

Ten Scripture Texts that Address Church Purpose

This is not offered as an exhaustive list of all the biblical passages pertinent to a consideration of the nature and purpose of a Christian congregation. Certainly there are other passages one might add. These ten do offer a balanced selection from the canon. Depending upon your purposes, you may also wish to select from this list, focusing on 3 to 5.

They might be used for 1) a sermon series, 2) an adult study or class, 3) a newsletter series, or 4) basis for bible studies with a congregation's leadership team or governing board. Here I cite only several verses, but Scripture texts should always be studied in context and you may choose to add additional verses.

Genesis 12: 1 – 4 God begins God's reclamation project, calling Abram and Sar'ai as the father and mother of God's people. Note that God blesses them so that they might be a blessing to others. How might that theme, "blessed to be a blessing," describe or illuminate the nature and purpose of the church?

Leviticus 19: 1 – 2 These are the introductory verses of the "Holiness Code," which describes the vocation of God's people as "to be holy" because God is "holy." What does that mean for a way of life and being in the world? What does it mean to be "holy," and how is that different from being "holier-than-thou?"

Micah 6: 8 The prophet Micah asks, "What does the Lord require of you?" And answers, "To do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God." How do these three qualities relate to one another? Might churches be called to help people grow in a faith that "does justice, loves kindness, and walks humbly with God?"

Matthew 5: 13 – 16 In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus speaks of the church as "the salt of the earth," and "the light of the world." What do these images tell us about the nature and purpose of the church and its role in and relationship to the world?

Matthew 28: 16 – 20 As Jesus concludes his earthly ministry he "charges" the disciples, instructing them to "Go and make disciples, to baptize and to teach . . ." What is a disciple? Are churches called to "make disciples," and if so, what might that look like?

Mark 12: 28 – 31 Jesus summarizes the heart of the Law, love of God and love of neighbor. To teach and to live these commandments as a way of life—could that be at the heart of the church's mission?

John 20: 19 – 23 The Risen Christ comes to his frightened disciples on Easter evening. He says "Peace be with you," and sends them with these words, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Who does the sending? To whom are they sent? For what purpose?

Acts 1: 7 – 8 Here, in Acts, another charge from the departing Jesus to his followers. They are to be his witnesses, witnesses of the Risen Lord, to “the ends of the earth.” What is a witness? What does a witness do? What does a witness not do? What does it mean to be a witness to the Crucified and Risen Christ?

I Corinthians 12: 12 Paul speaks of the church as “the Body of Christ,” a body that is many and yet one. What does this image suggest to you about the nature and purpose of the church?

Ephesians 4: 1 To the church at Ephesus Paul writes, “I beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling.” What does he mean by their “calling?” What would you imagine a life “worthy of their calling” would look be and include?