Doorways

STUDY GUIDE for
THE ESSENTIAL TENETS

LEADER’S GUIDE
by Stephen Eyre and Mary Holder Naegeli
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Forward

I had guessed that the taxi driver was a Christian as soon as I got into the cab. The evidence certainly seemed strong: there was a small wooden cross hanging from his rearview mirror, and when I leaned forward to tell him what hotel I wanted to go to, I saw an open Bible on the front passenger seat. But all doubt was removed when, driving through the city, we passed a church with a large neon sign proclaiming “Jesus Saves.” The driver leaned back, pointing: “See that sign? That’s all you need to know!”

His remark caught me off guard, so I merely grunted a quick approving sound. But when he dropped me off a few minutes later, I told him that I appreciated his Christian witness. Needless to say, though, if we had been given time for a longer conversation I would have discussed the two-word message with him at a great length.

That message is a profound one. I’m pleased when I see it on public display. But it is shorthand for a lot of important topics, ones that deal with highly significant questions. Here are some of them. Who is the Jesus who saves? What does he save us from? How did he do it? What does he expect us to do about it? What does his saving mission tell us about how human history is going to end up?

People can agree on the simple formula, “Jesus Saves,” and still have strong disagreements about how to answer those questions. As a Presbyterian who subscribes to the basic teachings associated with the Reformed faith, I believe that my tradition provides a profound framework for answering those important questions. And when I say “subscribe” I am putting it mildly. I am passionate about the Reformed way of understanding the basic claims of the gospel.

We Presbyterians are committed to a system of thought that centers on our profound trust in a sovereign God who has done for us in Jesus Christ what we could never have accomplished for ourselves. We are sinners who desperately need God’s mercy and grace. And the freely offered salvation that comes to us through Jesus is life-giving. It incorporates us into a community of people who are in the process of becoming more like Jesus. And we want to be like Jesus because that means being all that God intended us to be when he created us. When Jesus saves us he empowers us to flourish as human beings who are doing the work of his Kingdom.

I find all of that very exciting stuff. And because of that I also find this study of the Essential Tenets of the Reformed faith to be very exciting. The authors have given us a gift, by selecting teachings set forth in our Book of Confessions that can serve as doorways into the message of the Scriptures. And they have taken great care to design their “content-heavy” presentations in a manner that encourages interaction with what they have provided. These materials will not shut down serious discussions. They are meant to stimulate honest questions; the lessons and exercises are nicely designed to promote lively discussions among groups of Christians who care deeply about
matters that are of eternal importance. Even more important, this study guide also has a very practical goal: the kind of spiritual nurture that can equip us to serve the Lord in our own everyday lives.

We Presbyterians have a wonderful heritage: not just the sort of thing that gets put in museums, but a vital basis for people who want to “glorify God and enjoy him forever.” Our Book of Confessions contains documents written at various historical moments—typically those moments demanded utter clarity about what it means to be faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are faced with one of those moments in our own day.

We need Christians today who have thought carefully about the foundations of the faith, and who are drawing on the wisdom of the past to serve the Lord in these challenging but exciting times. I hope this study guide will be widely used. Study these important matters. You may even find that these materials come in handy when you have the opportunity to discuss theology with a taxi driver!

RICHARD MOUW, President, Fuller Theological Seminary
Introduction and Orientation to Study Guide of the Essential Tenets

1. The genesis of this study guide
When The Fellowship Theology Project was published in 2012, the church received an exciting gift. The rich confessional heritage contained in the Book of Confessions was made accessible in fresh new ways. The Project’s purpose was to provide a clear theological identity for The Fellowship of Presbyterians (the Fellowship) and the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO). The Taskforce that produce The Fellowship Theology Project also issued a challenge to the Fellowship and to ECO to recommend “theological practices that will sustain us for the next generation.”

This DOORWAYS: Study Guide for the Essential Tenets is one response to that challenge. Our vision was to produce a tool that would place the Essential Tenets on the table for all to appreciate. We believe that pastors and church officers have desired help in unpacking the essential tenets of the Reformed faith and felt called to meet this need. Our hope is that the Study Guide will provide a portal into the biblical and theological riches that are part of our Reformed heritage and engage many churches and their members in life-giving theological reflection.

The master format organizes the material into nine topics, which can be subdivided for various purposes and audiences. Each topic is explored through the lens of the Essential Tenet found in The Fellowship Theology Project, using biblical and confessional background material to substantiate the claim that these topics are among the “essentials of the Reformed Faith.”

For the present purpose, we (the study guide writers) have started with each Essential Tenet as a doorway into the Scriptures, our primary teaching authority, and the Confessions, our primary interpretive authority. You need not view this as eisegesis (that is, reading our own doctrinal presuppositions into biblical texts), but a necessary linking of The Theology Project with its scriptural roots, out of which both the Confessions and Essential Tenets were derived. Our assigned task was to orient you to the doctrinal statements of an emerging religious movement within the Presbyterian and Reformed family, and to do so by letting its outline inform the organization of biblical and confessional teaching. To this end, the topics are articulated by The Theology Project, but each topic is developed first by looking at relevant Scriptures and then appropriate confessional statements.

The Rev. Stephen Eyre (Cincinnati, OH) was the primary author. He wrote and then tested the material with members of his church. His work was edited and augmented with teaching aids and introductions by the Rev. Dr. Mary Holder Naegeli (Walnut Creek, CA), who became the managing editor of the project. The Rev. Chris Hammond (Washington, DC) scrutinized every detail to tighten up the material for final publication, and Mr. Jeremy Emmerich (Minneapolis, MN) designed the package for both Web and print distribution.

2. The intended user
This Study is geared to ordinary Presbyterians who want to think through their Reformed faith. While writing this study, we had in mind thoughtful, intelligent Christians who are curious about the foundations of Presbyterian and Reformed faith and who desire to put that faith into action in and through their church families. Our material is designed for use in groups, as opposed to private
study. However, there is a strong component of personal involvement around pre-class homework and follow-up questions for reflection.

Groups might comprise
- church officers
- church members interested in understanding Presbyterian doctrinal distinctives
- pastors desiring to cultivate theological reflection in the company of other pastors
- congregations evaluating their confessional heritage as part of a discernment process (conducting a mission study, writing a Church Information Form, or considering options for dismissal to another Reformed body)

Alternative formats geared for different groups are provided at the end of this study guide.

3. The overall goals of this study
The overall goal of *DOORWAYS: Study Guide to the Essential Tenets* is to outline a teaching/learning curriculum that enables curious and thoughtful Presbyterians to become conversant in eight essential doctrines of the Reformed faith and more generally the *Book of Confessions* as “reliable expositions of what the Scriptures teach.” The hope is that participants will appreciate the wisdom of Church history, tap into the brilliance of a Christian thought system, and stand in awe of the majesty and sovereignty of God. Further, because Presbyterians seek to apprehend the Truth in order to live obedient and holy lives, our hope is that every participant will undergo spiritual transformation leading to biblically informed life choices and behavior. In other words, we hope you (the leader) and those you teach will never be the same again, becoming enthusiastic followers of Jesus Christ after immersing yourselves in this rich doctrinal material.

4. What characterizes these lessons
We are going to be honest here: These nine lessons are challenging and stretching for the average Presbyterian. There is a lot of meat and solid spiritual food here to chew on for many weeks. Without apology, but in the interest of full disclosure, the lessons include the following characteristics:
- they are content-heavy
- despite their content-heaviness, they are designed to be interactive
- they rely on homework of both teacher and student
- they are meant as an overview and orientation to a rich body of material
- they are intended to be doorways into deeper personal study on the topic later

5. What is assumed or expected of the leader
- well-established Christian faith and some familiarity with basic Christian doctrine
- a willingness to let *The Fellowship Theology Project* shape your presentation of those basic teachings
- some limited experience teaching adults so that you can navigate the material, which gives sufficient guidance and an appropriate structure for learning
- diligence in study, evidenced by thorough preparation of the lesson, reading each Scripture and confessional resource ahead of time, and working through the various questions that appear in the lesson plan
- pastoral wisdom to know when to stop for group discussion and when to push on through the material—this will be a weekly struggle, but we trust that the Spirit of God will guide you to a good balance
- freedom to add or edit as you are inspired to adapt this material to your learners
6. What is assumed and expected of participants
Understanding the diversity of people likely to use this material, we nevertheless assume and expect that those participating in the study will have some characteristics in common:

- an honest curiosity and openness to the basic teachings of the Christian faith in the Presbyterian/Reformed Tradition
- a commitment of time to attend the class sessions, however scheduled
- willingness to spend about 30 minutes in preparation before each class session (reading and pondering) and 10 minutes per day reading the given Scriptures in their contexts
- a desire to know God better and to relate more closely to the Father through the Son, with the Spirit’s assistance
- a certain bravery to voice questions and seek application of the material to everyday life. “So what?!” is a legitimate question, since our goal is to make faith a way of life.

7. What the guides include

Leader’s Guide
- instruction on how to use the Leader’s Guide effectively
- nine detailed lesson plans for use in a two-hour weekly format in a more traditional teaching/learning setting
- three alternative uses of the material, including the following:
  - Officer training—30 minute modules for use in Session or Deacon meetings
  - Pastors Engaged in Theological Reflection—focused on discussion questions
  - Sermon Series—The 9-Week Plan and the 25-Week Plan

Participant’s Guide:
- an 800-word essay introducing the doctrinal theme of the lesson
- a reading assignment in preparation, including confessional documents and daily Bible readings
- a few warm-up questions on the topic to consider in advance of class
- blank note pages for in-class use
- The Reader containing Scripture passages, confessional statements, illustrative quotations
- in-class discussion questions, only some of which can be addressed in the class time allotted, but made available to all for future consideration

About the Authors

The Rev. Stephen D. Eyre has written a number of Bible studies and books. After several years with Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship, specializing in thoughtful Christian discipleship for college students, he became a pastor in the PC(USA). He is currently Minister of Congregational Development at Madeira-Silverwood Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, and is grateful for the freedom afforded him to write and develop Doorways. He is also the Director of the C. S. Lewis Institute for Cincinnati and Church Consultant with Connections, a ministry providing Bible study materials for congregational engagement in Scripture.

The Rev. Dr. Mary Holder Naegeli was a specialist in adult discipleship prior to serving two Presbyterian pastorates in San Francisco Presbytery. Her experience as associate editor of The Serendipity Bible was the first of many writing and editing projects, including reFORM for Presbyterians For Renewal. She has taught preaching, teaching, and missional leadership at Fuller Seminary, where her D.Min. dissertation was entitled, “Reclaiming the Ministry of Teaching in the Missional Setting.” She currently serves as teaching pastor for a Lutheran congregation part-time. You can read her blog Bringing the Word to Life at https://wordtolife.wordpress.com.
# The Structure of the Lessons

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<th>TIME</th>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>:00–:05</td>
<td>GREETING, OPENING PRAYER</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| :05–:10 | STATE THE TOPIC AND GOALS FOR THE LESSON  
*As you get to know your learners better, you may wish to add more specific learning objectives.* |
| :10–:20 | WARM-UP DISCUSSION from four questions in the lesson plan |
| :20–:25 | Ask the group, “What questions are you going to want to have answered before we finish tonight?”  
*List on whiteboard, but don’t answer them now. These might be words to be defined, meaning to be explained, or application to be made. Make mental note where these questions will be answered in your instruction below, or handle questions here with a referral to a later lesson or a one-on-one conversation.* |
| :25–:30 | READ THE ESSENTIAL TENET TEXT  
*Read in its entirety, the tenet establishes the scope of the topic, introduces an approach to the doctrine, and gives the participants a chance to use another sense (hearing) to apprehend a wonderful truth previously read (sight). Treat this as a devotional exercise.* |
| :30–1:20 | PRESENT EACH SUB-TOPIC  
*Think in terms of OBSERVE, INTERPRET, REFLECT, APPLY.*  

- **TENET SUB-TOPIC I**  
  - Scriptures  
  - Confessional witness  
  - ET and teaching points  
  - Illustration, Quotation, or Other Supportive Material  

- **TENET SUB-TOPIC II**  
  - Scriptures  
  - Confessional witness  
  - ET and teaching points  
  - Illustration, Quotation, or Other Supportive Material  

- **TENET SUB-TOPIC III**  
  - Scriptures  
  - Confessional witness  
  - ET and teaching points  
  - Illustration, Quotation, or Other Supportive Material  

- **TENET SUB-TOPIC IV**  
  - Scriptures  
  - Confessional witness  
  - ET and teaching points  
  - Illustration, Quotation, or Other Supportive Material  

| 1:20–1:50 | GROUP DISCUSSION from a list of prepared group questions in the lesson plan  
*Emphasize how this belief enlivens relationship with God and motivates responsive action. Pick questions that address issues that have been raised in class; or, start with the few questions in bold type to cover the main points.* |
| 1:50–1:57 | CHECK IN with original questions written on the board, and tie up loose ends.  
SUMMARIZE “What We Have Learned Tonight” |
| 1:57–2:00 | CLOSING PRAYER  
*Be open to the way God may be moving your people to respond to the Word of God and gather this awareness into your closing prayer.* |
Some Practical Suggestions

Though we are heavy on content, and discussions have the potential for becoming quite technical, be sure to step back occasionally and welcome the faith-building dynamic. Knowing these concepts is one thing, but having their truth intrude upon the learner’s life can introduce a range of emotions: awe, gratitude, befuddlement, remorse, or excitement. Approach these feelings with tenderness, appreciate the impact the Holy Spirit is having, and seek where God might be leading faith into action.

Time is going to be your greatest friend and enemy while teaching these lessons. We have provided more material than you can use in any given two-hour class. With this in mind, it is better to cover every sub-topic using less time for each than to omit any of the sub-topics. Use your best judgment to modulate your presentation, and be prepared to advise your people on how to follow up at home if time is short.

Here are some specific suggestions for coping with a racing clock:

• Start on time. They’ll get the idea.
• Use only one or two warm-up questions.
• Go into depth on at least one of the three or four major concepts per lesson; spend less time on the others.
• Offer at least one Scripture verse and one confessional reference for each concept. Skip illustrative quotations if you must—but refer your people to them for edifying reading later (they will be included in the Participant’s Guide along with all the other texts appearing in that lesson).
• If your group is large or particularly talkative, agree on informal guidelines for asking questions.

Closing Exhortation

While we urge you to take your leadership role seriously in this endeavor, we hope that you will consider yourself a fellow learner and seeker on this adventure through the Doorways. It is a great comfort to all Christian teachers that Jesus promised his Spirit’s help: “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you” (John 14:26). So be encouraged that you are not alone in the effort to transmit the great truths of our Reformed heritage to the next generation. Teach with the expectation that God speaks in and through this learning experience. Much more is in action than meets the eye, and we do best to stand back and let God be our teacher. With the Apostle Paul, we remember: “Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant” (II Corinthians 3:5f).
# Lesson 1

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<td>:05–10</td>
<td>STATE THE TOPIC AND GOALS FOR THE LESSON</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.  To consider why Presbyterians have confessional documents</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2.  To consider the role of confessional documents in experiencing Christian unity and spiritual vitality</td>
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<td>3.  To become acquainted with the confessional documents in The Book of Confessions</td>
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<tr>
<td>:10–25</td>
<td>WARM-UP DISCUSSION (choose one or two questions)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1.  How do you know what you should believe and not believe?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2.  What do you say to a person who asks you, “What’s the difference between Christianity and other faiths?”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3.  What comes to mind when you hear the word “doctrine”?</td>
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<tr>
<td>:25–30</td>
<td><em>Ask the group:</em> “What questions are you going to want to have answered before we are finished tonight?”</td>
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<td>PRESENTATION OF EACH SUB-TOPIC</td>
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<td>I.  CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE DERIVES FROM THE BIBLE</td>
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<td>II. CONFESSIONAL DOCUMENTS ARTICULATE A BIBLICAL FAITH</td>
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<td>III. THE REFORMED TRADITION ENGAGES IN DOCTRINAL DIALOGUE</td>
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<td></td>
<td>IV. WE EMBRACE NINE CREEDS, CONFESSIONS, CATECHISMS</td>
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I. Christian doctrine derives from the Bible.

A. There are many different faith options to choose from in today’s world:
   - The nature of this world: Good? Evil? Corrupted?
   - Why God helps us: Due to our good effort? No effort on our part?
   - How we ought to behave (morality): Within family? Toward the neighbor? At work? In business dealings? Sexually? Politically?

→ What we believe determines how we live and experience life.

B. Christians believe that we learn what to believe from the Bible. This narrows and defines our choices/beliefs significantly.

C. Even so, there are still a wide range, different and even conflicting, among those who take the Bible as their source of beliefs
   - Roman Catholic
   - Orthodox (e.g., Greek, Coptic, Russian)
   - Protestant (e.g., Lutheran, Anglican/Episcopalian, Methodist, Baptist, Pentecostal, Quaker, Reformed/Presbyterian)

Some Christian denominations have rejected the use of confessional documents because they believe them to be barriers rather than channels of spiritual life. These denominations say they have “no creed but the Bible.”

II. Confessional documents articulate a biblical faith

A. Creeds, confessions, and catechisms are the means by which Christians have articulated their faith and educated generations.
   - A **creed** is a concise statement of belief—from the Latin credo, “I believe.”
   - A **confession** is an extended and comprehensive statement of beliefs.
   - A **catechism** is a statement of beliefs organized as an instructional tool (often with the use of questions and answers).

B. Many confessional documents have been written over the last 2,000 years. Almost all Christian denominations adhere to at least one confessional statement. In the Presbyterian/Reformed faith tradition, all ordained leaders are required to affirm them. This is what we believe.

The church’s confessions are not marginal details in the church’s life. The ordination vows made by most deacons, ruling elders, and teaching elders commit us to receive and adopt their essential tenets, and to be instructed, led, and guided by them. Our task is to be faithful to our vows, reading and studying the confessions, learning from them, teaching them, and living out their wisdom. Shared confession of faith shapes any serious community of faith, and the community’s ordered ministries bear a particular obligation to order their confession around the church’s creeds, confessions, and catechisms. Because confessional seriousness includes mutual responsibility and accountability, the church must be prepared to instruct, counsel with, or even discipline one ordained who rejects the faith expressed in the confessions. (The Fellowship Theology Project [FTP], p. 4)
III. The Reformed tradition engages in doctrinal dialogue

A. There are a range of attitudes towards doctrine:

   **Doctrinal “Progressives”** understand the church’s confessional and theological tradition as an evolutionary development of doctrine in which the church’s expression of the gospel becomes richer in each succeeding age. In this view, contemporary theology and new confessions of faith are more developed, better expressed, fuller apprehensions of truth than the faith of previous centuries. “Our way is the way.”

   **Doctrinal “Restorationists”** understand the church’s theological and confessional tradition as a series of missteps leading to imperfect understanding and inadequate articulation of the gospel. In this view, a particular moment in the church’s confessional and theological tradition, such as the sixteenth century Augsburg Confession or the seventeenth century Westminster standards, is the pure faith of a theological golden age. “Their way is the way.”

   **The Reformed understanding** of the church’s confessional and theological tradition sees contemporary Christians as participants in an enduring theological and doctrinal conversation that shapes the patterns of the church’s faith and life. Communities of believers from every time and place engage in a continuous discussion about the shape of Christian faith and life, an exchange that is maintained through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Today’s church brings its insights into an ongoing dialogue with those who have lived and died in the Faith before us. Voices from throughout the Church’s life contribute to the interchange – ancient voices that articulate the enduring rule of faith, sixteenth and seventeenth century voices that shape the Reformed tradition, and twentieth century voices that proclaim the Church’s faith in challenging contexts. The confessions in the *Book of Confessions* were not arbitrarily included, but were selected to give faithful voice to the whole communion of saints. (*FTP*, pp. 3-4)

B. Some denominations have just one or two essential confessional documents. The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) embrace only the Westminster Confession and its Short and Longer Catechisms.

C. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in the 1980s adopted *The Book of Confessions*. The Fellowship of Presbyterians and Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO) also affirm the same *Book of Confessions*.

IV. Our denomination embraces nine creeds, confessions, and catechisms.

A. Here is a synopsis of the documents in *The Book of Confessions*:

1. Ecumenical Creeds

   *The Book of Confessions* begins with two foundational creeds, shared throughout the whole Church. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed is the decisive dogmatic articulation of Trinitarian faith. It establishes the vocabulary, grammar, and syntax of Christian theology. The Apostles’ Creed is the Baptismal creed that expresses the shared belief of the faithful as persons are incorporated into the body. (*FTP*, 3)
Lesson 1: INTRODUCTION TO ESSENTIAL TENETS

a. The Nicene Creed

Theme: The Trinity and the divine and human nature of Jesus

Original language: Latin

Opening passage: “WE BELIEVE in one God the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.”

Other key passage: “Jesus Christ . . . who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man . . .”

b. The Apostles’ Creed

Theme: The nature of God

Original language: Latin

Opening passage: “I BELIEVE in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only son our Lord . . .”

Other key passage: “. . . he descended into hell . . .” (This phrase is not in the Nicene Creed.)

2. Historic Reformed Creeds and Confessions

Two Reformation confessions, Scots and Second Helvetic, and one Reformation catechism, Heidelberg, give voice to the dawning of the Reformed tradition. The seventeenth century Westminster standards powerfully express God’s sovereignty over all of life. (*FTP*, p. 3)

a. The Scots Confession

Theme: The continuity of Church with the Old Testament, while making distinctions from Roman Catholicism

Original language: English (in Scotland by John Knox and five others)

Opening passage: “We confess and acknowledge one God alone, to whom alone we must cleave, whom alone we must serve, whom only we must worship, and in whom alone we put our trust.”

Other key passage: “God preserved . . . his Kirk [Church] in all ages since Adam until the coming of Christ in the flesh.”

b. The Heidelberg Catechism

Theme: The Fall, Redemption, and Gratitude (see Romans 7:24-25)

Original language: German

Opening/ key passage:
“Q1. What is your only comfort, in life and in death?
“A. That I belong—body and soul, in life and in death—not to myself but
to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, who at the cost of his own blood has fully paid for all my sins and has completely freed me from the dominion of the devil; that he protects me so well that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, that everything must fit his purpose for my salvation. Therefore, by his Holy Spirit, he also assures me of eternal life, and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.”

c. The Second Helvetic Confession
   Theme: Comprehensive ordering of Church life and doctrine according to Reformation principles

   *Original language:* German (by Heinrich Bullinger in Switzerland)

   *Opening passage:* “C**ANONICAL** S**CRIPTURE.** We believe and confess the canonical Scriptures of the holy prophets and apostles of both Testaments to be the true Word of God, and to have sufficient authority of themselves, not of men. For God himself spoke to the fathers, prophets, apostles, and still speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures.”

   *Other key passage:* “SCRIPTURE T**EACHES FULLY ALL GODLINESS.** We judge, therefore that from these Scriptures are to be derived true wisdom and godliness, the reformation and government of churches; as also instruction in all duties of piety; and . . . the confirmation of doctrines, and the rejection of all errors . . . .”

d. The Westminster Confession and Its Shorter and Larger Catechisms
   Themes: God’s Covenant through Christ, authority of Scripture

   *Original Language:* English (England)

   *Opening passage:* Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation; therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his Church; and afterwards for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God’s revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.”

   *Other key passage:* “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to his Word . . . .”

   *Other key passage (from Shorter Catechism):*  
   “Q1. What is the chief end of man?  
   “A. Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.”
3. Contemporary Reformed Creeds and Confessions  

The Theological Declaration of Barmen, the Confession of 1967, and A Brief Statement of Faith articulate the church’s fidelity to the gospel in the midst of uncongenial and sometimes hazardous cultures. *(FTP, p. 3)*

### a. The Theological Declaration of Barmen

**Theme:** The Lordship of Jesus Christ over all things, including the State, in response to Nazi domination of the German church

**Original language:** German (by Karl Barth, chiefly)

**Opening passage:** “The Confessional Synod of the German Evangelical Church met in Barmen, May 29–31, 1934. Here representatives from all the German Confessional churches met with one accord in a confession of the one Lord of the one, holy, apostolic church.”

**Other key passage:** “We reject the false doctrine, as though the State, over and beyond its special commission, should and could become the single and totalitarian order of human life, thus fulfilling the Church’s vocation as well.”

### b. The Confession of 1967

**Theme:** The ministry of God’s reconciliation

**Original language:** English (United States)

**Opening passage:** “In Jesus of Nazareth, true humanity was realized once for all. Jesus, a Palestinian Jew, lived among his own people and shared their needs, temptations, joys, and sorrows.”

**Other key passage:** “God’s redeeming work in Jesus Christ embraces the whole of man’s life: social and cultural, economic and political, scientific and technological, individual and corporate.”

### c. A Brief Statement of Faith

**Theme:** Unity in Jesus Christ (written in celebration of the reunion of the PCUS [Southern branch] and the UPCUSA [Northern branch])

**Original Language:** English (United States)

**Opening passage:** “In life and in death we belong to God. Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit, we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel, whom alone we worship and serve.”

**Other key passage:** “We trust in God the Holy Spirit, . . . [who] calls women and men to all ministries of the Church.”

### B. From *The Fellowship Theology Project*:

These confessions, from widely different contexts, are complementary. They do not sing in unison, but in a rich harmony that glorifies God and deepens our enjoyment of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the
communion of the Holy Spirit.

Are these the only voices that could be included in the church’s theological conversation? No, but they are faithful witnesses to the gospel and appropriate expressions of the Reformed perspective on Christian faith and life. Participating in their colloquy frees us from the narrow prison cell of our own time and place by listening to the voices of our brothers and sisters who struggled to be faithful in diverse circumstances. Through their confessions of faith we are privileged to hear their wisdom in the midst of our own struggle to be faithful. We overhear conversations among our forebears that expand and enrich our apprehension of the gospel. Sometimes we simply listen in on their discussion, at other times we pay particular attention to one of their voices, and many times we find ourselves participating actively in lively instruction.

The questions of our parents in the faith may not be identical to ours, but their different approaches enable us to understand our own questions better. Their answers may not be identical to ours, yet their answers startle us into new apprehensions of the truth. We may sometimes be puzzled by their particular questions or answers, but even that perplexity serves to clarify our own thinking and the shape of our faithfulness. Throughout the conversation we are aware that all councils may err, yet because we are not doctrinal progressives we acknowledge the confessions have a particular authority over us: we are answerable to them before they are answerable to us.

The confessions call the Church to account. Because we are not traditionalists, we can be utterly honest about the Church’s past failings: crusades and inquisitions, easy acceptance of Christendom and easy dismissal of the leadership of women, neglect of evangelistic mission and excess of missionary zeal. Because we are not idealists we can be utterly honest about the Church’s current failings: marginalization of the Sacraments, indifference to theological labor, easy acceptance of cultural morality, neglect of evangelism, and inadequate mission. If we listen to our forebears in the Faith, we will hear their hard questions addressed to us. Perhaps then we can be utterly honest about our own accommodations to the culture, our indifference to the proclamation of the gospel, and our abandonment of shared conviction and committed community in easy acquiescence to the individualism and localism of our time.

The confessions are not final authorities; Scripture is the authority that measures all doctrinal, confessional, and theological expression. The Reformed tradition has always understood that while confessional standards are subordinate to the Scriptures, they are, nonetheless, standards. They are not lightly drawn up or subscribed to, nor may they be ignored or dismissed. Being questioned by the confessions is not an exercise in servitude, but liberation from the tyranny of the present that enables us to live freely and faithfully within God’s will.

As subordinate standards, the confessions are not freestanding authorities. They are subject to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, who is known through Scripture, the word of God. Subordination to the Lord and to Scripture’s witness serves to locate confessional authority, however, not diminish it. The confessions provide reliable guidance to our reading and reception of Scripture, protecting us from self-absorbed interpretation, and opening us to Christ’s way, Christ’s truth, and Christ’s life.

The Book of Confessions itself is not problematic. The problem with the Book of Confessions is the Church’s . . . neglect and misuse of its theological treasure. Too
often, we have treated the confessions of the Church as museum pieces, historical artifacts of what people used to believe long ago and far away. Too many of us have imagined that our own thoughts are sufficient for faithful proclamation of the gospel. We have been guilty of what C.S. Lewis called “chronological snobbery, the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that account discredited.” We have also been guilty of reducing the confessions to theological and moral law books, selecting disembodied affirmations as elements in a logical proof. Our task is to put misuse of the confessions behind us, engaging in bold, faithful appropriations of the doctrinal and theological wisdom of the Book of Confessions, allowing them to enrich our faith and faithfulness.

Neither The Fellowship nor the ECO can imagine that it should or could disavow the Reformed confessional heritage. Whatever the Church’s confessional and theological failings may be, they are the failings of all of us. The task now is to embody faithful ways of being Presbyterian. The most appropriate footing for a new venture is the faithful doctrinal and theological foundation provided by the creeds, confessions, and catechisms of the Book of Confessions. (FTP, pp. 3-4)

1:20–1:50

GROUP DISCUSSION: Choose from prepared group questions:

1. Sometimes it is helpful to begin by looking at the end. In the concluding Addendum to The Fellowship Theology Project (FTP), we are asked several questions which guided the entire project and which can guide us as we begin our study. “In a time of both ecclesial division and realignment, how can schism among parts of the church be diminished and how can reconnection with the whole church be increased?” How do you think we can reduce conflict and increase unity?

2. Other questions it poses include these: “The Church has a Faith without which she cannot live faithfully. What is that Faith? What is faithful living? What initial responses occur to you to their questions?

3. In the opening section authors write: “We reject the proposition that theology divides. Instead, we affirm the proposition that truth tends toward unity, yet we are the first generation of Presbyterian officers who do not have in the same ordination question the words truth and unity.” How does identifying essentials necessarily and rightly provide for a foundation of truth and unity?

4. “One of the tasks for theological reflection is to identify the theological practices that will sustain us for the next generation and which we must, therefore commit to and sustain.” What practices would you find most helpful?

5. Doctrinal “Progressives” believe that doctrine is always evolving and that our present understanding is always the best: “Our way is the way.” Doctrinal “Restorationists” believe that we need go back to the Reformers’ teaching: “Their way is the way.” Which position do you find more attractive?

6. What is the value of seeing doctrine as a conversation between the past and the present?
7. Presbyterians have been of two minds about essential tenets. What are the hesitations about articulating them? What is the value of defining a set of essential tenets?

8. “Elders, Ruling as well as Teaching, are to be equipped to teach.” What equipping have you received to this point in learning and teaching others the essentials of the Christian Faith?

9. What do you hope to gain from a study on the Essential Tenets? What concerns do you have?

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<tr>
<th>1:50–1:57</th>
<th>SUMMARIZE “What We Have Learned Tonight”</th>
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| 1:57–2:00 | CLOSING PRAYER |
# God's Word, the Authority of Our Confession

## LESSON 2

<table>
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<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
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<tr>
<td>:00–:05</td>
<td>GREETING, OPENING PRAYER</td>
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<tr>
<td>:05–:10</td>
<td>STATE THE TOPIC AND GOALS FOR THE LESSON</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. To grow in our gratitude and appreciation for the Word of God</td>
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<td>2. To ponder the intimate connection between Jesus Christ and the Scriptures</td>
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<td>3. To open our hearts to the enlightening work of God’s Spirit through God’s Word</td>
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<td>4. To develop godly thoughts and actions through our surrender to the guidance of the Word of God</td>
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<tr>
<td>:10–:20</td>
<td>WARM-UP DISCUSSION (choose one or two questions)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1. What do your friends and co-workers think about the Bible?</td>
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<td>2. Describe your experience of the Bible, as you read it, study it, and as you hear it preached.</td>
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<td>3. Share a favorite portion of Scripture and tell why you like it.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4. What questions do you have about the Bible?</td>
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<tr>
<td>:20–:25</td>
<td>Ask the group, “What questions are you going to want to have answered before we finish tonight?”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*List on whiteboard, but don’t answer them now.*

These might be words to be defined, meaning to be explained, or application to be made. Make note where these questions will be answered in your instruction below, or handle questions here with a referral.

