

“God Gathers”—*Covenant Life in the Church*
ECO Essential Tenets Study for BYF - August 16, 2026
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1. Announcements and Prayer

2. Quick review of August 9 lesson on Essential Tenets III.B., Election for Salvation and Service

- Because of human sinfulness, the only way we can enter into a relationship with God is by his sovereign, gracious choosing of us—what we call “election”
- This election happens not just to save us from something, but also for something: God’s good work in his name and for his glory

3. Today’s lesson now moves to a third distinctive area for Presbyterians: III.C., “Covenant Life in the Church,” *Essentials of the Reformed Tradition*, ECO Essential Tenets

We are elect in Christ to become members of the community of the new covenant. This covenant, which God Himself guarantees, unites us to God and to one another. Already in the creation, we discover that we are made to live in relationships to others, male and female, created together in God’s image. **In Christ, we are adopted into the family of God and find our new identity as brothers and sisters of one another, since we now share one Father.** Our faith requires our active participation in that covenant community.

Jesus prays that His followers will all be one, and so we both pray and work for the union of the church throughout the world. Even where institutional unity does not seem possible, we are bound to other Christians as our brothers and sisters. In Christ the dividing wall of hostility created by nationality, ethnicity, gender, race, and language differences is brought down. God created people so that the rich variety of His wisdom might be reflected in the rich variety of human beings, and the church must already now begin to reflect the eschatological reality of people from every tribe, and tongue, and nation bringing the treasures of their kingdoms into the new city of God.

Within the covenant community of the church, God’s grace is extended through the preaching of the Word, the administration of the Sacraments, and the faithful practice of mutual discipline. First, through the work of the Holy Spirit, the word proclaimed may indeed become God’s address to us. The Spirit’s illuminating work is necessary both for the one who preaches and for those who listen. Second, the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are signs that are linked to the things signified, sealing to us the promises of Jesus. In the Baptism of infants, we confess our confidence in God’s gracious initiative, that a baby who cannot turn to God is nonetheless claimed as a member of the covenant community, a child of God, cleansed by grace and sealed by the Spirit; in the Baptism of adults, we confess our confidence that God’s grace can make us new creations at any stage of our lives. Baptism is a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, a mark of entrance into the visible church, and it is the Holy Spirit who makes this sacrament efficacious in God’s time to those whom God has called. In the Lord’s Supper, we confess that as we eat the bread and share one cup the Spirit unites us to the ascended Christ, so that His resurrection life may nourish, strengthen, and transform us. Third, the community of the Church practices discipline in order to help one

another along the path to new life, speaking the truth in love to one another, bearing one another's burdens, and offering to one another the grace of Christ.

4. Our adoption into the family of God means, among other things, we have a lot of new brothers and sisters in Christ...

- Members of "community of the new covenant" (quotation from III.C.), the Church (John 17:1-26)
- Adoption a strong motif in Paul's letters (Romans 8:12-30; Ephesians 1:3-8)
- Unity of ministry and service as the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Ephesians 4:1-16)
- Ethnic, racial, economic, national, and linguistic barriers come down in Christ (Acts 10:1—11:26; Acts 13:1-3; Galatians 3:27-29; Ephesians 2:11-22)

5. Three ways in which God's grace is extended to us in his community (quotations from III.C.)...

- The preaching of God's Word, Scripture, becomes "God's address to us" (Examples of sermons from Acts: 2:14-41, 3:11-26; 4:8-12; 13:16-41; 17:22-33)
- The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper—"signs of the things signified"—that seal, mark, and mature us as God's people (Matthew 3:1-17 and 26:26-29, with similar passages in Mark and Luke; Matthew 28:18-20; Ephesians 4:4-6; 1 Corinthians 11:17-26)
 - Analogy of baptism and Lord's Supper with circumcision and Passover
 - Presbyterians emphasize "real, but spiritual, presence of Christ" in sacraments
- The mutual accountability within the covenant community in order to "help one another along the path of new life" (Matthew 18:15-35; Galatians 5:25—6:5; Hebrews 12:1-17)

6. Closing Prayer with reminder for Next Week: August 23, III.D. from Essential Tenets, "Faithful Stewardship of All of Life"

DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- *Adoption comes up again in this Tenet. What is its significance and importance here?*
- *Look at the last sentence of the first paragraph of this Tenet that starts, "Our faith requires..." If this is true, then why are so many professing Christians unconnected to a church? What keeps people away from congregations? Why is "church hurt" so painful?*
- *Give an example of when you have seen ethnic, racial, economic, national, or linguistic barriers to Christian community come down. What makes these barriers so hard to penetrate and overcome with what Christianity offers through Christ?*
- *How does the Presbyterian perspective on baptism differ from the Baptist one? Why are most Presbyterians pleased to baptize young children incapable of professing their faith?*
- *What do most Catholics believe about the Lord's Supper? What do most non-denominational Christians believe about the Lord's Supper? How do Presbyterians strike a "middle ground" about the Lord's Supper?*
- *Christian accountability is easier to talk about than to practice. Discuss one example in which you've seen this accountability work well. Discuss another example you've seen when it didn't work well. What makes the difference?*