

# THE BIG SPLIT

NAVIGATING THE SCHISM OF THE UNITED  
METHODIST CHURCH



**SESSION 2: WHERE ARE  
WE NOW?**

## WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Last week, we talked about why the United Methodist Church is splitting, the time-sensitive nature of the schism, and why our church has to make a decision between the theologically-conservative GMC and a new, more theologically-progressive expression of the UMC. We also looked at the historic root of this schism. We learned about the battle between the modernists and the fundamentalists and saw the way their feud helped shaped the division between today's progressive and evangelical Christians. And remember, we're not talking about politics! If evangelical seems to loaded, terms like "orthodox" and "traditional" have also been used for evangelical, while terms like "mainline" and "liberal" are also used in lieu of progressive.

Now that we better understand how we got here and what caused this split, let's look at particulars. What are some of the major issues that the GMC and the UMC are fighting over? Below, you'll find three major feuds that tend to dominate debates . Are these the only disagreements? By no means. Next week, we'll take a broader look at the differences between the GMC and the UMC (especially their organizational policies), but since these theological issues are discussed so often, they merit a little extra depth. In each instance, I will present an argument from each perspective and list theologians that subscribe to that view. As per usual, you may not fit cleanly in the boxes presented here. That's fine. Your goal isn't to be the perfect Global Methodist or the perfect United Methodist. Your goal is to find out which perspective is closer to your own on average so you can decide which organization is best for our community.

### ISSUE 1: WHAT IS SCRIPTURE?



"The Bible is the words of people who were influenced by God, and yet who were also shaped by the times in which they lived... while influenced by God, it is not dictated by God."

**-ADAM HAMILTON  
PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIAN**



"What we believe and feel about the word of God are absolutely crucial, if for no other reason than that they should mirror what we believe and feel about Jesus.. Jesus believed unequivocally all that was written in the Scriptures. If we are to be his disciples, we should believe the same."

**-KEVIN DEYOUNG  
EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN**

Progressive Christians tend to think of Scripture as a diverse collection of theological writings about God. They were written in many eras by many different people for many purposes. It would be considered unlikely that any were written by the figures that bear their name, but popular theories for authorship are that some books are collections of folk legends stitched together over thousands of years (Genesis), some were written secondhand by a community that had a particular affiliation with a disciple (the gospels), and some were even forgeries written to capitalize on the status of legendary figures within the Christian tradition (the Pauline epistles). In the pages of the Bible, we have all of these unknown authors writing with a wild diversity of conflicting ideas and motivations. One author would write something and another would disagree and add their own ideas and then yet another would disagree and add in their ideas, all without erasing what came before them. We cannot turn to the Bible to unambiguously learn what God would have of us. We can, however, use the Bible to help navigate where God might be leading us today.

The diversity of theology within Scripture is seen as a gift to progressive Christian communities. Scripture is not seen as important because the authors were so wise or the content was so perfect. It's valuable in part because it is so messy. Life is messy. It's hard to know what we should do in a given circumstance. Scripture mirrors life like that. Rather than treating Scripture as "the Word of God" (terminology that is often seen as inappropriate in progressive circles), it's better to let Scripture lead us to an experience with God today who can guide us as he would like us to go.

That's not to say that the Bible is unimportant to progressive Christians. Most

progressive Christian denominations have historic statements about the primacy of Scripture, but what those statements mean is very different than what they would mean in evangelical circles. The difference might best be described via a popular quip: “We take the Bible seriously, but not literally.” Do they read the Bible regularly? Sure. Do they care what it says? Yes. But they don’t feel bound to agree with any one statement. They are one more thinker in the long line of Bible writers. They’re just peering back to see some of the foundations that they can build on with their own theology.

