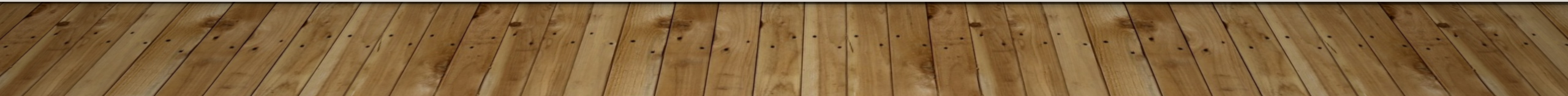


# THE GREAT ENDS OF THE CHURCH

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THE PRESERVATION OF THE TRUTH



# THE GREAT ENDS OF THE CHURCH

The great ends of the Church are:

- the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind;
- the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God;
- the maintenance of divine worship;
- the preservation of the truth;
- the promotion of social righteousness; and
- the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world

# HISTORY

This statement of the Great Ends of the Church, appears in the PCUSA Book of Confessions.

This now classic statement was adopted by the United Presbyterian Church of North America in 1910, following various actions between 1904 and 1910 looking forward to the revision of the church's Constitution.

The statement was then made a part of the Constitution of The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, as the united body was called.

Finally, it was used by the United Presbyterian Church of North America, which united with the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America in 1958.

Unfortunately, the authoring body, conversations and reasoning behind these statements are lost to history.

# FAITH AND TRUTH

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According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, the definition of TRUTH is:

- the body of real things, events, and facts : ACTUALITY
- the state of being the case : FACT
- *often capitalized* : a transcendent fundamental or spiritual reality

According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, the definition of FAITH is:

- belief and trust in and loyalty to God
- belief in the traditional doctrines of a religion
- firm belief in something for which there is NO PROOF
- complete TRUST

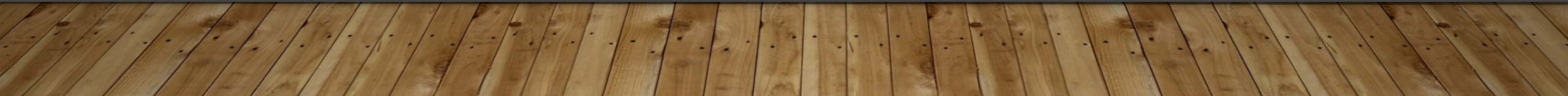
CAN THESE TWO CO-EXIST?  
WHAT IS THE TRUTH WE ARE  
TRYING TO PRESERVE?  
WHO DECIDES?

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- God could have inspired/directed a document to be written that lays out in easy steps what it means to be a faithful person and follow Christ and what is true.
  - Step one – go to church.
  - Step two – pray. Step three and so on.
- Instead, we are presented with a text that reads in some places like an epic poem, others like a boring legal document and in others like a modern novel or mini-series with plot twists, war, love, betrayal and reconciliation.
- There are many times when scripture disagrees or contradicts itself. There are timelines that make no sense and descriptions of God that we cannot imagine as part of our own faith.
- **What are we to make of this?**
- **If it isn't all true what does it mean and what's the point?**

# THE BIBLE AND TRUTH



# THERE HAVE HISTORICALLY BEEN THREE WAYS TO APPROACH THIS – THE TWO MOST DIAMETRIC ARE:

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## INERRANCY

- The Bible is in fact totally true. Word for Word. Without error.
- After all, God is perfect, and the Bible is God's Word, so it too must be perfect.
- It is impossible, and is a sin, for us to pick and choose which parts of the Bible we believe are true or authoritative and which parts are not or are only historical.
- Under this view, the books of the Bible must be either inerrant, or be devoid of authority. All or nothing.

## CHRISTIAN DEISM

- Deism holds that God does not intervene with the functioning of the natural world in any way, allowing it to run according to the laws of nature.
- God does not control or interfere with God's self-sustaining creation or with its beliefs
- Christian deism refers to those who believe in the moral teachings—but not divinity—of Jesus.
- Christian deists see no paradox in adopting the values and ideals espoused by Jesus without believing he was God

# INERRANCY

The term "*inerrancy*" itself does not appear in the Bible, but the Bible does speak of God being without error

- Psalms 12:6 reads "the words of the LORD are flawless" and Psalm 119:89 states "Your word, O LORD, is eternal, it stands firm."