**Introduction to Topic**

Since the Christian faith is passed from generation to generation, this generational transmission raises questions: How do we know that what we received from those
before us is true and trustworthy? Do/should we today believe what those before us believed? Can we add to those beliefs or even change them?

The question of the source of our beliefs and the knowledge of God is addressed by the historic orthodox understanding the Word of God.

I. **God’s Word, Incarnate and Written**

**Scriptures:**

1. Genesis 1:3ff, God speaks the world into existence (his Word is *performative*).
2. Psalm 33:4-6, God made the world by means of his Word.
3. John 1:1-3, The Word exists with God, is God, and is the means of Creation.
4. Hebrews 1:1-3, God has spoken through his Son, who is the complete and exact expression of the Father.
6. Isaiah 55:11, God’s Word does not fail to accomplish what God intends through it (his Word is *infallible*).
**Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms**

**SCOTS CONFESSION, CHAPTER XIX; The Authority of the Scriptures**

As we believe and confess the Scriptures of God sufficient to instruct and make perfect the man of God, so do we affirm and avow their authority to be from God, and not to depend on men or angels. We affirm, therefore, that those who say the Scriptures have no other authority save that which they have received from the Kirk [Church] are blasphemous against God and injurious to the true Kirk, which always hears and obeys the voice of her own Spouse and Pastor, but takes not upon her to be mistress over the same.

**SECOND HELVETIC CONFESION, CHAPTER I; Of the Holy Scripture Being the True Word of God**

CANONICAL SCRIPTURE. We believe and confess the canonical Scriptures of the holy prophets and apostles of both Testaments to be the true Word of God, and to have sufficient authority of themselves, not of men. For God himself spoke to the fathers, prophets, apostles, and still speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures.

**WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH, CHAPTER I; Of the Holy Scripture**

1. Although the light of nature, and the works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet are they not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will, which is necessary unto salvation; therefore it pleased the Lord, at sundry times, and in divers manners, to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his Church; and afterwards for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God’s revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.

**WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM**

Q1. What is the chief end of man?
A. Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

Q2. What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?
A. The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.

**CONFESSION OF 1967, Part I; Section C, 2. The Bible**

The one sufficient revelation of God is Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, to whom the Holy Spirit bears unique and authoritative witness through the Holy Scriptures, which are received and obeyed as the word of God written.

**Other Perspectives:**

Augustine, *Confessions*, VIII, 12

... All at once I heard the sing-song voice of a child in a nearby house. Whether it was the voice of a boy or a girl I cannot say, but again and again it repeated the refrain, 'Take it and read, take it and read.' At this I looked up, thinking hard, whether there was any kind of game in which children used to chant words like these, but I cannot remember ever hearing them before . . . I read the first passage on which my eyes fell . . . For in an instant, as I came to the end of the sentence, it was as though the light of
confidence flooded into my heart and all the darkness of doubt dispelled.”
(Augustine, Confessions, VIII, 12)

**Essential Tenet**

The clearest declaration of God’s glory is found in His Word both incarnate and written. The Son eternally proceeds from the Father as His Word, the full expression of the Father’s nature, and since in the incarnation the Word became flesh all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are offered to His disciples. “The written Word grants us those treasures, proclaims the saving gospel of Jesus Christ, and graciously teaches all that is necessary for faith and life. We glorify God by recognizing and receiving His authoritative self-revelation, both in the infallible Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and also in the incarnation of God the Son.

**Teaching Points**

1. The Word of God comes to us in two ways, incarnate and written.
2. God’s full being is embodied in Jesus Christ, who is the Word of God incarnate.
3. Jesus’ wisdom and blessing are made accessible to us through the Scriptures, the Word of God written. (The Scripture is unique and powerful)
4. God is glorified when we believe and obey Jesus Christ—the Word incarnate—by believing and obeying the Scriptures—the Word written. (The Scripture is sufficient)
5. The Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments reliably express God’s glory and reliably teach us about God’s Son. (The Scriptures are infallible)

**II. God’s Word, Inspired and Inspiring**

**Scriptures:**

- Luke 24:44-45, Jesus opened the eyes, minds, and hearts of the disciples to understand what the Scriptures teach about him
- II Timothy 3:16-17, The Scriptures are inspired by God (“God-breathed”) and useful in the Christian life
- II Peter 3:15-16, Peter identifies Paul’s writings as Scripture
- Ephesians 1:17f, Ephesians 1:17-18, Paul’s prayer for the church’s spiritual enlightenment
- Hebrews 4:12, God’s Word cuts to the core of our being and judges our true spiritual condition

**Creeds, Confessions and Catechisms:**

SECOND HELVETIC CATECHISM, Chapter 1, Of the Holy Scripture Being the True Word of God

2nd Helvetic, 5.003

“SCRIPTURE TEACHES FULLY ALL GODLINESS. We judge, therefore, that from these Scriptures are to be derived true wisdom and godliness,... ‘All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof,’ etc. (II Tim. 3:16-17).

2nd Helvetic, 5.006

“INWARD ILLUMINATION DOES NOT ELIMINATE EXTERNAL PREACHING. For he that illuminates inwardly by giving men the Holy Spirit, the same one, by way of
commandment, said unto his disciples, “Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15). And so in Philippi, Paul preached the Word outwardly to Lydia, a seller of purple goods; but the Lord inwardly opened the woman’s heart (Acts 16:14). . . .

2nd Helvetic, 5.007

“At the same time we recognize that God can illuminate whom and when he will, even without the external ministry, for that is in his power; but we speak of the usual way of instructing men, delivered unto us from God, both by commandment and examples.”

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH, Chapter 1, Of the Holy Scripture

Westminster 6.005

5. . . . Not withstanding, our full-persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit, bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.

Westminster 6.004

4. “The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.

C67, 9.27—9.30 CONFESSION OF 1967, Part I; Section C, 2. The Bible

The one sufficient revelation of God is Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate . . . to whom the Holy Spirit bears unique and authoritative witness through the Holy Scriptures, which are received and obeyed as the word of God written. God’s word is spoken to his church today where the Scriptures are faithfully preached and attentively read in dependence on the illumination of the Holy Spirit and with readiness to receive their truth and direction.

Other Perspectives:

Luther quotation

“I do not know it and do not understand it, but sounding from above and ringing in my ears I hear what is beyond the thought of Man.” (Martin Luther, quoted by Karl Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man, Translated by Douglas Horton [New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1957], p. 179).

Calvin, Institutes, 1, VII, 5

Therefore illumined by power, we believe neither by our own nor by anyone else’s judgment that Scripture is from God, but above judgment we affirm with utter certainty just (as if we were gazing upon the majesty of God himself) that it has flowed to us from the very mouth of God by the ministry of men. (John Calvin, Institutes, I, VII, 5)

Essential Tenet

We affirm that the same Holy Spirit who overshadowed the virgin Mary also inspired the writing and preservation of the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit testifies to the authority of God’s Word and illumines our hearts and minds so that we might receive both the Scriptures and Christ Himself aright.

Teaching Points

1. The Holy Spirit was the agent for the writing of the Scriptures.
2. The Holy Spirit is the agent in preserving the Scriptures.
3. The Holy Spirit empowers us to receive the Word written and incarnated.
### III. GUIDING, CONNECTING

#### III. God's Word, Guiding and Connecting

**Scriptures:**

| Deuteronomy 4:5 | 1. Deuteronomy 4:5, The nation of Israel was to live in obedience to God's Word (observe God's law diligently, and teach it to your children) |
| Psalm 145:4 | 2. Psalm 145:4, God's Word is shared from one generation to the next, through the ages |
| Matthew 5:17-20 | 3. Matthew 5:17-20, Jesus' ministry was a fulfillment of the Word (and whoever practices what the Word commands will be great in the Kingdom of Heaven) |
| Matthew 7:21-27 | 4. Matthew 7:21-27, Jesus required obedience to his Word, and a life built on its foundation will stand strong |
| II Peter 2:12-15 | 5. II Peter 1:12-15, Peter wrote his letters to pass the Word on to succeeding generations |

**Creeds, Confessions, Catechisms:**

| Scots, 3.05 | SCOTS CONFESSION, CHAPTER V; *The Continuance, Increase, and Preservation of the Kirk* |
| 2nd Helvetic, 5.003 | SECOND HELVETIC CONFESSION, Chapter 1 |

**Another Perspective:**

N.T. Wright, *The Last Word*

The earliest church was centrally constituted as the people called into existence, and sustained in that existence, by the powerful, effective and (in that sense and many others) ‘authoritative’ word of God, written in the Old Testament, embodied in Jesus, announced to the world, taught in the church. (N. T. Wright, *The Last Word*, Harper Row, 2005, p. 51)

#### Essential Tenet

We confess that God alone is Lord of the conscience, but this freedom is for the purpose of allowing us to be subject always and primarily to God’s Word, The Spirit will never prompt our conscience to conclusions that are at odds with the Scriptures that He has inspired. The revelation of the incarnate Word does not minimize, qualify, or set aside the authority of the written Word. We are happy to confess ourselves captive to the Word of God, not just individually, but also as members of
a community of faith, extending through time and around the globe. In particular, we join with other members of the Presbyterian and Reformed community to affirm the secondary authority of the *Book of Confessions* as a faithful exposition of the Word of God.

**Teaching Points**

1. True freedom is to be subject to the Word of God.
2. The Spirit and the Word written work in harmony with each other.
3. The Word incarnate and the Word written work in harmony with each other.
4. The community of faith in the Word exists through the ages, and in all parts of the world.
5. Those who affirm the Essential Tenets affirm that they belong to the community of believers defined by the Reformed faith that was launched in the sixteenth century.
6. Reformed confessions are subject to the authority of the Scriptures.
7. The *Book of Confessions* is a trustworthy guide to the Word of God.

1:20–1:50

**GROUP DISCUSSION** from prepared group questions

*Emphasize how this belief enlivens relationship with God and motivates responsive action. Scratch where they itch, as long as interaction is on-point.*

1. “The clearest declaration of God's glory is found in His Word, both incarnate and written.” What are some of “the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” that the incarnate Word teaches us about God that we can discover from no other source (*John 1:1-18*)?

2. What are some other “treasures of wisdom and knowledge” that the Word written teaches us about God that we can discover from no other source (*Psalm 19:7-14*)?

3. What problems are created if we claim to be followers of Jesus and yet discount or discard the Word written?

4. “We affirm that the same Holy Spirit who overshadowed the virgin Mary also inspired the writing and preservation of the Scriptures.” What happens to our faith if the Scriptures were not inspired and preserved in transmission from generation to generation (*John 14:25-27*)?

5. “The Holy Spirit testifies to the authority of God’s Word and illumines our hearts and minds so that we might receive both the Scriptures and Christ Himself aright.” What did Paul expect from the Spirit within the ministry of writing and teaching (*Ephesians 1:17, 18; 3:14-22*)?

6. In what ways have you experienced the Holy Spirit illuminating the Word in Bible study, preaching, or other ways?

7. “We confess that God alone is Lord of the conscience, but this freedom is for the purpose of allowing us to be subject always and primarily to God's Word.” How did Paul experience the work of the Spirit prompting, instructing his mind, and guiding his conduct (*1 Corinthians 4:16; 6:12f*)?
8. What would you say to those who believe the Spirit has prompted them to help themselves to money or possessions that don’t belong to them?

9. Jesus, anointed with the Spirit, spoke with God’s authority. What was his attitude toward the Scriptures of the Old Testament (Matthew 5:17-20)?

10. “Creeds are expressions of what Christians believe about God’s Word.” What benefits come from remembering that throughout the world, the generations and in various languages, Christians have affirmed both the Nicene and Apostles’ Creeds?

11. What can we learn by exploring creeds of the Reformed tradition that were written to expound and apply God’s Word to their own place and time?

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<tr>
<th>1:50–1:57</th>
<th>SUMMARIZE “What We Have Learned Tonight”</th>
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<td>We have learned tonight</td>
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<td>Check in with original questions on board.</td>
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**Conclusion**

The canonical Scriptures are a veritable book of life, showing us God in relation to the most dramatic human crises (births, sickness, deaths, loves, losses, wars, falls, risks, disasters, failures, victories), the most elemental human emotions (joy, grief, love, hate, hope fear, pain, anger, shame, awe) and the most basic human relationships (to parents, spouses, children, friends, neighbors, civil authorities, enemies, fellow-believers).” (J. I. Packer, *God Has Spoken*, IVP, 1979, p. 13)

| 1:57–2:00 | CLOSING PRAYER |
### TIME | ACTIVITY
--- | ---
00:00 – 05 | GREETING, OPENING PRAYER

### 05:05 – 10
STATE THE TOPIC AND GOALS FOR THE LESSON

1. To discover the importance and blessing of thinking about God
2. To consider alternative (non-Christian) ways of thinking about God in order to understand what Christians believe
3. To explore the Christian view of the Trinity
4. To enrich our worship and enjoyment of God

### 10:20
WARM-UP DISCUSSION (choose one or two questions)

1. What comes into your mind when you think about God?
2. What do you know of other religions’ descriptions of God?
3. Who and what have influenced your understanding of God?
4. How has your understanding of God grown and developed over time?

### 20:25
Ask the group, “What questions are you going to want to have answered before we finish tonight?” List on whiteboard, but don’t answer them now.
These might be words to be defined, meaning to be explained, or application to be made. Make note where these questions will be answered in your instruction below, or handle questions here with a referral.

### Introductory Comment:
The word “God” is both a name and a noun. The word “god” as a noun refers to the supreme being or beings. Our forebears of the Reformation referred to the Supreme Being who is revealed in the Old and New Testaments. We could say, when it comes to God, the noun and the name were the same. However cultural shifts in the final decades of the twentieth century have changed this. It is no longer clear when people say the word “God” that they are referring to the God of the Bible. For this reason it is very important that Christians understand what the Christian Scriptures teach about God, how the teaching of the Christian Scriptures differs from other ways of understanding God, and what the differences in understanding have to do with the way that we live now and in eternity.
Lesson 3: **THE TRINITY**

### The Essential Tenets

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<tr>
<td>:25–:30</td>
<td><strong>READ ESSENTIAL TENET II-A</strong></td>
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</table>
| :30–:1:20 | **PRESENTATION OF EACH SUB-TOPIC**  
Think in terms of **OBSERVE, INTERPRET, REFLECT, APPLY.** |

#### I. GOD’S NATURE AND CHARACTER

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<th>Notes</th>
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<td>Exodus 15:1-5</td>
<td>Celebration of God for deliverance from slavery in Egypt</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psalm 100</td>
<td>Privileged as God’s chosen to offer jubilant worship to a loving and faithful God</td>
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<td>Isaiah 40:9-31</td>
<td>Praise for the wonders and benefits of the only true God, the creator and savior</td>
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<td>Romans 1:20</td>
<td>God’s invisible qualities of eternity and divinity are evident in the world</td>
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<td>Rom 11:33-36</td>
<td>The unsearchable riches and wisdom of God</td>
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<td>I Tim 1:16-17</td>
<td>God as sovereign, eternal, immortal, invisible</td>
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<tr>
<td>Revelation 4:8, 11</td>
<td>God is the holy creator, worthy to be worshiped</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### II. THE TRIUNE GOD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scripture</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deuteronomy 6:4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mark 1:9-11</td>
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<td>Matthew 28:19-20</td>
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<td>II Corinthians 13:14</td>
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<td>Ephesians 1:3-14</td>
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<td>I John 5:6-9</td>
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<td>Revelation 5:13-14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heidelberg, 4.025</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second Helvetic, 5.015, 5.016, 5.017</td>
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<tr>
<td>Calvin, <em>Institutes</em>, I, V, 6 and 9</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westminster, 6.013</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Larger Catechism, 7.121</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barth, <em>Church Dogmatics</em></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

#### III. THE SOVEREIGN CREATOR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scripture</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 1:1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Isaiah 40:21-26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psalm 33:6-16</td>
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<td>Exodus 19:21-23</td>
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<td>Exodus 33:17-23</td>
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<td>Isaiah 6:1-5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heidelberg, 4.026</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second Helvetic, 5.029</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Teaching Comment

The people of God take delight in God in a rich variety of ways. He is revealed as abundant in resources, loving, powerful, saving, and even dangerous. He is like no other god. He is the only true God, and Christians believe that our doctrine about God is the only one that is true and trustworthy. However, there are other ways to think about God, as expressed in other religions summarized below:
Views of God

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Belief System</th>
<th>Example(s)</th>
<th>Essential Teaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dualism</td>
<td>Manichaeism</td>
<td>Two gods competing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polytheism</td>
<td>Paganism</td>
<td>Many gods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Animism</td>
<td>Nature filled with gods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pantheism</td>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>Everything is god</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Age</td>
<td>You are god</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monotheism</td>
<td>Judaism—The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Islam—Allah</td>
<td>One God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinitarian</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>One God</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Three persons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms:**

**Apostles’ Creed, 1.1-3**

I BELIEVE in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth,
And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; ...  
I believe in the Holy Ghost; ...  

**Scots, 3.01**

SCOTS CONFESSION, CHAPTER I, God  
We confess and acknowledge one God alone ... [w]ho is eternal, infinite, immeasurable, incomprehensible, omnipotent, invisible; one in substance and yet distinct in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. By whom we confess and believe all things in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, to have been created, to be retained in their being, and to be ruled and guided by his inscrutable providence for such end as his eternal wisdom, goodness, and justice have appointed, and to the manifestation of his own glory.

**Westminster, 6.011**

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH, CHAPTER II, Of God, and of the Holy Trinity  
There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty; most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; and withal most just and terrible in his judgments; hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty.
Q4. What is God?

A. God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

Another Perspective:

Reflecting about God is more than abstract speculation. God is the most wonderful being. Thinking about him, talking about him, and writing about him can be wonderful, too. Fourth century St. Augustine records in Confessions his conversion to the knowledge of God:

“How sweet all at once it was for me to be rid of those fruitless joys which I had once feared to lose. . . . You drove them from me, you who are the true, the sovereign joy. You drove them from me and took their place, you who are sweeter than all pleasure, though not to flesh and blood, you who outshine all light, yet are hidden deeper than any secret in our hearts, you who surpass all honor, though not the eyes of men who see all honor in themselves . . . O Lord my God, my Light, Wealth, and my salvation.” (IX,1)

Essential Tenet

The triune nature of God is the first great mystery of the Christian faith. With Christians everywhere, we worship the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - who is both one essence and three persons. God is infinite, eternal, immutable, impassible, and ineffable. He cannot be divided against Himself, nor is He becoming more than He has been, since there is no potential or becoming in Him. He is the source of all goodness, all truth and all beauty, of all love and all life, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent.

Teaching Points

1. The nature of God is mysterious.
2. The triune nature of God is a belief held in common by all Christians in all places and all ages and all denominations.
3. God is unlimited, eternal, unchangeable, and beyond our comprehension.
4. God is not internally conflicted and has no need to grow or develop.
5. He is the source of all life, love goodness, beauty, and truth.
6. He is all-powerful, all-knowing, and everywhere present.

II. TRIUNE GOD

Scriptures:

1. Deuteronomy 6:4, “God is one”
2. Mark 1:9-11, Father, Son, Spirit all engaged in Jesus’ baptism
3. Matthew 28:19-20, The commission to mission is the name of the triune God
4. II Corinthians 13:14, A benediction in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
5. Ephesians 1:3-14, Father, Son, and Spirit engaged in our salvation
I John 5:6-9  6. I John 5:6-9, The Father, Son, and Spirit speak with one voice and give life
Rev 5:13-14  7. Revelation 5:13-14, The Father and Lamb are both worshiped jointly

Comment on “Trinity”

The word “Trinity” does not appear in the Bible. Then why do we use it? Because the doctrine of the Trinity honors and expresses what we find in the Scriptures. The teachers of the first centuries of the Christian Faith used “Trinity” to articulate the complexity and mystery of God as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. Undeniably each acts in the Scripture as God, yet there is only one God!

Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms:

Heidelberg, 4.025

HEIDELBERG CATECHISM

Q25. Since there is only one Divine Being, why do you speak of three, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?
A. Because God has thus revealed himself in his Word, that the three distinct persons are the one, true, eternal God.

2nd Helvetic, 5.015

SECOND HELVETIC CONFESSION, CHAPTER III; Of God, His Unity and Trinity

GOD IS ONE. We believe and teach that God is one in essence or nature, subsisting in himself, all sufficient in himself, invisible, incorporeal, immense, eternal, Creator of all things both visible and invisible, the greatest good, living, quickening and preserving all things, omnipotent and supremely wise, kind and merciful, just and true. . . .

GOD IS THREE. Notwithstanding we believe and teach that the same immense, one and indivisible God is in person inseparably and without confusion distinguished as Father, Son and Holy Spirit so, as the Father has begotten the Son from eternity, the Son is begotten by an ineffable generation, and the Holy Spirit truly proceeds from them both, and the same from eternity and is to be worshipped with both.

Thus there are not three gods, but three persons, consubstantial, coeternal, and coequal; distinct with respect to hypostases, and with respect to order, the one preceding the other yet without any inequality.

Westminster, 6.013

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH, CHAPTER II, Of God, His Unity and Trinity

3. In the unity of the Godhead there be three Persons of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.

W Larger, 7.121

THE LARGER CATECHISM

Q11. How doth it appear that the Son and the Holy Ghost are equal with the Father?
A. The Scriptures manifest that the Son and the Holy Ghost are God equal with the Father, ascribing unto them such names, attributes, works, and worship, as are proper to God only.

Other Perspective:

The doctrine of the Trinity is what basically distinguishes the Christian doctrine of God as Christian . . . in contrast to all other possible doctrines of God . . . . (Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, I, 1, 8)
**Essential Tenet:**

The three persons are consubstantial with one another, being both coeternal, and coequal, such that there are not three gods, nor are there three parts of God, but rather three persons within the one Godhead. The Son is eternally begotten from the Father, and the Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son. All three persons are worthy of worship and praise.

**Teaching Points**

1. There are not three gods but One.
2. There are not three “parts” to God.
3. God doesn’t change from one person into the other; the Father is not the Son or the Spirit; the Son is not the Father or the Spirit; the Spirit is not the Father or the Son.
4. No person within the Godhead precedes the other.
5. No person within the Godhead is created.
6. No person within the Godhead is more important than another.
7. All three persons are worthy of worship.

The Trinity is a mystery that we will never completely understand but which leads us to discover the wonders of the triune God who creates us, saves us, and guides us.

**The Celtic Trinity**

The Father, the Son and Spirit dynamically interact with one another. The points represent the persons in the Godhead, the circle represent eternity.

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**III. Sovereign Creator**

**Scriptures:**

1. Genesis 1:1, God created the heavens and the earth  
2. Isaiah 40: 21-26, The majesty of the Maker of the heavens and the earth who governs everything according to his will  
3. Psalm 33:6-16, God creates and continues to govern his creation—nations and individuals  
4. Exodus 19:21-23, God’s appearance before Israel at Mt. Sinai displays his holy majesty  
5. Exodus 33:17-23, God’s glory, God’s name, God’s face  
6. Isaiah 6:1-5, Majestic and heavenly king
Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms:

Heidelberg, 4.026

HEIDELBERG CATECHISM

Q26. What do you believe when you say: “I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth”?

A. That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who out of nothing created heaven and earth with all that is in them, who also upholds and governs them by his eternal counsel and providence, is for the sake of Christ his Son my God and my Father. I trust in him so completely that I have no doubt that he will provide me with all things necessary for body and soul. Moreover, whatever evil he sends upon me in this troubled life he will turn to my good, for he is able to do it, being almighty God, and is determined to do it, being a faithful Father.

2nd Helvetic, 5.029

SECOND HELVETIC CONFESSION, CHAPTER VI; Of the Providence of God

ALL THINGS ARE GOVERNED BY THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD. We believe that all things in heaven and on earth, and in all creatures, are preserved and governed by the providence of this wise, eternal and almighty God. For David testifies and says: “The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens! Who is like the Lord our God, who is seated on high, who looks far down upon the heavens and the earth?” (Ps. 113:4 ff.). Again: “Thou searchest out . . . all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, lo, O Lord, Thou knowest it altogether” (Ps. 139:3 f.). Paul also testifies and declares: “In him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28), and “from him and through him and to him are all things” (Rom. 11:36). . . . “The Lord said, ‘Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's will’” (Matt. 10:29). . . . He also says that the hairs of our head are numbered (Matt. 6:26 ff.).

Another Perspective:

Let us therefore remember, whenever each of us contemplates his own nature, that there is one God who so governs all nature that he would have us look unto him, direct our faith to him and worship and call upon him.” (Calvin, Institutes, I. V. 6)

And here again we ought to observe that we are called to a knowledge of God; not that knowledge which, content with empty speculation, merely flits in the brain but that which will be sound and fruitful if we duly perceive it and if it takes root in our heart. (Calvin, Institutes, I. V. 9)

Essential Tenet:

God has no need of anyone or anything beyond Himself. Yet in grace this Triune God is the one Creator of all things. The ongoing act of creation is further manifested in God’s gracious sovereignty and providence, maintaining the existence of the world and all living creatures for the sake of His own glory. He is the Holy One, the ground of all being, whose glory is so great that for us to see Him is to die. Yet He has made the creation to reflect His glory, and He has made human beings in His own image, with a unique desire to know Him and a capacity for relationship with Him. Since our God is a consuming fire whom we in our sin cannot safely approach, He has approached us by entering into our humanity in Jesus Christ.

Teaching Points

1. God creates by grace alone, not out of need.
2. God is totally sovereign and providentially governs all that happens in his creation.
3. God creates to share and display his glory.
4. God is holy.
5. God’s glory is overwhelmingly wonderful and dangerous.
6. God made all things for his glory.
7. God made humanity is his image to especially reflect his glory.
8. God comes to us incarnated in Jesus Christ.

1:20–1:50

GROUP DISCUSSION from prepared group questions

Emphasize how this belief enlivens relationship with God and motivates responsive action. Scratch where they itch, as long as interaction is on-point.

1. There are many different religions with many different views of their god/gods; not one of them has any mind-stretching view of God comparable to the Christian understanding of God as Triune (Genesis 1:1-2, 26-29; Matthew 28:19-20; Revelation 5:13). How might exploring the mystery of the Trinity enrich the way you think about the Christian faith?

2. “With Christians everywhere, we worship the only true God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who is both one essence and three persons.” The doctrine of the Trinity can be proclaimed but not explained; all attempts inevitably come up short. Why might it be both comforting and challenging to know that the nature of God is beyond our ability to explain?

3. The Trinity is one of many incomprehensible truths about the one true God who is “infinite, eternal, immutable, impassible and effable.” What does God tell Moses about Moses’ desire to know him (Exodus 33:18-23)?

4. While God is beyond our understanding, he is not beyond our reflection. How does thinking about God’s characteristics shape our perspective on life in this world?

5. Where do you see attributes of God reflected in your life and in your world?

6. “All three persons are worthy of worship and praise.” How is the Trinity present in the throne room of heaven and what can we learn from the response to the Godhead (Revelation 5:6-14)?

7. John Owen, one of the great English seventeenth century theologians, wrote that Christians should develop a relationship with each person of the Trinity. Consider and describe your relationship individually with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

8. How are our lives enriched and enhanced by the understanding that God’s wisdom and power governs all that happens for his own purposes and not from any need within God?

9. One of the wonderful paradoxes of the Christian Faith is that, while God is both invisible and incomprehensible, Jesus is the visible God who makes God known (Colossians 1:14, Hebrews 1:1-4). What is there about God that you see in Jesus Christ?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:50–1:57</td>
<td><strong>CHECK IN</strong> with original questions on board.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>SUMMARIZE</strong> “What We Have Learned Tonight”</td>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>Concluding Remarks</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Those who know the Triune God want to know God more. God is thrilling,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>enticing and satisfying. Believers are pulled and drawn by the Spirit to</td>
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<td>study God, worship God and pray to God. As Augustine wrote in his <em>Confessions</em>, “You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find themselves in you.” (I, 1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:57–2:00</td>
<td><strong>CLOSING PRAYER</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am no longer my own but yours.</td>
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<td>Your will, not mine, be done in all things,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>wherever you may place me,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>in all that I do</td>
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<td>and in all that I may endure;</td>
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<td>when there is work for me</td>
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<td>and when there is none;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>when I am troubled</td>
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<td>and when I am at peace.</td>
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<td>Your will be done</td>
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<td>when I am valued</td>
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<td>and when I am disregarded;</td>
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<td>when I find fulfillment</td>
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<td>and when it is lacking</td>
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<td>when I have all things</td>
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<td></td>
<td>and when I have nothing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>I willingly offer</td>
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<td>all I have and am</td>
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<td>to serve you,</td>
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<td>as and where you choose</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Glorious and blessed God,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Father, Son and Holy Spirit,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>you are mine and I am yours.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May it be so for ever</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Let this covenant now made on earth</td>
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<td></td>
<td>be fulfilled in heaven.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Amen.</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>From St. Mark’s Church, New Bedford, England</td>
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<tr>
<td>TIME</td>
<td>ACTIVITY</td>
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<tr>
<td>:00–:05</td>
<td>GREETING, OPENING PRAYER</td>
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<tr>
<td>:05–:10</td>
<td>STATE THE TOPIC AND GOALS FOR THE LESSON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. To gain historical perspective on the unique Christian doctrine of the Incarnation</td>
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<td>2. To grasp the unique and essential nature of Christ: fully God and all that means, and fully human and all that means</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. To appreciate the dual role only Jesus Christ could fulfill: embodying God’s full nature for human beings to know (as prophet) and representing and acting on behalf of humanity to God (as priest).</td>
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<td>4. To sort truth from error in historical teachings about Jesus Christ and to correct our own misconceptions about him</td>
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<td>5. To trust God while holding tightly to paradox</td>
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<td>6. To remember the benefits found in Jesus Christ our Lord</td>
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<td></td>
<td>7. To increase and enhance our faith in Jesus as our Lord</td>
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<tr>
<td>:10–:20</td>
<td>WARM-UP DISCUSSION (choose one or two questions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. When you think about Jesus, what comes to mind?</td>
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<td>2. What are some of the ways that people think about Jesus?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. What attracted you Jesus?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4. What are some hindrances and obstacles to being a believer in Jesus?</td>
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<tr>
<td>:20–:25</td>
<td>Ask the group, “What questions are you going to want to have answered before we finish tonight?”</td>
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<td>List on whiteboard, but don’t answer them now. These might be words to be defined, meaning to be explained, or application to be made. Make mental note where these questions will be answered in your instruction below, or handle questions now or with a referral . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:25–:30</td>
<td>INTRODUCTORY COMMENT</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
|          | Say that Jesus is a great man and/or a good teacher and you will more than likely find nodding heads. However, say you believe that Jesus Christ is God and you will rapidly
run into conflict. Of course, some would be willing so say that Jesus is “a god.” But assert that Jesus is God, the only God, the true God, the source of life and the creator, and most of those nodding heads will stop moving up and down.

Growing up in the Christian faith, “Jesus Christ is God” seems a natural and normal statement. What could be more obvious? Given serious reflection, the assertion that “Jesus Christ is God” becomes strange, even disorienting, as well as thrilling and wonderful!