A good example of a popular progressive in the UMC today is Adam Hamilton. In his book, *Making Sense of the Bible*, Hamilton argues that there can be no talk of a “clear teaching of Scripture.” The Bible is bizarre! Confusing! Downright immoral at times! It is anything but clear! Throughout the Bible, the various authors disagree with one another, with common-sense morality, and with scientific discovery. It cannot rightly be called “the Word of God,” since only Jesus and God’s active whispering in our lives deserve the fullness of that title. He advocates for a “three-buckets” approach to reading the Bible. In the first bucket, there are commands that are intended for all time. Love your neighbor, love God, etc. The second bucket is for verses that were intended for a specific time and place. Commands about kosher diets, circumcision, and same-sex marriage might be placed in this bucket. They were helpful at one point, but they’ve outlived their usefulness. The third and final bucket contains verses that *never* reflected God’s truth. He writes, “there are things commanded in the Bible, in the name of God, that today we recognize as immoral and inconsistent with the heart of God.” He argues that every Christian sorts things into those three buckets in one way, shape, or form. Progressives and conservatives just sort the Scriptures differently. If we want to live together, we need to accept that we have our own way of seeing what is timeless truth, what was temporary advice, and what was pure human cruelty, and learn to work together as a community of the Bible regardless of our specific interpretation.

Traditional Christians believe that the Bible is the word of God, inerrant and authoritative. The Holy Spirit worked through the famous saints of the past to help them write the Scriptures as they stand. The names of those saints are often the same names that we know as the titles of each book: the Book of John, the epistles of Paul, etc. Not only does traditional authorship reflect that

the men who wrote the Scriptures were deeply in love with God, but it reflects that Scripture is genuinely true. After all, many books of the Bible have statements within them where the author claims to be the saint in question. Paul's epistles claim to be written by Paul! The books of Moses claim to be written by Moses! If someone questions the authorship of these books, they're questioning whether the Bible is actually true. If we can believe that Jesus came back from the dead, believing that Paul wrote the epistles that Christian tradition says were written by Paul seems a much smaller ask. But the particulars of authorship are not the point. The Holy Spirit is the true author of it all, and consequently, every word is sacred. A good core statement about Scripture in theologically-conservative communities is 2 Timothy 3:16-17: all of Scripture is "God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correction, and training in righteousness so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." "All Scripture" is inspired, not choice pieces.

When an evangelical Christian reads the Bible, they have a deep sense of reverence regarding the particularities of each word. In theological terms, we might see how they treat Scripture via the anagram SCAN. Scripture is sufficient, clear, authoritative, and necessary. In simpler terms, Scripture is enough for anyone to live a godly life, it is understandable to anyone who studies it regularly, it is the final word on all matters of life, and it is irreplaceable to anyone who wants to know God. Of course, that's not to say that all verses are for all time. Some verses are descriptive of a certain time and people while others are prescriptive for God's servants forever. By reading and studying our Bibles regularly, we can tell which parts are which.

To an evangelical Christian, reading the Bible isn't just an act of reading a historical document full of ideas about god; it's speaking to God. His word is eternal, so when he's said something once, it's good for all time for all of us. Bible reading isn't about figuring out what we want to do so much as looking to God to see how he wants us to act. When we submit to his word, we can start to call ourselves genuinely Christian.

A modern Methodist that advocates for the traditional position of Scripture is Bill Arnold of Asbury Theological Seminary. Responding to Hamilton's

recommendation, he argues that the three buckets approach doesn't reflect a genuinely Christian approach to Scripture. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says that all Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching. How can we sort verses into buckets if Scripture specifically tells us that every verse is both useful and from God? The Scriptures were passed down to us by our Christian ancestors as a sacred canon understood to be God's sacred word. When we divide it up and put one passage against another, eliminating passages we find troublesome, we lose pieces of the full witness of who God is and what he asks of us. In Arnold's words, "deciding that certain [passages] don't express 'the heart, character or will of God' turns everything around backwards. We're creating a Bible in our own image."

# PROCESSING TOGETHER

HOW DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE BIBLE? IS IT THE BASIC INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE LEAVING EARTH? THE FOUNDATION OF YOUR FAITH? THE CONTENT OF YOUR FAITH? GOD'S WORD FOR US? SOMETHING ELSE?

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CAN ANYONE KNOW WHAT THE BIBLE IS SAYING WITH ANY DEGREE OF ACCURACY? CAN THERE BE BAD INTERPRETATIONS? BETTER INTERPRETATIONS? WHAT CONSTITUTES A LEGITIMATE READING OF THE BIBLE?

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WHICH STYLE OF PREACHING SEEMS MORE LEGITIMATE TO YOU? DOES IT MATTER? HOW MUCH DOES A PREACHER HAVE TO REFERENCE THE BIBLE FOR YOU TO FEEL LIKE THEY'RE DOING THEIR JOB?

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## ISSUE 2: WHAT IS SEXUALITY?



