. God uses natural abilities and directs them by his Spirit for the proclamation of his message.

"Faithfully" in the translation is an attempt to distill all that is included in the expression κατα την αναλογιαν της πιστεως. If it seems to be a "neutral" translation, which leaves the issue of *fides quae/fides qua* unsettled, it was not originally intended to be. It simply seemed to be the best way to express what Paul is saying here. Further reflection, however, has led this writer to think that a "neutral" translation of της πιστεως might be in place. What follows will explain.

Some want to limit the meaning of της πιστεως to *fides quae creditur*, the faith which is believed, the content of faith, objective faith. They do not, for the most part, argue that the use of the article requires the sense of "the faith," recognizing that the article is also used with διακονια, διδασκαλια, and παρακαλησει in v 7 and 8. Their argument really lies in κατα την αναλογιαν. As a translation of the phrase Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich offers the alternatives "in relation to," "in agreement with," or "in proportion to." The second is closest to the sense in which the proponents of *fides quae* understand the phrase: "in agreement with the faith." In this view κατα puts restraints on prophecy, assigning it a limited sphere or scope. The area in which it operates, the extent of its boundaries, is what "is in agreement with (the objective) faith." This is a good thought, in line with a sound "analogy of Scripture" principle of interpretation and doctrinal formulation.

Is this, however, Paul's meaning? NIV allows the possibility in a footnote: "Or in agreement with the [faith]." Lenski expresses himself strongly in favor of this interpretation. He regards Jude 3, "the faith once for all delivered to the saints," as decisive. That verse, however; can also be the subject of the same objective/subjective argument. *God's Word to the Nations* (Second Edition) adopts the objective sense of πιστις

with "in complete agreement with the faith." Its footnote offers a concise and comprehensible defense of this choice, and it is worth quoting:

"If a person can prophesy, let what he says be in complete conformity with the standard [Greek: 'analogia' ('analogy')] of the faith." The Greek word for 'standard' refers to the equality that must exist between the two parts of an equation or between the members of a proportion.

A problem with this comment is that it attaches the meaning "standard" to the word *αναλογια* when the idea of "standard" really derives from the preposition *κατα*. A compilation from standard lexicons provides only the meanings "proportion, agreement, relation correspondence" for *αναλογια*. What the note ought to say is that the phrase *κατα την αναλογιαν* can mean "in keeping with the standard."

Contributors to *Theological Wordbook of the New Testament* (Kittel) do not agree among themselves as to the proper understanding of the genitive *πιστεως* or of the phrase *κατα την αναλογιαν*. Some say that none of the early Greek Fathers interpreted *πιστεως* objectively as *fides quae*. Most modern English versions translate it as *fides qua* subjective faith, believing. Representative are RSV's "in proportion to our faith" and NIV's "in proportion to his faith."

Closer to Paul in time and place than we are were the translator of the Peshitta, the Syriac vernacular translation. We are told that they used the same word for *αναλογια* in verse 6b as they used for *μετρον* in verse 3. Several modern commentators see the correspondence of each with verse 6b as well, even though they do not treat *αναλογια* and *μετρον* as synonyms.

At verse 3 we interpreted *εκαστω ως ο θεος εμερισεν μετρον πιστεως* to mean: "as God has apportioned faith's portion to each one." We said that "faith's portion" is to be understood in the light of the differing *χαρισματα* of verse 6a. Taking the *της* of verse 6b (*της πιστεως*) as anaphoric and demonstrative, "that aforementioned faith," also leads us back to verse 3. That faith of v 3 has its portion in the God-given *χαρισματα* of verse 6a. Then *κατα την αναλογιαν της πιστεως* can be paraphrased "in proportion to faith's portion." To shorten it for purposes of translation we can abridge the adverbial phrase *κατα την αναλογιαν της πιστεως* to a single adverb: "faithfully." Also in favor of this rendering is the fact that the other six implied hortatories or imperatives in verses 7 and 8 can in every case be reduced to a common injunction: "Do it faithfully."

All of this does not absolutely exclude the objective sense of *πιστις*, faith's content. It ought to show, however, that the subjective sense of "believing" cannot be excluded, either.

Is it possible that we pose false alternatives when we insist on a sharp distinction between the two senses of *πιστις*, as though Paul (and his contemporaries) must always mean one or the other? As far as we know the New Testament writers did not consciously use the grammatical-theological categories objective/subjective with regard to faith. But they did teach that trust (*πιστις*) is elicited by and relies upon the trustworthiness (*πιστις*) of God and his word. Nor did they ever teach a faith (believing, *fides qua*) without content (*fides quae*).

So, what is Paul saying in verse 6b? "Let the believing preacher use all the gifts that are his as a believer to proclaim faith's content."

V 7,8a—*ειτε διακονιαν εν τη διακονια, ειτε ο διδασκων εν τη διδασκαλια, ειτε ο παρακαλων εν τη παρακλησει*

Translation: If [we have] the gift of service [let us occupy ourselves] in that service. If a person is teaching [let him occupy himself] in teaching. If a person is counseling [let him occupy himself] in that counseling.

