New Test. Stud. 52, pp. 433–439. Printed in the United Kingdom © 2006 Cambridge University Press
DOI:10.1017/S0028688506000245

SHORT STUDY

Romans 12.4–8: One Sentence or Two?*

KENNETH BERDING
Talbot School of Theology/Biola University, 13800 Biola Ave., La Mirada, CA 90639, USA

Is Rom 12.4–8 to be read as one sentence or as two sentences – do verses 12.6–8 form a different sentence from Rom 12.4–5, or does the sentence begun in v. 4 continue all the way through to the end of v. 8? One initial difficulty when considering this problem is that grammarians and commentators discussing this issue usually comment on one or two (or none) of the seven or so pertinent issues in the passage and then offer their opinion as to whether this is one sentence or two. Romans 12.4–8, however, features a number of difficult issues that must be held together in order to arrive at an adequate understanding of what Paul intends. The goal of this short study is to consider each of these issues and to argue that a one-sentence reading is the most satisfying option.

Romans 12.4–8 reads:

> [4]καθάπερ γὰρ ἐν ἑνὶ σώματι πολλὰ μέλη ἔχομεν, τὰ δὲ μέλη πάντα οὐ τὴν αὐτὴν ἔχει πρᾶξιν, [5]οὕτως οἱ πολλοὶ ἓν σῶμά ἐσμεν ἐν Χριστῷ, τὸ δὲ καθ᾽ εἷς ἀλλήλων μέλη, [6]ἔχοντες δὲ χαρίσματα κατὰ τὴν χάριν τὴν δοθεῖσαν ἡμῖν διάφορα, εἴτε προφητείαν κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως, [7]εἴτε διακονίαν, ἐν τῇ διακονίᾳ, εἴτε ὁ διδάσκων, ἐν τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ, [8]εἴτε ὁ παρακαλῶν, ἐν τῇ παρακλήσει, ὁ μεταδιδοὺς ἐν ἁπλότητι, ὁ προϊστάμενος ἐν σπουδῇ, ὁ ἐλεῶν ἐν ἱλαρότητι.[1]

The majority view is that there are two sentences rather than one.[2] The first sentence consists of vv. 4–5; the second sentence is vv. 6–8. First and most important,

* Special thanks are due to Brian Asbill, my research assistant, for his help on this article, especially on the secondary literature search, and to my colleague, Alan Hultberg, for dialoguing with me on a number of grammatical issues in this passage.

1 I have only included vv. 4–8 because these verses are the particular focus of this study. But the paragraph actually begins at v. 3, a verse that is occasionally referred to in the following discussion.

2 See the following comments by proponents of the two-sentence approach: H. A. W. Meyer, *The Epistle to the Romans* (trans. John C. Moore; New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1889) 471–2; Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament* (rev. Everet F. Harrison; Chicago: Moody, 1968) 441–2; C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (ICC;

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688506000245 Published online by Cambridge University Press

there appear to be two main reasons that interpreters adopt the two-sentence approach. The presence of the postpositive δέ after the participle ἔχοντες at the beginning of v. 6: since similar constructions frequently introduce new sentences elsewhere, it is proposed that we should begin a new sentence here. Second, the nature of the list that follows is commonly used to argue that Paul introduces a new sentence in v. 6: it is suggested that Paul is not only listing the distribution of ministry functions; his purpose is hortatory as well. Thus, in this view, Paul is not only listing the *charismata* that we are said to 'have'; he is encouraging their use. Beyond these two most commonly used reasons, it should also be noted that, from a translational perspective, the two-sentence approach is the simplest. Attempts to translate vv. 4–8 as one sentence often end up unwieldy and unsatisfactory from a stylistic perspective.

I wish to contend for the minority view that what we are dealing with here is one sentence rather than two.[3] There are seven main issues – together with various minor issues embedded within each consideration – that point to the one-sentence reading. Discussing these seven will help to resolve how Paul is employing the list found in vv. 6–8 and thus answer the second concern raised by two-sentence proponents. After discussing these, we will return to a consideration of the function of the postpositive δέ and finish with an annotated diagram of the issues discussed in the text.

First, it should be noted that there is no main verb in vv. 6–8: the last main verb in the paragraph is the ἐσμέν of v. 5. The lack of a main verb in vv. 6–8 is a substantial point and should not be underestimated. Though ellipses are not unusual in Paul, the type of ellipsis suggested here by two-sentence proponents is unparalleled in the letters of Paul. The suggested void has to be filled either by the

Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979) 618; William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 5th edn., 1902) 356 (who nevertheless refer to it as a 'harsh ellipse'); John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, one-volume edn., 1971) 120–1; Friedrich Adolph Philipi, *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1879) 261–3; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 763–4.

