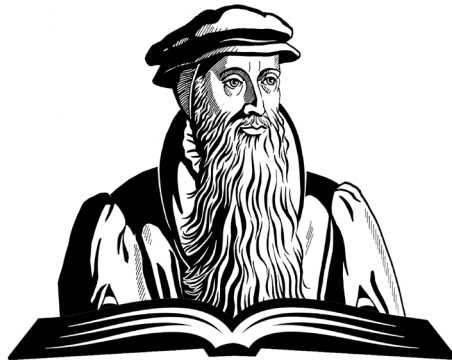

**VIDEO LECTURE MODULE:
THE APOSTLES' CREED**

13 LECTURES

Lecturer Presenter: Rev. Cornelis Harinck



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Module

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THE APOSTLES' CREED

Rev. Cornelis Harinck

Transcript—Lecture 1

Introduction

Dear listener, welcome to a series of lectures on the Apostles' Creed. I will start with an introduction about creeds in general and the Apostles' Creed in particular.

The word “creed” sounds not very attractive. Dogma, doctrine, creeds, confessions and catechisms are not popular today. Many say, “No words, but deeds. It turns not on what we confess or believe, but on what we are and do in this world.” Yet, the first Christians deemed dogma important, for we read of the church after Pentecost, “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine”—Acts 2, verse 42. And that is precisely what we intend to do.

When you read the name, *Apostles' Creed*, you might ask, What is the Apostles' Creed? You might even ask, What is a creed? The name, Apostles' Creed, reminds us of the apostles of Jesus Christ. What an encouragement would it be for the church today, if the apostles were still among us, but they have died long ago. However, we do have the Apostles' Creed, a confession based upon the doctrine and the teachings of the apostles.

The word “creed” is a Latin word, which means, “I believe.” The Apostles' Creed is a confession whereby the believer says, “This is what I believe,” and by which the church says this is what it believes. To say it more dogmatically, a creed is a formal and foundational statement of what a Christian believes regarding God and salvation. A creed is a confession of faith and a summary of Christian doctrines. The Apostles' Creed is such a creed or confession—a very short and concise confession of faith, containing only 113 words that articulate all the foundational truths of Christianity. It is the most basic statement of Christian belief.

The Apostles' Creed is a very ancient creed, even the oldest creedal document of the Christian church. It brings us back to the early days of Christianity. In the early church, there arose a need for some sort of confession of faith to instruct new believers. As the church began to expand, she needed a means to identify those that were truly converted to the Christian faith. Most vital were the questions, “Who may be baptized?” and “What is necessary to be baptized?” In Acts 8, verse 37, we read that Philip required that the eunuch would confess his faith in the Gospel, before he could be baptized. He said to him, If you believe with all your heart, you may. The eunuch responded, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” After that confession, he was baptized by Philip. This became the rule in the Christian congregations. Baptism was never administered without a confession of faith. Even as the eunuch first had to make a confession of faith before he was baptized, so everyone who wanted to be baptized had to make a public confession of the Christian faith. This was mandatory in all Christian congregations.

Furthermore, baptism was administered in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Before being baptized, the converts had to confess their belief in God the Father and creation, in God the Son and redemption, and in God the Holy Ghost and sanctification. This mandatory profession of faith for new converts culminated in the formulation of certain rules of faith. They served as a baptismal confession.

There were certain rules of faith in the Christian congregations already in the second century that articulated what was necessary to believe. They focused on the doctrine of the Trinity and confessed what the Christian believed about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. It was around the year 100 AD, after Christ, that the congregation in Rome already had creedal statements which were used at baptism. They were almost identical to the later-accepted twelve articles of the Apostles' Creed.

The name, Apostles' Creed, is therefore somewhat misleading. Contrary to what the name

might suggest, this creed was not authored by the twelve apostles. Legend has it that before the apostles parted ways, and went out from Jerusalem into the heathen world to preach the gospel, each of them wrote an article of faith. That would explain why the Apostles' Creed contains twelve articles, and how the Apostles' Creed came into existence. However, there is no evidence in support of this claim. It is merely a legend and is not based on facts.

The formulation of the early rules of faith have gradually emerged over time into the Apostles' Creed, as we know it today. The doctrine confessed in the Apostles' Creed began to serve in the early church as a paradigm for the instruction of the catechumen—people being prepared for baptism. The Apostles' Creed was therefore not the result of a synodical meeting, but originated in and emerged from the life and practice of the early Christian congregations. This fact teaches a very important truth. The Apostles' Creed was already in existence before the councils and synods accepted this creed as the common confession of the Christian church.