**READ THE TEXT OF ESSENTIAL TENET II-B**

### :30–1:20

**PRESENT EACH SUB-TOPIC**

**THINK IN TERMS OF OBSERVE, INTERPRET, REFLECT, APPLY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JESUS CHRIST, TRULY GOD AND TRULY HUMAN</th>
<th>JESUS CHRIST, COMPLETELY GOD AND COMPLETELY HUMAN</th>
<th>JESUS CHRIST, ASCENDED, EMPOWERING, AND COMING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 2:7; Mark 5:35-42</td>
<td>John 1:14</td>
<td>Hebrews 12:2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psalm 32:5; Mark 2:1-5</td>
<td>Romans 1:1-4</td>
<td>2 Timothy 4:1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exodus 20:1-17; Matthew 5:1-10</td>
<td>Hebrews 1:3</td>
<td>John 14:15-18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matthew 28:16-17</td>
<td>Westminster, 6.044</td>
<td>Acts 2:1-4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nicene Creed</td>
<td>W Shorter, 7.038–7.039</td>
<td>Romans 8:9-11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scots, 3.06</td>
<td>C67, 9.08</td>
<td>2nd Helvetic, 5.074</td>
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<tr>
<td>Westminster, 6.044</td>
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<td>Westminster, 6.185</td>
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<tr>
<td>W Shorter, 7.037</td>
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<td>Darrell Guder, <em>The Continuing Conversion of the Church</em>, 79</td>
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<tr>
<td>C. S. Lewis, <em>Mere Christianity</em>, 1,3.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### I. Jesus Christ is both truly God and truly Human

**Scriptures:**

1. Matthew 1:23, Jesus, the human, is to be “Immanuel, God with us.”
2. Luke 1:30-35, By the Holy Spirit, Jesus born of Mary, is to be God’s Son and the son of David
3. Genesis 2:7, God gives us life to Adam
4. Mark 5:35-42, Jesus Christ gives life to a dead girl
5. Exodus 12:50–13:3, God delivers from slavery to Pharaoh
6. Mark 1:21-28, Jesus Christ delivers from slavery to Satan
7. Psalm 32:5, God forgives sin
Mark 2:1-5  8. Mark 2:1-5, Jesus Christ forgives sin
Matt 5:1-12  10. Matthew 5:1-12ff, Jesus Christ gave the Law of the New Covenant
Deut 6:13-16;  11. Deuteronomy 6:13-16, Only God is to be worshiped
Matt 28:17  12. Matthew 28:16-17, The disciples worship Jesus Christ

Creeds, Confessions and Catechisms:

NICENE CREED

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made.

SCOTS CONFESSION, CHAPTER VI; The Incarnation of Christ Jesus

When the fullness of time came God sent his Son, his eternal wisdom, the substance of his own glory, into this world, who took the nature of humanity from the substance of a woman, a virgin, by means of the Holy Ghost. And so was born the “just seed of David,” the “Angel of the great counsel of God,” the very Messiah promised, whom we confess and acknowledge to be Emmanuel, true God and true man, two perfect natures united and joined in one person . . .

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION, CHAPTER VIII; Of Christ the Mediator

2. The Son of God, the second Person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance, and equal with the Father, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man’s nature, with all the essential properties and common infirmities thereof; yet without sin: being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, of her substance.

WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

Q. 37. How did Christ, being the Son of God, become man?
A. Christ, the Son of God, became man by taking to himself a true body, and a reasonable soul, being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the Virgin Mary, of her substance, and born of her, yet without sin.

Another Perspective:

“...I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: “I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.” That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.” (C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book I, 3.)

Essential Tenet

This is the second great mystery of the Christian faith, affirmed by all Christians everywhere: that Jesus Christ is both truly God and truly human. As to His
divinity, He is the Son, the second person of the Trinity, being of one substance with the Father; as to His humanity, He is like us in every way but sin, of one substance with us, like us in having both a human soul and a human body. As to His divinity, He is eternally begotten of the Father; as to His humanity, He is born of the virgin Mary, conceived by the Holy Spirit. As to His divinity, His glory fills heaven and earth; as to His humanity, His glory is shown in the form of a suffering servant, most clearly when He is lifted up on the cross in our place.

**Teaching Points**

1. All Christians affirm that Jesus is truly God and truly human.

2. This affirmation is a mystery:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Divine Nature of Jesus</th>
<th>The Human Nature of Jesus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jesus is the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity</td>
<td>Jesus is like us in every way except sin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus is one substance with the Father</td>
<td>Jesus is one substance with us, like us, with both human soul and body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eternally begotten of the Father</td>
<td>Born of the virgin Mary, conceived by the Holy Spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His glory fills heaven and earth</td>
<td>Glory shown as a suffering servant dying on the cross in our place</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

II. Jesus Christ is completely God and completely Human (not half god and half human)

**Scriptures:**

1. Luke 4:2, Jesus had human appetites
2. John 1:14, The disciples beheld the glory of Jesus as the Word of God
3. John 14:8-11, Jesus Christ tells his disciples that to see Him is to see the Father
4. Colossians 1:19, The fullness of God indwelt Jesus the man
5. Romans 1:1-4, Jesus is God’s son, who becomes human as a descendent of David
6. Hebrews 1:3, The Son is the “visible God,” the exact representation of God’s glory

**Creed, Confessions, and Catechisms:**

SECOND HELVETIC CONFESSION; Of Jesus Christ, True God and Man, the Only Savior of the World

TWO NATURES IN CHRIST. We therefore acknowledge two natures or substances, the divine and the human, in one and the same Jesus Christ our Lord (Heb., ch. 2). And we say that these are bound and united with one another in such a way that they are not absorbed, or confused, or mixed, but are united or joined together in one person—the properties of the natures being unimpaired and permanent.

NOT TWO BUT ONE CHRIST. Thus we worship not two but one Christ the Lord. We repeat: one true God and man. With respect to his divine nature he is consubstantial with the Father, and with respect to the human nature he is consubstantial with us men, and like us in all things, sin excepted (Heb. 4:15).
WESTMINSTER CONFESSION, CHAPTER VIII; Of Christ the Mediator

2. … So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man.

THE SHORTER CATECHISM

Q. 38. Why was it requisite that the Mediator should be God?
A. It was requisite that the Mediator should be God; that he might sustain and keep the human nature from sinking under the infinite wrath of God, and the power of death; give worth and efficacy to his sufferings, obedience, and intercession; and to satisfy God’s justice, procure his favor, purchase a peculiar people, give his Spirit to them, conquer all their enemies, and bring them to everlasting salvation.

Q. 39. Why was it requisite that the Mediator should be man?
A. It was requisite that the Mediator should be man; that he might advance our nature, perform obedience to the law, suffer and make intercession for us in our nature, have a fellow feeling of our infirmities; that we might receive the adoption of sons, and have comfort and access with boldness unto the throne of grace.

THE CONFESSION OF 1967, PART I, GOD’S WORK OF RECONCILIATION

1. JESUS CHRIST

In Jesus of Nazareth, true humanity was realized once for all. Jesus, a Palestinian Jew, lived among his own people and shared their needs, temptations, joys, and sorrows. He expressed the love of God in word and deed and became a brother to all kinds of sinful men.

Teaching Point

Errant conceptions of Jesus Christ, which misconstrue either Jesus Christ’s humanity or His deity eviscerate His ability to save us: if Jesus Christ is not human, than He can’t save humanity; if He is not God, His death has no eternal saving significance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Misconceived Beliefs</th>
<th>Consequence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>God merely took on human appearance in</td>
<td>Jesus Christ is not really human</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus Christ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus Christ was a human who became God</td>
<td>Jesus Christ is not really God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus Christ was half human and half God</td>
<td>Jesus Christ is neither really God nor really human</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(divine soul, human body)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus Christ was a blended being—</td>
<td>Jesus Christ is neither really God nor really human</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a mixture of God and human</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus Christ is a heavenly being—</td>
<td>Jesus Christ is neither really God nor really human</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>like an angel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus Christ was an enlightened human</td>
<td>Jesus Christ is not really God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>being who taught about God</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Essential Tenet

We confess the mystery of His two natures, divine and human, in one person. We reject any understanding of the communication of attributes that must result in a blending of the two natures such that Jesus Christ is neither truly God nor truly human. We insist upon sufficient distinction between the two natures to preserve the truth of the incarnation, that Jesus Christ is indeed Immanuel, God-with-us, not one who used to be God, nor one who has merely been sent from God. Rather, in His coming we have seen God's glory, for Jesus is the exact imprint of God’s very being and in Him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. **The divinity of the Son is in no way impaired, limited, or changed by His gracious act of assuming a human nature, and that His true humanity is in no way undermined by His continued divinity.** This is a mystery that we cannot explain, but we affirm it with joy and confidence.

Teaching Points

1. Jesus Christ’s humanity and divinity, in one person, is a mystery we must be careful to guard and hold in dynamic tension.
2. There is a complete distinction of the two natures in one person.
3. There is no blending of the two natures in Jesus Christ.
4. There is no loss of divine nature nor altering of human nature, as both natures are totally present in Jesus Christ.
5. That Jesus Christ is completely God and completely human is a mystery to be joyfully and confidently embraced.

ASCENDED, EMPOWERING, AND COMING

**Hebrews 12:2**

1. Hebrews 12:2, Jesus Christ is currently seated at the right hand of God’s throne in heaven

**Colossians 3:1-2**

2. Colossians 3:1-2, We are to set our minds on the ascended and returning Christ

**II Timothy 4:1**

3. II Timothy 4:1, Jesus is coming back to judge the living and the dead

**John 14:15-18**

4. John 14:15-18, Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit as a comforter and coach

**I Cor 12:3**

5. I Corinthians 12:3, The Holy Spirit empowers people to confess Jesus as Lord

**Acts 2:1-4**

6. Acts 2:1-4, The Holy Spirit, sent by the ascended Jesus Christ, unleashes and empowers the mission of His Church

**Romans 8:9-11**

7. Romans 8:9-11, The same Spirit of God who raised Christ from the dead dwells in us and empowers us

Creeds, Confessions and Catechisms

THE SECOND HELVETIC CONFESSION, CHAPTER XI; Of Jesus Christ, True God and Man, the Only Savior of the World

**CHRIST IS TRULY ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN.** We believe that our Lord Jesus Christ, in His same flesh, ascended above all visible heavens into the highest heaven, that is, the dwelling-place of God and the blessed ones, at the right hand of God the Father. Although it signifies an equal participation in glory and majesty, it is also taken to be
a certain place about which the Lord, speaking in the Gospel, says: “I go to prepare a
place for you” (John 14:2). The apostle Peter also says: “Heaven must receive Christ
until the time of restoring all things” (Acts 3:21). And from heaven the same Christ
will return in judgment, when wickedness will then be at its greatest in the world and
when the Antichrist, having corrupted true religion, will fill up all things with
superstition and impiety and will cruelly lay waste the Church with bloodshed and
flames (Dan., ch. 11). But Christ will come again to claim his own, and by his
coming to destroy the Antichrist, and to judge the living and the dead (Acts 17:31).
For the dead will rise again (I Thess. 4:14 ff.), and those who on that day (which is
unknown to all creatures [Mark 13:32]) will be alive will be changed “in the twinkling
of an eye,” and all the faithful will be caught up to meet Christ in the air, so that then
they may enter with him into the blessed dwelling-places to live forever (I Cor. 15:51 ff.).
But the unbelievers and ungodly will descend with the devils into hell to burn
forever and never to be redeemed from torments (Matt. 25:46).

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION, CHAPTER XXXIV; Of the Holy Spirit

3. The Holy Spirit, whom the Father is ever willing to give to all who ask him, is the
only efficient agent in the application of redemption. He regenerates men by his
grace, convicts them of sin, moves them to repentance, and persuades and enables
them to embrace Jesus Christ by faith. He unites all believers to Christ, dwells in
them as their Comforter and Sanctifier, gives to them the Spirit of adoption and
prayer, and performs all these gracious offices by which they are sanctified and
sealed unto the day of redemption.

Another Perspective:

“Like the birth, death and resurrection, and the ascension of Jesus, Pentecost is an
event that happened once and yet continues . . . . God is the initiator and carries out
his mission, through empowered recipients of the message . . . . The signs of wind,
fire and tongues all underline the initiation and sovereign action of God in giving the
Spirit for the church’s missionary obedience.” (Darrell L. Guder, The Continuing
Conversion of the Church, p. 79.)

Essential Tenet

This mystery of the incarnation is ongoing, for the risen Jesus, who was sent from
the Father, has now ascended to the Father in His resurrected body and
remains truly human. He is bodily present at the right hand of the Father. When
we are promised that one day we will see Him face to face, we acknowledge that it is
the face of Jesus of Nazareth we will someday see. The one who, for us and for our
salvation, was born of Mary, died at Calvary, and walked with disciples to Emmaus is
the same Jesus Christ who is now ascended and who will one day return visibly
in the body to judge the living and the dead.

Jesus promised His disciples that He would not leave them comfortless when He
ascended into heaven, but would ask the Father to send them the Holy Spirit as a
comforter and advocate. We are able to confess Jesus Christ as Lord and God
only through the work of the Holy Spirit. He comes to us as He came to the
gathered disciples at Pentecost: to kindle our faith, to embolden our witness, and to
accompany us in mission.

Teaching Points

1. The mystery of Jesus Christ continues, as He is now in heaven as both human and
divine.
2. Jesus is bodily at the right hand of God the Father in heaven.
3. Jesus Christ, as portrayed in the gospels, will one day return.
4. Jesus Christ is coming back to be the judge of all.
5. Jesus Christ sent the Holy Spirit to provide guidance and comfort to His church.
6. The Holy Spirit reveals Jesus Christ as Lord so that we can believe.
7. The Holy Spirit empowers God’s people for mission.

1:20–1:50

GROUP DISCUSSION from prepared group questions

Emphasize how this belief enlivens relationship with God and motivates responsive action. Scratch where they itch, as long as interaction is on-point.

1. In the gospels we can see that Jesus’ disciples struggled to comprehend Jesus as the God-Man, saying, “Who is this? Even the wind and the wave obey him?” (Mark 4:41). Peter refers to one of the events that convinced him (II Peter 1:16-20). What does he say?
2. What actions does Jesus exercise, which could only belong to God (Colossians 1:15-17)?
3. Mary was the first to struggle to comprehend the mysterious privilege being the mother of Jesus, the Son of God (Luke 1:26-28). In Gabriel’s response to her questions, what does she learn about the role of the Father and the Spirit in Jesus’ birth?
4. The Apostle Paul expounds both the divinity and humanity of Jesus in Philippians 2:5-11. From this passage we see that Paul’s understanding of Christ’s divinity and humanity lead him to thrilling insights about the character of Jesus. What are they?
5. What benefits come to us because the second person of the Trinity became human (Colossians 2:9-15, Ephesians 2:14-22)?
6. It took Christians about 300 years of reflection to articulate the mystery of Jesus Christ as one person, fully human and fully divine. Some had suggested that Jesus was a blending of divinity and humanity but neither God nor human. Why might this approach have been rejected?
7. Another suggestion was that Jesus used to be God, but gave up his divinity at his birth. Why might people have made such a proposal? Why might this approach have been rejected?
8. Another proposal was that Jesus gave up his humanity when he returned to heaven. How might the Apostle Paul have responded to that idea (Ephesians 1:19-23; Philippians 2:9-11)?
9. Jesus, as human and divine sits at the right hand of God, ruling both heaven and earth (Colossians 3:1-4) and is coming back to be our judge (II Thessalonians 1:5-10). Why is it good news to know that Jesus is the Judge of you and of all there is?
10. Since Jesus ascended to heaven He promised His disciples that He would not leave them as orphans (John 14:15-22). On the day of Pentecost he fulfilled his promise (Acts 2:1-4). What is Jesus’ relationship to the Holy Spirit and how is that to our benefit?
11. What are some of the ways that you see Jesus and the Holy Spirit active in your church, your family, and you?
### Lesson 4: THE INCARNATION

**Leader’s Guide**  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1:50–1:57 | CHECK IN with original questions written on the board, and tie up loose ends.  
SUMMARIZE “What We Have Learned Tonight” |
| 1:57–2:00 | CLOSING PRAYER and RECITATION OF NICENE CREED  
We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is, seen and unseen.  
We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father,  
God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God,  
begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father;  
through him all things were made.  
For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,  
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary  
and became truly human.  
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered death and was buried.  
On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures;  
he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom will have no end.  
We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,  
who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.  
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.  
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.  
We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.  
Amen. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>:00–05</td>
<td>GREETING, OPENING PRAYER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:05–10</td>
<td>STATE THE TOPIC AND GOALS FOR THE LESSON</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. To consider the existence of sin and identify consequences of the fall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. To understand how Jesus Christ rescues us from those consequences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. To explore the Christian claim that salvation comes only through Jesus Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. To develop awe and gratitude for the multiple benefits (present and future) of God’s grace that come to us through Jesus Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:10–20</td>
<td>WARM-UP DISCUSSION (choose one or two questions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Many believe that humans are basically good. Why do you agree or disagree?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. What evidence of sin do you see in the world?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. What are some of the ways that you see evidence of sin in your life?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. What comes to mind when you hear the phrase, “Jesus saves”?</td>
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<tr>
<td>:20–25</td>
<td>Ask the group, “What questions are you going to want to have answered before we finish tonight?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>List on whiteboard, but don’t answer them now.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>These might be words to be defined, meaning to be explained, or application to be made. Make mental note where these questions will be answered in your instruction below, or handle questions now or with a referral . . . .</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:25–30</td>
<td>READ ESSENTIAL TENET III-A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:30–1:20</td>
<td>PRESENTATION OF EACH SUB-TOPIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Think in terms of OBSERVE, INTERPRET, REFLECT, APPLY.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I. Creation and Fall

A. Essential points about creation from Genesis 1 and 2
1. God exists before and beyond his world
2. God creates and orders his world
3. God makes the world good and blesses it
4. God makes humanity in his image and blesses us

B. But something goes wrong! (Read Genesis 3:1-24.)
1. Present in the world is a mysterious, divinely hostile being who calls God’s character into question
2. Adam and Eve break faith with God and overstep their limits
3. Relationships immediately are fractured: between God and humans, between Adam and Eve, between them and creation

C. The Characters involved in the Fall:
1. Serpent: subtle, sneaky, snide, sinister, cynical and suspicious
2. Eve: doubtful, dissimulating, distrustful, deceived, delusional, determined and disobedient
3. Adam: silent, passive, conceding, capitulating and disobedient
4. Sin: Attitudes and actions that put oneself rather than God at the center of life, including (as examples) the “seven deadly sins” (pride, envy, greed, gluttony, lust, anger, and sloth)

D. The Consequences
1. Adam and Eve feel deficient, diseased, defensive, and afraid
2. Adam and Eve become divided, conflicted, alienated, frustrated, exiled, expelled, and dead
### The Creeds, Confessions and Catechisms:

**SCOTS CONFESSION, CHAPTER II; The Creation of Man**

We confess and acknowledge that our God has created man, i.e., our first father, Adam, after his own image and likeness, to whom he gave wisdom, lordship, justice, free will, and self-consciousness, so that in the whole nature of man no imperfection could be found. From this dignity and perfection man and woman both fell; the woman being deceived by the serpent and man obeying the voice of the woman, both conspiring against the sovereign majesty of God, who in clear words had previously threatened death if they presumed to eat of the forbidden tree.

**CHAPTER III; Original Sin**

By this transgression, generally known as original sin, the image of God was utterly defaced in man, and he and his children became by nature hostile to God, slaves to Satan, and servants to sin. And thus everlasting death has had, and shall have, power and dominion over all who have not been, are not, or shall not be reborn from above.

**HEIDELBERG CATECHISM**

Q6. Did God create man evil and perverse like this?

A. No. On the contrary, God created man good and in his image, that is, in true righteousness and holiness, so that he might rightly know God his Creator, love him with his whole heart, and live with him in eternal blessedness, praising and glorifying him.

Q7. Where, then, does this corruption of human nature come from?

A. From the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden; whereby our human life is so poisoned that we are all conceived and born in the state of sin.

**SECOND HELVETIC CONFESSION, CHAPTER VIII; Of Man’s Fall, Sin and the Cause of Sin**

THE FALL OF MAN. In the beginning, man was made according to the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness, good and upright. But when at the instigation of the serpent and by his own fault he abandoned goodness and righteousness, he became subject to sin, death and various calamities. And what he became by the fall, that is, subject to sin, death and various calamities, so are all those who have descended from him.

DEATH. By death we understand not only bodily death, which all of us must once suffer on account of sins, but also eternal punishment due to our sins and corruption. For the apostle says: “We were dead through trespasses and sins... and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind... Also: “As sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned” (Rom. 5:12).

**WESTMINSTER CONFESSION, CHAPTER VI, Of the Fall of Man, of Sin, and of the Punishment Thereof**

1. Our first parents, being seduced by the subtlety and temptation of Satan, sinned in eating the forbidden fruit. This their sin God was pleased, according to his wide and holy counsel, to permit, having purposed to order it to his own glory.
6. Every sin, both original and actual, being a transgression of the righteous law of God, and contrary thereunto, doth, in its own nature, bring guilt upon the sinner, whereby he is bound over to the wrath of God, and curse of the law, and so made subject to death, with all miseries spiritual, temporal, and eternal.

The Essential Tenets

W Shorter, 7.013-7.017

THE SHORTER CATECHISM

Q13. Did our first parents continue in the estate wherein they were created?
A. Our first parents, being left to the freedom of their own will, fell from the estate wherein they were created, by sinning against God.

Q14. What is sin?
A. Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God.

Q15. What was the sin whereby our first parents fell from the estate wherein they were created?
A. The sin whereby our first parents fell from the estate wherein they were created was their eating the forbidden fruit.

Q16. Did all mankind fall in Adam’s first transgression?
A. The covenant being made with Adam, not only for himself, but for his posterity, all mankind, descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him, and fell with him, in his first transgression.

Q17. Into what estate did the Fall bring mankind?
A. The Fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery.

Other Perspectives:

O God, hear me. Alas for the sins of humankind! A human it is who here bewails them, and you treat him mercifully because you made him, though the sin that is in him is not of your making. Who is there to remind me of the sin of my infancy (for sin there was: no one is free from sin in your sight, not even an infant whose span of earthly life is but a single day); who can remind me of it? . . .

Look upon my heart, O God, look upon this heart of mine, on which you took pity in its abysmal depths. Enable my heart to tell you now what it was seeking in this action which made me bad for no reason, in which there was no motive for my malice except malice. The malice was loathsome, and I loved it. I was in love with my own ruin, in love with decay: not with the thing for which I was falling into decay but with decay itself, for I was depraved in soul, and I leapt down from your strong support into destruction, hungering not for some advantage to be gained by the foul deed, but for the foulness of it. (Augustine, Confessions, I.7 and II.4)

Forthreaching to the Fruit, she pluk’d, she eat:
Earth felt the wound, and Nature from her seat
Sighing through all her Works gave songs of woe,
That all was lost. Back to the Thicket slunk
The guilty Serpent (Milton, Paradise Lost, Book 9, lines 780-785)
Essential Tenet

God declared that the world He created was good and that human beings, made in His own image, were very good. The present disordered state of the world, in which we and all things are subject to misery and to evil, is not God’s doing, but is rather a result of humanity’s free, sinful rebellion against God’s will.

Teaching Points

1. God made the world good.
2. The present disordered state of the world is not God’s doing.
3. The present disordered state is a result of humanity’s choice contrary to God’s will.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>God’s Intention</th>
<th>“Since the Fall . . .”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nature</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God created human beings from the dust of the earth and his own breath, to be his images and representatives, conduits of God’s grace to the creation.</td>
<td>Since the fall our natural tendency is to abuse and exploit the creation, preferring evil to goodness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationships</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>God also created human beings to speak his grace and truth to one another, to be helpers who are fit for one another, so that their social relationships would strengthen their ability to serve and obey their Creator.</td>
<td>Since the fall, our natural tendency is to engage in relationships of tyranny and injustice toward one another, in which power is used not to protect and serve but to demean.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>God</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>God further created human beings with the capacity for relationship with him, with his law written on their hearts so that they had the ability to worship God in love and obey him by living holy lives.</td>
<td>Since the fall, our natural tendency is to hate God and our neighbor, and to worship idols of our own devising rather than the one true God.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

II. The Pervasiveness of Sin

*Scriptures:*

1. Romans 1:21-32, Failure to honor, glorify, and thank God starts a sin spiral characterized by spiritual blindness, futile thinking, degrading passions, and idolatry
2. Romans 3:10-18, No one is righteous; everyone is inwardly rebellious
3. Ephesians 2:1-3, We were dead in our sins; by nature children of wrath
<table>
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<tr>
<th>The Creeds, Confessions and Catechisms:</th>
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**SECOND HELVETIC CONFESSION, CHAPTER VIII; Of Man’s Fall, Sin and the Cause of Sin**

SIN. By sin we understand that innate corruption of man which has been derived or propagated in us all from our first parents, by which we, immersed in perverse desires and averse to all good, are included to all evil. Full of all wickedness, distrust, contempt and hatred of God, we are unable to do or even to think anything good of ourselves. Moreover, even as we grow older, so by wicked thoughts, words and deeds committed against God’s law, we bring forth corrupt fruit worthy of an evil tree (Matt. 12:33 ff.). For this reason by our own deserts, being subject to the wrath of God, we are liable to just punishment, so that all of us would have been cast away by God if Christ, the Deliverer, had not brought us back.

**HEIDELBERG CATECHISM**

Q8. But are we so perverted that we are altogether unable to do good and prone to do evil?

A. Yes, unless we are born again through the Spirit of God.

**WESTMINSTER CONFESSION, CHAPTER VI; Of the Fall of Man, of Sin, and of the Punishment Thereof**

2. By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body.

3. They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity, descending from them by ordinary generation.

4. From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.

6. Every sin, both original and actual, being a transgression of the righteous law of God, and contrary thereunto, doth, in its own nature, bring guilt upon the sinner, whereby he is bound over to the wrath of God, and curse of the law, and so made subject to death, with all miseries spiritual, temporal, and eternal.

**THE SHORTER CATECHISM**

Q18. Wherein consists the sinfulness of that estate where into man fell?

A. The sinfulness of that estate where into man fell consists in: the guilt of Adam’s first sin, the want of original righteousness, and the corruption of his whole nature, which is commonly called original sin; together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it.

Q19. What is the misery of that estate where into man fell?

A. All mankind, by their fall, lost communion with God, are under his wrath and curse, and so made liable to all miseries of this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever.

**THE CONFESSION OF 1967, PART I, Section A, 2; The Sin of Man**

The reconciling act of God in Jesus Christ exposes the evil in men as sin in the sight
of God. In sin, men claim mastery of their own lives, turn against God and their fellow men, and become exploiters and despoilers of the world. They lose their humanity in futile striving and are left in rebellion, despair, and isolation.

Wise and virtuous men through the ages have sought the highest good in devotion to freedom, justice, peace, truth, and beauty. Yet all human virtue, when seen in the light of God’s love in Jesus Christ, is found to be infected by self-interest and hostility. All men, good and bad alike, are in the wrong before God and helpless without his forgiveness. Thus all men fall under God’s judgment. No one is more subject to that judgment than the man who assumes that he is guiltless before God or morally superior to others.

**Essential Tenet**

As a result of sin, human life is poisoned by everlasting death. **No part of human life is untouched by sin. Our desires are no longer trustworthy guides to goodness, and what seems natural to us no longer corresponds to God’s design.** We are not merely wounded in our sin; we are dead, unable to save ourselves. Apart from God’s initiative, salvation is not possible for us. Our only hope is God’s grace. We discover in Scripture that this is a great hope, for our God is the One whose mercy is from everlasting to everlasting. This grace does not end when we turn to sin.

**Teaching Points**

1. Death is universal because of sin.
2. Sin is pervasive in every area of life.
3. Human desires are untrustworthy.
4. Spiritually, we human beings are not mostly dead, we are completely dead.
5. God must save us; we cannot save ourselves.
6. God has revealed that he wants to save us.

**Another Perspective:**

*What a chimera then is man! What a novelty! What a monster, what a chaos, what a contradiction, what a prodigy! Judge of all things, imbecile, worm of the earth; Depository of truth, a sink of uncertainty and error; The pride and refuse of the universe! Know then, proud man, what a paradox you are to yourself. Humble yourself, weak reason; be silent, foolish nature; Learn that man infinitely transcends man and learn from your Master your true condition, of which you are ignorant. Hear God.* (Pascal, *Penseés*, fragment 434)

III. God’s Rescue in Jesus Christ

**The Plan in a Nutshell:**

- The God who patiently called Adam and Eve out of the bushes began his great work of salvation. God selects the family of Noah (Genesis 6-9) to save, rescuing humans from slavery to Satan and sin. When the descendants of Noah seek to
construct a civilization while ignoring God, he frustrates their efforts and confuses human language (Genesis 11).

- Then God selects Abraham (Genesis 12). Through the family of Abraham, God creates a line, the Hebrew nation, that in over 2,000 years will lead to the birth of a new Adam, Jesus Christ.
- Likewise Jesus took the consequences of Adam’s faithlessness, the curse of death, and died. In Christ, the son of Adam, (Jesus’ favorite title was the Son of Man/Adam) and true head of creation, death is overcome.

**Scriptures:**

1. Romans 3:21-29, All people have sinned and fall short of God’s glory; but sinners find redemption through Christ’s atoning work on the cross.

2. Romans 5:12-21, As sin entered the world through one man, Adam, so the gift of God’s grace flowed through the one man, Jesus Christ.

3. Ephesians 1:3-14, God chose us in Christ for adoption, redemption, forgiveness, and a life conforming to his will.

**Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms:**

**Nicene Creed**

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

**Apostles’ Creed**

[I believe . . .] in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

**Scots, 3.08**

SCOTS CONFESSION, CHAPTER VIII; *Election*

That same eternal God and Father, who by grace alone chose us in his Son Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world was laid, appointed him to be our head, our brother, our pastor, and the great bishop of our souls. But since the opposition between the justice of God and our sins was such that no flesh by itself could or might have attained unto God, it behooved the Son of God to descend unto us and take himself a body of our body, flesh of our flesh, and bone of our bone, and so become the Mediator between God and man, giving power to as many as believe in him to be the sons of God; as he himself says, “I ascend to my Father and to your Father, to my God and to your God.” By this most holy brotherhood whatever we have lost in Adam is restored to us again. Therefore we are not afraid to call God our Father, not so much because he has created us, which we have in common with the reprobate, as because he has given unto us his only Son to be our brother, and given us grace to acknowledge and embrace him as our only Mediator. Further, it
Heidelberg, 4.029–4.030

THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM; Of God the Son

Q29. Why is the Son of God called JESUS, which means SAVIOR?
A. Because he saves us from our sins, and because salvation is to be sought or found in no other.

Q30. Do those who seek their salvation and well-being from saints, by their own efforts, or by other means really believe in the only Savior Jesus?
A. No. Rather, by such actions they deny Jesus, the only Savior and Redeemer, even though they boast of belonging to him. It therefore follows that either Jesus is not a perfect Savior, or those who receive this Savior with true faith must possess in him all that is necessary for their salvation.