"We don't get to pick the age we will live in, and we don't get to choose all the struggles we will face. Faithfulness is ours to choose; the shape of that faithfulness is God's to determine. In our time, faithfulness means (among a thousand other things) a patiently winsome and carefully reasoned restating of the formerly obvious: homosexual behavior is a sin. Along with most Christians around the globe and virtually every Christian in the first nineteen-and-a-half centuries of church history, I believe the Bible places homosexual behavior- no matter the level of commitment or mutual affection- in the category of sexual immorality."

**-KEVIN DEYOUNG  
EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN**



"I affirm LGBTQ people because they are human beings, created in the image of God. I affirm their sexual orientations and gender identities because they reflect the diversity of God's good creation, where little fits into rigid binary categories.

I affirm their (healthy) relationships.

I affirm them because theology that refuses to accept their personhood is deadly."

**-RACHEL HELD EVANS  
PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIAN**

Before we begin, it's worth noting that this may be a painful topic for many, so let's start out with what should be obvious: nobody is debating whether or not gay people should be loved. Nobody is debating whether gay people are delightful neighbors. Nobody is debating whether God loves gay people. Any answers in the negative to these questions are nothing more than bigotry. The question is, what is a rightly-oriented Christian sexual ethic?

Broadly speaking, there are three camps on the issue of human sexuality and Scripture: traditional, moderate progressive, and progressive. There are a million sub-approaches, but these three tend to hold the most water in theological circles. Here are a few of the undisputed passages in which the Bible addresses homosexuality directly:



### **Leviticus 18:22**

Do not practice homosexuality, having sex with another man as with a woman. It is a detestable sin.

### **Romans 1:21-27**

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

### **1 Timothy 1:8-10**

We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine...

### **1 Corinthians 6:9-10**

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

It is impossible to name every passage, since there is disagreement on what passages count as “referring to homosexuality.” For example, moderate progressives claim that there are very few passages overall and Jesus never addressed the matter directly. They propose that no passage that mentions the broad category of “sexual immorality” should ever be understood to include same-sex sexual activity. Traditionalists say that Jesus's condemnations of sexual immorality (*pornea* in the greek) would have been a reference to all sexual sins described in the Bible, such as premarital sex, homosexual activity, and incest. For the time being, the verses above represent about half of the verses that are unambiguously agreed upon by both parties as verses referring to sexuality. They establish (at minimum) that the Bible is not silent on the issue at hand. Passages against homosexual activity are obviously present in the Bible and must be accounted for. The question isn't *are they there* but *do they count*.

As a roadmap to the beliefs that follow, three positions are dominant in Western Protestantism:

1. The Bible **clearly addresses** same-sex sexual activity and **that matters**. (traditional)
2. The Bible **doesn't clearly address** same-sex sexual activity and **that matters**. (moderate progressive)
3. The Bible **clearly addresses** same-sex sexual activity, but that **doesn't matter**. (progressive)

It's worth admitting that we will cover two progressive positions here (moderate progressive and progressive, whereas we'll only be covering one traditional position. While this seems to give an unfair advantage to one side, the split in the progressive camp regarding why same sex marriage is worth exploring. The traditional camp tends to have relatively unified logic and doesn't require any extra time to explore.

Let's start with the traditional position. Their claim is simple to understand: they believe that the Bible says that homosexual sex is a sin. A person may feel attracted to people of the same sex. Nobody can help how they feel. Acting on that feeling, however, is sinful. This is an easy position to understand, given its alignment with plain-sense readings of the Bible. Warnings about same-sex

sexual relationships can be found in both the Old and New Testaments and were applied to both ancient Israel and the early Christian movement. This position was held unanimously by the Church until around the 20th century and can be found in the writings of numerous theologians (Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Wesley, etc.). It tends to be the normative position in non-Western countries today (South Korea, Senegal, etc).

It's worth noting that this position does not hold that homosexuality is *uniquely* sinful. The Bible contains many lists of sins that we practice daily (gossip, for example) and lists of sexual sins regularly include pre-marital sex (another sin that one need not look far to find). The problem with gay marriage is not that gay sex is a uniquely bad sin, but that it asks churches to bless what God has specifically told us to avoid. While many people gossip, nobody makes arguments that it should be upheld as a virtue. Similarly, people that have pre-marital sex often know that their church disapproves of the activity, and so they refrain from bringing it up while inside the walls of their church. In both cases, there's a general understanding that the act in question might be common, but it isn't good. By talking about same-sex marriage, the church is not just turning a blind eye to an individual person's sins. It's attempting to change the definition of sin.