The Apostles' Creed was not imposed upon the church by a decision of either a council, a synod, a pope or a magistrate. Rather, it emerged from the teachings of the apostles and the practice of the early Christian churches. It came spontaneously into existence. It emerged from the bosom of the church. The Apostles' Creed united the local congregations as members of the same body, the church of Jesus Christ. As to the name, Apostles' Creed, it simply communicates that these articles conform to the teachings of the apostles.

There are certain churches and denominations that are very much opposed to creeds and confessions. Pentecostal churches, charismatic churches, the Assembly of Believers, and other evangelical churches come to mind here. They resist strongly against all creeds and regulations, which by synods and councils are forced upon the church. They deem that confessions and creeds are man-made and thus, ought to be rejected. Their slogan is, "No creed but the Bible. No creed but Christ. Not a doctrine, but the Lord." They say, "The Bible is my creed, and Christ is my confession." These statements contain a truth that is worthy of emulation. We agree wholeheartedly with the thought that nothing else can replace the Bible as the sole authority for doctrine and practice in life. We also agree with the motto that nothing can replace Christ. He is, in the words of Peter, the only name given under heaven among men, whereby we must be saved—Acts 4, verse 12.

The difficulty, however, is that when one has neither a creed nor a confession, one holds to a notion that is not Biblical. It is Biblical for the church of Christ to have a creed. The Bible is filled with creedal statements and confessions. In fact, we already encounter creeds in the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 6, verse 4, we read of the confession of the people of Israel: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD." This is indeed a creed and a very important creed for the Jew, for this creed confesses the uniqueness and the individuality of God. Also, the New Testament contains creeds and confessions. The Gospel writings are filled with testimonies about Jesus Christ and the way of salvation. In John 3, verse 18, it is said, He who believes in the Son has everlasting life and he who does not believe is condemned already, "because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." We read the testimony of Jesus himself, who declares, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me"—John 14, verse 6. We can think of Peter's confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Another very old creed is recorded, in 1 Timothy 3, verse 16: "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." In Acts 8, verse 37, we read the confession of the Ethiopian eunuch, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." This creedal confession was required of all who desired to be baptized. We find in Paul's letter to the Philippians, chapter 2, a very important creed that was already embraced by the first New Testament Christians. The apostle states of Christ, "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

These inspired statements that speak of Christ were sung as hymns in the gathering of the congregations. They were hymnodic creeds, liturgical expressions of what was believed. They were recited in their gatherings, even as in some churches today, the Apostles' Creed is recited. It is reported in the first century, by the Roman governors, that Christians were people who gathered

together on the evening of the day of the sun, to sing and praise their crucified God.

Paul the apostle stresses the necessity of believing certain basic elements of Christianity. He admonishes the Christians at Corinth, “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also you have received, and wherein you stand; by which also you are saved, if you keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless you have believed in vain.” Then follows a summary of the facts concerning Christ: “For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.” This sounds very much like a creed, and a confession, articulating what a Christian church believed regarding Jesus Christ.

The early Christians had creeds and confessions. One of the oldest statements that united the early Christians was the confession, “Jesus is Lord!” They confessed Jesus to be Lord over all. They called Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, the Savior, and the Victor over death. The early Christians had a symbol called an “ichthus,” a fish. Ichthus is the Greek word for fish. The meaning is found in the letters of this Greek word. They stood for: Jesus, Christ, God, Son, and Savior. Thereby the Christians confessed to believe in Jesus, as the Christ, the Son of God, and the Savior. It was a sign of recognition. When someone drew a fish you knew that you had to do with a Christian. It was a sign to recognize one another, during the time of persecution. It also served as a confession of what they believed concerning Jesus.

The Christians always have used certain statements to confess their faith. When someone asks you what you believe, you will not respond by reading the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation. Rather, you give a summary of what the entire Bible teaches. This is how we confess our faith in and to the world. A believer cannot witness to the world without making definitive statements about what and in whom he believes. Everyone makes use of statements to express his meaning—so also the Christian. In fact, when someone loudly exclaims, “No creed but Christ. No creed but the Bible,” he or she is uttering a creed. Such statements will then have become your creed.