Essential Tenet

This grace does not end when we turn to sin. Although we are each deserving of God’s eternal condemnation, the eternal Son assumed our human nature, joining us in our misery and offering Himself on the cross in order to free us from slavery to death and sin. Jesus takes our place both in bearing the weight of condemnation against our sin on the cross and in offering to God the perfect obedience that humanity owes to Him but is no longer able to give. All humanity participates in the fall into sin. Those who are united through faith with Jesus Christ are fully forgiven from all our sin, so that there is indeed a new creation. We are declared justified, not because of any good that we have done, but only because of God’s grace extended to us in Jesus Christ. **In union with Christ through the power of the Spirit we are brought into right relation with the Father, who receives us as His adopted children.**

Teaching Points

1. Jesus joins us—taking our human nature and entering into our pain.
2. Jesus takes our place—for condemnation and for obedience.
3. Jesus makes us new creations—we are forgiven and remade anew.
4. Jesus justifies us—his goodness becomes our goodness.
5. Jesus joins us to God’s family—we are adopted.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>CENTRAL, SUPREME, TOTAL and EXCLUSIVE</th>
<th>IV. Jesus Christ: Central, Supreme, Total and Exclusive</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John 1:1-18</td>
<td>1. John 1:1-18, Christ was in the beginning with God, and through him everything was created. The Word became flesh and lived among us. To all who receive him and believe in him, he gave the right to become God’s children</td>
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<td>John 3:1-21</td>
<td>2. John 3:1-21, You must be born again; God loved the world so much he sent his Son</td>
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<td>John 5:16-30</td>
<td>3. John 5:16-30, The Father has given the Son authority to execute judgment upon evil</td>
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<td>John 14:1-14</td>
<td>4. John 14:1-14, Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father but through him</td>
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<td>Acts 4:8-12</td>
<td>5. Acts 4:8-12, Jesus, who was crucified, has been risen from the dead</td>
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<td>Colossians 1:15-20</td>
<td>6. Colossians 1:15-20, In Christ all the fullness of God dwells</td>
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<td>2nd Helvetic, 5.077</td>
<td>SECOND HELVETIC CONFESSION, Chapter XI, Of Jesus Christ, True God and Man, the Only Savior of the World</td>
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</table>

Jesus Christ is the only Savior of the world, and the true awaited Messiah. For we teach and believe that this Jesus Christ our Lord is the unique and eternal Savior of the human race, and thus of the whole world, in whom by faith are saved all who before the law, under the law, and under the Gospel were saved, and however many will be saved at the end of the world. For the Lord himself says in the Gospel: “He who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. . . . I am the door of the sheep” (John 10:1 and 7). And also in another place in the same Gospel he says: “Abraham saw my day and was glad” (John 8:56). The apostle Peter also says: “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” We therefore believe that we will be saved through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, as our fathers were (Acts 4:12, 10:43; 15:11). For Paul also says: “All our fathers ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ” (I Cor. 10:3 f.). And thus we read that John says: “Christ was the Lamb which was slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8), and John the Baptist testified that Christ is that “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Wherefore, we quite openly profess and preach that Jesus Christ is the sole Redeemer and Savior of the world, the King and High Priest, the true and awaited Messiah, that holy and blessed one whom all the types of the law and predictions of the prophets prefigured and promised; and that God appointed him beforehand and sent him to us, so that we are not now to look for any other. Now there only remains for all of us to give all glory to Christ, believe in him, rest in him alone, despising and rejecting all other aids in life. For however many seek salvation in any other than in Christ alone, have fallen from the grace of God and have rendered Christ null and void for themselves (Gal. 5:4).
his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ: enlightening their minds, spiritually and savingly, to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and by his almighty power determining them to that which is good; and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ; yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace.

THE SHORTER CATECHISM

Q21. Who is the Redeemer of God’s elect?

A. The only Redeemer of God’s elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continueth to be, God and man, in two distinct natures, and one Person forever.

THE THEOLOGICAL DECLARATION OF BARMEN

Jesus Christ, as he is attested for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death.

We reject the false doctrine, as though the church could and would have to acknowledge as a source of its proclamation, apart from and besides this one Word of God, still other events and powers, figures and truths, as God’s revelation.

THE CONFESSION OF 1967

The same Jesus Christ is the judge of all men. His judgment discloses the ultimate seriousness of life and gives promise of God’s final victory over the power of sin and death. To receive life from the risen Lord is to have life eternal; to refuse life from him is to choose the death, which is separation from God. All who put their trust in Christ face divine judgment without fear, for the judge is their redeemer.

Essential Tenet

Jesus Christ is the only Way to this adoption, the sole path by which sinners become children of God, for He is the only-begotten Son, and it is only in union with Him that a believer is able to know God as Father. Only in Jesus Christ is the truth about the Triune God, fully and perfectly revealed, for only He is the Truth, only He has seen the Father, and only He can make the Father known. Only Jesus Christ is the new Life that is offered, for He is the bread from heaven and the fountain of living water, the one by whom all things were made, in whom all things hold together. The exclusivity of these claims establishes that God’s love is not impersonal, but a particular and intimate love in which each individual child of God is called by name and known as precious; that God’s love is not only acceptance, but a transforming and effective love in which His image within us is restored so that we are capable of holy living.

Teaching Points

1. Jesus is the only way back to God.
2. Jesus is only begotten Son of God.
3. Jesus is the only complete revelation of God.
4. Jesus is the only source of life and spiritual sustenance.
5. Jesus’ love is personal and particular.
6. Jesus’ love changes us.
### Group Discussion (from prepared group questions)

*Emphasize how this belief enlivens relationship with God and motivates responsive action.*

**Scratch where they itch, as long as interaction is on-point.**

1. “God declared that the world He created was good and that human beings, made in His own image, were very good” (Genesis 1:26-31). What are some of the differences between this view of the world and the modern perspective that sees humans as merely highly evolved animals?

2. The Scriptures record that there is something wrong with the world because we are in a state of rebellion against God’s good intentions (Romans 1:21-24). What are some of the consequences of believing that the present state of the world is “normal” and just in need of more progress as opposed to fallen and abnormal?

3. God made humans to reflect His image (Genesis 1:26-27), to be partners and companions to each other (Genesis 2:21-24), and to enjoy a relationship with Him (Genesis 3:8). How do you find these purposes of God present in your life and the world around you?

4. “Natural is normal” is the modern conception of life. In contrast, the biblical view is that disease, distrust, and death are the “natural” condition of the world today. What is now natural is abnormal (Ephesians 2:1-4; Romans 3:10-18). What is the good news and bad news about this biblical diagnosis of the world when it comes to our appetites, inclinations, desires, and conduct?

5. The biblical diagnosis for the problem of pain everyone experiences is sin, and the solution is atonement through Jesus Christ (Romans 3:19-26). In contrast, the modern diagnosis for the problem of pain is ignorance, and the solution is education. How would you explain these differences to a young person in your church youth group?

6. Our rescue from sin by Jesus Christ is described a number of ways in the Bible and in our confessions: our debts are forgiven, we are justified before the law courts, we are redeemed from the slave market, we are adopted into the family of God, we are born anew and are new creations (Romans 3:21-26; II Corinthians 5:14-20; Ephesians 2:4-10; Galatians 6:14-16). After looking at these passages, describe God’s role and our role in our salvation.

7. Which description of salvation is especially meaningful to you at this point in your life?

8. Buddhists follow the teaching of Buddha, Muslims the teaching of Mohammed, as other religions have their teachers. How is it that Christianity, going all the way back to Jesus, maintains that He alone is the teacher and savior of the world (John 1:18, 3:12-18, 6:35, 14: 6; Colossians 1:15-17; Ephesians 1:5)?

9. Another wonderful and amazing mystery of the Christian faith is that the rescuing work of Jesus Christ is not general and generic but personal and intimate; He calls each by name and leads into a life that is pleasing to his Father (John 10: 1-5; Ephesians 4:20-24). What does it mean to you to have personal and intimate relationship with Jesus Christ?

### Check In with Original Questions on Board.

**Summarize “What We Have Learned Tonight”**

### Closing Prayer
### TIME

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
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<tr>
<td>00:00–05</td>
<td>GREETING, OPENING PRAYER</td>
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<tr>
<td>05:05–10</td>
<td>STATE THE TOPIC AND GOALS FOR THE LESSON</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. To establish our abject need of a savior and our spiritual paralysis due to sin</td>
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<td>2. To recognize the necessity of God’s gracious choice on our behalf</td>
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<td>3. To appreciate how being chosen “in Christ” changes everything</td>
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<td>4. To connect election with mission/ministry/service</td>
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<td>10:20–25</td>
<td>WARM-UP DISCUSSION (choose one or two questions)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1. Predestination, election and effectual calling have been hallmarks of Presbyterian/Reformed beliefs since the beginning. How familiar are you with these terms and the doctrines they represent?</td>
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<td>2. When was the last time you heard a sermon or were in a class that taught them? Why do think these doctrines have dropped (almost) out of sight for so many?</td>
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<td>3. If you told a friend or a colleague that you believed in predestination and election, what kind of reaction do you think you’d get?</td>
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<td>4. If these doctrines are so challenging and difficult, why do you think that the Reformers ever conceived and preached them?</td>
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<tr>
<td>20:25–25</td>
<td>Ask the group: “What questions are you going to want to have answered before we are finished tonight?”</td>
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<td><strong>List on whiteboard.</strong> These might be words to be defined, meaning to be explained, or application to be made. Make note where these questions will be answered in your sub-topic below.</td>
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<td>25:25–30</td>
<td>READ ESSENTIAL TENET III-B</td>
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**Election for Salvation and Service**

**LESSON 6**
I. Spiritual Paralysis and God’s Gracious Call

**Scriptures:**

1. Ephesians 2:1-3, Jews and Gentiles alike are in a state of spiritual death in the ways of the world and rule of Satan

2. Mark 4:12, Jesus teaches the disciples about spiritual blindness and hard-heartedness

3. Acts 28:26-28, In Paul’s last words to the Jewish leaders in Rome, he confronts them with their deadly resistance to the gospel due to spiritual blindness, deafness, and calloused hearts

4. Romans 3:10-20, Paul describes sin as not only extensive (to all the human race), but also intensive (completely penetrating to every aspect of a person)

5. Ephesians 1:3-5, God chooses believers in Christ out of love before creation begins

6. II Timothy 1:9-10, God saving grace is given before time

7. Ephesians 2:4, Because of his great love God gives life to the spiritually dead freeing them to be united with Christ in his resurrection
The survivors of the judgment call out to God even as God calls out to them.

**Teaching Points**

1. Humanity is desperate and helpless, dead in transgressions and sins and in bondage to Satan, trapped in his domain of darkness.

2. Multiple scripture passages portray humans as having spiritual paralysis (e.g., deaf ears, blind eyes, and hard unresponsive hearts).

3. Human expressions of religion in general and corruptions evident in biblical history show the extent of human depravity, as no one naturally seeks God on God’s terms.

4. Our only hope is found in God, who chooses to bring life to the dead.

5. This saving work of God is not a general call but an intensely personal one in which he speaks life to individuals whom he graciously chooses to call.

6. The reasons that God chooses to call some, but not all to life, are both gracious and mysterious. It is never because anyone deserves it or because God is capricious.

7. The call of God does not exclude our calling out to God but includes it.

**Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms:**

2nd Helvetic, 5.045

SECOND HELVETIC CONFESSION CHAPTER IX; Of Free Will, and Thus of Human Powers

MAN IS NOT CAPABLE OF GOOD, PER SE. In regard to goodness and virtue man’s reason does not judge rightly of itself concerning divine things. For the evangelical and apostolic Scripture requires regeneration of whoever among us wishes to be saved. Hence our first birth from Adam contributes nothing to our salvation. Paul says: “The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God,” etc. (I Cor. 2:14). And in another place he denies that we of ourselves are capable of thinking anything good (II Cor. 3:5). Now it is known that the mind or intellect is the guide of the will, and when the guide is blind, it is obvious how far the will reaches. Wherefore, man not yet regenerate has no free will for good, no strength to perform what is good. The Lord says in the Gospel: “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin” (John 8:34). And the apostle Paul says: “The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, indeed it cannot” (Rom. 8:7). Yet in regard to earthly things, fallen man is not entirely lacking in understanding.

2nd Helvetic, 5.052

SECOND HELVETIC CONFESSION, CHAPTER X; Of the Predestination of God and the Election of the Saints

GOD HAS ELECTED US OUT OF GRACE. From eternity God has freely, and of his mere grace, without any respect to men, predestinated or elected the saints whom he wills to save in Christ, according to the saying of the apostle, “God chose us in him before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4). And again: “Who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of our works but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which he gave us in Christ Jesus ages ago, and now has manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus” (II Tim. 1:9 f.).
### The Essential Tenets

#### LARGER CATECHISM

**Q67. What is effectual calling?**

**A.** Effectual calling is the work of God’s almighty power and grace, whereby (out of his free and especial love to his elect, and from nothing in them moving him thereunto) he doth in his accepted time invite and draw them to Jesus Christ, by his Word and Spirit; savingly enlightening their minds, renewing and powerfully determining their wills, so as they (although in themselves dead in sin) are hereby made willing and able, freely to answer his call, and to accept and embrace the grace offered and conveyed therein.

#### WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH; Declaratory Statement

. . . concerning those who are saved in Christ, the doctrine of God’s eternal decree is held in harmony with the doctrine of his love to all mankind, his gift of his Son to be the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and his readiness to bestow his saving grace on all who seek it; that concerning those who perish, the doctrine of God’s eternal decree is held in harmony with the doctrine that God desires not the death of any sinner, but has provided in Christ a salvation sufficient for all, adapted to all, and freely offered in the gospel to all; that men are fully responsible for their treatment of God’s gracious offer; that his decree hinders no man from accepting that offer; and that no man is condemned except on the ground of his sin.

#### Other Perspectives:

But mortals cannot live righteously and piously unless the will itself is liberated by the grace from God from the servitude to sin into which it has fallen, and is aided to overcome its vices. (Augustine, *On Free Will*, Augustine’s Earlier Writing, *The Library of Christian Classics*, Vol. 6, p. 103)

. . . with regard to God and in all that bear on salvation or damnation, he has no free will, but is a captive, prisoner and bondslave, either to the will of God, or to the will of Satan. (Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 638-639,ix.)

#### Essential Tenet

The call of God to the individual Christian is not merely an invitation that each person may accept or reject by his or her own free will. **Having lost true freedom of will in the fall, we are incapable of turning toward God of our own volition. God chooses us for Himself in grace before the foundation of the world, not because of any merit on our part, but only because of His love and mercy.**

1. Responding to the call of God is more than a matter of personal discretion.
2. Responding to God’s call requires liberation from enslavement to sin.
3. God’s choice precedes creation; it is not a reaction to human sin.
4. God’s choice is based on God’s grace, not on any human merit.

#### II. God’s Choice of Us in Jesus Christ

**Scriptures:**

1. Matthew 3:13-15, Jesus receives John’s baptism for the forgiveness of sin
2. John 1:14, The disciples knew that with Jesus they were in the presence of the glory of God
Mark 1:17; 2:14
3. Mark 1:17; 2:14, Jesus personally called disciples (he chose each individually)

Ephesians 1:11-14
4. Ephesians 1:11-14, In Christ we were chosen to glorify God, to be “included in Christ” and secured in him by the Holy Spirit

Ephesians 1:17-18
5. Ephesians 1:17-18, God is the source of spiritual revelation and enlightenment enabling us to know him and the truth he imparts (we didn’t make this up)

I Corinthians 2:12
6. I Corinthians 2:12, God gives the Spirit to help us understand God’s gift

Teaching Points

1. Jesus receives John’s baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, not because he needs to repent or be forgiven, but to enter fully our world of sin and judgment.

2. Jesus as the Word of God incarnate displays God’s glory, and his disciples are awed.

3. Those who are made alive by God’s regenerating call in Christ have enlightened hearts and minds to see how wonderful and glorious Jesus is and how great is his gift.

Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms:

SCOTS CONFESSION, CHAPTER VIII; Election

That same eternal God and Father, who by grace alone chose us in his Son Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world was laid, appointed him to be our head, our brother, our pastor, and the great bishop of our souls. But since the opposition between the justice of God and our sins was such that no flesh by itself could or might have attained unto God, it behooved the Son of God to descend unto us and take himself a body of our body, flesh of our flesh, and bone of our bone, and so become the Mediator between God and man, giving power to as many as believe in him to be the sons of God; as he himself says, “I ascend to my Father and to your Father, to my God and to your God.” By this most holy brotherhood whatever we have lost in Adam is restored to us again. Therefore we are not afraid to call God our Father, not so much because he has created us, which we have in common with the reprobate, as because he has given unto us his only Son to be our brother, and given us grace to acknowledge and embrace him as our only Mediator. . . .

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH, CHAPTER XII; Of Effectual Calling

1. All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ: enlightening their minds, spiritually and savingly, to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and by his almighty power determining them to that which is good; and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ; yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace.

Essential Tenet

Each of us is chosen in Christ, who is eternally appointed to be head of the body of the elect, our brother and our high priest. He is the one who is bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, our divine Helper who is also our Bridegroom, sharing our human nature so that we may see His glory. We who receive Him and believe in His name do so not by our own will or wisdom, but because His glory compels us irresistibly to
turn toward Him. By His enticing call on our lives, Jesus enlightens our minds, softens our hearts, and renews our wills, restoring the freedom that we lost in the fall.

**Teaching Points**

1. Election incorporates us into Jesus Christ who is Lord of all.

2. Jesus Christ is the faultless human who shares his human nature with us even as he is Lord over us.

3. Jesus Christ is completely sufficient to meet all our needs and helps us in all our challenges.

4. The glory and wisdom of Jesus Christ is so wonderful that when we see him, he unfailingly wins us over and transforms our hearts and minds.

5. In Jesus Christ we are made whole, complete, and renewed so that we are free to choose to obey him.

### III. The Saving Power of Jesus Christ

**Scriptures:**

1. Romans 3:21-26, God atones for our sin and satisfies his justice by the death of Jesus Christ

2. Hebrews 10:19-22, Christ’s death and resurrection have given us access to God’s presence

3. Romans 8:1-4, Christ’s death has set us free from spiritual bondage, enabling us to live according to the Spirit

4. Ephesians 3:11-12, Through faith in Jesus Christ we may approach God with confidence

**Teaching Points**

1. Jesus alone, truly human and truly God, was able to offer his life to satisfy the righteous expectations of divine justice.

2. He reconciles us to God and God to us, and then leads us back into God presence.

3. In the imperial courts of the classical world no one was allowed to enter the presence of the king/emperor without an invitation. Upon an invitation, an official in the court called a prosagon (Gk. = “one who goes before and leads the way”) was assigned to take a person before the royal throne. In Ephesians 3 11-12, Jesus is portrayed as the prosagon, the one in whom we have access to the presence of God.

**Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms:**

Scots, 6.08 (b) SCOTS CONFESSION, CHAPTER VIII; *Election*

... Further, it behooved the Messiah and Redeemer to be true God and true man, because he was able to undergo the punishment of our transgressions and to present himself in the presence of his Father’s judgment, as in our stead, to suffer for our transgression and disobedience, and by death to overcome him that was the author of death. But because the Godhead alone could not suffer death, and neither could manhood overcome death, he joined both together in one person, that the weakness of one should suffer and be subject to death—which we had deserved—and the infinite and invincible power of the other, that is, of the Godhead, should triumph, and purchase for us life, liberty, and perpetual victory. So we confess, and most undoubtedly believe.
Essential Tenet

We are all sinners who fall short of God’s glory, and we all deserve God’s eternal judgment. Apart from the saving work of Jesus Christ, we are incapable of being in God’s presence, incapable of bearing the weight of His glory. We rejoice that Jesus Christ offers us safe conduct into the heart of God’s consuming and purifying fire, shielding us with His perfect humanity and transforming us by His divine power. Having received such grace, we extend grace to others.

Teaching Points

1. All humans are guilty before God and are justly under divine judgment.
2. We are incapable of returning to God, reforming ourselves, or restoring what is wrong with the world.
3. We celebrate the good news that Jesus Christ is able to restore us to God because of his perfect humanity and divine power.
### IV. The Serving and Saving Power of the Holy Spirit

#### Scriptures:

1. Matthew 5:13-16, Jesus expects that his disciples will impact the world with character (salt and light)

2. Matthew 28:16-20, Jesus commissions his disciples to make disciples by bringing people into Christian community and teaching them everything he had commanded

3. Romans 10:13b-15, People will not hear about Jesus unless someone is sent to tell them

4. Acts 1:8, The Holy Spirit is given to all believers to empower their witness to Jesus Christ

5. Philippians 2:12-16, God works within believers to live purposeful lives that shine in contrast to the world’s ways

#### Teaching Points

1. Jesus expected his disciples to make a healthy difference in the world by the quality of their character and the contributions of their work.

2. Jesus expected his followers to make disciples through their teaching about him and what he required.

3. Christianity, distinct from Judaism, has been characterized as an “incurably evangelistic” religion in which sharing the good news is part of its DNA.

4. The quality of Christians behavior toward one another and their care towards all of God’s world means that the Church embodies, proclaims and demonstrates the good news of Jesus.

#### Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms:

- **WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH, CHAPTER XXXV; Of the Gospel of the Love of God and Missions**

  4. Since there is no other way of salvation than that revealed in the gospel, and since in the divinely established and ordinary method of grace faith cometh by hearing the Word of God, Christ hath commissioned his Church to go into all the world and to make disciples of all nations. All believers are, therefore, under obligation to sustain the ordinance of the Christian religion where they are already established, and to contribute by their prayers, gifts, and personal efforts to the extension of the Kingdom of Christ throughout the whole earth.

- **WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH, CHAPTER IX; Of the Holy Spirit**

  3. The Holy Spirit, whom the Father is ever willing to give to all who ask him, is the only efficient agent in the application of redemption. He regenerates men by his grace, convicts them of sin, moves them to repentance, and persuades and enables them to embrace Jesus Christ by faith. He unites all believers to Christ, dwells in them as their Comforter and Sanctifier, gives to them the spirit of Adoption and Prayer, and performs all those gracious offices by which they are sanctified and sealed unto the day of redemption.
Essential Tenet

We are not elect for our own benefit alone. God gathers His covenant community to be an instrument of His saving purpose. Through His regenerating and sanctifying work, the Holy Spirit grants us faith and enables holiness, so that we may be witnesses of God’s gracious presence to those who are lost. We are now in service to God’s plan for the fullness of time: uniting all things in heaven and earth to Himself. To this end, we preach Christ, calling all persons to repent and believe the gospel. We also care for the natural world, claim all areas of culture in the name of Jesus, serve the poor, feed the hungry, visit the prisoner, and defend the helpless. We do this work not with any thought that we are able to bring in the kingdom, but in the confident hope that God’s kingdom is surely coming, a day when suffering and death will pass away and when God will live among His people.

Teaching Points

1. God’s chooses us for His purposes, not only to enjoy His glory but also to work for the benefit of others.

2. God’s Spirit works his life inside us, giving us faith so that we can see His glory, share His holiness, and empower us to bear witness to all who are lost.

3. Chosen in Christ, we are part of God’s plan that is moving to final completion in which all are united together under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

4. The purpose and plan of God motivates all Christians to evangelism/mission, inviting all to believe the gospel.

5. The purpose and plan of God also motivate Christians to act in compassion and service.

6. Christian mission/service is a demonstration and anticipation of God’s coming kingdom when all that is wrong with the world will be made right.

7. Christian mission/service is expression of hope and humility because we know that no matter what we do, only God can bring in His kingdom.

GROUP DISCUSSION (from among these group questions)

Emphasize how this belief enlivens relationship with God and motivates responsive action. Scratch where they itch, as long as interaction is on-point.

1. “Having lost true freedom of will in the fall, we are incapable of turning toward God of our own volition. God chooses us for Himself in grace before the foundation of the world.” What does Paul have to say about the choosing love of God (Eph. 1:3-6)?

2. Paul’s statement of God’s electing choice is filled with praise. Why is this wonderful to know and challenging to believe?

3. How do you respond to the idea that your life in Christ is not an after-thought on the part of God but something He did before He created the world?

4. Before believing in Christ, we were dead in their transgressions and sins (Ephesians 2:1-4). What do you think it means to be spiritually dead?

5. The life-giving call of God also includes regeneration; i.e., God gives life to the dead. According to Ephesians 2:4-8, what does it mean to be spiritually alive?

6. God’s electing choice is “in Christ” not apart from Christ. How does Paul convey this in the passage from Ephesians 1:3-14?
7. **Effectual calling** means that God's call works; it's effective! It doesn't mean that we are manipulated or forced. Rather, “By His enticing call on our lives, Jesus enlightens our minds, softens our hearts, and renews our wills, restoring the freedom that we lost in the fall.” What is supernatural and what is natural about our believing in Christ?

8. Our spiritual inabilities not only mean that we can’t save ourselves, we can’t even keep a relationship with God by our own power; we are spiritually “incapable.” However, “[w]e rejoice that Jesus Christ offers us safe conduct into the heart of God’s consuming and purifying fire, shielding us with His perfect humanity and transforming us by His divine power.” How do you respond, knowing the depth of your inabilities and the necessity for God’s power?

9. “We are not elect for our own benefit alone. God gathers his covenant community to be an instrument of His saving purpose.” What is Jesus’ expectation for the work of the Holy Spirit in the mission and ministry of his Church (Acts 1:8; Acts 10:44-48)?

10. The wind, flame, and languages of the Spirit (Acts 2:1-4) bring inspiration to act, light to penetrate darkness, and words to proclaim in every culture and language. Where do you see that inspiration, light, and proclamation by the Spirit in the Church today?

11. “The Spirit gathers us in a community that is built up and equipped to be light, salt, and yeast in the world” (Ephesians 4:7-13). What are some of the ways that the Spirit has equipped your church for ministry and mission?

12. The ministry of Jesus Christ is for all the world. That is why “We also care for the natural world, claim all areas of culture in the name of Jesus, serve the poor, feed the hungry, visit the prisoner, and defend the helpless.” What acts of service have you been involved in, and how do you think they have demonstrated the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ?

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**1:50–1:57**

**CHECK IN WITH ORIGINAL QUESTIONS ON BOARD.**

**SUMMARIZE “What We Have Learned Tonight”**

**Concluding Remarks**

The Reformed Faith has been consistent and insistent about the importance of teaching election and effectual calling. Erasmus, a seminal theologian of the sixteenth century wanted to find some compromising position on these doctrines, or at least to play them down. In contrast Martin Luther wrote: “... doctrinal truth should be preached always, openly, without compromise, and never dissembled or concealed.” (Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, [630-634].)

We must also keep in mind that the Christian faith is filled with mysteries, like the Trinity and the natures of Christ, which we seek to articulate but know that we will never totally comprehend. Election is one of those mysteries. As Calvin observes:

First, then, let them remember that when they inquire into predestination they are penetrating the sacred precincts of divine wisdom. If anyone with carefree assurance breaks into this place, he will not succeed in satisfying his curiosity and he will enter a labyrinth from which he can find no exit. (Calvin, *Institutes*, III, XXI, 1).

As we consider this Essential Tenet, it is possible to show how it builds upon those previously considered: the triune nature of God who creates and redeems; the nature of Christ as both divine and human that enables him to be a sufficient savior; and the fallen
nature of humanity that places us in a helpless condition and in desperate need of a savior. From the outside, the doctrines of election and effectual calling may seem grossly unfair and even offensive. But step inside the Faith, and we can see that only the gracious call of God can rescue us from the dungeons of death and spiritual slavery. Seen from the inside, the doctrines of election and effectually calling not only make sense, they thrill and humble our hearts before the wonder of our gracious God and our amazing Savior Jesus Christ.

1:57–2:00

CLOSING PRAYER
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>00–05</td>
<td><strong>GREETING, OPENING PRAYER</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>05–10</td>
<td><strong>STATE THE TOPIC AND GOALS FOR THE LESSON</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. To embrace the eternal significance of the Church</td>
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<td>2. To set the foundation for unity and healthy relationships in the church</td>
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<td>3. To explore the ways that God cares and provides for the Church (i.e., the “means of grace”)</td>
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<td>4. To see the indispensable value of covenant commitments within the Church</td>
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<tr>
<td>10–20</td>
<td><strong>WARM-UP DISCUSSION</strong> (choose one or two questions)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. What comes to mind when you think about the Church in general?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. What comes to mind when you think about your church?</td>
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<td>3. What are some reasons people have given you for not going to church?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4. What do you think is the difference between attending church and being a member of a church</td>
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<tr>
<td>20–25</td>
<td>Ask the group, “What questions are you going to want to have answered before we finish tonight?”</td>
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<td><em>List on whiteboard, but don’t answer them now.</em></td>
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<td>These might be words to be defined, meaning to be explained, or application to be made. Make</td>
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<td>note where these questions will be answered in your instruction below, or handle questions here</td>
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<td>with a referral.</td>
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<tr>
<td>25–30</td>
<td><strong>READ ESSENTIAL TENET III-C</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>30–1:20</td>
<td><strong>PRESENTATION OF EACH SUB-TOPIC</strong></td>
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<td><em>Think in terms of OBSERVE, INTERPRET, REFLECT, APPLY.</em></td>
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### GOD'S FAMILY IN JESUS CHRIST

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scripture</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exodus 19:4-6</td>
<td>God makes a covenant with the people he has redeemed from Egyptian slavery</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matthew 26:27-28</td>
<td>Jesus makes a new covenant by his own blood and expands its reach to all people for forgiveness of sin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Peter 2:9-10</td>
<td>Peter celebrates the chosen people of God now including those who believe in Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebrews 9:14-15</td>
<td>Hebrew 9:14-15, By Christ's blood the new covenant achieved what the old covenant failed to do: eternal redemption and inner spiritual cleansing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ephesians 4:1-6</td>
<td>Ephesians 4:1-6, In Christ, believers share a deep unity—expressed through humble behavior towards each other—around one Lord, one faith, one Spirit, one Baptism, and one God and Father</td>
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### THE UNITY OF THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scripture</th>
<th>Commentary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John 13:34</td>
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<td>John 17:20-23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ephesians 2:14-18</td>
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<td>Acts 2:5-18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ephesians 4:11-14</td>
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<tr>
<td>2nd Helvetic, 5.125</td>
<td>In Christ, believers share a deep unity—expressed through humble behavior towards each other—around one Lord, one faith, one Spirit, one Baptism, and one God and Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westminster, 6.146</td>
<td>Westminster, 6.149, 6.150, 6.154</td>
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<tr>
<td>White, <em>The Fight</em>, 137</td>
<td>2nd Helvetic, 5.004, 5.006</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peterson, <em>A Long Obedience</em>, 170</td>
<td>Westminster, 6.149, 6.150, 6.154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stott, <em>Living Church</em>, 19</td>
<td>Confession of 1967, 9.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westminster, 6.154</td>
<td>Calvin, <em>Institutes</em>, IV, XXII, 2</td>
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### THE NOURISHMENT OF GOD'S FAMILY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scripture</th>
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<tr>
<td>I Thessalonians 1:4-6</td>
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<td>I Corinthians 2:13-14</td>
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<tr>
<td>John 6:53-58</td>
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<td>Romans 6:1-7</td>
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<td>Acts 16:33-34</td>
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<td>Philippians 4:2-3</td>
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<td>Galatians 5:13-15</td>
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<td>Westminster, 6.149, 6.150, 6.154</td>
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### I. God's Family in Christ

From the Old Testament to the New, God has been calling out a people to whom he says, “I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God” (Exodus 6:7). Jesus Christ is the one who brings God’s work of creating a “holy nation” to completion.