3 Examples of other one-sentence proponents (the minority position) include: James Denney, 'St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans', in *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 2:555–725 (689–90); James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16* (WBC 38B; Milton Keynes: Word, 1988) 725; James Hope Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1906) 1:183–4; Berhard Weiss, *Der Brief an die Römer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1899) 514–9; W. M. L. deWette, *Briefes an die Römer* (Leipzig: Weidmannsche, 1841) 170–2; Johann Peter Lange, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1889) 384. An entirely different approach is suggested by William Williams, *An Exposition of Paul to the Romans* (Cincinnati: Jennings & Pye, 1902) 359, who claims that Paul's 'incoherent, and almost jerky' form represents merely brief notes that Paul intended to be filled out later in full sentences by his amanuensis Tertius. This suggestion cannot be verified.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688506000245 Published online by Cambridge University Press

addition of an entire clause ('let us use them', RSV; 'each of us is to exercise them accordingly' [NASB]) or by a hortatory expression preceding each prepositional phrase, 'whether prophecy, *let us prophesy* according to the proportion of faith . . .' (KJV, ASV). In the absence of a main verb in vv. 6–8, if there is an acceptable way to read vv. 6–8 together with vv. 4–5, that approach should be given preference.

Second, it is possible to read the participle ἔχοντες together with the ἐσμέν of v. 5 and thus supply the needed main verb for vv. 6–8. It should be noted that Paul does elsewhere use ἐσμέν together with an anarthrous participle (e.g. 1 Cor 15.19; 2 Cor 2.17; Eph 2.10).

Third, and perhaps most important, is the function of διάφορος in the sentence. It is not merely an adjective modifying χαρίσματα, though it at the very least functions as an adjective. Its position at the end of the participial clause and as the word immediately preceding the list that follows appears purposeful on Paul's part. Paul *distributes* the list that follows and *differentiates* the various areas of ministry and attitudes through his use of this adjective. So, rather than reading this as 'having different *charismata* according to the grace given to us' and then trying to supply a verb, we should let the διάφορος distribute what follows: 'having *charismata* according to the grace given to us *that differ* . . .'[4] The capacity of this adjective to distribute the following items is almost as effective as if Paul had employed its verbal counterpart διαφέρω (cf. 1 Cor 15.41). Of course, had Paul tried to use διαφέρω as a main verb (so διαφέρουσιν), he would have lost syntactical contact with vv. 4–5. But it appears that Paul did not want to disrupt the connection with vv. 4–5 and his choice of διάφορος may again be the evidence. That is, διάφορος has another function in this sentence in addition to the two already mentioned (i.e. of modifying χαρίσματα and of distributing the items in the list); διάφορος establishes a conceptual link with Paul's earlier statement in v. 4 (i.e. the same sentence), τὰ δὲ μέλη πάντα οὐ τὴν αὐτὴν ἔχει πρᾶξιν, and could almost be viewed as shorthand for that expression. Moreover, διαφόρος conceptually ties into Paul's earlier point in v. 3 (same paragraph, different sentence) about humility, the issue he used to start the paragraph. In other words, one of the ways

4 This passage is full of distributing expressions, arguing that distribution and comparison is Paul's main issue rather than some sort of unstated hortatory impulse. Indicators of distribution in this passage include: (1) the χάρις in v. 3 τῆς δοθείσης and in v. 6 τὴν δοθεῖσαν; (2) ἑκάστῳ in v. 3; (3) ὡς ὁ θεὸς ἐμέρισεν μέτρον πίστεως in v. 3 (note that μερίζω is specifically a word of distribution); (4) τὰ δὲ μέλη πάντα οὐ τὴν αὐτὴν ἔχει πρᾶξιν in v. 4; (5) τὸ δὲ καθ' εἷς ἀλλήλων μέλη in v. 5 (that is, distributed by God to each other – cf. Eph 4.11); (6) διαφόρα in v. 6; (7) the use of εἴτε before various items in the list in vv. 6–8a. Also, note that although the NRSV translates vv. 4–8 as two sentences, the translation indicates that it is in agreement with the idea of διαφόρος distributing the list that follows: 'We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness'.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688506000245 Published online by Cambridge University Press

humility in relationships is engendered is through the recognition of the differing roles each member plays. Paul's use of διαφόρος at a crucial moment in this sentence draws the paragraph together into a conceptual unity – a unity that is lost if two sentences are posited instead of one.