Creeds, confessions and catechisms are of great value for instructing the youth and in helping us to witness to the world. Once a Christian man, accompanied with his little daughter, had a discussion with an unbeliever about prayer. He tried to explain what prayer really is, but he could not find the right words to explain it. The unbeliever kept asking, “What is prayer; what makes it so special?” Then the little girl quoted the words of the catechism she had learned and said, “Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God for things agreeable to his will in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins and thankful acknowledgment of his mercy.” God must be thanked for the catechism, from which this girl had been taught to say what prayer really is.

It would be legitimate to object to creeds and confessions, if creeds and confessions were to set aside the supreme authority of the Bible, and the absolute sufficiency of Scripture for the knowledge of faith and practice unto salvation. Confessions and creeds that teach doctrines contrary to the teaching of the Bible ought to be rejected. The creeds of the Roman Catholic councils here come to mind, which, contrary to the teachings of the Bible, not only teach that the Pope is Christ’s vicar on earth, but also that the priest has the power to repeat the sacrifice of Christ, in the administration of the mass, for the benefit of the living and the dead. Creeds and confessions can pose a danger to the church when they are not based on Scripture. True creeds and confessions echo and repeat the doctrines of Scripture, and they are therefore subordinate to the Bible. They can pose a danger to the church when they set aside the supreme authority of the Scriptures. The church of Christ adheres to Sola Scriptura—only the Scriptures.

There is yet another reason why the church must have creeds. It is the responsibility of the church to protect the truth from error. The apostle admonishes Timothy, “Hold fast the form of sound words, which you have heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus”—2 Timothy 1, verse 13. In 1 Timothy 6, verse 20, he exclaims, “O Timothy, keep that which is committed to your trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called.” Paul posits that there is a standard of Christian teaching, there is a Christian doctrine, and there is a body of truth that God has given to the church to be retained as a form of doctrine. When you ask, What is the church? What makes a church to be the church? Paul calls the church “the pillar and ground of the truth”—1 Timothy 3, verse 15. Paul here defines the church as being the pillar and support of the truth. It is the responsibility of the church to support and defend the truth. She has received

it from God, and she may neither alter nor modify it at her own will. Rather, she must uphold and safeguard the truth as a sacred treasure entrusted to her—all to the glory of God, and for the good of men. If she fails to do so, she will no longer be the household of God. The fact that God has entrusted the truth to the church, obligates the church to uphold the standard of this truth. She does so by adhering closely to the Word of God, neither adding anything to the Word nor removing or taking anything from the Word. To the extent that she either corrupts or abandons the truth of the Scriptures, she will cease to be the pillar of the truth.

The church is also obligated to defend the truth against errors and heresies. The emergence of heresy was a matter of constant concern for the apostles, and for the leaders who followed them in the New Testament church. Since the dawn of Christianity, there have been heretics in the church, who have promulgated heretical viewpoints regarding the divinity and the humanity of Christ, and furthermore, they have intermingled the free gospel and the Judaic doctrine of salvation by the deeds of the law.

In order to uphold the truth, the church has therefore formulated creeds and confessions to defend and preserve Biblical truth. History affirms that the church has always deemed it necessary to articulate the truth by way of creedal statements. The prevalence of error and heresy has compelled the church to counter all error and heresy, by formulating and articulating the truth in more precise ways. Creeds have been and are a necessity in the life of the church.

By means of creeds, the church also defends the Christian faith against false accusations. In the early years of the Christian church, her enemies spread the rumor that Christians wanted to overthrow the reign of the Roman Caesar. When Paul and his helpers in Thessalonica were accused of undermining the authority of the Roman emperor, the enemies of the gospel said to the rulers of the city, “And these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king, one Jesus”—Acts 17, verse 7. The rulers of the nation might thus be influenced with wrong impressions and ideas that the intent of the Christian church is to overthrow the authority of the government. Such circumstances make it necessary to articulate in plain and precise words what the church believes.

There was a similar situation in the Netherlands during the time of the Reformation. In order to make clear to the government that the church acknowledges the authority of the king and the government, the church formulated a confession, the Belgic Confession of Faith, as we know it today. It was set forth, on the basis of Scripture, what the church believed to be the calling and task of the government, and then furthermore, was set forth the obedience that Christians are obligated to render. It was made clear that believing in Jesus as King does not mean that the Christian does not render honor in subjection to the magistrate. The Christian is taught in the Bible to obey all those whom God has set over him. We read, in Romans 13, verse 1, “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.” It is significant that Paul here is not speaking of a Christian government, but of the Roman government. However, the Bible does not obligate any Christian to do things contrary, either to any of the blessed commandments of God, or to the Christian faith. When we are forced to do so, we should obey God more than man, as we read, in Acts 5, verse 29, “Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than man.”