There are also many passages which state or imply that the authors of the Bible were inspired by God.

Since errors, mistakes and duplicity are not generally regarded as qualities of God, inspiration by God would, for some, imply inerrancy of the text.

# INERRANCY

In the New Testament there are several passages which imply that the apostles would convey the words of the Holy Spirit when they were addressing a crowd or an accuser. From these, one might infer that the Holy Spirit would also guide their written statements.

- Matthew 10:19-20 reads, “When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you..”
- And John 16:13, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.”



CREATION MUSEUM -  
KY

# CHRISTIAN DEISM

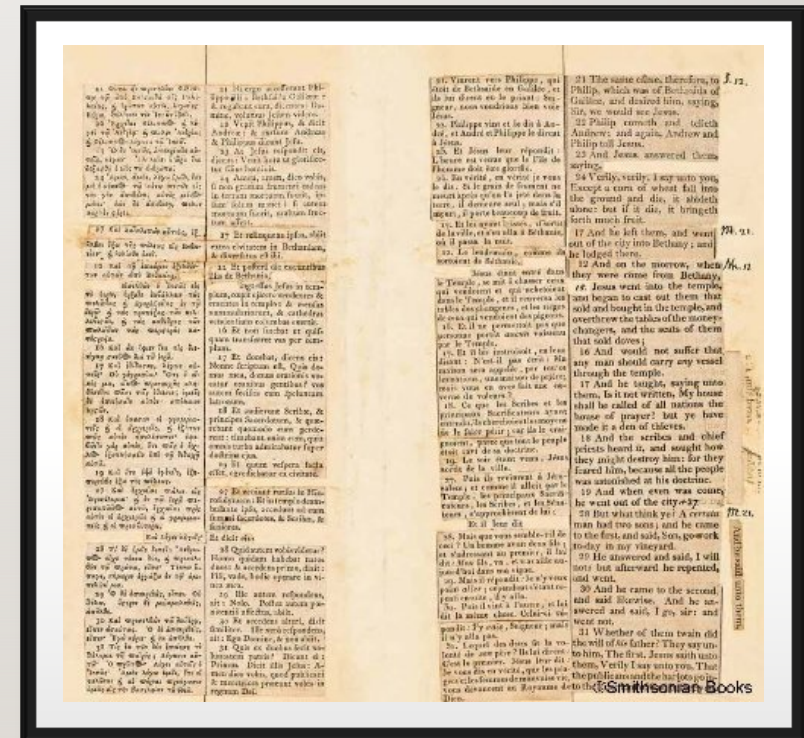
- Proponents of this view of scripture argue that biblical writers sometimes incorporated text from earlier writings that had been created by unknown authors or usurped from surrounding traditions.
  - We see this most profoundly in the many parallels with Epic of Gilgamesh, an epic poem from ancient Mesopotamia and the Biblical stories of Adam and Eve and the flood of Noah.
- They also argue that sometimes the writers expressed the ideas and promoted the beliefs of the religious group that the author was part of, whether in its initial writing or later in translation.
- Additionally, scripture uses a lot of allegory, that is, a story that was intended to have a hidden or symbolic meaning.
  - The writers did not intend that these passages relate to an event that really happened or to a person who actually existed.

# CHRISTIAN DEISM

- Deists argue that scripture records a gradual evolution of religious thought over many centuries. The writings contain discrepancies and internal contradictions and passages that exhibit highly immoral practices by today's standards.
  - For example, the Bible promotes religious intolerance, the death penalty for behavioral transgressions, extensive genocide of neighboring tribes, sexism, etc.
- *This understanding obviously works better for me as scripture tells us in 1 Corinthians 14:34 that “women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate.”*