**Scriptures:**

- Exodus 19:4-6
- Matthew 26:27 ff.
- I Peter 2:9-10
- Hebrews 9:14-15
- Ephesians 4:1-6

### Creeds, Confessions and Catechisms:

- **APOSTLE’S CREED**
  
  I believe in . . . the holy catholic Church; the communion of saints;

- **NICENE CREED**
  
  We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scots, 3.16</th>
<th>SCOTS CONFESSION, CHAPTER XVI; The Kirk</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As we believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, so we firmly believe that from the beginning there has been, now is, and to the end of the world shall be, one Kirk, that is to say, one company and multitude of men chosen by God, who rightly worship and embrace him by true faith in Christ Jesus, who is the only Head of the Kirk, even as it is the body and spouse of Christ Jesus. This Kirk is catholic, that is, universal, because it contains the chosen of all ages, of all realms, nations, and tongues, be they of the Jews or be they of the Gentiles, who have communion and society with God the Father, and with his Son, Christ Jesus, through the sanctification of his Holy Spirit. It is therefore called the communion, not of profane persons, but of saints, who, as citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem, have the fruit of inestimable benefits, one God, one Lord Jesus, one faith, and one baptism. . .</td>
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<tr>
<th>2nd Helvetic, 5.124</th>
<th>SECOND HELVETIC CONFESSION, CHAPTER XVII; Of the Catholic and Holy Church of God, and of the One Only Head of the Church</th>
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<tr>
<td>THE CHURCH HAS ALWAYS EXISTED AND IT WILL ALWAYS EXIST. But because God from the beginning would have men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth (I Tim. 2:4), it is altogether necessary that there always should have been, and should be now, and to the end of the world, a Church.</td>
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**Other Perspectives:**

**Stott, Living Church, 19**

For the church lies at the very center of the eternal purpose of God. It is not a divine afterthought. It is not an accident of history. On the contrary, the church is God’s new community. For his purpose, conceived in a past eternity, being worked out in history and to be perfected in a future eternity, it is not just to save isolated individuals and so perpetuate our loneliness, but rather to build his church, that is to call out of the world a people for his own glory. (John Stott, *The Living Church*, IVP, 2007, p. 19)

**Peterson, A Long Obedience, 169.**

Our membership in the church is a corollary of our faith in Christ. We can no more be a Christian and have nothing to do with the church than we can be a person and not be in a family . . . It is part of the fabric of redemption. (Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, InterVarsity Press, 1980, p. 169.)

**Essential Tenet**

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.

**Teaching Points**

1. We are called in Christ to a new covenant community.
2. In the new covenant community we are securely connected to God and each other.
3. This new covenant community fulfills God’s intention in creation for human relationships.
4. As we are adopted into God’s family through Christ, God becomes our Father.

5. It is imperative that we participate with each other in God’s covenant community.

**II. The Unity of the Christian Family**

Since the Fall the human race has been divided and conflicted. Due to the pervasiveness of human sin, God blocked efforts at creating an international community unity at the Tower of Babel, (Genesis 11:1-9). However, God accomplishes the unifying of our fragmented and conflicted race under the headship of Jesus Christ.

**Scriptures:**

1. John 13:34, Jesus commands his disciples to love one another in the same way that he loves
2. John 17:20-23, Jesus prays that the unity of his disciples will display and demonstrate his mission
3. Ephesians 2:14-18, Jesus brought the message of peace by the cross, providing access for all—Jew and Gentile alike—into the presence of God
4. Acts 2:5-18, The Spirit of Jesus made the message of Jesus understood by people from any and every nation thereby reversing the chaos of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9) and anticipating the divine unity in heaven (Revelation 5:13f)
5. Ephesians 4:11-14, God desires that the body of Christ find its unity in the faith and knowledge of Jesus, which yields spiritual maturity

**Creeds, Confessions and Catechisms:**

2nd Helvetic, 5.125 **SECOND HELVETIC CONFESSION, CHAPTER XVII; Of the Catholic and Holy Church of God, and of the One Only Head of the Church**

What is the Church? The Church is an assembly of the faithful called or gathered out of the world; a communion, I say, of all saints, namely, of those who truly know and rightly worship and serve the true God in Christ the Savior, by the Word and Holy Spirit, and who by faith are partakers of all benefits which are freely offered through Christ. Citizens of one commonwealth. They are all citizens of the one city, living under the same Lord, under the same laws, and in the same fellowship of all good things. For the apostle calls them “fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (Eph. 2:19), calling the faithful on earth saints (1 Cor. 4:1), who are sanctified by the blood of the Son of God. The article of the Creed, “I believe in the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints,” is to be understood wholly as concerning these saints.

Westminster, 6.146 **THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH, CHAPTER XXVIII/CHAPTER XXVI; Of the Communion of Saints**

1. All saints being united to Jesus Christ their head, by his Spirit and by faith, have fellowship with him in his graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory: and, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other’s gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as to conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man.
Teaching Points

We are called to Christian unity, but we know that the practice of Christian community is difficult. One pastor in the Presbyterian Church describes his experience of Christian unity and conflict. “I went to a Christian college that broke off from a denomination in the 1960s, which broke off from another denomination in the 1950s, which broke away from another denomination in the 1930s, which was part of a denomination that split in the 1850s. Since I became a pastor there have been two other divisions in my denomination.”

These conflicts that fragment Christian unity can be confusing and unsettling. But there is hope for Jesus’ church, as articulated by John White:

Considering all the divisions that have plagued Christendom for two thousand years, it is amazing that God has continued to use the church to extend his kingdom. To this day covert battles are raging, hostilities and suspicion fermenting and breeding. Loudly touted church unions patch outward differences while discontent and bitterness seethe within. And for every amalgamation in one place there will be a couple of break-ups some place else.

What can you do about it?

The first thing you must not do is to let the situation throw you. Christ is still in control and he knows what he is doing. His kingdom is advancing. His plans are ripening. No sinful strife evades his watchful eyes. What may cause you to be appalled and deeply discoursed may grieve but never dismay him. Nothing can or will slow down his forward thrust to final victory and judgment. (John White, The Fight, IVP, 1976, p. 137)

Despite our experience of Christian fragmentation and conflict, we must hold onto our commitment to Christian unity under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

So the question is not, ‘Am I going to be a part of the community of faith’ but ‘How am I going to live in this community of faith?’ God’s children do different things. Some run away from it and pretend that the family doesn’t exist. Some move out and get an apartment from which they return to make occasional visits . . . some determine to find out what God has in mind by placing them in this community called a church, learn how to function in it harmoniously and joyously and develop the maturity that is able to share and exchange God’s grace with those who might otherwise be viewed as nuisances. (Eugene Peterson, A Long Obedience in the Same Direction, p. 170)

Essential Tenet

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.
Teaching Points

1. Jesus prays his Church into spiritual unity.
2. We join Jesus in his prayer for spiritual unity and work to express that unity in the world.
3. Christianity includes and transcends organizational unity.
4. The unity Christ achieved transcends national identity, race, gender, and language.
5. God intends the Church of Jesus Christ to embody and display this unity and diversity.
6. The unity and diversity of the Church is this world will be fulfilled and completed in the consummation of God’s kingdom.

III. The Nourishment of God’s Family

Jesus Christ constantly sustains the church, His body (I Corinthians 12:7; Ephesians 1:23), with His life. Historically, the ways Christ shares His life with His body are called “the means of grace.” The classic means of grace include preaching, the sacraments, and discipline (Calvin, Institutes, IV, I, 9 and IV, XXII, 1)

Preaching

1. I Thessalonians 1:4-6, The Holy Spirit moves in power as the gospel is spoken, such that the hearers are convicted that it is a message from God.

Sacraments


4. Romans 6:1-7, We are united to Christ through baptism so that his death becomes our death and his life becomes our life.

5. Acts 16:33-34, An entire family is united to God through faith and Baptism

Discipline

6. Philippians 4:2-3, Paul appeals for the entire community to resolve conflict among those who are not of one mind.

7. Galatians 5:13-15, Paul disciplines by direct rebuke and a call to fulfill the law of love.

Creeds, Confessions and Catechisms:

Preaching

SECOND HELVETIC CONFESSION, CHAPTER 1; Of the Holy Scripture Being the True Word of God

THE PREACHING OF THE WORD OF GOD IS THE WORD OF GOD. Wherefore when this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is proclaimed, and received by the faithful;

INWARD ILLUMINATION DOES NOT ELIMINATE EXTERNAL PREACHING. For he
that illuminates inwardly by giving men the Holy Spirit, the same one, by way of commandment, said unto his disciples, “Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15). And so in Philippi, Paul preached the Word outwardly to Lydia, a seller of purple goods; but the Lord inwardly opened the woman’s heart (Acts 16:14). And the same Paul, after a beautiful development of his thought, in Rom. 10:17 at length comes to the conclusion, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing from the Word of God by the preaching of Christ.”

**Sacraments**

Westminster, 6.149, 6.150

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH, CHAPTER XXIX/XXVII; Of the Sacraments

1. Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ and his benefits, and to confirm our interest in him: as also to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the church, and the rest of the world; and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to his Word.

2. There is in every sacrament a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified; whence it comes to pass that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other.

Westminster, 6.154

CHAPTER XXX/CHAPTER XXVIII, Of Baptism

1. Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church, but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life: which sacrament is, by Christ’s own appointment, to be continued in his church until the end of the world.

C67, 9.52

CONFESSION OF 1967, Part II, Reconciliation in Society, Section B. The Equipment of the Church

4. THE LORD’S SUPPER

The Lord’s Supper is a celebration of the reconciliation of men with God and with one another, in which they joyfully eat and drink together at the table of their Savior. Jesus Christ gave his church this remembrance of his dying for sinful men so that by participation in it they have communion with him and with all who shall be gathered to him. Partaking in him as they eat the bread and drink the wine in accordance with Christ’s appointment, they receive from the risen and living Lord the benefits of his death and resurrection. They rejoice in the foretaste of the kingdom which he will bring to consummation at his promised coming, and go out from the Lord’s Table with courage and hope for the service to which he has called them.

**Discipline**

Westminster, 6.171

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION, CHAPTER XXXII/CHAPTER XXX, Of Church Censures

3. Church censures are necessary for the reclaiming and gaining of offending brethren; for deterring of others from like offenses; for purging out of that leaven which might infect the whole lump; for vindicating the honor of Christ, and the holy profession of the gospel; and for preventing the wrath of
God, which might justly fall upon the Church, if they should suffer his covenant, and the seals thereof, to be profaned by notorious and obstinate offenders.

**Another Perspective:**

If no society, indeed, no house which has even a small family can be kept in proper condition without discipline, it is much more necessary in the church, whose condition should be as ordered as possible. According, as the saving doctrine of Christ is the soul of the church, so does discipline serve as it sinews, through which the members of the body hold together, each in its own place. (John Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, XII, 2)

**Essential Tenet**

*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. 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.

1. We don’t covenant together in our strength; God provides spiritual power and resources for his Church.

2. The spiritual resources and power of God come to his covenant community by means of preaching, the sacraments, and mutual discipline.

3. The Spirit brings spiritual light through the preaching and hearing of his Word.

4. In the Lord’s Supper, the Spirit connects, confirms, and nourishes us as members of Jesus’ community.

5. The Spirit connects and confirms us as members of the covenant community in Baptism.

6. Baptism can be received by infants or adults, as the Spirit works in people of all ages.

7. The Church practices discipline—as an expression of the grace of Christ—to direct, correct, and support believers in the covenant community.
| 1:20–1:50 | GROUP DISCUSSION  
Emphasize how this belief enlivens relationship with God and motivates responsive action.  

Discussion Questions |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The Church is about a relationship with God and God’s people. “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” (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:19-25). What do relationships, even at their best and worst, show us about the character of God and the call of the Christian life?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. It is not uncommon to hear people today say that they can have a relationship with God without the Church. What are some of the things that people are missing when they say this (John 13:34, 35; Phil. 2:1-4)?</td>
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<td>3. Jesus prayed that his followers would be one (John 17:1-25). How is it possible to believe that his prayer was answered even though there are many different denominations?</td>
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<td>4. What obligations does Jesus place upon us to relate to those who are in different branches of the Church (Ephesians 4:1-16)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. “In Christ the dividing wall of hostility created by nationality, ethnicity, gender, race, and language differences is brought down” (Ephesians 2:11-22). Describe your experiences or impressions of congregations that are multicultural and multi-racial.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. “The Spirit’s illuminating work is necessary both for the one who preaches and for those who listen” (Colossians 1:3-8; Ephesians 1:15-20). What is it like to sense the Spirit’s work in sermons, classes, small groups, and personal study?</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. How does this knowledge—that the Spirit must work in the teacher/preacher as well as the listener/student—affect the way we approach learning about the triune God?</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. We affirm the value of baptizing children as well as adults. How does our belief in God’s electing choice, in which we are “cleansed by grace and sealed by the Spirit,” provide a foundation for baptizing children (Acts 16:29-34)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. How does our belief in God’s requirement that it is necessary to believe and obey provide a foundation for baptizing adults (Matthew 28:16-20)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. In the Lord’s Supper His life nourishes, strengthens, and transforms us (I Corinthians 11:21-32; Luke 22:17-20). Describe what it is like to be spiritually hungry and to be spiritually nourished.</td>
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<td>11. How are we affected in mind, attitude, and conduct when we are spiritually impoverished and fail to partake of the nourishment of the body and blood of Christ?</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Being the community of the Church requires not only common beliefs and common practices, it also requires discipline (I Corinthians 5:1-8; I Timothy 1:3-7). In what ways should we exercise discipline?</td>
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<td>13. What are the costs, challenges, and benefits of mutual accountability?</td>
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### 1:50–1:57
**SUMMARIZE “What We Have Learned Tonight”**

_Check in with original questions on board._

**Concluding Remarks**

The word “church” brings up a variety of images, thoughts and feelings. Perhaps you think of the church as a *place* where you go to worship on Sunday: maybe it’s a white colonial building with columns, or a stone gothic edifice, or a little ramshackle wooden building out in the country. There is a church in the Midwest that was built in the 60s with jalousie windows and linoleum tile, currently being updated. Members of that church are quite uncomfortable with the large and growing church several miles away—built in what was once a Home Depot and renovated to accommodate thousands—that has no cross and no organ.

Maybe you think of the church as a *group of people* representing a particular demographic. When you look around you on Sunday mornings you may see pews filled with grey-haired people dressed in Sunday best nice clothes. Perhaps under these circumstances, are you tempted to compare yourselves, favorably or unfavorably, with those newer churches with fewer grey-haired members, where dress is casual, and the music is very loud?

Maybe you think of the church as an *emotional support system*. Maybe you have warm feelings that bring back memories of Sunday School when you were a child. Maybe you have bitter feelings thinking about the preacher who ran off with somebody on staff, or shame for someone in your family who was humiliated.

Whatever you see or think about when you hear the word “church,” it most likely isn’t big or rich enough to accommodate God’s picture and purposes for the Church. If you are to take your place in God’s work of transforming the world, then perhaps this lesson has stretched your imagination for what the Church is called to be.

### 1:57–2:00
**CLOSING PRAYER**
**Faithful Stewardship of All of Life**

**LESSON 8**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>:00–:05</td>
<td>GREETING, OPENING PRAYER</td>
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<tr>
<td>:05–:10</td>
<td>STATE THE TOPIC AND GOALS FOR THE LESSON</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. To grapple with the claim that Jesus Christ is Lord over all areas of life</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. To explore the practical implications of the Lordship of Jesus Christ in his Church</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. To connect the Lordship of Jesus Christ in action through his Church to the world</td>
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<tr>
<td>:10–:20</td>
<td>WARM-UP DISCUSSION (choose one or two questions)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Have you ever served as an elder or deacon? What did you enjoy? What would you like to have done differently?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Have you ever participated in a mission project outside of your community? What did you do? How did it benefit others? How did it affect you?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Have you ever shared the gospel with anyone and invited him/her to surrender to Christ’s Lordship? Describe your experience.</td>
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<tr>
<td>:20–:25</td>
<td><em>Ask the group:</em> “What questions are you going to want to have answered before we are finished tonight?”</td>
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</table>

*List on whiteboard, but don’t answer them now.* These might be words to be defined, meaning to be explained, or application to be made. Make mental note where these questions will be answered in your instruction below, or handle questions now or with a referral . . .

**Introductory Comments**

- Our new member class not only facilitates people joining a religious institution but joining a spiritual and eternal community of people united under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.
- Ordained officers of the Church often come into their service expecting
institutional management to be their primary task. But immersion in the Scriptures soon leads them into a new way of thinking about their call.

- The special privileges and responsibilities of Christian ministry and mission as understood by Presbyterians are covered in the Essential Tenet Faithful Stewardship of All of Life.

### READ ESSENTIAL TENET III-D

### PRESENTATION OF EACH SUB-TOPIC

*Think in terms of OBSERVE, INTERPRET, REFLECT, APPLY.*

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<th>MINISTRY TO THE WORLD</th>
<th>MINISTRY FROM THE HEART AND MIND</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mark 1:9-11; Matthew 28:16-20</td>
<td>Matthew 28:16-20</td>
<td>Mark 12:30</td>
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<td>Acts 6:2-4; I Timothy 3:1, 8</td>
<td>Philippians 1:29</td>
<td>Romans 8:5-8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second Helvetic, 5.146</td>
<td>Philippians 2:5-11</td>
<td>I Corinthians 1:20</td>
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<td>Shorter Catechism, 7.023–.026</td>
<td>Barmen, 8.14</td>
<td>Romans 12:1-2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Calvin, Institutes, II, XV, 1 and IV, III, 1</td>
<td>Michael Green, <em>Evangelism Now and Then</em></td>
<td>Westminster, 6.190</td>
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<td>Brief Statement of Faith, 10.4 (58-64)</td>
<td>David Livingston</td>
<td>Calvin, Institutes, I, V, 9</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mother Teresa</td>
<td>Jonathan Edwards, <em>The Religious Affections</em></td>
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<td>Orthodox Bishop of Jerusalem</td>
<td>Perry Miller, <em>The New England Mind in the Seventeenth Century</em></td>
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<td>Harry Blamires, <em>Recovering the Christian Mind</em></td>
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### MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH

I. Ministry in the Church

Jesus continues to lead and direct his church even as he is seated at the Father’s right hand in heaven.

**Scriptures:**

#### The Lordship of Jesus Christ

- **Mark 1:9-11**
  - Mark 1:9-11, The baptism of Jesus is a kingly coronation in which Jesus, as God’s Son, begins His reign as the Steward/Lord/King of all that God created

- **Matthew 28:16-20**
  - Matthew 28:16-20, Having conquered death, Jesus reaffirms that all authority in heaven and earth is given to him
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verses</th>
<th>Text</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jesus: Prophet, Priest, King</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>John 17:1-5</td>
<td>“John 17:1-5, Jesus prays in his tri-fold office: as priest to God for us, as king to whom has been granted authority to give life, and as prophet who speaks God’s Word.”</td>
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<td>Mark 2:1-12</td>
<td>“Mark 2:1-12, Functioning as prophet, priest, and king, Jesus declares forgiveness of sins and healing to a paralytic.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acts 6:2-4</td>
<td>“Acts 6:2-4, The Apostles stay focused on teaching and create the office of deacon to provide a ministry of compassion.”</td>
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<td>I Timothy 3:1 &amp; 8</td>
<td>“I Timothy 3:1 &amp; 8, Paul guides Timothy, pastor of the Ephesian church, on selecting ruling elders and deacons.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts 2:17-18</td>
<td>“Acts 2:17-18, The Spirit and his ministry of speaking God’s Word (prophecy) are given to males and females in the Church.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>SECOND HELVETIC CONFESSION, CHAPTER XVIII; Of the Ministers of the Church, Their Institution and Duties</td>
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<tr>
<td>CHRIST THE TEACHER. After these the heavenly Father even sent his only-begotten Son, the most perfect teacher of the world; in whom is hidden the wisdom of God, and which has come to us through the most holy, simple, and most perfect doctrine of all. For he chose disciples for himself whom he made apostles. These went out into the whole world, and everywhere gathered together churches by the preaching of the Gospel, and then throughout all the churches in the world they appointed pastors or teachers according to Christ’s command; through their successors he has taught and governed the Church unto this day.”</td>
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<td>SHORTER CATECHISM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q23. What offices doth Christ execute as our Redeemer?</td>
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<tr>
<td>A. Christ, as our Redeemer, executeth the offices of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king, both in his estate of humiliation and exaltation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q24. How doth Christ execute the office of a prophet?</td>
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<tr>
<td>A. Christ executeth the office of a prophet in revealing to us, by his Word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q25. How doth Christ execute the office of a priest?</td>
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<tr>
<td>A. Christ executeth the office of a priest in his once offering up of himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God, and in making continual intercession for us.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q26. How doth Christ execute the office of a king</td>
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<tr>
<td>A. Christ executeth the office of a king in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies.”</td>
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</table>
THE CONFESSION OF 1967, PART II, THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION,
Section A. The Mission of the Church, 2. Forms and Order

In recognition of special gifts of the Spirit and for the ordering of its life as a community, the church calls, trains, and authorizes certain members for leadership and oversight. The persons qualified for these duties in accordance with the polity of the church are set apart by ordination or other appropriate act and thus made responsible for their special ministries.

The church thus orders its life as an institution with a constitution, government, officers, finances, and administrative rules. These are instruments of mission, not ends in themselves. Different orders have served the gospel, and none can claim exclusive validity . . .

Other Perspectives:

…The office enjoined upon Christ by the Father consists in three parts. For he was given to be prophet, king and priest. (John Calvin, Institutes, II. XV, 1)

…Because he does not dwell among us in visible presence [Matt. 26:11] we have said that he used the ministry . . . to declare openly his will to us . . . just as a workman uses a tool to do his work. (John Calvin, Institutes, IV. III.1)

We trust in God the Holy Spirit, . . . The same Spirit who . . . calls women and men to all ministries of the Church. (Brief Statement of Faith, 10.4 [58-64])

Essential Tenet

The ministries of the church reflect the three-fold office of Christ as prophet, priest and king—reflected in the church’s ordered ministries of teaching elders, deacons, and ruling elders. We affirm that men and women alike are called to all the ministries of the Church, and that every member is called to share in all of Christ’s offices within the world beyond the church.”

Teaching Points

1. Jesus is the source, model and standard for all ministry.
2. Jesus’ conducted his ministry as a prophet, a priest, and a king.
3. The three-fold ministry of Jesus is expressed in the Church through the offices of teaching elders, deacons, and ruling elders.
4. Jesus calls men and women to all the ministries of his Church and in the world.

MINISTRY IN THE WORLD

II. Ministry to the World

The Church is a lighthouse from which the light of the gospel shines. It is a fountainhead from which flows the living water of the Spirit. Christians are salt of the earth, seasoning the world.

Scriptures:

Matthew 28:16-20 1. Matthew 28:16-20, Jesus sends his disciples to proclaim the good news of his authority to all the nations
Acts 1:8 2. Acts 1:8, Jesus’ commissions his Church to witness to his Kingdom
Acts 2:1-4 3. Acts 2:1-4, Jesus sends his Spirit to enable the Church to fulfill his commission
4. **Philippians 1:29**
   Christians share in Christ’s suffering as they serve in the battle to witness to his Kingdom

5. **I Timothy 2:13**
   Christians are to pray for others, especially for those in authority

6. **Philippians 2:5-11**
   Jesus will be exalted before all creation by God the Father for his humble submission

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**Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms:**

**THEOHOGICAL DECLARATION OF BARMEN**

2. . . As Jesus Christ is God’s assurance of the forgiveness of all our sins, so in the same way and with the same seriousness is he also God’s mighty claim upon our whole life. Through him befalls us a joyful deliverance from the godless fetters of this world for a free, grateful service to his creatures.

**CONFESSION OF 1967, PART II, THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION, Section A. The Mission of the Church, 1. Direction**

The life, death, resurrection, and promised coming of Jesus Christ has set the pattern for the church’s mission. His life as man involves the church in the common life of men. His service to men commits the church to work for every form of human well-being. His suffering makes the church sensitive to all the sufferings of mankind so that it sees the face of Christ in the faces of men in every kind of need. His crucifixion discloses to the church God’s judgment on man’s inhumanity to man and the awful consequences of its own complicity in injustice. In the power of the risen Christ and the hope of his coming, the church sees the promise of God’s renewal of man’s life in society and of God’s victory over all wrong.

**Other Perspectives:**

There is no hint among ancient records that the early church saw evangelism as the task of the leadership alone. All were called to pass on the good news. It was too good to leave to the professionals. (Michael Green, *Evangelism Now and Then*, IVP, 1979, p. 14)

People talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa... It is emphatically no sacrifice. Say rather it is a privilege. Anxiety, sickness, suffering or danger, now and then, with the foregoing of the common conveniences and charities of this life, may make us pause, and cause the spirit to waver, and the soul to sink, but let this only be for a moment. All these are nothing when compared with the glory which shall hereafter be revealed in and for us. I never made a sacrifice. (David Livingston quoted in the *Personal Life of David Livingston*...NY, Harper & Bros., 1895, pp. 243-244)

“Let us touch the dying, the poor, the lonely and the unwanted according to the graces we have received and let us not be ashamed or slow to do the humble work.” (Mother Teresa)

The Apostle Paul on a number of occasions states that the Church will share in the sufferings of Christ. However that suffering is not equitably distributed to the churches around the world. So, the churches that have not been called to suffer must then find the churches that have been called to suffer and stand with them in their pain. (The Orthodox Bishop of Jerusalem)
**Essential Tenet**

Every Christian is called to a prophetic life, proclaiming the good news to the world and enacting that good news. Every Christian is called to extend the lordship of Christ to every corner of the world. And every Christian is called to participate in Christ’s priestly, mediatorial work, sharing in the suffering of the world in ways that extend God’s blessing and offering intercession to God on behalf of the world. We are equipped to share in these offices by the Holy Spirit, who conforms us to the pattern of Christ’s life.

**Teaching Points**

1. Every Christian, sharing in Christ’s prophetic ministry, is to proclaim, embody and demonstrate the Good News.
2. Every Christian, sharing in Christ’s kingly ministry, is to carry Christ's Lordship into every area of life.
3. Every Christian, sharing in Christ’s priestly ministry, is to pray for world and share in its suffering.
4. Every Christian is equipped and empowered by the Holy Spirit who works Christ’s ministry in us and through us.

**MINISTRY FROM THE HEART AND MIND**

In the age of rationalism and psychology, it surprising to some people to discover that the life of the mind and the heart are part of the warp-and-woof of Christianity in general and Presbyterians in particular.

**Scriptures:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bible Reference</th>
<th>Scripture Text</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mark 12:30</td>
<td>Love God with heart, soul, mind and strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 14:26-27</td>
<td>Jesus the Lord requires that all our relationships as well as all our desires must take second place to him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romans 8:5-8</td>
<td>Fallen human nature is hostile to God's will and God's Spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colossians 2:6-8</td>
<td>Human philosophy is insufficient to know God or understand God's world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Corinthians 1:20</td>
<td>God ultimately reveals himself, not through human wisdom, but through Christ's death on the cross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romans 12:1-2</td>
<td>Christians are to have transformed and renewed minds under the Lordship of Christ</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms:**

**SHORTER CATECHISM**

Q82. Is any man able perfectly to keep the commandments of God?

A. No mere man, since the Fall, is able, in this life, perfectly to keep the commandments of God, but doth daily break them, in thought, word, and deed.

**WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH, CHAPTER XXXV; OF THE GOSPEL OF THE LOVE OF GOD AND MISSIONS**

4. Since there is no other way of salvation than that revealed in the gospel, and since
in the divinely established and ordinary method of grace faith cometh by hearing the Word of God, Christ hath commissioned his Church to go into all the world and to make disciples of all nations. All believers are, therefore, under obligation to sustain the ordinance of the Christian religion where they are already established, and to contribute by their prayers, gifts, and personal efforts to the extension of the Kingdom of Christ throughout the whole earth.

Other Perspectives:

…We are called to a knowledge of God; not that knowledge which, content with empty speculation, merely flits in the brain, but that which will be sound and fruitful if we duly perceive it, and if it takes root in the heart.” (John Calvin, Institutes, I.V. 9)

That religion which God requires, and will accept, does not consist in weak, dull and lifeless, wishes…. God, in His word, greatly insists upon it, that we be in good earnest, “fervent in spirit”… (Jonathan Edwards, The Religious Affections, Banner of Truth Trust, 1986, p. 26)

A saint must believe in order to know—but after he has believed he must endeavor to know as much as possible. (Perry Miller, The New England Mind in the Seventeenth Century, Beacon Press, 1968, p. 66)

We live in a society in which, by and large, the fact of the Fall has been ignored or forgotten…. Thus diagnoses of the human predicament are devised, and prescriptions for human betterment are proposed which ignore the central cause of all malaise, criminality and disorder.” (Harry Blamires, Recovering the Christian Mind, IVP, Downers, Grove, p. 65)

Essential Tenet

Jesus teaches us that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind. There is no part of human life that is off limits to the sanctifying claims of God. Historically, the Presbyterian tradition has been especially called to explore what it is to love God with all our minds, being committed to the on-going project of Christian education and study at all levels of Christian life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REJECTIONS</th>
<th>AFFIRMATIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We reject that claim that love of any sort is self-justifying.</td>
<td>We affirm that all our affections and desires must be brought under God’s authority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We reject that human souls are unaffected by the fall and are naturally inclined to God.</td>
<td>We affirm that soul and body alive must be cleansed and purified in order to love God properly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We reject the claim that the life of the mind is independent from faith.</td>
<td>We affirm that unless we believe we cannot properly understand either God or the world around us.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teaching Points

1. Love for God is to be the motive for all we think, feel, and do.
2. Human love for love’s sake does not win God’s approval.
3. Any approach to solving the problems of the world or healing diseases of mind or body is bound to fail if it is not rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ.
4. Historically, Presbyterians especially have been committed a thoughtful faith, education and study as an expression of the Lordship of Christ.

1:20–1:50

GROUP DISCUSSION from prepared group questions

Emphasize how this belief enlivens relationship with God and motivates responsive action. Scratch where they itch, as long as interaction is on-point.

1. “The ministries of the church reflect the three-fold office of Christ as prophet, priest, and king—reflected in the church’s ordered ministries of teaching elders, deacons, and ruling elders.” What benefits come into the world because Christ fulfilled his ministry as prophet, priest, and king (Mark 1:9-12; Mark 2:12; Mark 2:23-27)?
2. What are some of the challenges and blessings that have come to the Church of Jesus because he sends the gift of his Spirit to both men and women (Acts 2:17, 18), young and old, Jews and Gentiles (Acts 10:44-48)?
3. “Every Christian is called to a prophetic life, proclaiming the good news to the world and enacting that good news.” How do you see Christians functioning as prophets, priests, and kings in the world today?
4. “We are equipped to share in these offices by the Holy Spirit, who conforms us to the pattern of Christ’s life” (Ephesians 4:7-13; Romans 12:4-8). What do spiritual gifts contribute to the ministry and mission of the Church?
5. How do you think the exercise of mission and ministry would be different if there were no spiritual gifts?
6. Which spiritual gifts do think you have and which would you like to have?
7. The modern world creates a secular/sacred dichotomy in which the business world, the academic world, and many other realms of life are seen as “out of bounds” for the exercise of the Christian Faith. Give several reasons for what’s wrong with this way of thinking.
8. What’s wrong with the belief that love alone justifies a person’s attitudes and actions?
9. What’s wrong with thinking that some part of the world or some part of a human being is immune from the infection of sin?
10. What problems are created if we separate the heart from the mind in the exercise of faith (Romans 12:1-2)?
11. The Reformers in the sixteenth century put pews in churches and made extended instructional sermons the essential element of Christian worship. How have you experienced this thoughtful and educational approach to Christian life as a Presbyterian?
| 1:50–1:57 | **CHECK IN with original questions on board.**  
SUMMARIZE “What We Have Learned Tonight”  
**Concluding Remarks**  
Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote *The Cost of Discipleship* to Lutheran Christians during the Nazi regime in Germany. His book was a call to follow Jesus as Lord no matter the demands of the state or society. “As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death—we give our lives over to death. Thus it begins; the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise God-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” (p. 89).  
Bonhoeffer’s challenge rings with authenticity as he paid with his life in his allegiance to Christ. May we, the Church in our day and time, surrender completely, heart and mind, to the call of Jesus Christ and share in all his ministries. |
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:57–2:00</td>
<td><strong>CLOSING PRAYER</strong></td>
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</table>
## TIME | ACTIVITY
--- | ---
00:00–05:00 | GREETING, OPENING PRAYER

### STATE THE TOPIC AND GOALS FOR THE LESSON

1. To serve God, not out of a drive to earn one's salvation, but rather out of gratitude and in freedom through a transformed life.
2. To discover in the Scriptures God's guidance for growth in holiness and faith as a way of life.
3. To deepen personal dependence upon Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit for godly thoughts and actions.
4. To embrace practical and specific ways to obey God.
5. To experiment with practical and specific ways to worship and pray.