Creeds are necessary. They are the expression of the spiritual authority in which God has vested the church. Christ’s commission was: “Go you therefore and teach all nations”—Matthew 28, verse 19. God has authorized the church to be the official communicator of the Word of God. The church teaches the truth of God by expounding the Word of God. She expounds the Word in preaching, but also by way of her creeds and confessions.

As we reflect on all the above, we ought to be thankful for what the Lord has entrusted unto us by means of sound creeds and confessions. The labor of the church of former ages helps the church today in formulating statements and confessions that articulate the foundational truths of Scripture, as well as combat error and heresy. We may not ignore or despise our heritage. Christianity does not begin with us. We belong to a long historical progression of men and women, who have confessed the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God and Father of Jesus Christ.

Creeds and Confessions are important. Many professing Christians regard creeds and confessions as merely man-made traditions and the expression of religious opinions. They do not understand how important they are in safeguarding and expounding Biblical truth. We read of the days

of the Judges: “In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes”—Judges 21, verse 25. These words describe a spiritual anarchy. Today we are marked by the same anarchy. It marks not only in the world, but in the churches as well. The sentiment of our day is that I explain the Bible in my own way. I will believe it as I see fit. I need neither a creed nor a confession to help me to understand the truth of the Bible. Everyone has the right to explain the Bible in his own way and believe what he believes. Such people insist on a high level of tolerance, when it comes to what anyone wishes to believe. Among those who hold to such a view, creeds and confessions will not be popular. They that oppose the creeds and confessions of the church often keep a hidden agenda. They abhor the doctrines articulated in the creeds and confessions of the church, because they have their own notions about God, about Christ, about faith, and about salvation. The motto, “No creed but the Bible,” is often used as a pretext to be at liberty to proclaim error and heresy. Such opposition against the creeds of the church is often a smoke screen for the espousal of heretical views. Such individuals want no creeds because they have formulated their own creeds. They thus despise what God has given to the church by way of the creeds and confessions of former generations.

Creeds and confessions based on the Word of God are important for the church—and especially today. Old errors and heresies always reemerge in new garments. Therefore, it is important to take notice and beware of what the church in former generations has said about such heresies. The weapons to battle these errors and heresies, are often to be found in the arsenal of the creeds and confessions of the church. It is a rich heritage of the generations that have preceded us.

Creeds and confessions can keep us from wandering away from the foundational truths of the Bible, and stay in union with former generations. Creeds and confessions also further the cause of uniting different churches that confess the same truth. They are the bond that unites churches from around the world. Throughout the ages, it is especially the Apostles’ Creed that has tremendously influenced the unity of Christianity. Eastern churches, Western churches, Protestants, Roman Catholics, Baptists, and other denominations all accept the Apostles’ Creed as the foundation of what they believe. And therefore, we recognize and acknowledge the Apostles’ Creed as the creed of Christianity.

THE APOSTLES' CREED

Rev. Cornelis Harinck

Transcript—Lecture 2

Article 1: God the Father and Creation

Dear listener, the first article of the Apostles' Creed confesses, "I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and of earth." The Apostles' Creed begins with, "I believe." It does not begin with, "I understand, and therefore I believe." The Christian says, "I believe, and therefore I understand." Believing comes first, and understanding follows. David says: "I believed, therefore have I spoken"—Psalm 116, verse 10. How contrary that is to our modern culture! Modern man only believes what he can prove, and therefore he understands so little. However, faith does understand what reason does not understand, because it believes God's Word. Therefore, David says, "You through your commandment hast made me wiser than my enemies. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation"—Psalm 119. Faith understands of what the scientists are still discussing, namely, how the world came into existence. As we read in Hebrews 11, verse 3, "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear."

The Apostles' Creed does not reason and is not concerned with opinions or notions. It says, "Credo!"—"I believe!" What the Christian believes on the basis of the Bible, is the focal point. The Apostles' Creed declares, "I believe in God." The Christian believes in the existence of God, One only God, the creator of heaven and earth. The Creed does not say, "I can prove that there is a God," or "I can comprehend God," but, "I believe in God." How can the Christian be so sure about God and his existence? Not because he can prove God, but because God has revealed himself in his Word and in creation. Therefore it is added, "creator of heaven and earth."

