

# BEVERAGES AND BIBLES

**"How we live our religion is far more important than what we say about our religion" -**

**Robert D. Hales**

**"You don't need to go to church to be a Christian. If you go to Taco Bell, that doesn't make you a taco." - Justin Bieber**

Church. We all think we know what it means, but what is it exactly? Is the church a building, a time and place on Sunday mornings, or is church a state of mind, a way of being in the world? What makes a gathering like this more or less churchy than a gathering on Sunday mornings? What is church?

## **Question: What is the essence of church?**

- "On the most elementary level, you do not have to go to church to be a Christian. You do not have to go home to be married either. But in both cases if you do not, you will have a very poor relationship." - R. Kent Hughes
- "The Church is the one institution that exists for those outside it." - William Tyndale
- "I don't think the job of the church is to make people happy. I think it's to make them holy." - Chuck Colson
- "I prefer a church which is bruised, hurting, and dirty because it has been out on the streets rather than a church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security...More than my fear of going astray, my hope is that we will be moved by the fear or remaining shut up within structures which give us a false sense of security, within rules which make us harsh judges, within habits which make us feel safe, while at our door people are starving and Jesus does not tire of saying to us, 'Give them something to eat.'" - Pope Francis

- “As God’s household, you are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. The whole building is joined together in him, and it grows up into a temple that is dedicated to the Lord. Christ is building you into a place where God lives through the Spirit.” - Paul, Ephesians 2:20-22

**Question: What are some things the church is doing wrong that we need to rethink?**

- “As spirituality organizes itself into religions, it has tremendous power to create close communities, and this power carries remarkable benefits. One study found that people who get involved in a church ave a similar shift in happiness as people who move from the bottom quartile of income to the top quarter. But this power can come at a cost. People who suffer at the hands of, and subsequently leave, their religious communities are more prone to depression and anxiety, who an elevated risk for suicide, and can even suffer PTSD.” - Mike McHargue
- “Every day, people are straying away from the church and going back to God.” - Lenny Bruce
- “Civilization will not attain to its perfection until the last stone from the last church falls on the last priest.” -

**Question: What are somethings the church is doing right - what do we need to keep and maintain?**

- The church is God saying, ‘I’m throwing a banquet, and all these mismatched, messed-up people are invited. Here, have some wine.’” - Rachel Held Evans
- When it comes to finding a congregation you can serve as a part of, there are two things you have to look for: a church that is safe and a church that will challenge you...Your church should affirm you and accept you exactly as you are, should celebrate how you were made and how you’ve grown, and should tend to your wounds and love you as you heal. But it can’t stop there. Your church also has to challenge you to become all you can

become. It should comfort you, but it shouldn't let you get too comfortable." Mike McHargue

### **Question: Why does the church still matter?**

- "...if churches spent one-tenth the time on evangelism and hospitality that the average american sorority spends, churches might retain visitors at a much higher rate. Nobody is talking about the decline of sororities." - Michael Baughman
- "What constitutes a church? Must there be a building, pews, organ and clergy for a church to be church? Not according to Jesus. He says that whoever two or three of us are gathered in his name, he is with us (Matt. 18:20). Ekklesia, the Greek word that we translate into English as church, simply means gathering." - Elaine Heath

### **More Questions**

- What are your earliest church memories?
- Why did you get involved in the church that you currently attend?
- What keeps you connected to the church you currently attend?
- What should the church look like?
- The church has never been perfect. The disciples often misunderstood Jesus, the early church argued with itself, and while Jesus prayed in the Gospel of John that we all might be one and Paul speaks of the church being one body made of many parts, we've liked some parts more than others and the church has never been one. Should this encourage or discourage us? Why or why not?

### **More Quotes**

- "Do not depend on the hope of results. You may have to face the fact that your work will be apparently worthless and even achieve no result at all, if not perhaps results opposite to what you expect. As you get used to this idea, you start more and more to concentrate not on the results, but on the value, the rightness, the truth of the work itself." - Thomas Merton
- "I get by with a little help from my friends." - The Beatles

- "We are made for goodness. We are made for love. We are made for friendliness. We are made for togetherness. We are made for all of the beautiful things that you and I know. We are made to tell the world that there are no outsiders. All are welcome: black, white, red, yellow, rich, poor, educated, not educated, male, female, gay, straight, all, all, all. We all belong to this family, this human family, God's family." - Desmond Tutu
- "Does the future of Christianity lie with progressives who can adapt and change or with conservatives who remain faithful to the old paths?" - anonymous on Twitter