### WARM-UP DISCUSSION (choose one or two questions)

1. What comes to mind when you hear the word “holy”?
2. What would you say to someone who asserts, “The Church has no right to tell me how I ought to live my life”?
3. In what areas do you see conflicts between biblical standards of conduct and the standards of conduct evident in our culture?
4. When you find a conflict between scriptural standards of conduct and your own desires, how do you handle it?

### Historical Note

What we believe shapes our behavior.

The first ecumenical creeds (Nicene and Apostles') do not address moral conduct. However, concern for godly conduct was part of the early catechumen process, as quality of life was carefully inspected before inquirers were permitted to join the Church. The code of conduct became more stringent in the first reforms of the Church and the rise of monasticism. These codes eventually resulted in a works-based approach to holiness. The Reformers addressed these problems in their confessional documents, affirming faith as the source of holy conduct, not the other way around.
### Prior to the Reformation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sanctification</th>
<th>→</th>
<th>Justification</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(The pursuit of holiness)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(May or may not someday achieve God’s acceptance in eternity)</td>
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### After the Reformation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Justification</th>
<th>→</th>
<th>Sanctification</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(God’s acceptance by grace/faith in this world)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(The pursuit of holiness)</td>
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</table>

#### :20:25

*Ask the group,* “What questions are you going to want to have answered before we are finished tonight?”

*List on whiteboard.* These might be words to be defined, meaning to be explained, or application to be made. Make note where these questions will be answered in your sub-topic coverage below . . . or punt!

#### :25–30

**READ ESSENTIAL TENET III-E**

#### :30–1:20

**PRESENTATION OF EACH SUB-TOPIC**

*Think in terms of OBSERVE, INTERPRET, REFLECT, APPLY.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GROWTH IN PRAYER AND WORSHIP</th>
<th>GROWTH IN GODLY THOUGHT AND ACTION</th>
<th>GROWTH IN FOLLOWING JESUS CHRIST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Romans 8:9-11</td>
<td>Matthew 5:11-48</td>
<td>Hebrews 12:1-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew 6:7-13</td>
<td>Colossians 3:5-4:1</td>
<td>I Peter 1:13-2:3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exodus 20:1-2</td>
<td>Exodus 20:12-17</td>
<td>I John 1:5-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exodus 20:3-11</td>
<td>Heidelberg, 4.086</td>
<td>Hebrews 8:8-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heidelberg, 4.086</td>
<td>Murray, <em>Principles of Conduct</em></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Heidelberg, 4.093, 4.094, 4.096, 4.099, 4.103</td>
<td>The Seven Deadly Sins</td>
<td>Larger Catechism, 7.265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C67, 9.50</td>
<td></td>
<td>C67, 9.22–9.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster, <em>Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lewis, <em>Mere Christianity</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peterson, <em>The Contemplative Pastor</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wright, <em>After You Believe</em></td>
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</table>

#### I. Growth in Prayer and Worship

Prior to the Reformation, moral effort and good works were considered necessary to be worthy of God’s acceptance.

The Reformation was unleashed when Martin Luther proclaimed that God awarded
salvation by faith, not because of good works. A holy life was the fruit of God’s saving grace, not the source of it.

**Scriptures:**

- Romans 8:9-11, The Holy Spirit enables holy life
- Matthew 6:7-13, Jesus provides his comprehensive model prayer for regular public and private use
- Exodus 20:1-2, Ten Commandments are given after redemption, not in order to achieve it
- Exodus 20:3-11, The Ten Commandments make worship our first priority

**Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms:**

- **Heidelberg, 4.086**
  - Q86. Since we are redeemed from our sin and its wretched consequences by grace through Christ without any merit of our own, why must we do good works?
  - A. Because just as Christ has redeemed us with his blood he also renews us through his Holy Spirit according to his own image, so that with our whole life we may show ourselves grateful to God for his goodness and that he may be glorified through us; and further, so that we ourselves may be assured of our faith by its fruits and by our reverent behavior may win our neighbors to Christ.

- **Westminster, 6.114, 6.116, 6.117**
  - 3. Prayer with thanksgiving, being one special part of religious worship, is by God required of all men; and that it may be accepted, it is to be made in the name of the Son, by the help of his Spirit, according to his will, with understanding, reverence, humility, fervency, faith, love, and perseverance; and, if vocal, in a known tongue.
  - 5. The reading of the Scriptures with godly fear; the sound preaching, and conscionable hearing of the Word, in obedience unto God with understanding, faith, and reverence; singing of psalms with grace in the heart; as, also, the due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ; are all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God: besides religious oaths, and vows, solemn fastings, and thanksgivings upon special occasion; which are, in their several times and seasons, to be used in an holy and religious manner.
  - 6. Neither prayer, nor any other part of religious worship, is now, under the gospel, either tied unto, or made more acceptable by, any place in which it is performed, or towards which it is directed: but God is to be worshipped everywhere in spirit and in truth; as in private families daily, and in secret each one by himself, so more solemnly in the public assemblies, which are not carelessly or willfully to be neglected or forsaken....
owe to our neighbor.

Q94. What does the Lord require in the first commandment?
A. That I must avoid and flee all idolatry, sorcery, enchantments, invocation of saints or other creatures because of the risk of losing my salvation. Indeed, I ought properly to acknowledge the only true God, trust in him alone, in humility and patience expect all good from him only, and love, fear and honor him with my whole heart. In short, I should rather turn my back on all creatures than do the least thing against his will.

Q96. What does God require in the second commandment?
A. That we should not represent him or worship him in any other manner than he has commanded in his word.

Q99. What is required in the third commandment?
A. That we must not profane or abuse the name of God by cursing, by perjury, or by unnecessary oaths. Nor are we to participate in such horrible sins by keeping quiet and thus giving silent consent. In a word, we must not use the holy name of God except with fear and reverence so that he may be rightly confessed and addressed by us, and be glorified in all our words and works.

Q103. What does God require in the fourth commandment?
A. First, that the ministry of the gospel and Christian education be maintained, and that I diligently attend church, especially on the Lord’s day, to hear the Word of God, to participate in the holy Sacraments, to call publicly upon the Lord, and to give Christian service to those in need. Second, that I cease from my evil works all the days of my life, allow the Lord to work in me through his Spirit, and thus begin in this life the eternal Sabbath.

CONFESSION OF 1967, PART II; Section B, 2. Praise and Prayer

The church responds to the message of reconciliation in praise and prayer. In that response, it commits itself afresh to its mission, experiences a deepening of faith and obedience, and bears open testimony to the gospel. Adoration of God is acknowledgement of the Creator by the creation. Confession of sin is admission of all men’s guilt before God and of their need for his forgiveness. Thanksgiving is rejoicing in God’s goodness to all men and in giving for the needs of others. Petitions and intercessions are addressed to God for the continuation of his goodness, the healing of men’s ills, and their deliverance from every form of oppression. The arts, especially music and architecture, contribute to the praise and prayer of a Christian congregation when they help men to look beyond themselves to God and to the world which is the object of his love.

Other Perspectives:

Real prayer comes not from gritting our teeth but from falling in love. (Richard Foster, Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home, Harper San Francisco, 1992, p. 3)

We do not have to be bright, or pure or filled with faith, or anything. That is what grace means, and not only are we saved by grace, we live by it as well. And we pray by it. (Richard Foster, Prayer, p. 8)

Peterson, The Contemplative Pastor

Prayer has to be a response to what God has said. The worshipping congregation—hearing the Word read and preached, and celebrating it in the sacraments—is the place where I learn how to pray and where I practice prayer. It is a center from
which I pray. From it I go to my closet or to the mountains and continue to pray. 

Essential Tenet

Progress in holiness is an expected response of gratitude to the grace of God, which is initiated, sustained, and fulfilled by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. The first response of gratitude is prayer, and the daily discipline of prayer – both individually and together – should mark the Christian life. The life of prayer includes praise to God for His nature and works, sincere confession of our sin, and intercession for the needs of those we know and for the needs of the world. As we practice the discipline of regular self-examination and confession, we are especially guided by the Ten Commandments. We therefore hold one another accountable to:

1. worship God alone, living all of life to His glory, renouncing all idolatry and all inordinate loves that might lead us to trust in any other help;
2. worship God in humility, being reticent in either describing or picturing God, recognizing that right worship is best supported not by our own innovative practices but through the living preaching of the Word and the faithful administration of the Sacraments;
3. eliminate from both speech and thought any blasphemy, irreverence, or impurity;
4. observe the Sabbath as a day of worship and rest, being faithful in gathering with the people of God . . . .

Teaching Points

1. The Holy Spirit sanctifies us.
2. Godliness springs from gratitude for what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.
3. Prayer is private and social, spontaneous and disciplined, and takes a variety of forms and expressions.
4. We are to worship God exclusively, humbly, reverently, and regularly.

II. Growth in Godly Thought and Action

The religion of the Bible is concerned with morality and character, but it is not primarily a moral code nor a rule-based religion.

Scriptures:

Matthew 5:11-48
1. Matthew 5:11-48, Jesus’ declaration of laws of the Kingdom of Heaven are addressed to the inward responses of the heart

Colossians 3:5-4:1
2. Colossians 3:5-4:1, Paul provides instructions on how Christians are to behave towards one another

Exodus 20:12-17
3. Exodus 20:12-17, The second table of the Law addresses godly social conduct
Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms:

HEIDELBERG CATECHISM, PART III; Thankfulness

Q104. What does God require in the fifth commandment?
A. That I show honor, love, and faithfulness to my father and mother and to all who are set in authority over me; that I submit myself with respectful obedience to all their careful instruction and discipline; and that I also bear patiently their failures, since it is God’s will to govern us by their hand.

Q105. What does God require in the sixth commandment?
A. That I am not to abuse, hate, injure, or kill my neighbor, either with, or by word or gesture, much less by deed, whether by myself or through another, but to lay aside all desire for revenge; and that I do not harm myself or willfully expose myself to danger. This is why the authorities are armed with the means to prevent murder.

Q106. But does this commandment speak only of killing?
A. In forbidding murder God means to teach us that he abhors the root of murder, which is envy, hatred, anger, and desire for revenge, and that he regards all these as hidden murder.

Q107. Is it enough, then, if we do not kill our neighbor in any of these ways?
A. No; for when God condemns envy, hatred, and anger, he requires us to love our neighbor as ourselves, to show patience, peace, gentleness, mercy, and friendliness toward him, to prevent injury to him as much as we can, also to do good to our enemies.

Q108. What does the seventh commandment teach us?
A. That all unchastity is condemned by God, and that we should therefore detest it from the heart, and live chaste and disciplined lives, whether in holy wedlock or in single life.

Q109. Does God forbid nothing more than adultery and such gross sins in this commandment?
A. Since both our body and soul are a temple of the Holy Spirit, it is his will that we keep both pure and holy. Therefore he forbids all unchaste actions, gestures, words, thoughts, desires and whatever may excite another person to them.

Q110. What does God forbid in the eighth commandment?
A. He forbids not only the theft and robbery which civil authorities punish, but God also labels as theft all wicked tricks and schemes by which we seek to get for ourselves our neighbor’s goods, whether by force or under the pretext of right, such as false weights and measures, deceptive advertising or merchandising, counterfeit money, exorbitant interest, or any other means forbidden by God. He also forbids all greed and misuse and waste of his gifts.

Q111. But what does God require of you in this commandment?
A. That I work for the good of my neighbor wherever I can and may, deal with him as I would have others deal with me, and do my work well so that I may be able to help the poor in their need.
Q112. What is required in the ninth commandment?

A. That I do not bear false witness against anyone, twist anyone’s words, be a gossip or a slanderer, or condemn anyone lightly without a hearing. Rather I am required to avoid, under penalty of God’s wrath, all lying and deceit as the works of the devil himself. In judicial and all other matters I am to love the truth, and to speak and confess it honestly. Indeed, insofar as I am able, I am to defend and promote my neighbor’s good name.

Q113. What is required in the tenth commandment?

A. That there should never enter our heart even the least inclination or thought contrary to any commandment of God, but that we should always hate sin with our whole heart and find satisfaction and joy in all righteousness.

**Other Perspectives:**

John Murray, *Principles of Conduct*

...Biblical ethics has paramount concern with the heart out of which are the issues of life. (John Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, Eerdmans, 1957, p. 13)

...The biblical ethic takes account, not [just] of individuals...but of individuals in their corporate relationships. (John Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, p. 13)

Calvin, *Institutes*, II, VII, 11

The Second Table prescribes how in accordance with the fear of his name we ought to conduct ourselves in human society. In this way our Lord, as the Evangelists relate, summarizes the whole law under two heads; that ‘we should love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul and with all our power’; and ‘that we should love our neighbor as ourselves’ [Luke 10:27; Matthew 22:37, 39]. You see that of the two parts in which the law consists, one he directs to God, the other he applied to men. (Calvin, *Institutes*, II.VII.11)

The seven deadly sins (pride, greed, gluttony, lust, jealousy, anger, and sloth) compiled during the Middle Ages were considered deadly precisely because they were destructive for healthy experience in Christian community.

**The Essential Tenet**

5. give honor toward those set in authority over us and practice mutual submission within the community of the church;

6. eradicate a spirit of anger, resentment, callousness, violence, or bitterness, and instead cultivate a spirit of gentleness, kindness, peace, and love; recognize and honor the image of God in every human being from conception to natural death.

7. maintain chastity in thought and deed, being faithful within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman as established by God at the creation or embracing a celibate life as established by Jesus in the new covenant;

8. practice right stewardship of the goods we have been given, showing charity to those in need and offering generous support of the Church and its ministries;

9. pursue truth, even when such pursuit is costly, and defend truth when it is challenged, recognizing that truth is in order to goodness and that its preservation matters;

10. resist the pull of envy, greed, and acquisition, and instead cultivate a spirit of contentment with the gifts God has given us.
Teaching Points

1. The Ten Commandments hold us accountable and guide us in the right way to think and act towards our neighbors.

2. Conduct that is obedient to God’s commands will manifest in the following virtues:
   - Honoring of authority in every area of life and practice mutual submission within the Church
   - Forgiveness and lifelong kindness and care for every person of whatever age
   - Chaste behavior in both married and single life
   - Stewardship of possessions
   - Truthfulness and contentment

III. Growth in Following Jesus Christ

By faith and in gratitude, through the Holy Spirit, in the face of challenges, we follow Jesus on the path of holiness as we anticipate the new heaven and earth.

Scriptures:

1. Hebrews 12:1-3, Jesus Christ is the perfect standard for all faith and conduct
2. I Peter 1:13–2:3, The blood of Christ frees us from the power of sin and transforms our conduct
3. I John 1:5-10, The light of Jesus Christ and his blood frees us from darkness in order to face our sin
4. Hebrews 8:8-13, The new covenant in Jesus Christ means that the law is written on the heart
5. Colossians 3:1-4, We are empowered to be holy as we set our hearts and minds on the ascended and impending Lord Jesus Christ

Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms:

Heidelberg, 4.114–115

HEIDELBERG CATECHISM, PART III; Thankfulness

Q114. But can those who are converted to God keep these commandments perfectly?

A. No, for even the holiest of them make only a small beginning in obedience in this life. Nevertheless, they begin with serious purpose to conform not only to some, but to all the commandments of God.

Q115. Why, then, does God have the ten commandments preached so strictly since no one can keep them in this life?

A. First, that all our life long we may become increasingly aware of our sinfulness, and therefore more eagerly seek forgiveness of sins and righteousness in Christ. Second, that we may constantly and diligently pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, so that more and more we may be renewed in the image of God, until we attain the goal of full perfection after this life.
Q155. How is the Word made effectual to salvation?

A. The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word, an effectual means of enlightening, convincing, and humbling sinners, of driving them out of themselves, and drawing them unto Christ, of conforming them to his image, and subduing them to his will; of strengthening them against temptations and corruptions; of building them up in grace, and establishing their hearts in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation.

The new life takes shape in a community in which men know that God loves and accepts them in spite of what they are. They therefore accept themselves and love others, knowing that no man has any ground on which to stand, except God’s grace.

The new life does not release a man from conflict with unbelief, pride, lust, fear. He still has to struggle with disheartening difficulties and problems. Nevertheless, as he matures in love and faithfulness in his life with Christ, he lives in freedom and good cheer, bearing witness on good days and evil days, confident that the new life is pleasing to God and helpful to others.

The new life finds its direction in the life of Jesus, his deeds and words, his struggles against temptation, his compassion, his anger, and his willingness to suffer death. The teaching of apostles and prophets guides men in living this life, and the Christian community nurtures and equips them for their ministries.

I think all Christians would agree with me if I said that though Christianity seems at first to be all about morality, all about duties and rules and guilt and virtue, yet it leads you on, out of all that, into something beyond. (C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book III, 12)

The aim of the Christian life in the present time—the goal you are meant to be aiming at once you have come to faith, the goal which is within your reach in the present life, anticipating the final life to come—is the fully formed, fully flourishing Christian character. (N. T. Wright, *After You Believe*, Harper One, 2010, p. 32)

In Jesus Christ we see the perfect expression of God’s holy will for human beings offered to God in our place. His holy life must now become our holy life. In Christ, God’s will is now written on our hearts, and we look forward to the day when we will be so confirmed in holiness that we will no longer be able to sin. As the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, Jesus leads us along the path of life toward that goal, bringing us into ever deeper intimacy with the Triune God, in whose presence is fullness of joy.

**Teaching Points**

1. Jesus Christ’s holy life is the standard for all human life.

2. We must share in Jesus Christ’s holy life if we are to grow in grace.

3. In Jesus Christ the law of God becomes internalized.
4. Even with the law inside us, we still sin.
5. One day, we will be transformed so that we will be free of sin.
6. Jesus Christ leads his people toward the goal of knowing, serving, and enjoying God forever.

GROUP DISCUSSION from prepared group questions

Emphasize how this belief enlivens relationship with God and motivates responsive action. Scratch where they itch, as long as interaction is on-point.

1. “The first response of gratitude is prayer, and the daily discipline of prayer—both individually and together—should mark the Christian life.” What challenges do you face in a life of daily prayer?
2. “The life of prayer includes praise to God for His nature and works, sincere confession of our sin, and intercession for the needs of those we know and for the needs of the world.” Which of these elements of prayer are you most inclined to include and which are you most apt to leave out?
3. The first four commandments comprise the first table of the law, (Exodus 20:1-12) in which we are instructed to worship God as a way of life. The first two commandments require that we worship God exclusively and humbly. What’s wrong with being open to other gods or worshiping God according to your own personal innovations?
4. In what ways is worship—with a dual focus on “preaching the Word and faithful administration of the Sacraments”—faithful to the intention of the second commandment not to make idols that suit our own appetites?
5. How do observing the Sabbath as a day of rest and worship, speaking circumspectly about God, and honoring those in authority equip us to live in ways that are honoring God?
6. Commandments 5-10 comprise the second table of the Law and focus on godly actions and attitudes (Exodus 20:13-17). How does obedience to these commandments create and cultivate healthy relationships?
7. The historic “seven deadly sins” were considered deadly because they were destructive to Christian community. In what specific ways does disobedience to the commandments erode healthy relationships?
8. Gratitude is at the heart of a healthy relationship with God and with other people. In what specific ways does gratitude lead to obedience to the second table of the Law?
9. In the last commandment we are to “resist the pull of envy, greed and acquisition, and instead cultivate a spirit of contentment with the gifts God has given us.” What is the relationship between gratitude and contentment?
10. Jesus Christ is our Lord. We follow Him and aspire to be like Him as “His holy life must now become our holy life.” By the Spirit, “God’s will is now written on our hearts.” In what ways can you see Jesus’ character reflected in your attitudes, actions, and relationships?

CHECK IN with original questions on board.

SUMMARIZE “What We Have Learned Tonight”
Concluding Remarks

Until the twentieth century, morality was central to education. Aristotle, who set the tone for ages to follow wrote, “… the aim of education is to make the pupil like and dislike what he ought.” Today public educators struggle to find the place for moral literacy and value added instruction in the curriculum.

More than ever the Church needs to be the conscience of the nations and the school of character. Jesus wants us to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

1:57–2:00  CLOSING PRAYER
Alternate Format No. 1

Session Modules
(Officer Equipping)

Target Group: The Session

Time frame: Monthly, at the regular meeting of Session

Meeting parameters: Thirty-minutes total, as the first module of the meeting

General idea: Each Session “devotional” revolves around a theme chosen from the twenty-five sub-topics. A brief presentation by the Moderator of Session is followed by discussion around questions from the curriculum and from the participants. Use “Summary of Course Content” on page 115 as a reference.

Assumptions:
• The overview of the Essential Tenets (Lesson 1) was introduced to the Session at their annual retreat or officer orientation (you have one, don’t you?). During the last retreat, new elders were oriented to their role as spiritual leaders and returning elders were given the opportunity to share the practical meaning of their ordination vows.
• Prior to each Session meeting, ruling elders have read the lesson’s Scriptures and the confessional excerpts, found in the Session packet, and reflected upon the Essential Tenet.

Leadership: The Moderator of the Session in his or her role as teaching elder.

Leader, ahead of time: Choose the sub-topic for discussion and choose the Scriptures to share at the meeting. Include the appropriate readings in the Session packet, or make available to every elder a copy of the Participant’s Guide.
Alternate Format No. 2
Theological Reflection Group

Target Group: Theologically trained pastors, certified Christian educators, or seminarians wishing to live into the call for theological reflection in the company of pastors.

Time frame: Monthly, bi-weekly, or weekly for nine meetings (or more—there's enough here to discuss for a year of semi-monthly meetings)

Meeting parameters: One hour total, 45-minutes devoted to discussion of one Essential Tenet sub-topic, in discussion groups of three to eight.

General idea: Each meeting centers on one sub-topic from the Fellowship Theology Project, using discussion starters found in the following pages, organized under each theme.

Assumptions:
• The material is not generally “new,” having been encountered before in seminary
• Prior to the meeting, participants have read and reflected upon the Essential Tenet chosen for discussion. For enrichment, they may also be invited to read the Scriptures and confessional documents related to that FTP excerpt, though this is not required for a good discussion.

Leadership: Rotated among members of the group, with focus less on content presentation and more on facilitating discussion and application to life and ministry.

Leader, ahead of time: Read the theme and pick questions as conversation starters, or augment with your own.
Discussion Questions on the Essential Tenets

God’s Word: The Authority of Our Confession

The clearest declaration of God’s glory is found in His Word, both incarnate and written. The Son eternally proceeds from the Father as His Word, the full expression of the Father’s nature, and since in the incarnation the Word became flesh all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are offered to His disciples. The written Word grants us those treasures, proclaims the saving gospel of Jesus Christ, and graciously teaches all that is necessary for faith and life. We glorify God by recognizing and receiving His authoritative self-revelation, both in the infallible Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and also in the incarnation of God the Son.

1. What are some of “the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” that the Word incarnate teaches us about God that we can discover from no other source (John 1:1-18)?

2. What are some of “the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” that the Word written teaches us about God that we can discover from no other source (Psalm 19:7-14)?

3. What problems are created if we claim to be followers of Jesus and yet discount or discard the Word written?

We affirm that the same Holy Spirit who overshadowed the virgin Mary also inspired the writing and preservation of the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit testifies to the authority of God’s Word and illumines our hearts and minds so that we might receive both the Scriptures and Christ Himself aright.

4. What happens to our faith if the scriptures were not inspired and preserved in transmission from generation to generation (John 14:25-27)?

5. What did Paul expect from the Spirit within the ministry of writing and teaching (Ephesians 1:17-18 and 3:14-22)?

6. In what ways have you experienced the Holy Spirit illuminating the Word in Bible study, preaching, or other ways?

We confess that God alone is Lord of the conscience, but this freedom is for the purpose of allowing us to be subject always and primarily to God’s Word. The Spirit will never prompt our conscience to conclusions that are at odds with the Scriptures that He has inspired. The revelation of the incarnate Word does not minimize, qualify, or set aside the authority of the written Word.

7. How did Paul experience the work of the Spirit prompting, instructing his mind, and guiding his conduct (I Corinthians 4:1-5; 6:12-13)?

8. What would you say to those who believe the Spirit has prompted them to help themselves to money or possessions that don’t belong to them?
9. Jesus, anointed with the Spirit, spoke with God’s authority. What was his attitude toward the Scriptures of the Old Testament (Matthew 5:17-20)?

We are happy to confess ourselves captive to the Word of God, not just individually, but also as members of a community of faith, extending through time and around the globe. In particular, we join with other members of the Presbyterian and Reformed community to affirm the secondary authority of the *Book of Confessions* as a faithful exposition of the Word of God.

10. Creeds are expressions of what Christians believe about God’s Word. What benefits come from remembering that throughout the world, the generations and in various languages, Christians have affirmed both the Nicene and Apostle’s Creeds”

11. What can we learn by exploring creeds of Reformed tradition which were written to expound and apply God’s Word to their own place and time?
The triune nature of God is the first great mystery of the Christian faith. With Christians everywhere, we worship the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - who is both one essence and three persons.

1. There are many different religions with many different views of their god or gods; not one of them has any mind-stretching view of God comparable to the Christian understanding of God as Triune (Genesis 1:1-2, 26-29; Matthew 28:19-20; Revelation 5:13). How might exploring the mystery of the Trinity enrich the way you think about the Christian faith?

2. The doctrine of the Trinity can be proclaimed but not explained; all attempts inevitably come up short. Why might it be both comforting and challenging to know that the nature of God is beyond our ability to explain?

God is infinite, eternal, immutable, impassible, and ineffable. He cannot be divided against Himself, nor is He becoming more than He has been, since there is no potential or becoming in Him. He is the source of all goodness, all truth and all beauty, of all love and all life, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent.

3. God is beyond our understanding. What does God tell Moses about Moses’ desire to know him (Exodus 33:18-23)?

4. While God is beyond our understanding, he is not beyond our reflection. How does thinking about God’s characteristics shape our perspective on life in this world?

5. Where do you see these attributes of God reflected in your life and in the world around you?

The three persons are consubstantial with one another, being both coeternal, and coequal, such that there are not three gods, nor are there three parts of God, but rather three persons within the one Godhead. The Son is eternally begotten from the Father, and the Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son. All three persons are worthy of worship and praise.

6. How is the Trinity present in the throne room of heaven and what can we learn from the response to the Godhead (Revelation 5:6-14)?

7. John Owen, one of the great English seventeenth century theologians, wrote that Christians should develop a relationship with each person of the Trinity. Consider and describe your relationship individually with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

God has no need of anyone or anything beyond Himself. Yet in grace this Triune God is the one Creator of all things. The ongoing act of creation is further manifested in God’s gracious sovereignty and providence, maintaining the existence of the world and all living creatures for the sake of His own glory.

8. How are our lives enriched and enhanced by the understanding that God’s wisdom and power governs all that happens for His own purposes and not for any need within God?
He is the Holy One, the ground of all being, whose glory is so great that for us to see Him is to die. Yet He has made the creation to reflect His glory, and He has made human beings in His own image, with a unique desire to know Him and a capacity for relationship with Him. Since our God is a consuming fire whom we in our sin cannot safely approach, He has approached us by entering into our humanity in Jesus.

9. One of the wonderful paradoxes of the Christian Faith is that while God is both invisible and incomprehensible; Jesus is the visible God who makes God known (Colossians 1:14, Hebrews 1:1-4). What is there about God that you see in Jesus Christ?
Incarnation

This is the second great mystery of the Christian faith, affirmed by all Christians everywhere: that Jesus Christ is both truly God and truly human. As to His divinity, He is the Son, the second person of the Trinity, being of one substance with the Father; as to His humanity, He is like us in every way but sin, of one substance with us, like us in having both a human soul and a human body.

1. In the gospels we can see that Jesus’ disciples struggled to comprehend Jesus as the God-Man, “Who is this? Even the wind and the wave obey him?” (Mark 4:41). Peter refers to one of the events that convinced him (II Peter 1:16-20). What does he say?

2. What actions does Jesus exercise which could only belong to God (Colossians 1:15-17)?

As to His divinity, He is eternally begotten of the Father; as to His humanity, He is born of the virgin Mary, conceived by the Holy Spirit.

3. Mary was the first struggle to comprehend the mysterious privilege being the mother of Jesus, the Son of God (Luke 1:26-28). In response to her questions, what does the angel tell her about the role of the Father and the Spirit in Jesus’ birth?

As to His divinity, His glory fills heaven and earth; as to His humanity, His glory is shown in the form of a suffering servant, most clearly when He is lifted up on the cross in our place.

4. How does the Apostle Paul expound both the divinity and humanity of Jesus (Philippians 2:5-11)?

5. In Philippians 2:5-11, we see that Paul’s understanding of Christ’s divinity and humanity lead him to thrilling insights about the character of Jesus. What are they?

6. What benefits come to us because the second person of the Trinity became human (Colossians 2:9-15, Ephesians 2:14-22)?

We confess the mystery of His two natures, divine and human, in one person. We reject any understanding of the communication of attributes that must result in a blending of the two natures such that Jesus Christ is neither truly God nor truly human. We insist upon sufficient distinction between the two natures to preserve the truth of the incarnation, that Jesus Christ is indeed Immanuel, God-with-us, not one who used to be God, nor one who has merely been sent from God. Rather, in His coming we have seen God’s glory, for Jesus is the exact imprint of God’s very being and in Him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

7. It took Christians about 300 years of reflection to articulate the mystery of Jesus Christ as one person, fully human and fully God. Some had suggested that Jesus was a blending of God and humanity but neither God nor human. Why might this approach have been rejected?

8. Another suggestion was that Jesus used to be God, but gave up his divinity at his birth. Why might people have made such a proposal? Why might this approach have been rejected?

The divinity of the Son is in no way impaired, limited, or changed by His gracious act of assuming a human nature, and that His true humanity is in no way undermined by His
**Incarnation (continued)**

**continued divinity.** This is a mystery that we cannot explain, but we affirm it with joy and confidence. This mystery of the incarnation is ongoing, for the risen Jesus, who was sent from the Father, has now ascended to the Father in His resurrected body and remains truly human. He is bodily present at the right hand of the Father. When we are promised that one day we will see Him face to face, we acknowledge that it is the face of Jesus of Nazareth we will someday see.

9. Another proposal was that Jesus gave up his humanity when he returned to heaven. How might the Apostle Paul have responded to that (Ephesians 1:19-23; Philippians 2:9-11)?

The one who, for us and for our salvation, was born of Mary, died at Calvary, and walked with disciples to Emmaus is the same Jesus Christ who is now ascended and who will one day return visibly in the body to judge the living and the dead.

