

ENCOURAGEMENT GOD'S WAY

“I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong – that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith.” —ROMANS 1:11-12

The church of Jesus Christ does not function in the way an organization or a business does. It is a spiritual entity, operating by spiritual means, which is the activity of God. Every Christian is gifted in a way that contributes to the functioning of God’s church. Paul doesn’t talk about imparting some spiritual gift, because he’s established himself as a founder of churches, but so that it becomes the means of mutually encouraging each other.

Spiritual gifts are skills and talents, unique to each of us, which derive from God, are energized by God and exercised for God. They differ from what we consider natural gifts because they are used to further God’s purposes. What we may not realize is that our natural gifts were in the mind of God long before we were born. God is our creator before He is our Saviour. He didn’t save us and then say to Himself, “What am I going to do with this person?” God knew we would come to Christ, and He created us with natural gifts, which He would eventually use to carry out His purpose.

There are also gifts the Holy Spirit gives which are apart from our natural gifts. One of the remarkable things about the operation of the church as opposed to the operation of business is that God takes the foolish to confound the wise and the weak to confound the strong. We recognize God makes His power most evident in those who acknowledge their insufficiency. When Jeremiah, for example, was

called to be a prophet to Israel, he protested, and said to God he didn't know how to speak. God reached out his hand, touched his mouth and said, "Now, I have put my words in your mouth" (Jeremiah 1:9). There are 52 chapters in the book of Jeremiah, comprising approximately 60 years of God using Jeremiah to proclaim His word.

Every Christian is a channel for the Spirit of God and we are meant to encourage one another. That's why Paul is eager to visit Rome. It isn't a case of, "I'm the giver; you're the receiver." We are all meant to be givers and receivers. Communion and fellowship on a regular basis with a community of believers not only encourages us, but unites us and makes us strong in Christ. To remain a lone ranger in our work with God becomes a stumbling block to the progress we would otherwise have. It deprives us of the enrichment of sharing in God's gifting of others and impedes our spiritual growth. As Christians, we are Christ's church, and God designed its operation to be in dependence upon Him and interdependence on one another.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, thank you for the many spiritual gifts You have blessed us with. I pray for every community of believers to be united, strengthened and encouraged by each other.

TO REFLECT UPON: In what way have I been most encouraged by sharing in the spiritual gifting of others?