The biggest challenge in holding this position is that it jars significantly with current cultural norms. Sex is often listed as a legitimate need in models of health and wellness. Students in some mainstream universities have diversity policies that prevent Christian organizations from holding these sorts of positions publicly, leading to CRU and Young Life's dismissal on those campuses. In a post-Freud world where sexuality is seen as both important to psychological health and identity, the question with the traditional theological understanding is, "how do you help gay people thrive if they can't have gay sex?" Traditionalist theologians that experience same-sex attraction like Gregory Coles (*Single Gay Christian*) and Wesley Hill (*Spiritual Friendship*) have insisted that churches that hold a traditional sexual ethic need to help gay people develop deep, meaningful relationships more than ever if they want to hold this position with integrity.

Secondly, there's the moderate progressive position. Passages about

avoiding same-sex sexual encounters might be in the Bible... but they also might not be. Moderate progressives would argue that interpretations of the Bible are always unclear. Who can say what they really meant when they used the word "homosexuality?" Perhaps they meant pedophilia. Perhaps they meant abusive same-sex relationships. Perhaps it was a passage about ritualistic temple prostitution. We cannot know the cultural expectations that were attached to these words when they were written! To deny same-sex couples marriage based on these passages seems unfair. If they experience attraction to members of the same sex, God may have wanted that! They should be allowed to seek loving, consensual sexual experiences regardless of anyone else's interpretations of the Bible. This particular school tends to argue that sexuality ought not be codified in church law. It is up to each individual believer to evaluate the Scriptures and see what they think for themselves.

To find a good example of this position in the UMC, we turn once more to Adam Hamilton. He argues that people in the Biblical era had so many negative associations with same-sex relationships that they couldn't possibly understand same-sex marriage in the same way that modern people today do. He writes,

I suggest that what Moses and Paul were addressing in their teachings on same-sex intimacy was very different from two human beings entering into a covenant relationship of mutual love. In the entire Old Testament we find only two expressions of same-sex intimacy: gang rape and pagan temple prostitution. This is not at all synonymous with two people entering into a lifelong covenant relationship with one another.

This argument absolutely embodies the moderate-progressive perspective. He reminds his audience that the Bible is from a time and a place and may not be able to guide us on this contemporary issue. What should we do? What does the Bible say? Who can know! We have to determine what is right for people today.

This position is perhaps the easiest to enact in large denominations today, especially since it leaves things in an ambiguous place. What is right? Each congregation must judge for themselves! But its weaknesses tend to show in

the academic arena. Arguing for permanent ambiguity in ancient texts is a tough challenge to meet. Ancient Greek and Hebrew had words for pedophilia, slave-master relationships, temple prostitution, and other sexual relationships between same-sex persons. The Scriptures do not use these words. They specifically use words that apply to all same-sex sexual relationships. Christians before the 20th century didn't see the Bible as ambiguous on these issues, and most non-Christian scholars tend not to see the passages as especially ambiguous either. Some scholars (such as David Greenberg) have also expressed concern about excusing anti-homosexual Christian history as "reasonable in its time" without delving into the concerns about homosexuality that people repeatedly expressed throughout those eras. Ultimately, the position tends to find traction specifically in large moderate-progressive churches as a middle-ground position, but has enough intellectual gaps that it has a hard time making inroads in other communities (especially universities).

Finally, there's the more progressive option. This ultimately reaches the same conclusion as the moderate progressive option (gay weddings are allowable within a Christian framework), but with a more intense theological bent. These thinkers think it's actively sinful not to condone same-sex marriage. God commanded justice for all people (Micah 6:8), and a system in which some people can indulge in their choice sexual relationships while others are prevented from doing so is unjust. People ought to be free to live into whatever person God made them to be. A refusal to acknowledge and affirm the identity of someone who is LGBTQIA+ is harmful to the individual in question. Psychologically, the person is wounded by their church's unwillingness to accept them as they are. A loving church cannot be a church that denies people marriage rights. A loving church must affirm and love each person and their identity.