### **Some well-known figures and voices on the Church**

- "Church is messed up. I know that. People, including me, have been hurt by it. But as my United Church of Christ pastor friend Heather says, "Church isn't perfect. It's practice." Among God's people, those who have been knocked on their asses by the grace of God, we practice giving and receiving the undeserved. And receiving grace is basically the best shitty feeling in the world. I don't want to need it. Preferably I could just do it all and be it all and never mess up. That may be what I would prefer, but it is never what I need. I need to be broken apart and put back into a different shape by that merging of things human and divine, which is really screwing up and receiving grace and love and forgiveness rather than receiving what I really deserve. I need the very thing that I will do everything I can to avoid needing. The sting of grace is not unlike the sting of being loved well, because when we are loved well, it is inextricably linked to all the times we have not been loved well, all the times we ourselves have not loved others well, and all the things we've done or not done that feel like evidence against our worthiness." - Nadia Bolz-Weber
- It is when the church gives itself away in radical acts of service and compassion, expecting nothing in return, that the way of Jesus is most vividly put on display. To do this, the church must stop thinking about everybody primarily in categories of in or out, saved or not, believer or nonbeliever. Besides the fact that these terms are offensive to those who

are the "un" and "non", they work against Jesus' teachings about how we are to treat each other. Jesus commanded us to love our neighbor, and our neighbor can be anybody. We are all created in the image of God, and we are all sacred, valuable creations of God. Everybody matters. To treat people differently based on who believes what is to fail to respect the image of God in everyone. As the book of James says, "God shows no favoritism." So we don't either." - Rob Bell

- We drop into church from time to time to see what is going on with God. We indulge in an occasional sunset or symphony to cultivate a feeling of reverence for God. But that is not the reality of our lives with God. Long before we ever got around to asking questions about God, God had been questioning us. Long before we got interested in the subject of God, God subjected us to the most intensive and searching knowledge. Before it ever crossed our minds that God might be important, God singled us out as important. Before we were formed in the womb, God knew us. We are known before we know. This realization has a practical result: no longer do we run here and there, panicked and anxious, searching for the answers to life. Our lives are not puzzles to be figured out. Rather, we come to God, who knows us and reveals to us the truth of our lives. - Eugene Peterson
- "The Church must be forever building, for it is forever decaying within and attacked from without." - T.S. Eliot
- "There is no salvation outside the church." - St. Augustine
- "The operation of the Church is entirely set up for the sinner; which creates much misunderstanding among the smug." - Flannery O'Connor
- "To those of us who believe that all of life is sacred every crumb of bread and sip of wine is a Eucharist, a remembrance, a call to awareness of holiness right where we are. I want all of the holiness of the Eucharist to spill out beyond church walls, out of the hands of priests and into the regular streets and sidewalks, into the hands of regular, grubby people like you and me, onto our tables, in our kitchens and dining rooms and backyards." - Shauna Niequist

**A final thought** - Bishop Laurie Haller reflecting on John Wesley's Sermon, 'The Character of a Methodist'

- "The distinguishing marks of a Methodist are not his opinions of any sort." Have you ever heard the remark that since United Methodists are so accepting of different views that they really don't believe anything? What they are usually referring to is the fact that we do not position ourselves over and against other Christians by our theology.

According to Wesley, what makes us different from other denominations is precisely the fact that we do not claim to have the only truth. In addition, Methodists are not distinguished by the particular religious jargon we use. We do not set ourselves apart from others by how we dress, by what we eat, or by our peculiar customs. We are not distinguished by insisting that one part of the Christian faith is more important than any other. We do not marginalize or alienate those who think differently or accuse others (as well as our Methodist brothers and sisters) of heretical theology. "But as to all opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think."

What is the character of a Methodist, then? Wesley writes, "I answer: A Methodist is one who has the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him." A Methodist is happy in God, knows how to be content in all circumstances, prays without ceasing, has a heart full of love for all people, is pure in heart, is single-mindedly focused on God's will, bears fruit in his/her life, and does everything to the glory of God. Lastly, a Methodist does good to all people.

Wesley astutely refers to those who deride Methodists by saying, "Why, these are only the common fundamental principles of Christianity!" To which Wesley replies (in my words), "You're absolutely right. We refuse to be distinguished from our brothers and sisters in other denominations. We are all one in Christ Jesus."