Fourth, if one reads this as two sentences rather than one, there is nothing in the apodosis of the purported first sentence (v. 5) to correspond to the third idea introduced by the physical body analogy of v. 4. Paul compares the human body (v. 4) to the 'one body in Christ' (vv. 5–8), introducing three elements in v. 4 that have correspondences in the rest of the sentence (vv. 5–8). It should be noted that the third element introduced in v. 4 seems to be the most important element Paul intends to compare. The three elements are: (1) the body is a unity (compare v. 4 'in *one* body' with v. 5 '*one* body in Christ' and 'one of another'); (2) there are *various* members, not just one (compare v. 4 '*many* members' with v. 5 'the *many*' and 'members individually one of another'); (3) there are *different* functions (compare v. 3 'all the members do not have the same function' with vv. 6–8 which is a list of ministry functions that differ [v. 6] from member to member). But whereas the *oneness* and the *many-ness* ideas introduced in v. 4 each correspond to something in v. 5, the *differing functions* idea which is emphasized in v. 4 does not appear until vv. 6–8. If we end the sentence after v. 5 and start another sentence at v. 6, as one-sentence proponents suggest, the *differing functions* idea corresponds to nothing in the sentence to which it supposedly belongs.

Fifth, it appears that in the two-sentence approach, often a view of spiritual-gifts-as-special-abilities is read into the passage, in some cases without the interpreter being aware that it is an issue. Thus, in this approach, one has a special Spirit-given ability that allows him or her to serve effectively, and this *ability* must be *used*.[5] A teacher has a special ability to teach; a leader a special ability to lead. This assumption is inadvertently superimposed upon Rom 12.3–8, which suggests to the interpreter's mind a conceptual break between v. 5 and v. 6. In other words, one reason for the popularity of the two-sentence approach may be the assumption that Paul's subject in vv. 6–8 is spiritual gifts (read 'special abilities'), which is only loosely connected to his theme of humility toward one another found in vv. 3–5. But the idea of special abilities is nowhere mentioned in this passage.[6] Rather,

5 Rather, I understand the ἔχοντες . . . χαρίσματα to mean: *participating in a particular function of ministry*. Cf. Moulton, *Grammar*, 1:183, 'the durative sense of ἔχω, *hold* and so *exercise*, must be once more remembered'. Χαρίσματα should be read in light of πρᾶξιν (v. 4) which is preceded also by ἔχω.

6 Nor will an appeal to the word χάρισμα do. See Kenneth Berding, 'Confusing Word and Concept in "Spiritual Gifts": Have We Forgotten James Barr's Exhortations?', *JETS* 43 (2000) 37–46. I am currently writing a book for Kregel Publications that will deal at length with the function of χάρισμα in Paul's writings. Note that in this very passage, the objects of each of the three appearances of ἔχω are 'members', 'function', and '*charismata*', the third of which should be read in light of 'members' and 'functions', not as special abilities.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688506000245 Published online by Cambridge University Press

being *members-in-one-body* and *having-different-functions* and being *members-in-relation-to-one-another* are the ideas explicitly stated in this paragraph. The main idea of the entire paragraph is humility toward one another; vv. 6–8 emphasize this by pointing out that all have *differing* functions (thus implying that all need each other). Paul introduces the main subject he wants to talk about in v. 3 and follows it through to the end of v. 8.[7] That this paragraph has a thematic unity is further established by the similarities between διὰ τῆς χάριτος τῆς δοθείσης μοι in v. 3 and κατὰ τὴν χάριν τὴν δοθεῖσαν ἡμῖν in v. 6, as well as between the ὡς ὁ θεὸς ἐμέρισεν μέτρον πίστεως in v. 3 and κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως in v. 6.

Sixth, in the list of vv. 6b–8 it is structurally simpler to read the first half of each pair (the functions themselves and the persons in those functions) under χαρίσματα and the second half of each pair (each prepositional phrase) under διάφορα.[8]

Seventh, there are two shifts in the list (vv. 6–8) that both one-sentence proponents and two-sentence proponents have to address. The first seems to be a move from functions to the persons doing the functions (in the first part of the pair), which includes a shift from the first person plural to the third person singular.[9] The second move seems to be from the sphere or implementation of the function to the attitude of the one doing the activity (in the second part of the pair). This shift is acceptable under the general framework of differing functions and the encouragement toward humility, but creates difficulties for one who suggests that Paul wants us to act in some unstated way. What does it mean to *use* one's 'service' in serving? Harder still for two-sentence proponents is what to do after Paul shifts from functions to persons-in-functions thirteen words later. How can one 'use' a person? Does the suggested insertion 'let us use them' influence the entire list or just the first part of the list? This is a problem for the two-sentence position.