With regard to *διακονια* Chrysostom wrote, "Every spiritual work is a *διακονια*." At 1 Corinthians 12:5 Paul says that there are different kinds of *διακονια*. Here, however, he positions *διακονια* between prophecy and teaching. That invites the conclusion that he has in mind the *διακονια* of the Word (Ac 6:4), the *διακονια* of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18f).

The Old Testament, the material contained in the Gospels, and moral instruction have been suggested as the content of the *διδασκαλια*. There is no reason to exclude any of these.

"To counsel" is not, of course, a lexicon listing for *παρακαλεω*. It is an attempt to include in a single word the various meanings, based on linguistic and contextual considerations, which the lexicons assign to the verb: "admonish, encourage, console, exhort."

Once again, there are no verbs. The datives of sphere after *εν* with the anaphoric articles (*τη*) suggest something like "be occupied with that" or "concentrate on that." The idea in each case is that the person with one or another gift should employ it, carrying out his or her proper function, without seeking something else to do or encroaching on the work of another.

V 8b—*ο μεταδιδους εν απλοτητι, ο προισταμενος εν σπουδη, ο ελεων εν ιλαποτητι*

Translation: He who shares, [let him do it] generously. He who provides care, [let him do it] diligently. He who shows mercy, [let him do it] cheerfully.

The *εν* phrases are datives of manner and thus adverbial. The present participles, as did *διδασκων* in verse 7 and *παρακαλων* in verse 8a, denote the characteristic activity of each person who has these gifts and functions.

εν απλοτητι could as well be rendered "wholeheartedly," for it speaks of generous motives rather than of the liberality of the amount given. Perhaps we should not confine the unstated object of *μεταδιδους* to material things. At Romans 1:11 Paul uses the verb with spiritual gifts as its object. At 1 Thessalonians 2:8 we read that Paul and his coworkers were pleased to *μεταδουναι* not only the gospel but their own lives.

προισταμενος in its first listed meaning is "one who is at the head of, rules, manages." The second definition is "one who is concerned about, cares for, gives aid." The second meaning is used at Titus 3:8, "devote themselves to doing what is good" (*καλων εργαων προιστασθαι*). The same phrase appears at Titus 3:14. The position of *προισταμενος* here, between *μεταδιδους* and *ελεων*, suggests a person who does something like Christian "social work," a provider of care and assistance to those who cannot help and support themselves.

Let the one who shows mercy (whether in the physical or the spiritual realm) do it with a cheerful attitude, prompted by love. Mercy as a grim and grudging performance of onerous duty is not mercy.

It is interesting and instructive that the subject of Paul's next sentence (v 9a) is love. As in 1 Corinthians 13:1, he moves from a discussion of spiritual gifts and their use to the subject of *αγαπη, η αγαπη ανυποκριτος*. Translators generally supply some kind of imperative. The indicative would do as well: "Love is without hypocrisy."

IV. Inferences as to the Gospel Ministry Today

What do these passages affirm regarding the service of Christian in either personal or public ministry? What descriptions or definition do they provide? What do they prescribe and what do they not prescribe? Let us consider these questions in order.

1. What do these passages affirm regarding the service of Christians in either personal or public ministry?

Spiritual gifts have their source in God's unmerited favor (1 Cor 12:4; Ro 12:6). They are given to believer-priests to be used for service (1 Cor 12:5; Ro 12:1-8). They are used in different ways (1 Cor 12:6). They are diverse, distributed by the Triune God, who apportions them in varying portions (1 Cor 12:4-6,28-30; Ro 12:3-6). One or more gifts are given to each believer (1 Cor 12:7,27; Ro 12:4f). Thus, they are to be used, not hoarded or left to deteriorate through non-use.

First mention is given to the gifts which enable Christians to communicate spiritual truth in a logical and clear manner (1 Cor 12:8,10,28; Ro 12:6-8a). These are the "greater gifts" (1 Cor 12:31), for in every age the gift and function of communicating God's truth are indispensable for the church's life and mission (Mt 28; Mk 16; Lk 24; Jn 20).

Communicating the truth, however, is not the only function designated as "ministry" (cf *διακονιων* in 1 Cor 12:5). *αντιλημψεις* and *κυβερνησεις* (1 Cor 12:28) are not explicitly or self-evidently offices of proclaiming the Word. Yet they are gifts given for service to the church, for ministry (1 Cor 12:25). These and all other gifts are called "spiritual" (1 Cor 12:1) because they all come from the same Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:7-11).

While all the Spirit's gifts are "spiritual," they are not all "supernatural." Many are simply "natural" gifts of mind, temperament, and energy which are set apart by a gracious God for serving him in the interest of Christ's church (Ro 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:8,28).

The Holy Spirit distributes gifts to each as he wills (1 Cor 12:11,19; Ro 12:4,6). It is self-evident that not all Christians are qualified (or equally qualified) for every function. It is also doubtful to the extreme that any one person, even the most gifted person in a full-time ministry, could do all the things Paul mentions in these passages.

