

THE CORPORATE NATURE

“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

Scripture teaches a great deal about our personal relationships with God, but we must also understand what it has to say about the corporate nature of our relationships with God. We cannot separate the individual from the corporate, because both are weakened without the other. It is together that we reach unity in the faith, not just academically, but as well-instructed people, knowing what we believe and why. Our knowledge of the Son of God is not simply propositional, but experiential. This is the ultimate goal of the Christian life, that we know Christ and go on knowing Him.

Christ gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists and some to be pastors and teachers. The apostles had two particular functions, the first being they established Christian teaching, not of their own initiative, but on what they had been given by the Lord. The second was establishing the Christian church, which is not a series comprising different generations, but is one church, wide and vast, encompassing all those in Christ, and with a history that goes back 2,000 years.

Prophets are the spokesmen of God, and together with the apostles, carried along by the Holy Spirit, gave us what are now the Scriptures. Evangelists are those who have the gift of presenting the Gospel in such a way that people are brought to faith in Christ. To be gifted as an

evangelist doesn't necessarily mean being a preacher, but a soul-winner. Pastors are soul-carers. The word 'pastor' is the literal word for 'shepherd', and shepherds, like the Lord Jesus, care for their sheep. Then there are teachers who instruct on the truths of Scriptures and are soul-builders. Apostles and prophets are foundational to the church of Jesus Christ, while evangelists, pastors and teachers are contemporary, and will go on being contemporary.

The reason why Christ has gifted His church in this way is "to prepare God's people for works of service"... (Ephesians 4:12). To know what God has planned for us to do, we need to discover in what ways He has uniquely gifted us, and how that will work within the corporate body of the church. We all have different gifts, which motivate and energize us, but we don't discover those gifts until we step out in faith and exercise them. Our service to God is always an outflow from the Holy Spirit's working in us, and is for the purpose of building up the body of Christ, which is His church, and enriching the lives of others.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, I understand the corporate nature of your church and am grateful for it. Help me to contribute in a way that reveals your Spirit and builds up your church.

TO REFLECT UPON: In what ways am I contributing to the corporate body of Christ?