These seven considerations suggest a way to read Rom 12.4–8 as one sentence that takes into account the various syntactical and conceptual difficulties encountered. We return now to the postpositive δέ at the beginning of v. 6, the presence

7 Moreover, 'by/according to the grace given to me/us' is an expression used 11 times in Paul's letters (twice here). In each case that he uses this expression one finds Paul reflecting upon specific ministry-functions in the immediate context, whether his own or those of others. This is another clue that this passage is about ministry-functions, not about special abilities.

8 Refer to the annotated diagram at the end of the article for clarification.

9 The fact that Paul sometimes moves between functions and persons-in-their-functions elsewhere (1 Cor 12.28–30) helps explain how he can easily move from functions in this passage (prophecy/service) to members in these functions. The difference between a function and the person doing the function seems to be a somewhat fluid concept for Paul. Note also that this shift could have easily been suggested simply because Paul says 'whether service' (i.e. the name of the function) to 'in his serving' (the activity of serving).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688506000245 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of which seems to be the main concern of two-sentence proponents. From the perspective of a one-sentence approach, the most plausible solution[10] is to read the δέ, not as signaling the beginning of a new sentence, but rather as a connective on a lower level that functions more or less in the same way as the δέ in the immediately preceding phrase (τὸ δὲ καθ᾽ εἷς ἀλλήλων μέλη).[11] Since such a function of δέ exists in the preceding phrase (v. 5), it at least opens up the possibility that δέ is similarly employed in the participial clause under consideration (v. 6). This would be similar to several places, both in Paul's writings and elsewhere, where δέ functions on a lower level and not as a signal that a new sentence has begun.[12]

When the seven considerations discussed above are weighed against the δέ consideration, the one-sentence reading emerges as the most likely reading of Rom 12.4–8. The following annotated diagram of the sentence in English[13] illustrates the issues raised in this discussion:

For			
just as			
(we)		have	many members
		in one body	
and			
all the members		do not have	the same function
so			
the many	(we) are	one body	
		in Christ	
		and	

10 Alternatively, it might be possible to understand a correlative μέν to be implied in the first clause of v. 4 and then again in the first clause of v. 5. The reason the μέν would not be written into the text (apart from the fact that it commonly drops out in Hellenistic literature) is because it would be stylistically rough and potentially confusing to put a μέν together with the καθάπερ in v. 4, and similarly to put a μέν together with the οὕτως in v. 5. Thus, in this understanding, Paul would be writing as though he were using a μέν at the beginning of v. 5 and correlating with what follows using not one δέ but rather two (cf. Matt 25.15). It may be significant that in texts with parallel ideas, there is a preponderance of the use of μέν and δέ comparisons, with the μέν either explicitly stated (1 Cor 12.12; also 12.8–10 and Eph 4.1 followed by more than one δέ) or implied (1 Cor 12.4–6,20). Whether or not this correlative idea is correct, or whether Paul is employing δέ as a simple connective (as suggested in text), there are plausible ways to read the δέ in v. 6 in continuity with the previous sentence rather than as signaling the start of a new sentence.

11 Refer to the annotated diagram at the end of the article.

12 Two of many examples would be the second δέ in Rom 2.8 or the second and third δέ in Rom 6.22 which simply connects the phrases. Stanley Porter (*Idioms of the Greek New Testament* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2nd edn., 1994] 208) calls the simple connective 'another significant usage' and notes that it is 'often neglected in analysis.' As interpreters work with this passage, they should remain aware of the rather broad range of ways this particular particle is used (cf. BDAG, 213).

13 In this case English makes the issues clearer than Greek, thus the use of English rather than Greek on the diagram.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688506000245 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(we are) members
individually one of another
and
(we are) having 1. *charismata*
according to the grace
of God
that was given
to us
2. differing (from other members)
whether
(we are having) 1. prophecy
2. (differing from other members) according to the proportion of (our) faith
whether
(we are having) 1. service
2. (differing from other members) in (our ministry of) serving
whether
3. the one who teaches[14]
2. (differing from other members) in (one's ministry of) teaching
whether
3. the one who encourages
2. (differing from other members) in (one's ministry of) encouragement
(whether)
3. the one who gives
2. (differing from other members) in (the attitude of one's) generosity[15]
(whether)
3. the one who rules
2. (differing from other members) in (the attitude of one's) diligence
(whether)
3. the one who shows mercy
2. (differing from other members) in (the attitude of one's) cheerfulness.

14 Note a change from functions to the people ministering in those functions. Also, note that Paul at the same time shifts from addressing the issue in the first person plural to addressing it in the third person singular.

15 Here it seems that the focus switches subtly from the area of ministry to the attitude or way in which the ministry is carried out. This could be because of the conceptual link with the issue of humility that Paul introduces in v. 3.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688506000245 Published online by Cambridge University Press