10. Jesus, as human and divine sits at the right hand of God, ruling both heaven and earth (Colossians 3:1-4) and is coming back to be our judge (II Thessalonians 1:5-10). Why is it good news to know that Jesus is the Judge of you and of all there is?

Jesus promised His disciples that He would not leave them comfortless when He ascended into heaven, but would ask the Father to send them the Holy Spirit as a comforter and advocate. **We are able to confess Jesus Christ as Lord and God only through the work of the Holy Spirit.** He comes to us as He came to the gathered disciples at Pentecost: to kindle our faith, to embolden our witness, and to accompany us in mission.

11. Since Jesus ascended to heaven, he promised His disciples that He would not leave them as orphans (John 14:15-22). On the day of Pentecost he fulfilled his promise (Acts 2:1-4). What is Jesus’ relationship to the Holy Spirit and how is that to our benefit?

12. What are some of the ways that you see Jesus and the Holy Spirit active in your church, your family and you?
God’s Grace in Christ

God declared that the world He created was good and that human beings, made in His own image, were very good. The present disordered state of the world, in which we and all things are subject to misery and to evil, is not God’s doing, but is rather a result of humanity’s free, sinful rebellion against God’s will.

1. What does the serpent suggest and imply about the character of God, Genesis 3:1-7?

2. What does it say about Adam and Eve that they chose to believe Satan and disobey God?

3. Why is it good to know that the present painful state of the world is our fault, not God’s?

God created human beings from the dust of the earth and His own breath, to be His images and representatives, conduits of God’s grace to the creation. Since the fall our natural tendency is to abuse and exploit the creation, preferring evil to goodness. God also created human beings to speak His grace and truth to one another, to be helpers who are fit for one another, so that our social relationships would strengthen our ability to serve and obey Him. Since the fall, our natural tendency is to engage in relationships of tyranny and injustice with one another, in which power is used not to protect and serve but to demean. God further created human beings with the capacity for relationship with Him, with His law written on our hearts so that we had the ability to worship Him in love and obey Him by living holy lives. Since the fall, our natural tendency is to hate God and our neighbor, to worship idols of our own devising rather than the one true God.

4. Give examples of ways you see humans cultivating creation and ways you see humans corrupting and exploiting creation.

5. Give examples in which we are helpful to each other; and ways you see us abusing and hurting each other.

6. In what ways do you see God honored in the world? What are some of the ways you see God dishonored?

As a result of sin, human life is poisoned by everlasting death. No part of human life is untouched by sin. Our desires are no longer trustworthy guides to goodness, and what seems natural to us no longer corresponds to God’s design. We are not merely wounded in our sin; we are dead, unable to save ourselves. Apart from God’s initiative, salvation is not possible for us. Our only hope is God’s grace. We discover in Scripture that this is a great hope, for our God is the One whose mercy is from everlasting to everlasting.

7. What are some of the consequences of believing that present state of world is “normal” and just in need of more progress as opposed to fallen and abnormal, Romans 1:21-24?

8. What is the good news and bad news about this Biblical diagnosis of this world, Ephesians 2:1-10?

This grace does not end when we turn to sin. Although we are each deserving of God’s eternal condemnation, the eternal Son assumed our human nature, joining us in our misery and offering
God’s Grace in Christ (continued)

Himself on the cross in order to free us from slavery to death and sin. Jesus takes our place both in bearing the weight of condemnation against our sin on the cross and in offering to God the perfect obedience that humanity owes to Him but is no longer able to give. The rescue of God comes through Jesus Christ. All humanity participates in the fall into sin. Those who are united through faith with Jesus Christ are fully forgiven from all our sin, so that there is indeed a new creation. We are declared justified, not because of any good that we have done, but only because of God’s grace extended to us in Jesus Christ.

9. What is our role and God’s role in our salvation, Romans 3:21-26?

10. Specifically, what is the role of Jesus Christ in our salvation, II Corinthians 5:14-20?

11. How is that Paul considers the cross and the shed blood of Christ central to our salvation, Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 2:13-15?

In union with Christ through the power of the Spirit we are brought into right relation with the Father, who receives us as His adopted children. Jesus Christ is the only Way to this adoption, the sole path by which sinners become children of God, for He is the only-begotten Son, and it is only in union with Him that a believer is able to know God as Father. Only in Jesus Christ is the truth about the Triune God, fully and perfectly revealed, for only He is the Truth, only He has seen the Father, and only He can make the Father known. Only Jesus Christ is the new Life that is offered, for He is the bread from heaven and the fountain of living water, the one by whom all things were made, in whom all things hold together.

12. Jesus teaches his disciples to pray “Our Father . . .” How does His prayer express both union with Him and adoption by His Father?

13. Buddhists follow the teaching of Buddha, Moslems the teaching of Mohammed, as other religions have their teachers. How is it that Christianity going all the way back to Jesus and his apostles affirm that He alone is the redeemer and savior of the world, John 1:18; 3:12-18; Colossians 1:15-17?

The exclusivity of these claims establishes that God’s love is not impersonal, but a particular and intimate love in which each individual child of God is called by name and known as precious; that God’s love is not only acceptance, but a transforming and effective love in which His image within us is restored so that we are capable of holy living.

14. The rescuing work of Jesus Christ is not “general and generic” but personal and intimate; He calls each by name and leads into a life that is pleasing to his father, John 10: 1-5. What does it mean to you to have personal and intimate relationship with Jesus Christ?

15. Give an example of how God’s transforming life has made a positive difference in the way you live and act towards others.
Election for Salvation and Service

The call of God to the individual Christian is not merely an invitation that each person may accept or reject by his or her own free will. **Having lost true freedom of will in the fall, we are incapable of turning toward God of our own volition. God chooses us for Himself in grace before the foundation of the world, not because of any merit on our part, but only because of His love and mercy.**

1. What does Paul have to say about the choosing love of God, Ephesians 1:3-6?

2. Paul’s statement of God’s electing choice is filled with praise. Why is this wonderful to know and challenging to believe?

3. How do you respond to the idea that your life in Christ is not an after-thought on the part of God but something he did before he created the world?

4. Before we believed in Christ, Christians as all people are, were dead in their transgressions and sins, Ephesians 2:1-4. What do you think it means to be spiritually dead?

5. The life giving call of God also includes regeneration, God giving life to the dead, Ephesians 2:4-8. According to this passage from Paul, what does it mean to be spiritually alive?

Each of us is chosen in Christ, who is eternally appointed to be head of the body of the elect, our brother and our high priest. He is the one who is bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, our divine Helper who is also our Bridegroom, sharing our human nature so that we may see His glory. We who receive Him and believe in His name do so not by our own will or wisdom, but because His glory compels us irresistibly to turn toward Him. By His enticing call on our lives, Jesus enlightens our minds, softens our hearts, and renews our wills, restoring the freedom that we lost in the fall.

6. God’s electing choice is “in Christ” not apart from Christ. How does Paul convey this in the passage from Ephesians 1:3-14?

7. Effectual calling doesn’t mean that we are manipulated or forced, it means we are freed. How does Christ’s statement of mission at the beginning of his ministry express this, Luke 4:18-19?

We are all sinners who fall short of God’s glory, and we all deserve God’s eternal judgment. Apart from the saving work of Jesus Christ, we are incapable of being in God’s presence, incapable of bearing the weight of His glory. We rejoice that Jesus Christ offers us safe conduct into the heart of God’s consuming and purifying fire, shielding us with His perfect humanity and transforming us by His divine power. Having received such grace, we extend grace to others.

8. Our spiritual inabilities not only mean that we can’t save our selves, we can’t even keep, by our own power, a relationship with God; we are spiritually “incapable.” How do you respond knowing the depth of your inabilities and the necessity for God’s power?

9. How do the knowledge of our inability and the knowledge of God’s enabling power shape the way we share in ministry with others?
Election for Salvation and Service (continued)

We are not elect for our own benefit alone. God gathers His covenant community to be an instrument of His saving purpose. Through His regenerating and sanctifying work, the Holy Spirit grants us faith and enables holiness, so that we may be witnesses of God’s gracious presence to those who are lost. We are now in service to God’s plan for the fullness of time: uniting all things in heaven and earth to Himself. To this end, we preach Christ, calling all persons to repent and believe the gospel. We also care for the natural world, claim all areas of culture in the name of Jesus, serve the poor, feed the hungry, visit the prisoner, and defend the helpless. We do this work not with any thought that we are able to bring in the kingdom, but in the confident hope that God’s kingdom is surely coming, a day when suffering and death will pass away and when God will live among His people.

10. What is Jesus’ expectation for the work of the Holy Spirit in the mission and ministry of his church, Acts 1:8; Acts 10:44-48?

11. “The Spirit gathers us in a community that is built up and equipped to be light, salt, and yeast in the world,” Ephesians 4:7-13. What are some of the ways that the Spirit has equipped your church for ministry and mission?

12. “We also care for the natural world, claim all areas of culture in the name of Jesus, serve the poor, feed the hungry, visit the prisoner, and defend the helpless.” What acts of service have you been involved in and how do you think they have demonstrated the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ?
Covenant Life *in the* Church

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.

1. The church is about a relationship with God and his people. What do relationships, at their best and worst, show us about the character of God and the call of the Christian life?

*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.

2. It is not uncommon to hear people today say that they can have a relationship with God without the church. What are some of the thing that people are missing when they say this, John 13: 34, 35; Philippians 2:1-4?

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.

3. How is it possible to believe that Jesus’ prayer for His followers to be one was answered even though there are many different denominations?

4. What obligations does Jesus place upon us to relate to those who are in different branches of the Church, Ephesians 4:1-16?

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.

5. Describe your experiences or impressions of congregations that are multi-cultural and multi-racial?

*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.

6. What is it like to sense Spirit’s work in sermons, classes, small groups, and personal study?

7. How does the knowledge the Spirit must work in the teacher/preacher as well as the listener/student affect the way we approach learning about the triune God?
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.

8. We affirm the value of baptizing children as well as adults. How does our belief in God’s electing choice in which we are “cleansed by grace and sealed by the Spirit” provide a foundation for baptizing children, Acts 16:29-34?

9. How does our belief in God’s requirement that we believe and obey provide a foundation for baptizing adults, Matthew 28:16-20?

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.

10. In the Lord’s Supper His life nourishes, strengthens and transform us. I Corinthians 11:21-32; Luke 22:17-20. Describe what it is like to be spiritually hungry and to be spiritually nourished?

11. How are we affected in mind, attitude and conduct when we are spiritually impoverished and fail to be partake the nourishment of the body and blood of Christ?

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.

12. Being the community of the Church requires not only common beliefs and common practices, it also requires discipline; holding each other accountable, I Corinthians 5:1-8; I Timothy 1:3-7. In what ways should we exercise discipline?

13. What are the costs, challenges and benefits of mutual accountability?
Faithful Stewardship in All of Life

The ministries of the church reflect the three-fold office of Christ as prophet, priest and king - reflected in the church’s ordered ministries of teaching elders, deacons, and ruling elders.

1. What benefits come into the world because Christ fulfilled his ministry as prophet, priest and king, Mark 1:9-12; Mark 2:12; Mark 2:23-27?

We affirm that men and women alike are called to all the ministries of the Church, and that every member is called to share in all of Christ’s offices within the world beyond the church.

2. What are some of the challenges and blessings that have come to the church of Jesus because he sends the gift of His Spirit to both men and woman, Acts 2:17, 18, young and old, Jews and Gentiles, Acts 10:44-48?

Every Christian is called to a prophetic life, proclaiming the good news to the world and enacting that good news every Christian is called to extend the lordship of Christ to every corner of the world. And every Christian is called to participate in Christ’s priestly, mediatorial work, sharing in the suffering of the world in ways that extend God’s blessing and offering intercession to God on behalf of the world.

3. How do you see Christians functioning as prophets, priests and kings in the world today?

We are equipped to share in these offices by the Holy Spirit, who conforms us to the pattern of Christ’s life.

4. What do spiritual gifts contribute to the ministry and mission of the church, Ephesians 4:7-13; Romans 12:4-8?

5. How do you think the exercise of mission and ministry would be different if there were no spiritual gifts?

6. Which spiritual gifts do think you have and which would you like to have?

Jesus teaches us that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind. There is no part of human life that is off limits to the sanctifying claims of God.

7. The modern world creates a secular/sacred dichotomy in which the business world, the academic world and many other realms of life are seen as “out of bounds” for the exercise of the Christian Faith. Give several reasons for what’s wrong with this way of thinking.

We reject the claim that love of any sort is self-justifying; we affirm that all our affections and desires must be brought under God’s authority.

8. What’s wrong with the belief that love alone justifies a person’s attitudes and actions?
We reject the claim that human souls are unaffected by the fall and remain naturally inclined to God; we affirm that soul and body alike must be cleansed and purified in order to love God properly.

9. What’s wrong with thinking that some part of the world or some part of a human being is immune from the infection of sin?

We reject the claim that the life of the mind is independent from faith; we affirm that unless we believe we cannot properly understand either God or the world around us.

10. What problems are created if we separate the heart from the mind in the exercise of faith, Romans 12:1-2?

Historically, the Presbyterian tradition has been especially called to explore what it is to love God with all our minds, being committed to the on-going project of Christian education and study at all levels of Christian life.

11. The Reformers in the sixteenth century put pews in churches and made extended instructional sermons the essential element of Christian worship. How have you experienced this thoughtful and educational approach to Christian life as a Presbyterian?
Progress in holiness is an expected response of gratitude to the grace of God, which is initiated, sustained and fulfilled by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. The first response of gratitude is prayer, and the daily discipline of prayer – both individually and together – should mark the Christian life. The life of prayer includes praise to God for His nature and works, sincere confession of our sin, and intercession for the needs of those we know and for the needs of the world.

1.) What challenges do you face to a life of daily prayer?

2.) Which of these elements of prayer are you most inclined to include and which are you most apt to leave out?

As we practice the discipline of regular self-examination and confession, we are especially guided by the Ten Commandments. We therefore hold one another accountable to:

1. worship God alone, living all of life to His glory, renouncing all idolatry and all inordinate loves that might lead us to trust in any other help;

2. worship God in humility, being reticent in either describing or picturing God, recognizing that right worship is best supported not by our own innovative practices but through the living preaching of the Word and the faithful administration of the sacraments;

3. eliminate from both speech and thought any blasphemy, irreverence, or impurity;

4. observe the Sabbath as a day of worship and rest, being faithful in gathering with the people of God;

5. give honor toward those set in authority over us and practice mutual submission within the community of the church;

3.) The first five commandments comprise the first table of the law, Exodus 20:1-12, in which we are instructed to worship God as a way of life. The first two commandments require that we worship God exclusively and humbly. What's wrong with being open to other gods or worshiping God according to your own personal innovations?

4.) In what ways is worship with a focus on “preaching the Word and faithful administration of the sacraments” faithful to intention of the second commandment not to make idols that suit our own appetites?

5.) How do observing the Sabbath as a day of rest and worship, speaking circumspectly about God and honoring those in authority equip us to live in ways that are honoring God?

6. eradicate a spirit of anger, resentment, callousness, violence, or bitterness, and instead cultivate a spirit of gentleness, kindness, peace, and love; recognize and honor the image of God in every human being from conception to natural death.
Living in Obedience (continued)

7. maintain chastity in thought and deed, being faithful within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman as established by God at the creation or embracing a celibate life as established by Jesus in the new covenant;

8. practice right stewardship of the goods we have been given, showing charity to those in need and offering generous support of the Church and its ministries;

9. pursue truth, even when such pursuit is costly, and defend truth when it is challenged, recognizing that truth is in order to goodness and that its preservation matters;

10. resist the pull of envy, greed and acquisition, and instead cultivate a spirit of contentment with the gifts God has given us.

6.) Commandments 6-10 comprise the second table of the law and focus on godly actions and attitudes, Exodus 20:13-17. How does obedience to these commandments create and cultivate healthy relationships?

7.) The historic lists of seven deadly sins were considered deadly because they were destructive to Christian community. In what specific ways does disobedience to these commands erode healthy relationships?

8.) Gratitude is at the heart of a healthy relationship with God and with other people. In what specific ways does gratitude lead to obedience to the second table of the law?

9.) In the last commandment we are to “resist the pull of envy, greed and acquisition, and instead cultivate a spirit of contentment with the gifts God has given us.” What is the relationship between gratitude and contentment?

In Jesus Christ we see the perfect expression of God's holy will for human beings offered to God in our place. His holy life must now become our holy life. In Christ, God’s will is now written on our hearts, and we look forward to the day when we will be so confirmed in holiness that we will no longer be able to sin. As the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, Jesus leads us along the path of life toward that goal, bringing us into ever deeper intimacy with the Triune God, in whose presence is fullness of joy.

10.) In what ways can you see his character reflected in your attitudes, actions and relationships?
Alternate Format No. 3
Sermon Series (9-week)

Target Group: The worshipping congregation

Time frame: Weekly for nine Sundays

Meeting parameters: 25 minutes within the context of one-hour worship

General idea: Each sermon revolves around one of the great themes covered in DOORWAYS: Study Guide of the Essential Tenets. The pastor’s style and approach to preaching is unique; but for those looking for a suggestion, the following general outline (with thanks to Lawrence O. Richards) is offered as a catalyst for brainstorming:

HOOK—an anecdote that illustrates the difference believing in this tenet would make in one person’s life,

BOOK—presentation of the theme and its declaration in chosen Scripture passage(s)

LOOK—reflection on the significance and meaning of this doctrine in contemporary life

TOOK—application of “truth unto goodness,” practical life-changes expected if believers were to embrace this truth whole-heartedly.

Assumptions:
• The preacher is generally familiar with Reformed doctrine, having studied it in seminary
• The congregation knows nothing about “essential tenets” and probably has an allergy to doctrinal preaching
• No homework has been done by the congregation prior to hearing a sermon. It’s a bonus if you have a sermon discussion group afterwards or small group discussions conducted during the week.
## A Nine-Week Preaching Series

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<th>Week #</th>
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| 1      | Introduction                                    | Stewards of the Faith—Pass It On                | Deuteronomy 4:1-9  
I Corinthians 15:1-8  
John 20:30-31 |
| 2      | God’s Word: The Authority of Our Confession    | Trusting God’s Word—Keep Listening and Reading  | Isaiah 55:8-11  
II Timothy 3:16f  
John 1:1-3 |
| 3      | Trinity                                        | One-in-Three, Three-in-One—Embrace the Mystery  | Deuteronomy 6:4  
Ephesians 1:3-14  
Mark 1:9-12 |
| 4      | Incarnation                                     | Visited by God’s Glory—Stand in Awe             | Isaiah 7:14  
Colossians 1:19-20  
John 1:14 |
| 5      | God’s Grace in Christ                           | Saved from Certain Death—Give Thanks           | Genesis 3:1-15  
Romans 3:21-26  
John 3:16- |
| 6      | Election to Salvation and Service              | Surrendered to God’s Loving Initiative—Just Say ‘Yes!’ | Deuteronomy 7:6-9  
Ephesians 1:3-14  
John 15:15-16 |
| 7      | Covenant Life in the Church                    | Part of God’s Family—Act Like It               | Exodus 19:3-6  
Ephesians 4:1-6  
John 13:34-35 |
| 8      | Faithful Stewardship of All of Life            | Representing God’s Intentions Everywhere—Live into God’s Purposes | Genesis 1:28, 2:15  
I Peter 2:9  
Matthew 28:16-20 |
| 9      | Living in Obedience                            | Faith As a Way of Life—Grow in Christ!         | Jeremiah 31:31-33  
Ephesians 3:14-4:16  
Matthew 7:24-27 |
# Summary of Course Content

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<td>1. Christian doctrine derives from the Bible</td>
<td>“Confessional Standards” of <em>The Fellowship Theology Project</em>, pp. 3-4.</td>
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<td>How does identifying essentials necessarily and rightly provide for a foundation of truth and unity?</td>
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<td>2. Confessional documents articulate a biblical faith</td>
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<td>Why are doctrinal statements necessary in the life of the Church when we have access to the Bible?</td>
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<td>3. The Reformed Tradition Engages in Doctrinal Dialogue</td>
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<td>Which position do you find more attractive: that doctrine is always evolving, and newer is better, or that doctrine was established by the Reformers, and older is better? What is the value of seeing doctrine as a conversation between the past and the present?</td>
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<td>4. We Embrace Nine Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms</td>
<td>Overview of <em>Book of Confessions</em></td>
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<td>What is the value of and the hesitation about articulating essential tenets? What equipping have you had, and what do you need, in order to help others learn the essentials of the Reformed faith?</td>
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<td>1. God's Word, Incarnate and Written</td>
<td>Genesis 1:3ff, Psalm 33:4-6, John 1:1-3, Hebrews 1:1-3, Luke 24:25-27</td>
<td>Scots, 3.19, Second Helvetic, 5.001, Westminster, 6.001, Shorter Catechism, 7.001-.002, Confession of 1967, 9.27</td>
<td>What are some of “the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” that the Word incarnate uniquely teaches us about God (John 1:1-18)? The Word written (Psalm 19:7-14)? What problems are created if we claim to be followers of Jesus and yet discount or discard the Word written?</td>
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<td>What happens to our faith if the Scriptures were not inspired and preserved in transmission from generation to generation (John 14:25-27)?</td>
<td>What did the Apostle Paul expect from the Spirit within the ministry of writing and teaching (Ephesians 1:17-18; 3:14-22)?</td>
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<td>In what ways have you experienced the Holy Spirit illuminating the Word in Bible study, preaching, or other ministries?</td>
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<td>What was Jesus’ attitude toward the Scriptures of the Old Testament (Matthew 5:17-20)?</td>
<td>What benefits are ours remembering that throughout the world, Christians have affirmed both the Nicene and Apostles’ Creeds?</td>
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<td>No other religion offers such a mind-stretching view of God as Trinity. How does the mystery of the Trinity enrich the way you think about the Christian faith?</td>
<td>While God is both invisible and incomprehensible, Jesus is the visible God who makes God known (Colossians 1:14, Hebrews 1:1-4). What is there about God that you see in Jesus Christ?</td>
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<td>Westminster, 6.013</td>
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<td>How is the Trinity present in the throne room of heaven and what can we learn from the response to the Godhead (Revelation 5:6-14)?</td>
<td>What is the comfort and the challenge of knowing the doctrine of the Trinity can be proclaimed but not fully explained?</td>
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| 3 Trinity (cont.) | 3. The Sovereign Creator | Genesis 1:1  
Isaiah 40:21-26  
Psalm 33:6-16  
Exodus 19:21-23  
Exodus 33:17-23  
Isaiah 6:1-5 | Heidelberg, 4.026  
Second Helvetic, 5.029 | How are our lives enriched and enhanced by knowing that God’s wisdom and power govern all that happens, for his own purposes and not out of any sense of need within God? |
|---|---|---|---|
Genesis 2:7; Mark 5:35-42  
Ex 12:50–13:3; Mark 1:21-28  
Psalm 32:5; Mark 2:1-5  
Exodus 20:1-17; Matthew 5:1-10  
Deuteronomy 6:13-16; Matthew 28:16-17 | Nicene Creed  
Scots, 3.06  
Westminster, 6.044  
W Shorter, 7.037 | In Philippians 2:5-11, Paul’s understanding of Christ’s divinity and humanity lead him to thrilling insights about the character of Jesus. What are they? What benefits come to us because the second person of the Trinity became human (Col 2:9-15, Eph 2:14-22)? |
John 1:14  
John 14:8-11  
Colossians 1:19  
Romans 1:1-4  
Hebrews 1:3 | Second Helvetic, 5.066–.067  
Westminster, 6.044  
W Shorter, 7.038–.039  
C67, 9.08 | Our forebears rejected the following ideas about Jesus: that he was a blending of divine and human but neither one fully; that he gave up his divinity at birth; and that he gave up his humanity when he returned to heaven. What insight from Scripture can support their conclusion? (Eph 1:19-23, Phil 2:9-11, Col 3:1-4, II Thess 1:5-10 for starters) |
Hebrews 12:2  
Colossians 3:1-2  
II Timothy 4:1  
John 14:15-18  
I Corinthians 12:3  
Acts 2:1-4  
Romans 8:9-11 | Second Helvetic, 5.074  
Westminster, 6.185 | What is the significance of Jesus’ ascension into heaven? Before he left, what promises did he make (cf John 14:15-22, Acts 1:1-9)  
How were those promises fulfilled?  
What are some of the ways that you see Jesus and the Holy Spirit active in your church, your family, and you? |
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| 1. Creation and Fall | Genesis 1–2  
Genesis 3:1-24 |
| Scots, 3.02–.03  
Heidelberg, 4.006–4.007  
Second Helvetic, 5.036, 5.038  
Westminster, 6.031, 6.036  
W Shorter, 7.013–.017 |
| What are some of the differences between the worldview in Gen 1:26ff and the modern perspective that sees humans merely as highly evolved animals?  
God made humans for his purposes (Gen 1:26f, 2:21ff, 3:8) How do you see God’s purposes reflected in your life and the world around you?  
What was Eve and Adam’s fatal error? |
| 2. Pervasiveness of Sin | Romans 1:21-32  
Romans 3:10-18  
Ephesians 2:1-3 |
| Second Helvetic, 5.037  
Heidelberg, 4.008  
Westminster, 6.032-6.034, 6.036  
W Shorter, 7.018–.019  
C67, 9.129.13 |
| The Scriptures diagnose the world’s problem differently than our present culture does. What is “good” and “normal” according to God, and what has happened to the world to create a “new normal” that is so different? (Cf. Romans 1:21ff, Eph 2:1ff, Rom 3:10ff) |
| 3. God’s Rescue in Jesus Christ | Romans 3:21-29  
Romans 5:12-21  
Ephesians 1:3-14 |
| Nicene Creed  
Apostles’ Creed  
Scots, 3.08  
Heidelberg, 4.029.030 |
| Our rescue from sin by Jesus Christ is described a number of ways: our debts are forgiven, we are justified before the law courts, we are redeemed from the slave market, we are adopted into the family of God, we are born anew and are new creations (Romans 3:21-26; II Corinthians 5:14-20; Ephesians 2:4-10; Galatians 6:14-16). After looking at these passages, describe God’s role and our role in our salvation.  
Which description of salvation is especially meaningful to you at this point in your life? |
Acts 4:8-12  
Colossians 1:15-20 |
| Second Helvetic, 5.077  
Westminster, 6.064  
W Shorter, 7.021  
Barmen, 8.11-12  
C67, 9.11 |
| How is it that Christianity all the way back to Jesus maintains that He alone is the teacher and savior of the world (John 1:18, 3:12-18, 6:35, 14; 6: Colossians 1:15-17; Ephesians 1:5)?  
What difference does it make to you that the rescuing work of Jesus Christ was accomplished for you personally? How do you relate to God as a result? |
| 6 Election for Salvation and Service | 1. Spiritual Paralysis, God's Call | Ephesians 2:1-3  
Mark 4:12  
Acts 28:26-28  
Romans 3:10-20  
Ephesians 1:3-5  
II Timothy 1:9-10  
Ephesians 2:4  
Joel 2:28-29 | Second Helvetic, 5.045, 5.052  
Westminster Larger Catechism, 7.177  
Westminster Declaratory Statement 6.192 | What does Paul have to say about the choosing love of God? Paul's statement in Eph 1 is full of praise. Why is this wonderful to know and challenging to believe?  
Before believing in Christ, what was our spiritual condition, and how did that affect the way we viewed the world and God? |
| 2. God's Choice of Us in Jesus Christ | Matthew 3:13-15  
John 1:14  
Mark 1:17; 2:14  
Ephesians 1:17-18  
Ephesians 1:22  
I Corinthians 2:12 | Scots, 3.08 (a)  
Westminster 6.064 | What relieves our spiritual paralysis?  
God's electing choice is “in Christ,” not apart from him. How does this work? (Cf. Eph 1) |
| 3. The Saving Power of Jesus Christ | Romans 3:21-26  
Hebrews 10:19-22  
Romans 8:1-4  
Ephesians 3:11-13 | Scots, 6.08 (b)  
Westminster 6.045—6.047  
Westminster Larger Catechism, 7.066 | How do you respond to God's effectual calling, knowing the depth of our inabilities and the necessity for God's power?  
What makes acceptance of God's saving power hard to accept for some? What makes it easy? |
Matthew 28:16-20  
II Corinthians 5:11  
What acts of service have you been involved in, and how do you think they have demonstrated the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ? |
### Covenant Life in the Church

#### 1. God's Family in Jesus Christ
- Exodus 19:4-6
- Matthew 26:27-28
- I Peter 2:9-10
- Hebrews 9:14-15
- Ephesians 4:1-6

What do relationships, even at their best and worst, show us about the character of God and the call of the Christian life?

What are some of the things that people are missing when they say they can have a relationship with God without the Church? (Cf. John 13:34, 35; Phil. 2:1-4)

- Apostles’ Creed, 2.3
- Nicene Creed, 1.3
- Scots Confession, 3.16
- Second Helvetic, 5.124

#### 2. The Unity of the Christian Family
- John 13:34
- John 17:20-23
- Ephesians 2:14-18
- Acts 2:5-18
- Ephesians 4:11-14

How is it possible to believe that Christ’s prayer for unity was answered even though there are many different denominations?

What obligations does Jesus place upon us to relate to those who are in different branches of the Church (Ephesians 4:1-16)?

Describe your experiences or impressions of congregations that are multi-cultural and multi-racial.

- Second Helvetic, 5.125
- Westminster, 6.146

#### 3. The Nourishment of God's Family
- I Thessalonians 1:4-6
- I Corinthians 2:13-14
- John 6:53-58
- Romans 6:1-7
- Acts 16:33-34
- Philippians 4:2-3
- Galatians 5:13-15

Describe what it is like to be spiritually hungry and then nourished by the Lord’s Supper. (Cf. I Corinthians 11:21-32; Luke 22:17-20).

How are we affected in mind, attitude, and conduct when we are spiritually impoverished and fail to partake of the nourishment of the body and blood of Christ?

How is it possible that God’s Family in Jesus Christ can be present in different branches of the Church?

- Second Helvetic, 5.004, 5.006
- Westminster, 6.149, 6.150, 6.154
- Confession of 1967, 9.52
- Westminster, 6.171

#### 8 Faithful Stewardship of All of Life

#### 1. Ministry in the Church
- Mark 1:9-11; Matthew 28:16-20
- John 17:1-5; Luke 21:5-6
- Mark 2:1-12
- Acts 6:2-4; I Timothy 3:1 & 8

What benefits come into the world because Christ fulfilled his ministry as prophet, priest, and king (Mark 1:9-12; Mark 2:12; Mark 2:23-27)?

What do spiritual gifts contribute to the ministry and mission of the Church?

How would the exercise of the Church’s ministry be different if there were no spiritual gifts?

- Second Helvetic, 5.146
- Shorter Catechism, 7.023–.026
- C67, 9.39-9.40
2. Ministry to the World

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Confession of 1967, 9.32</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matthew 28:16-20</td>
<td>Barmen, 8.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts 1:8; 2:1-4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philippians 1:29</td>
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<tr>
<td>I Timothy 2:13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philippians 2:5-11</td>
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</table>

The modern world creates a secular/sacred dichotomy in which the business, academy world, and recreation are seen as “out of bounds” for the exercise of the Christian Faith. What’s wrong with this way of thinking?

3. Ministry from the Heart and Mind

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Westminster, 6.190</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mark 12:30</td>
<td>Shorter Catechism, 7.082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 14:26-27</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Romans 8:5-8</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Colossians 2:6-8</td>
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<tr>
<td>I Corinthians 1:20</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Romans 12:1-2</td>
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What’s wrong with the belief that love alone justifies a person’s attitudes and actions?
What’s wrong with thinking that some part of the world or some part of a human being is immune from the infection of sin?
What problems are created if we separate the heart from the mind in the exercise of faith (Rom 12:1f)?
How have you experienced a thoughtful and educational approach to your Christian life as a Presbyterian?

