

# Roles & Gifts

## *Module 3.7*

Unfortunate to the human condition is the tendency, and temptation, to believe that one's role determines their value. We see this everywhere in our world today, and this experience is not new or novel. In fact, the reality of this tendency and temptation is why the American scales of justice are supposed to be blind. Regardless of what someone's role is, or is not, our judicial system has a duty to prosecute and protect, because all are valuable and justice is to be equitable.<sup>1</sup>

Another example of this tendency and temptation within culture can be seen in the ways unborn babies are referred to. Questions are such as, "is this a *wanted* pregnancy?" or statements are made such as, "I'm choosing abortion because it's not the *right time* to have a baby." This language reveals a deeply engrained belief that the unborn child's value is determined by their role in my life. Consequently, if I do not want the baby to have a role in my life, or if I have determined that it's not the right time to have a baby, I am allowed to commit murder and end their life.

Furthermore, this struggle does not just take place in the church, it also takes place in our homes. Husbands and wives have long struggled, since Genesis 3, to fully understand how value can be equal while roles remain unique.

Not only is the temptation to believe that role determines value apparent in our culture and homes, it happens in the church as well. Whether it be in the way I view my role within the church, or the way I view someone else's role, I can easily find myself tempted to believe that value is determined by role.

The Charis Fellowship understands that we must work hard to uphold biblical truth in this area and continually apply the truths of the Bible, regarding roles and gifts, in all situations. As those committed to Biblical Relationships, we understand that we must be committed to never asserting that role determines value. To clarify our convictions about these truths the Commitment to Common Identity states, "*We affirm that the Triune God serves as the perfect and ultimate model for human relationships.*"

Within the Trinity we see the distinction of roles functioning in the midst of perfect unity. The Apostle Paul highlights these truths in Ephesians chapter 1 where he gives tremendous detail regarding the role and activity of each member of the Trinity in

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<sup>1</sup> While there are unfortunate examples of where this ideal is not met, the overarching goal of the Justice System remains the same. In fact, that justice is *supposed* to be blind makes cases of injustice all the more grievous.

regards to salvation. Without question, their roles are different, and without question their value is equal as they exist in perfect unity.

Secondly, *“we affirm that differences in gifts and ministries are a manifestation of the multifaceted grace of God.”* Here again, the Apostle Paul helps us understand how value and roles/gifts intersect within the body of Christ.

The overarching point of 1 Corinthians 12 is that God has given a variety of gifts to his body, the church, and this body is made up of different parts. Consequently, we must not think or behave in a way that gives greater or lesser value to someone based on their gift(s). A summary of Paul’s instructions from 1 Corinthians 12 is as follows:

- “...it is the same God who empowers them all [gifts] in everyone” (1 Corinthians 12:6).<sup>2</sup>
- “All these [gifts] are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills” (1 Corinthians 12:11).
- “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...” (1 Corinthians 12:13).<sup>3</sup>
- “...God has arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose” (1 Corinthians 12:18).<sup>4</sup>
- “...God has so composed the body...that there may be no division in the body” (1 Corinthians 12:25).<sup>5</sup>
- “...God has appointed in the church...” (1 Corinthians 12:28).<sup>6</sup>

Six different times in 1 Corinthians 12 the Apostle Paul makes a statement about how the differences found within the body of Christ are the result of God’s sovereign choice.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright ©2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>3</sup> This point is critical in seeing that there are not “really spiritual” people and “normally spiritual” people in Corinth. Furthermore, the distinction between different gifts (and persons with different gifts) is because of the will of the Holy Spirit, not because a greater portion of the Holy Spirit has been given to some and not others. All have been baptized into one body in the Holy Spirit. While distinction exists in regards to role, there is no distinction in regards to the measure of the Holy Spirit that one is indwelt with. See Module 3.4 for further truths from this verse.

<sup>4</sup> Here Paul is asserting that individuals should not look down on themselves if they have a gift that doesn’t look as good as someone else’s gift. “The foot cannot say ‘I do not belong’ because I am not a hand.” (1 Corinthians 12:15). Because there is no hierarchy within the body of Christ, a person must not conclude that they are less significant than another.

<sup>5</sup> Here, and in verses 21-24, Paul makes the point that one person cannot tell another person that they are less important (or spiritual) if they have a gift that doesn’t look as good, is not as “useful,” or doesn’t appear to be as supernatural.

<sup>6</sup> Once again, the Apostle Paul is making the point that how the body has been composed is at the appointment of God and his sovereign will.

<sup>7</sup> Paul uses the words, empowers, empowered, were all baptized, arranged, composed, and appointed to make his point clear.

The conclusion resounds clearly; if God has chosen to compose his body in this way, who are we to claim that some gifts (or people) are more valuable than others, or inversely, that some gifts (or people) are less valuable than others. God has given different roles to different people within the body of Christ. But these differences in no way determines their value as members of the body of Christ.

For example, the Sunday School teacher is not less valuable than the Senior Pastor, even though they occupy similar, yet unique, roles on a Sunday morning. Another example can be found within the role of elder/pastor within the church. While this office serves a distinct role and function within the church, those occupying this office are not more valuable than those not serving in this role. This means that the pastor doesn't pray more valuable prayers than a young child in the congregation! Surely, there is a distinction of role and function, but there is not one of value.

In Matthew 19, we see Jesus making this point clear to his disciples as they rebuked the people who were bringing children to him, "that he might lay his hands on them and pray" (Matthew 19:14). Mark tells us that Jesus was "indignant" with his disciples when he saw their actions and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:14). Here, Jesus is providing an illustration of saving faith by pointing to these children, and he is also making clear that while society might quickly reject these little ones because they do not have anything to offer, he will not; and neither should his disciples.<sup>8</sup>

The wide and varied differences within the body of Christ exist because of the sovereign determination of God. We must work hard to not confuse role with value, because one does not determine the other.

*Lastly, "as a result, we encourage all believers to use their gifts in ways that promote the unity, growth, and ministry of the local church."*

All believers have been given gifts by God the Father through God the Holy Spirit. As a Fellowship, we want to celebrate and encourage everyone to use the gifts that God has given them for his glory and fame. Furthermore, we believe that the primary place that spiritual gifts are used is within a local body of believers.

Throughout the New Testament there is a consistent refrain that exclaims the priority of the local church and a believer's role within. Certainly, gifted individuals do benefit those

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<sup>8</sup> "Childhood was typically regarded as an unavoidable interim between birth and adulthood, which a boy reached at age 13. One will search Jewish and early Christian literature in vain for sympathy toward the young comparable to that shown by Jesus." Edwards, James. *The Gospel According to Mark*. Pg. 306.

outside their local congregations, but this reality does not replace the priority that the New Testament places on the local church.

As a Fellowship we must continually contend for these truths and the application of them in our homes, churches, and spheres of influence. Humanity has been created in the image of God and has intrinsic value and worth because of it. As a result, regardless of one's gift or role their value does not change.