God's distribution of gifts and of persons to exercise them is not limited to a certain place or time. They are given to the body of Christ, the church (1 Cor 12:7f), not only to the Corinthian or Roman congregations in the first century. The Holy Spirit has, at every time and place, given the church the gifts needed for that place and time.

The similarity between these passages (1 Cor 12 and Ro 12) and Ephesians 4:11-13 is quite clear. In the latter the gifts are persons given to the church, ministers who "prepare God's people for works of service" (v

13). In the former he speaks of gifts given to persons in the church "for the common good" (1 Cor 12:7) and enumerates many of the "works of service."

What we read in 1 Corinthians 12 and in Romans 12 suggests that there was a "team" or "staff" ministry in the congregations addressed. That is, the varying gifts were utilized in a cooperative way to carry out the various serving functions. This may have included the work of both public (called) ministers and the personal service of individuals, just as it may have entailed the work of both full-time and part-time ministers.

2. *What descriptions or definitions of the various forms of ministry do these passages provide?*

Lexicons and biblical usage offer us approximations of gifts, services, and functions, but no detailed position descriptions are to be found. In Romans 12:6-8, for example, Paul simply indicates what some of the gifts are. He urges that they be used and directs that they be used faithfully, wholeheartedly, diligently, and cheerfully.

It is clear that none of the forms of office, none of the functions mentioned in the passages under study, equate with the present-day pastorate in every respect. Any of them could be carried out as a public ministry. Any of them could be carried out (by the person gifted to perform them) privately or personally—as long as that did not interfere with someone else's ministry. Again, none of these either demand or preclude full-time ministry. Nor would part-time ministry be precluded where practical considerations indicated it.

3. *What does Paul prescribe in the passages under consideration?*

By implication the apostle encourages thankful appreciation of God's gifts in all their variety (1 Cor 12:4-6), grateful acknowledgment of their distribution for the common good, and their faithful use (1 Cor 12:7). There is an implied admonition to accept cheerfully the fact that one and the same Spirit has determined to allot this to one and that to another according to his will (1 Cor 12:7-11).

Using the analogy of the body and its members, Paul stresses the importance of willing cooperation, reminding his readers of the reality: "You are the body of Christ" (1 Cor 12:27). Romans 12:4f conveys the same thought. With the series of *μη παντες* questions at 1 Corinthians 12:29f he implies that no member of the body should aspire to perform functions for which he or she is not suited. Neither should there be any envy on the part of those who lack certain gifts or are not called to certain offices. Finally comes an imperative, a prescription: "Earnestly desire the greater gifts," not for yourselves but for the body of believers (1 Cor 12:31).

Romans 12 begins with what might be regarded as prescriptions: "Present your bodies as a living sacrifice . . . and do not conform to the pattern of this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind" (vv 1,2). In his apostolic voice Paul prescribes sober thinking as to one's capabilities and importance (v 3). As noted previously (under Point 2), he directs by means of implied imperatives that gifts be used and functions be performed in a spiritual manner (vv 6-8).

4. *What do these passages not prescribe?*

The passages under consideration do not provide a constitution with an article on the ministry or prescribe a plan of organization—not even for the congregations to which these letters were written. There is instruction as to the use of what has been given. The varying terminology and listings in 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and the Pastoral Epistles indicate a variety and fluidity rather than bureaucratic uniformity among the churches. There certainly is no prescription for a permanent arrangement anywhere.

While there may be a kind of ranking at 1 Corinthians 12:28 ("first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers") and at Romans 12.:6,7 (prophecy, service, teaching), these do not constitute a prescription for or an institution of a hierarchical structure for the church's ministry. The same can be said of nomenclature, the titles by which the church's ministers are recognized and addressed.

A church which has been gifted with active ministry in the seven functions mentioned by Paul in Romans 12:6-8 certainly "has the bases covered." There is no prescription, however, that every congregation must have all the ministries mentioned in order to be a God-pleasing and viable church. Gifts given and functions described are not the same as forms of ministry instituted by God for every time and place.

The way in which spiritual gifts are to be recognized by the church, in which persons are to be called to exercise their gifts, is not prescribed. It goes without saying that no one can claim a public ministry without being called to a function which he or she can perform and which the church can use. It is likewise self-evident that no person, however gifted, may exercise a personal ministry which interferes with the ministry of another.

These passages do not prescribe that one form or function of the public ministry be regarded as the divinely instituted office, with others serving in only auxiliary or ancillary capacities. The passages under study lead us to a contrary conclusion. Even what Lutherans call the pastoral office has not been identical at every time in every place as to responsibilities and scope.

What is neither prescribed in God's Word, nor forbidden by God's Word, nor excluded by Christian common sense remains open. That is, what might be useful at any given time in the church's life and available because of Spirit-given abilities is a legitimate (but not a required) form of the public ministry.