1. Growth in Prayer and Worship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Westminster, 6.114, 6.116, 6.117</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Romans 8:9-11</td>
<td>Heidelberg, 4.086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew 6:7-13</td>
<td>Westminster, 6.114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exodus 20:1-2</td>
<td>Heidelberg, 4.093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exodus 20:3-11</td>
<td>Heidelberg, 4.094</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exodus 20:12-17</td>
<td>Heidelberg, 4.096</td>
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<td>4.099</td>
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<td>4.103</td>
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<td>C67, 9.50</td>
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What’s wrong with being open to other gods or worshiping God according to your own personal innovations?
How does observing the Sabbath through worship and rest help you honor God above any rival?

2. Growth in Godly Thought and Action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Heidelberg, 4.104–4.113</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matthew 5:11-48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colossians 3:5–4:1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Exodus 20:12-17</td>
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</table>

How does obedience to Commandments 5-10 create and cultivate healthy relationships?
With the “seven deadly sins” as a guide, how does disobedience to the commandments erode healthy relationships?
What is the connection between gratitude to God and obedience to the second table of the Law?
<table>
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<tr>
<th>3. Growth in Following Jesus Christ</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hebrews 12:1-3</td>
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<tr>
<td>I Peter 1:13–2:3</td>
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<td>I John 1:5-10</td>
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<td>Hebrews 8:8-13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Colossians 3:1-4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heidelberg, 4.114–115</td>
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<tr>
<td>Larger Catechism, 7.265</td>
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<tr>
<td>C67, 9.22–9.24</td>
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<tr>
<td>In what ways can you see Jesus’ character reflected in your attitudes, actions, and relationships? Where do you anticipate growth as you surrender more fully to God’s loving election?</td>
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Foreword

As the theological work group considered our charge to help the Fellowship and the Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians (ECO) clarify theological identity, we discovered three tasks. The first task requires looking to the past. The second task requires a new statement. The third task requires commitment for the future. Each of the three tasks requires us to re-covenant.

The first task is to identify the statements of our confessional heritage that will connect us with the one holy catholic apostolic church and express our distinctively Reformed convictions within that church. We propose the collection of confessional documents in the Book of Confessions as the appropriate theological expression at this moment in our life together. These creeds, confessions, and catechisms have much-needed wisdom of proven worth for us, and can uniquely serve as the central documents for a new Fellowship that strives to retain meaningful connections among congregations, some of whom will be within the PC(USA), some of whom will be in the ECO.

Critical to this first task is clear commitment to our confessional heritage in fresh and robust ways that announces what we mean when we say we adopt these documents, and defined accountability for keeping that covenant. The documents that compose the Book of Confessions are not seen in our rear view mirrors as road markers of where the church has been; they are seen through our windshield as faithful and sure guides for our perilous road ahead.

Casual affirmation of our theological heritage by our generation has severely weakened our worship and witness. We are squandering the gifts our confessional heritage could give us. We confess we have not been good stewards of the Faith. We must now reengage the Faith of the Church in ways that are more deeply committed to its truth and thus its value in ordering our life toward faithfulness. We have a strong conviction that our current theological failures are not the failures of the bishops at Nicea, the divines at Westminster, or the confessors at Barmen; the failures are our own. Now is the time to confess it and strengthen our theological covenant.

We recognize that the Fellowship and/or the ECO may, after a time of building and testing theological consensus among us, alter this judgment. But it is our opinion that the theological consensus among evangelicals has not been tested and, further, that to presume a consensus where one does not exist is to repeat one of the most significant theological failures of our generation. As members of the ordered ministries of the Church, we have agreed to the Book of Confessions. Let us keep that covenant that we may be found faithful to any new theological covenant we will make.

The first paper invites us to see the wisdom in reaffirming the creeds, confessions, and catechisms of the Book of Confessions, and invites us to say and live our confessions in ways that are profoundly faithful.

The second task is to identify and articulate the essentials of the Reformed Faith as expressed in these documents. To this end, we offer a new naming and explication of those essentials. This task helps us keep the renewed covenant we make in the first task.

While the value and role of the essentials have long been debated, the essentials themselves have not been identified for debate. Recent generations have acknowledged their presence – this is stated clearly in every officer’s ordination questions – and yet simultaneously we have not bothered to locate them. We are impoverished for their absence.

We are also too broad. A collection of confessions lends itself to the wisdom of identifying what is essential within them. Our theological ideas and inclinations as a church are far too diffuse to unite us. We reject the proposition that theology divides. Instead, we affirm the proposition that truth tends toward unity, yet we are the first generation of Presbyterian officers who do not have in the same ordination question
learn how to fulfill their missional callings in light of the Faith of the Church. Our faithfulness depends on it. We strongly propose that new structures be formed for the purpose of making a contribution to the theological well-being of the church so that our Faith can make its full contribution to the mission of the Church.

We propose the establishment of theological friendships in communities of mutual encouragement and accountability. This is an invitation for all ruling and teaching elders to commit to disciplined ways of life together.

Three things are necessary for the theological work of the church to flourish and in return for theology to help the church to flourish: adoption of theological confession with utmost sincerity, articulation of the confession with great clarity, and forming structures that sustain those convictions. These three papers propose these three necessary tasks and invite us to covenant toward those ends. We offer them in the emerging work of The Fellowship of Presbyterians and the Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians.

God help us.

Theology Taskforce

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John Crosby, President, The Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians and Pastor, Christ Presbyterian, Edina, MN
Paul Detterman, Administrative Consultant, The Fellowship of Presbyterians
Jim Singleton, President, The Fellowship of Presbyterians and Pastor, First Presbyterian, Colorado Springs, CO
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Joe Small, former Director of Theology, Worship, and Education for the PC(USA)
Confessional Standards

The appropriate confessional standards for the Fellowship and the ECO are the creeds, confessions, and catechisms in the Book of Confessions – The Nicene Creed, the Apostles’ Creed, the Scots Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Second Helvetic Confession, the Westminster Confession, the Westminster Shorter Catechism and the Westminster Larger Catechism, the Theological Declaration of Barmen, the Confession of 1967, and A Brief Statement of Faith. This collection is theologically faithful, ecclesiially appropriate, and organizationally suitable. The Book of Confessions contains the confessions that we have taken vows to receive. It also embodies the Reformed understanding of the way confessions function in the life of the church, an understanding that differs from two common approaches:

**Doctrinal Progressives** understand the church’s confessional and theological tradition as an evolutionary development of doctrine in which the church’s expression of the gospel becomes richer in each succeeding age. In this view, contemporary theology and new confessions of faith are more developed, better expressed, fuller apprehensions of truth than the faith of previous centuries. *Our way is the way.*

**Doctrinal Restorationists** understand the church’s theological and confessional tradition as a series of missteps leading to imperfect understanding and inadequate articulation of the gospel. In this view, a particular moment in the church’s confessional and theological tradition, such as the sixteenth century Augsburg Confession or the seventeenth century Westminster standards, is the pure faith of a theological golden age. *Their way is the way.*

**The Reformed understanding** of the church’s confessional and theological tradition sees contemporary Christians as participants in an enduring theological and doctrinal conversation that shapes the patterns of the church’s faith and life. Communities of believers from every time and place engage in a continuous discussion about the shape of Christian faith and life, an exchange that is maintained through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Today’s church brings its insights into an ongoing dialogue with those who have lived and died the Faith before us. Voices from throughout the church’s life contribute to the interchange – ancient voices that articulate the enduring rule of faith, sixteenth and seventeenth century voices that shape the Reformed tradition, and twentieth century voices that proclaim the church’s faith in challenging contexts. The confessions in the Book of Confessions were not arbitrarily included, but were selected to give faithful voice to the whole communion of saints.

The *Book of Confessions* is an appropriate expression of the Reformed commitment to honor our fathers and mothers in the Faith. It begins with two foundational creeds, shared throughout the whole Church. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed is the decisive dogmatic articulation of Trinitarian faith. It establishes the vocabulary, grammar, and syntax of Christian theology. The Apostles’ Creed is the Baptismal creed that expresses the shared belief of the faithful as persons are incorporated into the body of Christ. Two Reformation confessions, Scots and Second Helvetic, and one Reformation catechism, Heidelberg, give voice to the dawning of the Reformed tradition. The seventeenth century Westminster standards powerfully express God’s sovereignty over all of life. The Theological Declaration of Barmen, the Confession of 1967, and A Brief Statement of Faith articulate the church’s fidelity to the gospel in the midst of un congenial and sometimes hazardous cultures. These confessions, from widely different contexts, are complementary. They do not sing in unison, but in a rich harmony that glorifies God and deepens our enjoyment of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.

Are these the only voices that could be included in the church’s theological conversation? No, but they are faithful witnesses to the gospel and appropriate expressions of the Reformed perspective on Christian faith and life. Participating in their colloquy frees us from the narrow prison cell of our own time and place by listening to the voices of our brothers and sisters who struggled to be faithful in diverse circumstances. Through their confessions of faith we are privileged to hear their wisdom in the midst of our own struggle to be faithful. We overhear conversations among our forebears that expand and enrich our apprehension of the gospel. Sometimes we simply listen in on their discussion, at other times we pay particular attention to one of their voices, and many times we find ourselves participating actively in lively instruction.

The questions of our parents in the faith may not be identical to ours, but their different approaches enable us to understand our own questions better. Their answers may not be identical to ours, yet their answers startle us into new apprehensions of the truth. We may sometimes be puzzled by their particular questions or answers, but even that perplexity serves to clarify our own thinking and the shape of our faithfulness. Through the conversation we are aware that all councils may err, yet because we are not doctrinal progressives we acknowledge the confessions have a particular authority over us: we are answerable to them before they are answerable to us.
The confessions call the church to account. Because we are not traditionalists, we can be utterly honest about the church's past failings – crusades and inquisitions, easy acceptance of Christendom and easy dismissal of the leadership of women, neglect of evangelistic mission and excess of missionary zeal. Because we are not idealists we can be utterly honest about the church's current failings – marginalization of the Sacraments, indifference to theological labor, easy acceptance of cultural morality, neglect of evangelism, and inadequate mission. If we listen to our forebears in the Faith we will hear their hard questions addressed to us. Perhaps then we can be utterly honest about our own accommodations to the culture, our indifference to the proclamation of the gospel, and our abandonment of shared conviction and committed community in easy acquiescence to the individualism and localism of our time.

The confessions are not final authorities; Scripture is the authority that measures all doctrinal, confessional, and theological expression. The Reformed tradition has always understood that while confessional standards are subordinate to the Scriptures, they are, nonetheless, standards. They are not lightly drawn up or subscribed to, nor may they be ignored or dismissed. Being questioned by the confessions is not an exercise in servitude, but liberation from the tyranny of the present that enables us to live freely and faithfully within God's will.

As subordinate standards, the confessions are not free-standing authorities. They are subject to the authority of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, who is known through Scripture, the word of God. Subordination to the Lord and to Scripture's witness serves to locate confessional authority, however, not diminish it. The confessions provide reliable guidance to our reading and reception of Scripture, protecting us from self-absorbed interpretation, and opening us to Christ's way, Christ's truth, and Christ's life.

The Book of Confessions itself is not problematic. The problem with the Book of Confessions is the church's – the whole church's – neglect and misuse of its theological treasure. Too often, we have treated the confessions of the church as museum pieces, historical artifacts of what people used to believe long ago and far away. Too many of us have imagined that our own thoughts are sufficient for faithful proclamation of the gospel. We have been guilty of what C.S. Lewis called "chronological snobbery, the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that account discredited." We have also been guilty of reducing the confessions to theological and moral law books, selecting disembodied affirmations as elements in a logical proof. Our task is to put misuse of the confessions behind us, engaging in bold, faithful appropriations of the doctrinal and theological wisdom of the Book of Confessions, allowing them to enrich our faith and faithfulness.

The church's confessions are not marginal details in the church's life. The ordination vows made by most deacons, ruling elders, and teaching elders commit us to receive and adopt their essential tenets, and to be instructed, led, and guided by them. Our task is to be faithful to our vows, reading and studying the confessions, learning from them, teaching them, and living out their wisdom. Shared confession of faith shapes any serious community of faith, and the community's ordered ministries bear a particular obligation to order their confession around the church's creeds, confessions, and catechisms. Because confessional seriousness includes mutual responsibility and accountability, the church must be prepared to instruct, counsel with, or even discipline one ordained who rejects the faith expressed in the confessions.

Neither the Fellowship nor the ECO can imagine that it should or could disavow the Reformed confessional heritage. Whatever the church's confessional and theological failings may be, they are the failings of all of us. The task now is to embody faithful ways of being Presbyterian. The most appropriate footing for a new venture is the faithful doctrinal and theological foundation provided by the creeds, confessions, and catechisms of the Book of Confessions.
Presbyterians have been of two minds about essential tenets. We recognize that just as there are some central and foundational truths of the gospel affirmed by Christians everywhere, so too there are particular understandings of the gospel that define the Presbyterian and Reformed tradition. All Christians must affirm the central mysteries of the faith, and all those who are called to ordered ministries in a Presbyterian church must also affirm the essential tenets of the Reformed tradition. Recognizing the danger in reducing the truth of the gospel to propositions that demand assent, we also recognize that when the essentials become a matter primarily of individual discernment and local affirmation, they lose all power to unite us in common mission and ministry.

Essential tenets are tied to the teaching of the confessions as reliable expositions of Scripture. The essential tenets call out for explication, not as another confession, but as indispensable indicators of confessional convictions about what Scripture leads us to believe and do. Essential tenets do not replace the confessions, but rather witness to the confessions’ common core. This document is thus intended not as a new confession but as a guide to the corporate exploration of and commitment to the great themes of Scripture and to the historic Reformed confessions that set forth those themes.

The great purpose toward which each human life is drawn is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. Each member of the church glorifies God by recognizing and naming His glory, which is the manifestation and revelation of His own nature. Each member of the church enjoys God by being so united with Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit as to become a participant in that divine nature, transformed from one degree of glory to another and escorted by Christ into the loving communion of the Trinity. So we confess our faith not as a matter of dispassionate intellectual assent, but rather as an act by which we give God glory and announce our membership in the body of Christ. We trust that when God’s glory is so lifted up and when His nature is thus made manifest in the life of the body, the church will be a light that draws people from every tribe and tongue and nation to be reconciled to God.

I. God’s Word: The Authority for Our Confession

The clearest declaration of God’s glory is found in His Word, both incarnate and written. The Son eternally proceeds from the Father as His Word, the full expression of the Father’s nature, and since in the incarnation the Word became flesh all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are offered to His disciples. The written Word grants us those treasures, proclaims the saving gospel of Jesus Christ, and graciously teaches all that is necessary for faith and life. We glorify God by recognizing and receiving His authoritative self-revelation, both in the infallible Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and also in the incarnation of God the Son. We affirm that the same Holy Spirit who overshadowed the virgin Mary also inspired the writing and preservation of the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit testifies to the authority of God’s Word and illuminates our hearts and minds so that we might receive both the Scriptures and Christ Himself aright.

We confess that God alone is Lord of the conscience, but this freedom is for the purpose of allowing us to be subject always and primarily to God’s Word. The Spirit will never prompt our conscience to conclusions that are at odds with the Scriptures that He has inspired. The revelation of the incarnate Word does not minimize, qualify, or set aside the authority of the written Word. We are happy to confess ourselves captive to the Word of God, not just individually, but also as members of a community of faith, extending through time and around the globe. In particular, we join with other members of the Presbyterian and Reformed community to affirm the secondary authority of the Book of Confessions as a faithful exposition of the Word of God.

II. Trinity and Incarnation: The Two Central Christian Mysteries

A. Trinity

The triune nature of God is the first great mystery of the Christian faith. With Christians everywhere, we worship the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - who is both one essence and three persons. God is infinite, eternal, immutable, impassible, and ineffable. He cannot be divided against Himself, nor is He becoming more than He has been, since there is no potential or becoming in Him. He is the source of all goodness, all truth and all beauty, of all love and all life, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. The three persons are consubstantial with one another, being both coeternal, and coequal, such that there are not three gods, nor are there three parts of God, but rather three persons within the one Godhead. The Son is eternally begotten from the Father, and the Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son. All three persons are worthy of worship and praise.

God has no need of anyone or anything beyond Himself. Yet in grace this Triune God is the one Creator of all things. The ongoing act of creation is further manifested in God’s gracious
sovereignty and providence, maintaining the existence of the world and all living creatures for the sake of His own glory. He is the Holy One, the ground of all being, whose glory is so great that for us to see Him is to die. Yet He has made the creation to reflect His glory, and He has made human beings in His own image, with a unique desire to know Him and a capacity for relationship with Him. Since our God is a consuming fire whom we in our sin cannot safely approach, He has approached us by entering into our humanity in Jesus Christ.

B. Incarnation
This is the second great mystery of the Christian faith, affirmed by all Christians everywhere: that Jesus Christ is both truly God and truly human. As to His divinity, He is the Son, the second person of the Trinity, being of one substance with the Father; as to His humanity, He is like us in every way but sin, of one substance with us, like us in having both a human soul and a human body. As to His divinity, He is eternally begotten of the Father; as to His humanity, He is born of the virgin Mary, conceived by the Holy Spirit. As to His divinity, His glory fills heaven and earth; as to His humanity, His glory is shown in the form of a suffering servant, most clearly when He is lifted up on the cross in our place.

We confess the mystery of His two natures, divine and human, in one person. We reject any understanding of the communication of attributes that must result in a blending of the two natures such that Jesus Christ is neither truly God nor truly human. We insist upon sufficient distinction between the two natures to preserve the truth of the incarnation, that Jesus Christ is indeed Immanuel, God-with-us, not one who used to be God, nor one who has merely been sent from God. Rather, in His coming we have seen God’s glory, for Jesus is the exact imprint of God’s very being and in Him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. The divinity of the Son is in no way impaired, limited, or changed by His gracious act of assuming a human nature, and that His true humanity is in no way undermined by His continued divinity. This is a mystery that we cannot explain, but we affirm it with joy and confidence.

This mystery of the incarnation is ongoing, for the risen Jesus, who was sent from the Father, has now ascended to the Father in His resurrected body and remains truly human. He is bodily present at the right hand of the Father. When we are promised that one day we will see Him face to face, we acknowledge that it is the face of Jesus of Nazareth we will someday see. The one who, for us and for our salvation, was born of Mary, died at Calvary, and walked with disciples to Emmaus is the same Jesus Christ who is now ascended and who will one day return visibly in the body to judge the living and the dead.

Jesus promised His disciples that He would not leave them comfortless when He ascended into heaven, but would ask the Father to send them the Holy Spirit as a comforter and advocate. We are able to confess Jesus Christ as Lord and God only through the work of the Holy Spirit. He comes to us as He came to the gathered disciples at Pentecost to kindle our faith, to embolden our witness, and to accompany us in mission.

III. Essentials of the Reformed Tradition

A. God’s grace in Christ
God declared that the world He created was good and that human beings, made in His own image, were very good. The present disordered state of the world, in which we and all things are subject to misery and to evil, is not God’s doing, but is rather a result of humanity’s free, sinful rebellion against God’s will. God created human beings from the dust of the earth and His own breath, to be His images and representatives, conduits of God’s grace to the creation. Since the fall our natural tendency is to abuse and exploit the creation, preferring evil to goodness. God also created human beings to speak His grace and truth to one another, to be helpers who fit for one another, so that our social relationships would strengthen our ability to serve and obey Him. Since the fall, our natural tendency is to engage in relationships of tyranny and injustice with one another, in which power is used not to protect and serve but to demean. God further created human beings with the capacity for relationship with Him, with His law written on our hearts so that we had the ability to worship Him in love and obey Him by living holy lives. Since the fall, our natural tendency is to hate God and our neighbor, to worship idols of our own devising rather than the one true God.

As a result of sin, human life is poisoned by everlasting death. No part of human life is untouched by sin. Our desires are no longer trustworthy guides to goodness, and what seems natural to us no longer corresponds to God’s design. We are not merely wounded in our sin; we are dead, unable to save ourselves. Apart from God’s initiative, salvation is not possible for us. Our only hope is God’s grace. We discover in Scripture that this is a great hope, for our God is the One whose mercy is from everlasting to everlasting.

This grace does not end when we turn to sin. Although we are each deserving of God’s eternal condemnation, the eternal Son assumed our human nature, joining us in our misery and offering Himself on the cross in order to free us from slavery to death and sin. Jesus takes our place both in bearing the weight of condemnation against our sin on the cross and in offering to God the perfect obedience that humanity owes to Him but is no longer able to give. All humanity participates in the fall into sin. Those who are united through faith with Jesus Christ are fully forgiven from all our sin, so that there is indeed a new creation. We are declared justified, not because of any good that we have done, but only because of God’s grace extended to us in Jesus Christ. In union with Christ through the power of the Spirit we are brought into right relation with the Father, who receives us as His adopted children.
Jesus Christ is the only Way to this adoption, the sole path by which sinners become children of God, for He is the only-begotten Son, and it is only in union with Him that a believer is able to know God as Father. Only in Jesus Christ is the truth about the Triune God, fully and perfectly revealed, for only He is the Truth, only He has seen the Father, and only He can make the Father known. Only Jesus Christ is the new Life that is offered, for He is the bread from heaven and the fountain of living water, the one by whom all things were made, in whom all things hold together. The exclusivity of these claims establishes that God’s love is not impersonal, but a particular and intimate love in which each individual child of God is called by name and known as precious; that God’s love is not only acceptance, but a transforming and effective love in which His image within us is restored so that we are capable of holy living.

B. Election for salvation and service
The call of God to the individual Christian is not merely an invitation that each person may accept or reject by his or her own free will. Having lost true freedom of will in the fall, we are incapable of turning toward God of our own volition. God chooses us for Himself in grace before the foundation of the world, not because of any merit on our part, but only because of His love and mercy. Each of us is chosen in Christ, who is eternally appointed to be head of the body of the elect, our brother and our high priest. He is the one who is bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, our divine Helper who is also our Bridegroom, sharing our human nature so that we may see His glory. We who receive Him and believe in His name do so not by our own will or wisdom, but because His glory compels us irresistibly to turn toward Him. By His enticing call on our lives, Jesus enlightens our minds, softens our hearts, and renews our wills, restoring the freedom that we lost in the fall.

We are all sinners who fall short of God’s glory, and we all deserve God’s eternal judgment. Apart from the saving work of Jesus Christ, we are incapable of being in God’s presence, incapable of bearing the weight of His glory. We rejoice that Jesus Christ offers us safe conduct into the heart of God’s consuming and purifying fire, shielding us with His perfect humanity and transforming us by His divine power. Having received such grace, we extend grace to others. We are not elect for our own benefit alone. God gathers His covenant community to be an instrument of His saving purpose. Through His regenerating and sanctifying work, the Holy Spirit grants us faith and enables holiness, so that we may be witnesses of God’s gracious presence to those who are lost. The Spirit gathers us in a community that is built up and equipped to be light, salt, and yeast in the world. Christ sends us into the world to make disciples of all nations, baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that Christ has commanded us. We are now in service to God’s plan for the fullness of time: uniting all things in heaven and earth to Himself. To this end, we preach Christ, calling all persons to repent and believe the gospel. We also care for the natural world, claim all areas of culture in the name of Jesus, serve the poor, feed the hungry, visit the prisoner, and defend the helpless. We do this work not with any thought that we are able to bring in the kingdom, but in the confident hope that God’s kingdom is surely coming, a day when suffering and death will pass away and when God will live among His people.

C. Covenant life in the church
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. 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.
D. Faithful stewardship of all of life

The ministries of the church reflect the three-fold office of Christ as prophet, priest, and king — reflected in the church’s ordered ministries of teaching elders, deacons, and ruling elders. We affirm that men and women alike are called to all the ministries of the Church, and that every member is called to share in all of Christ’s offices within the world beyond the church. Every Christian is called to a prophetic life, proclaiming the good news to the world and enacting that good news. Every Christian is called to extend the lordship of Christ to every corner of the world. And every Christian is called to participate in Christ’s priestly, mediatorial work, sharing in the suffering of the world in ways that extend God’s blessing and offering intercession to God on behalf of the world. We are equipped to share in these offices by the Holy Spirit, who conforms us to the pattern of Christ’s life.

Jesus teaches us that we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind. There is no part of human life that is off limits to the sanctifying claims of God. We reject the claim that love of any sort is self-justifying; we affirm that all our affections and desires must be brought under God’s authority. We reject the claim that human souls are unaffected by the fall and remain naturally inclined to God; we affirm that soul and body alike must be cleansed and purified in order to love God properly. We reject the claim that the life of the mind is independent from faith; we affirm that unless we believe we cannot properly understand either God or the world around us. Historically, the Presbyterian tradition has been especially called to explore what it is to love God with all our minds, being committed to the ongoing project of Christian education and study at all levels of Christian life.

E. Living in obedience to the Word of God

Progress in holiness is an expected response of gratitude to the grace of God, which is initiated, sustained, and fulfilled by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. The first response of gratitude is prayer, and the daily discipline of prayer — both individually and together — should mark the Christian life. The life of prayer includes praise to God for His nature and works, sincere confession of our sin, and intercession for the needs of those we know and for the needs of the world. As we practice the discipline of regular self-examination and confession, we are especially guided by the Ten Commandments. We therefore hold one another accountable to:

1. worship God alone, living all of life to His glory, renouncing all idolatry and all inordinate loves that might lead us to trust in any other help;

2. worship God in humility, being reticent in either describing or picturing God, recognizing that right worship is best supported not by our own innovative practices but through the living preaching of the Word and the faithful administration of the Sacraments;

3. eliminate from both speech and thought any blasphemy, irreverence, or impurity;

4. observe the Sabbath as a day of worship and rest, being faithful in gathering with the people of God;

5. give honor toward those set in authority over us and practice mutual submission within the community of the church;

6. eradicate a spirit of anger, resentment, callousness, violence, or bitterness, and instead cultivate a spirit of gentleness, kindness, peace, and love; recognize and honor the image of God in every human being from conception to natural death.

7. maintain chastity in thought and deed, being faithful within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman as established by God at the creation or embracing a celibate life as established by Jesus in the new covenant;

8. practice right stewardship of the goods we have been given, showing charity to those in need and offering generous support of the Church and its ministries;

9. pursue truth, even when such pursuit is costly, and defend truth when it is challenged, recognizing that truth is in order to goodness and that its preservation matters;

10. resist the pull of envy, greed, and acquisition, and instead cultivate a spirit of contentment with the gifts God has given us.

In Jesus Christ we see the perfect expression of God’s holy will for human beings offered to God in our place. His holy life must now become our holy life. In Christ, God’s will is now written on our hearts, and we look forward to the day when we will be so confirmed in holiness that we will no longer be able to sin. As the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, Jesus leads us along the path of life toward that goal, bringing us into ever deeper intimacy with the Triune God, in whose presence is fullness of joy.
The Church has a Faith without which she cannot live faithfully.

Renewed commitment to sustained conversation is needed. At its best, sustained conversation is characterized by prayerful and rigorous study of the Scripture with attention to clarifying the Reformed theological lens through which we read the Scriptures, by grateful listening to the voice of the church around the world and through the ages, and application of theological wisdom to every part of life before God and for the world.

Toward these ends, we now commit ourselves to the formation of theological friendships in communities that include all teaching and ruling elders — gatherings of elders which covenant to study and learn together, providing mutual encouragement and accountability for the sake of sustaining and advancing the theological and missional work of the church.

Certain to this commitment are:
1. Identifying the best practices of current theological projects and relationships within the Church that will help guide the shape of these theological friendships.
2. Building the structures that connect elders with each other locally, regionally, and nationally in environments that establish and sustain theological friendships.

These theological friendships should strive to:
- transform life and ministry,
- be sustained over the years,
- include a breadth of participants
  - gender, age, ethnic and global communities
  - other Reformed churches
  - other orthodox and evangelical theological traditions,
- engage other theological friendships, thus forming broadening communities, worship and witness together.

An invitation is now offered in an excellent resource, “A Pastoral Rule,” developed by the Re-forming Ministry Program of the PC(USA)’s Office of Theology and Worship. This resource invites us to commit to personal disciplines, conduct in ministry that is holy, and mutual encouragement and accountability. It is offered to the whole church as a tool for the formation of theological friendships that sustain us and are sustained over time. We propose that the Fellowship and the ECO accept that invitation to adapt and then adopt “The Pastoral Rule.”

These three theological projects are offered for broad immediate consideration:
- Recommitment to a particular confessional heritage
as an immediate core constituent of our renewed common life, however that common life is re-formed.

• Identification and affirmation of the essential tenets of the Reformed Faith.
• Commitment to re-engaging the theological enterprise broadly and deeply.

Further advance on these three projects will be made as we put our theology on the table for public discussion, deliberation, and decision; share best practices; form theological-missional relationships; build the structures; and covenant together.

Questions for immediate consideration:

Do we consider the proposal to reaffirm the Book of Confession as we work to build and test theological consensus among us, to be the right judgment to make at this time? Is this an adequate and helpful articulation of the essentials of the Faith as expressed in Reformed ways, and will we sincerely adopt it? What theological friendships will we form, what practices will we commit to, and what structures will we build for mutual encouragement and accountability?

The theological project is required of the Church, and now is re-engaged by this Fellowship within the Church. The invitation is now offered. How will you respond?

ADDENDUM

Suggested questions for the covenanting gatherings of theological friends:

What has the Spirit gathered the Church to be? What has the Spirit sent the Church to do? Always and everywhere; here and now.

What is the authority of Scripture in the actual life of the church? How will we teach and obey the Scripture?

What does it mean to be saved? What is the gospel we are to preach?

Elders, ruling as well as teaching, are to be equipped to teach. Teach what, to whom, how? Ruling elders are to measure out the patterns of faithfulness for the congregation. What are those patterns, and how are they measured?

In a time of both ecclesial division and realignment, how can schism among parts of the church be diminished and how can reconnection with the whole church be increased?

The Church has a Faith without which she cannot live faithfully. What is that Faith? What is faithful living?
The mission of The Fellowship of Presbyterians is to build flourishing churches that make disciples of Jesus Christ.

OUR VALUES

Jesus-Shaped Identity
We believe Jesus Christ must be at the center of our lives and making disciples of Jesus at the core of our ministry.

Biblical Integrity
We believe the Bible is the unique and authoritative Word of God, that teaches all that is necessary for faith and life. The prominence of God's Word over our lives shapes our priorities, and the unrivaled authority of the Bible directs our actions to be in concert with Christ's very best for our lives.

Thoughtful Theology
We believe in theological education, constant learning, and the life of the mind; celebrating this as one of the treasures of our Reformed heritage.

Accountable Community
We believe guidance is a corporate spiritual experience. We want to connect leaders to one another in healthy relationships of accountability, synergy, and care.

Egalitarian Ministry
We believe in unleashing the ministry gifts of women, men, and every ethnic group.

Missional Centrality
We believe in living out the whole of the Great Commission — including evangelism, spiritual formation, compassion, and redemptive justice — in our communities and around the world.

Center-Focused Spirituality
We believe in calling people to the core of what it means to be followers of Jesus — what “mere Christianity” is and does — and not fixate on the boundaries.

Leadership Velocity
We believe the work of identifying and developing gospel-centered leaders is critical for the church, and a great leadership culture is risk-taking, innovative, and organic.

Kingdom Vitality
We believe congregations should vigorously reproduce new missional communities to expand the Kingdom of God.

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