The Rachel Held-Evans quote above is an excellent example of this belief in action. What does she believe? That affirming gay people is critical to their health. Any theological system that does not acknowledge the legitimacy of same-sex relationships is harmful and unworthy of the church. Jesus did not directly speak about same-sex relationships in the Scriptures, so why should we? If the church is to remain relevant in the modern era, we must be loving to all people and affirm same-sex relationships. The verses in the Bible that condemn

these acts do not reflect God's love. They were written by humans and reflect human sin, rather than God's love.

The challenge with this position is that the Bible contains passages that become difficult to condone reading. If Romans 1:21-27 does not reflect the glory of God, how can we read it in churches? Moreover, if God most wants liberation and justice for all (in a relatively secular Western framework), what makes Christians unique from any other person group in the United States? Christians are called to be the salt of the Earth, but if salt is no longer salty, it is to be cast out and trampled underfoot (Matt 5:13). What makes salt salty? What makes Christians Christian? As professor Steven Chapman at Duke University said, "If same-sex marriage is not allowed, we have to ask, how can we reach out to gay people and help them find space in churches? If same-sex marriage is allowed, we have to ask, are there any uniquely Christian commands in the Bible that we are expected to live out when they're unpopular?"

# PROCESSING TOGETHER

THEORIES REGARDING SEXUALITY CAN BE AWKWARD TO EXPRESS. SEXUALITY IS TABOO CONVERSATION FOR MANY PEOPLE, AND MEDDLING IN SOMEONE ELSE'S INTIMATE LIFE MIGHT SEEM INAPPROPRIATE. WHAT DO YOU THINK GOD IS CALLING HIS DISCIPLES TO SAY TO GAY PEOPLE?

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GAY SEXUALITY IS RARELY ISOLATED IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY. IT IS OFTEN INTERCONNECTED WITH IDEAS ABOUT PORNOGRAPHY, MOVING IN WITH SOMEONE, AND PREMARITAL SEX. AS ABOVE, PROGRESSIVES TEND TO SEE THESE AS LESSER SINS OR NON-SINS, WHEREAS EVANGELICALS SEE THEM AS SINS. WHEN YOU ADD THESE TO THE MIX, DO YOU TEND TO WAIVER IN ONE DIRECTION OR THE OTHER?

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HOW CAN PEOPLE SHEPHERD THEIR SEXUALITY WELL AS A DISCIPLE? HOW DO WE HELP PEOPLE LIVE THAT OUT?

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## ISSUE 3: WHAT IS THE ROLE OF JESUS IN CHRISTIANITY?

This is, perhaps, a dramatic final question to end on. And yet, it's safe to say that there is a significant disagreement on what Jesus expects from us and how we're supposed to interact with him. Traditionalists tend to think that the biggest ask that the Bible has of us is to have faith in Jesus Christ as our savior and look to his death on the cross as the heart of all things. We can't be saved by looking to Christ's teachings alone! That's the law. And we aren't capable of keeping the law on our own. We need to believe in Christ and know him. Once we do that, the path to salvation opens and we can start to act according to Christ's teachings. Progressive Christians tend to say that traditional Christianity has put too much emphasis on Christ's death and not enough on his life. They emphasize his teachings as key to understanding him. The story of the cross is good, but it might well be a myth. Jesus' main concern was caring for the least and the lost. If someone does that, that's way more important than anything else. As C.S. Lewis put it, the debate is really about what genre the Christian story belongs to. Is the story of Christ a hero's story, telling of the one who saved us? Or is the story of Christ a piece of philosophy, teaching us how to act?

As Christianity seems more of a philosophy to them, progressive Christians tend towards universalism. In other words, they tend to be uncomfortable with the idea of Jesus being uniquely important and regard other religions as potentially equal expressions of religious truth. The way they express this differs depending on the individual. Some think that Hell might exist, but it is intended for especially *hateful* people, whereas Heaven is for *loving* people of all religions. Some believe that Hell is only for people that refuse God's gracious invitation to go to Heaven. Some believe there is no Hell at all. As you see, there are a variety of potential expressions of universalism ranging from soft to hard, but a unifying factor is the idea that a good god wouldn't send people to Hell just because they were not a Christian in this life.

Nadia Bolz-Weber is a popular pastor and author that expresses this viewpoint readily. In her article with Religion and Politics she described her position:



"I confess that I am a Christo-centric universalist. What that means to me is that, whatever God was accomplishing, especially on the cross, that Christological event, was for the restoration and redemption and reconciliation of all things and all people and all Creation - everyone... How God manages to play that out through other religions, other symbol systems, I will never understand. I have to allow for the idea that God is actually nimble enough and powerful enough and creative enough to do that."