# CHRISTIAN DEISM

- Thomas Jefferson, a son of the Enlightenment, may be the best example of Christian Deism
- Jefferson had trouble reconciling the miraculous stories of the Bible and Jesus Christ with his scientific understanding of the world
- Using a razor and glue, Jefferson cut and pasted his arrangement of selected verses from the King James Version of the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in chronological order—putting together excerpts from one text with those of another to create a single narrative.
- Most supernatural events are not included in Jefferson's heavily edited compilation. (If necessary to exclude the miraculous, Jefferson would cut the text even in mid-verse.)
  - In Jefferson's Bible there is no virgin birth, no miraculous healings, no loaves and fishes and no resurrection.
- However, Jefferson managed to maintain Jesus' role as a great moral teacher



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I, and most modern Christians, are not completely comfortable with either of these two understandings.

- Inerrancy seems too extreme and puts limits on what God, through the Spirit, continues to reveal to us about our faith; and discounts what we have learned from science.
- While Christian Deism seems too stark – too individualistic. It lacks a realization of God's continuing role in creation
  - There is a reason this document has survived, intact, for as long as it has and scripture in its entirety is owed reverence and honor – every word.

## A THIRD WAY

# THE BURNING BUSH

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- St. Catherine's Monastery
- The bush of Moses where God spoke in the flames, yet the plant was not consumed is guarded by a fire extinguisher
- We believe ...but just in case.





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MT. SINAI

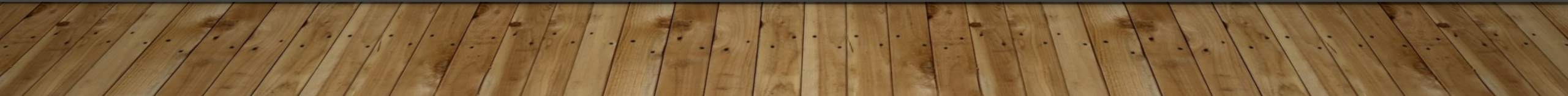
# PRESERVATION OF THE TRUTH

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- Theologian Karl Barth Rejects any notion of the Word of God that reduces it to mere speech that imparts information.
  - Discounts it as instruction manual or history book.
- Rather, the Word of God is divine action; it breathes with the Spirit of God
- Scripture elects, creates, changes, judges, calls, forgives, saves!
- It is God's Word — God's very breath - powerful and dynamic, to which we respond (and can't help but respond) in obedience and faith!

- The reality of the bush or mountain is not the truth – the capital T truth is Faith in God – The capital T truth is fellowship through the Holy Spirit
  - TRUTH is when God's words reach us – each of us in our own language – on mountaintops, in valleys, in joy and in sorrow - and speaks to our hearts - it speaks the truth of God's love for us
  - TRUTH is that God's grace and covenant keeps us – and God's fellowship binds us together.
- The Bible is not a group of words and stories of the past but is alive with the very Spirit of God.

## PRESERVATION OF THE TRUTH



# PRESERVATION OF THE TRUTH

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- Theologian, N.T.Wrights notes, “Scripture not only gives us **true** information about how our lives can be transformed, but it will also itself be a part of that **process**.”
- **The truth is not static – it is not a guarding of some old words – it is active and alive**
- God’s TRUTH, in scripture and in our lives, requires action
  - Preserving the truth calls us to communicate – to be in relationship with God – to study, to wrestle with meaning and to be engaged with our faith.
  - Preserving the truth requires that we be in fellowship with one another and to see God in one another

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## **PROVERBS 2**

CRY OUT FOR INSIGHT,  
AND RAISE YOUR VOICE FOR UNDERSTANDING;  
SEEK IT LIKE SILVER,  
AND SEARCH FOR IT AS FOR HIDDEN TREASURES—  
THEN YOU WILL UNDERSTAND THE FEAR OF THE LORD  
AND FIND THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

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# QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

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- What comes to your mind when you hear “Preservation of the Truth” in terms of your faith or scripture?
- What does TRUTH mean to you? How do you know when something is true?
- Are you closer to an Inerrant or Deist Christian? Has that stance changed over time?
- Is it ok that different people have different ideas of truth when it comes to God? Do you think God intended that or is disappointed in it?