

Chapter 57

Gifts That Differ

(Romans 12:3–8)

Paul immediately gets down to details and the first topic on his agenda is life within the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. **We must evaluate ourselves rightly.** His starting point concerns evaluating one's giftedness within the Christian fellowship. ³*For through the grace of God given to me, I say to every person who is among you, not to think of yourself more highly than is necessary, but to think of yourself sensibly, as God measured out to each person a portion of faith.* Paul himself is an apostle and an eye-witness of the resurrection. Yet he is what he is only by the grace of God. When we are evaluating ourselves or speaking of ourselves, we are what we are only by God's grace. We are to ask ourselves what it is that God's grace enables us to do well. We all have faith to be able to do something for God in a regular manner. Other gifts we do not have because we do not have the faith to exercise them. Faith, we remember, is believing what God has said to us.

2. **We remember that the church is 'one body'.** ⁴*For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, ⁵so we though many are one body in Christ and individually members one of another.* Just as there are many parts in a body, so every Christian has some gift. Just as there is great variety in the human body, so there is variety of giftedness in the Christian church. No part of the human body can do

everything. The eye cannot hear. So no Christian has all gifts. Even the greatest of Christian leaders have areas where they are not gifted. Different gifts must flow together. We belong to each other. My gifts belong to you. Your gifts belong to me. We are individually members one of another.

3. **We must use our gifts.** What is a gift? It is any aspect of one's temperament, any aspect of one's position, any ability given by God, experienced in an unusual measure, through which we are generally used by the Holy Spirit for the benefit of his people. No gift is possessed by all people. Not everyone is a preacher, a public tongues-speaker, a Sunday School teacher. There is no complete list of the gifts. Some gifts are not specially mentioned in the New Testament. Think of singing, worship-leading, hospitality, personal evangelism, letter writing – even writing books! Actually there are as many gifts as there are Christians – because we have gifts that differ! Gifts must be used. The fellowship is defective if you are not using your gift.

The greatest difficulty in using our gifts is pride. But we must equally beware of timidity. All gifts are a matter of grace. If we see every gift as a matter of God's grace we shall hold to unity within the fellowship. How do we know our gifts? They 'manifest' themselves.

⁶Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them. If it is prophecy, let it be according to the proportion of faith. 'Prophecy' is speaking for God with words given by God. There are different levels of prophecy. Paul regards it as a wonderful gift. He wants the gift of prophecy to be used, but he adds the instruction, 'let it be according to the proportion of faith.' This seems to mean at least two things. Firstly: let not the Christian who thinks God gives him revelations try to go beyond the measure of the gift he or she has. Secondly, prophecy should not contradict the clear teaching of previous revelations and the clear teaching of written Scripture. ⁷If someone has the gift of serving let that person get on with serving! 'Serving' (Greek

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diakonia) is the kind of gift needed for a person to be a deacon (Greek *diakonos*). *If it is teaching, let that person be active in teaching!* ‘Teaching’ is the steady imparting of a largish body of Christian instruction about receiving salvation, and about working out salvation in the way in which we live. ⁸*If someone has the gift of exhortation, let that person use it!* Once again it is a gift of speaking. ‘Exhortation’ is the ability to rouse men and women to obedience. *If someone has the gift of giving, he should give freely.* The fact that Paul should include ‘giving’ as a spiritual gift helps us to understand what the ‘gifts’ are. A gift might include ‘any aspect of one’s position’. Some people have a position in life where they are wealthier than others. It is a ‘gift’! *If someone has the gift of presiding in leadership, let him use his gift with diligence!* This is the gift that is appropriate to elders. It is the gift of ‘ruling’ or ‘presiding’ in the church, working as a ‘shepherd’. *If someone has the gift of mercy, let that person use it freely and gladly.* This is the gift or skill in ministering to the suffering and the distressed. It is a gift often possessed by women – although it is not exclusively theirs.

Romans 12:3–8 gives us a picture of the life of the early church. Obviously everyone was involved. There was leadership within the church, but the main task of the leaders was to lead and direct a body of people where everyone was involved. The great question is: what is the church meant to be like? It is to be like the book of Acts! It is to include what we find here in Romans 12:6–8.