In Bolz-Weber's theology, other religions are "symbol systems" capable of communicating the grace that was poured out on the cross. Hinduism is communicating the same essential truth of Jesus that Christianity is; it's just a different way of explaining it. Perhaps there's a vital truth of God that can be uncovered in the Hindu symbol system more easily than it is in our own. We need to listen more than we speak if we want to find God. Who was Jesus in this system? A radical teacher of love, forgiveness, and God's grace. His essential message can be shared in other systems without reference to himself or his crucifixion. He is the teacher par-excellence.

Traditionalist Christians read the Bible as the story of a hero. Humanity was mired in sin, and Jesus swooped in and offered a helping hand. Through his suffering, death, and resurrection, humanity can be restored. The particularity of Christ is important because there is no way around sin without him. If you don't stand with the mighty hero of God (whose strength is weakness and whose death brings life), then sin is invincible. Christianity is, then, an exclusive truth, demanding the whole of our lives and asking that we share it with those that don't know Christ's love. Traditionalists tend not to see that exclusivity as offensive, but as an honest and logical expression of belief. All belief systems involve certain claims to truth. Secular people and progressive Christians say that all religious truths can be right (in a manner of speaking), but if every claim is equally right, then every claim is also equally useless and ultimately equally wrong. That system of thought leads people to thinking that the truth is a system of morality, rather than a person or a god. Christianity is about a God that actually exists and is intervening on our behalf. It must be held as genuinely true or genuinely false, not as something part-true or helpful for some and not for

others. Christianity is not a way of discovering moral actions, but the only way to become truly moral. As Tim Keller (an evangelical pastor and author in New York) once preached in his sermon “Exclusivity: How can there be just one true religion”:

Everyone has a set of exclusive beliefs. Christianity has exclusive beliefs. But which set of exclusive beliefs leads people to the most inclusive behavior? I submit this. Take moralism into the center of your life and you’ll feel superior to the secularists. Take secularism into the center of your life and you’ll feel superior to all those stupid religious people. Take the gospel to the center of your life and you’ll be humbled before people who don’t believe what you believe, you’ll seek to serve the people who don’t believe what you believe and you’ll know that a man who loves people who don’t love him is what your whole life is built on.

For the traditionalist, the exclusivity of Christ as the only source of salvation opens up the path to true inclusive behavior and love.

These different understandings of Christ lead to different emphases within churches. Evangelical/Traditional denominations tend to have a much higher emphasis on evangelism. Helping others know Christ is crucial to their faith, and so they prioritize it. The GMC has expressed that they will put more resources towards missionary work and prioritize those stories within congregations. Progressive Christians tend to put more emphasis on interreligious dialogue. Other religions are valid expressions of God’s way of being, so why try to change someone’s belief? It’s better to listen to their tradition than to talk about your own. Several United Methodist seminaries (such as the Claremont School of Theology and Iliff) currently offer programs to train clergy of multiple religions including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam (a subject of pride for progressives and frustration for evangelicals). The role of Christ within Christianity changes the expression of the church’s ministries, so this is not a purely philosophical dilemma. Ultimately, the way the church understands itself and its mission will be shaped by this difference.

# FINAL PROCESSING

THESE THREE QUESTIONS REPRESENT ONLY A FEW OF THE ISSUES THAT DIFFERENTIATE THE THEOLOGY OF THE GMC AND THE UMC. THEY TEND TO BE THE MOST POPULAR ISSUES BROUGHT UP FOR BOTH SIDES. WERE THERE ANY ISSUES YOU EXPECTED TO SEE THAT YOU DIDN'T? DID ANY OF THE ISSUES BROUGHT UP SURPRISE YOU?

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HOW DO YOU THINK ABOUT YOUR BIBLE? WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN THERE ARE HARD VERSES THAT YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND? WHAT ROLE SHOULD THE BIBLE PLAY IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY?

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DO YOU THINK OF THE STORY OF CHRIST PRIMARILY AS A HERO STORY ABOUT THE GOD-MAN? OR AS A PHILOSOPHY FROM A WISE TEACHER?

