

A FRUITFUL CHURCH

“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers...”

—EPHESIANS 4:11

In Buenos Aires, a number of years ago, a pastor named, Juan Carlos Ortiz, made a challenging and intriguing observation about his church. He started with a congregation of about 300 people, and in the course of about 18 months, the church had grown to over a thousand. But one day, while contemplating the growth of the church, Juan realized they weren't actually growing at all, but were simply getting fat. That leads us to wonder what is a healthy church and how does it come about?

Scripture teaches a great deal about our personal relationship with God, but we must also understand what it has to say about the corporate nature of our relationship with God. Paul's letter to the Ephesians fully addresses what the church is and how it functions. The first stage he writes about is Christ giving some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, pastors and teachers.

The reason why Christ has gifted His church in this way is “to prepare God's people for works of service” (Ephesians 4:12). The New Testament model of the church is not like a pyramid with the minister or pastor positioned on top, but rather, he is positioned like a coach, training, equipping and motivating his team. When it comes to the game, he sits on the sidelines while the players do their work.

A good example is a church in Connecticut that listed its service times on a billboard, and underneath, it read: “Ministers: All the

Congregation”. That is a very biblical understanding of the church, in that pastoral ministry is there to direct, encourage and prepare people for works of service. In Ephesians 2:10, Paul says, “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Those in teaching or leadership roles are there to expound the word of God in dependence upon the Holy Spirit so that people are moved more fully onto God’s agenda and get excited by it.

We cannot separate the individual from the corporate, because both are weakened without the other. It is together we reach unity in the faith, not just academically, but as well instructed people, knowing what we believe and why. God has gifted each of us in unique ways so that we may work interdependently, enriching and encouraging one another. If we’re going to be an effective and fruitful church, it isn’t the size of the congregation that matters, but that others are motivated to become disciples, going into their homes, workplaces, communities and even abroad to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to others.

PRAYER: Thank You, Lord, for the way You have gifted your church, and I pray that your Holy Spirit richly enables and directs us all, especially those in leadership roles.

TO REFLECT UPON: In what ways does attending church deepen my relationship with God?