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## TO READ BEFORE NEXT TIME:

For our next session, read these articles:

*Time To Go: Why We Must Pass the Protocol*, Jeff Greenway

This article was written back when there was a deal on the table to split the Methodist Church amicably between theological conservatives and liberals. The deal didn't work out, but Greenway's article remains a helpful article in identifying the difference between evangelical and progressive thinking in our church today and why a split is needed. Note his concern for adherence to historic Christian orthodoxy.

Available at: <https://firebrandmag.com/articles/time-to-go-why-we-must-pass-the-protocol>

*A Narrative for the Continuing United Methodist Church*, The UM Council of Bishops

This article was released not long after the conservative methodists announced their plans to leave if the protocol to split the church amicably would not be passed. Note the Fosdickian concern for tolerance of ideology and the elevation of Christ's social philosophy over orthodoxy.

Available at: [https://www.unitedmethodistbishops.org/files/websites/www/a+narrative+for+the+continuing+united+methodist+church....\\_.pdf](https://www.unitedmethodistbishops.org/files/websites/www/a+narrative+for+the+continuing+united+methodist+church...._.pdf)

# RESOURCES FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO GO DEEPER

## What is Scripture?

### Evangelical/Traditional:

*Who Wrote the Bible*, John Piper

Available at <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/who-wrote-the-bible>

*Taking God at His Word*, Kevin DeYoung

Available on Amazon, preview of e-book is free

### Progressive/Modernist:

*Critical Traditioning*, Ellen Davis

Available at JSTOR.com (account required but free)

*Making Sense of the Bible*, Adam Hamilton

Available on Amazon, preview of e-book is free

## What is Sexuality?

### Progressive/Modernist:

*Shameless: A Sexual Revolution*, Nadia Bolz-Weber

Available on Amazon, preview of e-book is free

Interview with Religion News Service, Adam Hamilton

available at <https://religionnews.com/2014/05/01/adam-hamilton-offers-scandalous-take-on-scripture/>

### Evangelical/Traditional:

*What Does The Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality?* Kevin DeYoung

Available on Amazon, preview of e-book is free

*What Do You say to Evangelicals who Affirm Same-Sex Marriage?*, John Piper

<https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-do-you-say-to-evangelicals-who-affirm-so-called-same-sex-marriage>

## **What is the Role of Jesus in Christianity**

### **Evangelical/Traditional:**

*Surprised by Joy*, C.S. Lewis, Chapter XV

available free at <https://gutenberg.ca/ebooks/lewiscs-surprisedbyjoy/lewiscs-surprisedbyjoy-01-h.html>

*How Can There Be Just One True Religion*, Tim Keller

available at [http://reformedevangelist.blogspot.com/2021/09/a-transcription-of-tim-kellers\\_15.html](http://reformedevangelist.blogspot.com/2021/09/a-transcription-of-tim-kellers_15.html)

### **Progressive/Modernist:**

*Love Wins*, Rob Bell

Available on Amazon, preview of e-book is free

*For All the Sinners and Saints*, Nadia Bolz-Weber

<https://religionandpolitics.org/2015/07/28/for-all-the-sinners-and-saints-an-interview-with-nadia-bolz-weber/>

# CHECK-IN

There are two more Sundays of our discernment process, one of which is devoted to structural differences between the GMC and the UMC and one of which is going to be driven by your questions. To help me understand where our community is at and what concerns you have, please take the time to fill out this little survey.

## 1) Are you a member of TPUMC?

YES NO

## 2) At this point in time, would you vote to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church?

YES NO UNDECIDED

## 3) At this point in time, would you vote to join the Global Methodist Church?

YES NO UNDECIDED

## 4) What factors have contributed to your current position?

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am theologically conservative/evangelical  | <input type="checkbox"/> I value institutional stability   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am theologically progressive   | <input type="checkbox"/> I want us to own our building   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I feel strongly about same-sex marriage  | <input type="checkbox"/> I want more choice in finding a pastor  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am frustrated that the Book of Discipline is not currently enforced by bishops             | <input type="checkbox"/> I have a strong preference for the UMC's name and logo  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I prefer a denomination with centralized power and more denominationally-affiliated agencies | <input type="checkbox"/> I prefer a denomination with greater missional autonomy for each church and a lower overhead cost |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I want to move on from the debate in the UMC and focus on making disciples                   |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____   |  |

## 5) What questions do you still have?

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