When Paul was in Athens, surrounded by the Greek philosophers, he preached God to them. He began his message with a shocker. He said, "God who made the world and everything in it, since he is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is he worshiped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, since he gives to all life, breath and all things" (Acts 17:24). Paul challenged their whole theology. The Greek and the Romans believed in many gods. They believed in a multitude of deities. But Paul did not speak about gods, but about the God—the only, true God. God the uncreated creator, who rules over every inch of what he has made and does not need to be kept alive by men. The Greeks believed that the gods were needy, and in some sense, depended upon the sacrifices of men. But Paul did not speak about a God who is dependent upon men. On the contrary, he spoke about a God who gives to all life and breath and all things. He spoke about God the giver and sustainer of life, who exists beyond the created—the God who is self-existent, the great creator of heaven and earth.

In the midst of the learned Greek philosophers, he did not begin his evangelistic message by speaking about the Christ, but by speaking about God, the creator. Paul's starting point was God—the true God—God the creator of heaven and earth. The apostle deemed it of the highest importance that his listeners had a right knowledge of God—a God so different from what they were used to think. What his listeners believed about God, would affect their understanding of life, of themselves, and of their real need. We need a right knowledge of God. It is the well-known statement of Calvin, the great Reformer, "Man can never come to a right knowledge of himself, when he has not first looked up to God and sees God in the face, and then descends to behold himself." Only then we will understand that we are lost and undone sinners in God's sight, and how we stand in need of His mercy. Therefore, God was the starting point of Paul.

And therefore, the Apostles' Creed also begins with God: "I believe in God." God is the starting point for belief. The Christian believes in God, and then specifically in God the Father, God

the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. It is a God with a specific identity. The apostles conclude their epistles by pronouncing a benediction upon the congregation. For instance, in 2 Corinthians 13, verse 14, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all.” It was a benediction of the Triune God. The Christian does not believe in just any god designated by people as “god.” The Christian believes in the Triune God. The Apostles’ Creed therefore speaks of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Consequently, we refer to the Apostles’ Creed as a Trinitarian creed. This is rooted in what candidates for baptism had to confess before they could be baptized. They had to confess what they believed regarding God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Triune God therefore constitutes the structure of the Apostles’ Creed, confessing that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

It is the believer’s response to God’s revelation of himself in the Bible. God has revealed himself in his Word as subsisting in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus made this clear when he issued the command to baptize “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” Matthew 28, verse 19.

This raises questions for us. How can we speak of the existence of one God and simultaneously speak of the three persons of the Godhead? Does not this yield a heretical faith in three gods, whereas there is but one true God? The Islam therefore rejects the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. They posit that Allah has no companions that are co-essential with him. Allah is the one and only, singular God. However, Christians believe in a Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They do not believe in three gods, but only in one God, not subsisting out of three persons, but in three persons. It is a great mistake to say that the Christian believes in three gods. He believes in one, only God subsisting in three persons. We do not believe this because we understand it, but rather because God has revealed himself as such in his Word.

Genesis 1, verse 26 comes to mind here, “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our own likeness.” The Hebrew word for God, which is used here, is the word Elohim—a plural word. Here, God speaks of himself in plural terms. The Bible also often speaks of distinct persons of the Godhead. In Psalm 110, the one Lord speaks to another Lord—it is said: “The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” When Jesus was baptized, it became very obvious that God subsists in three persons. The Son was baptized, the Father spoke from heaven, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove.

The Bible clearly articulates two truths about God. The first truth is that there is but one only God: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD”—Deuteronomy 6, verse 4. This is the well-known Shema of the Jews. The second truth is that the Scriptures teach that the Godhead must be distinguished, as subsisting in three persons. 1 John 5, verse 7 says, “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.” Based on this scriptural evidence, the Apostles’ Creed holds up a Triune God. The God confessed exists in trinity. He is one God existing in three persons. Each person of the Godhead, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, is fully God, eternally in communion with one another.

God is more than a supreme being. He is more than a life source. He is more than the highest intelligence, or a great architect. He is the living and the true God. He is Father, Son and Holy Ghost. We do not believe this because we understand this, but because God has revealed himself in his Word, that these three distinct persons are the only true and eternal God. Although this truth does not contradict our reason, it evidently transcends our reason. We cannot comprehend God. We must say with David, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain to it”—Psalm 139. Sound and Biblical theologians teach us that two matters are essential for understanding the divine Trinity. The first truth is that God, in his eternal existence, has not been a lonely God. He subsists in the persons of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They find in each other their supreme happiness. Thus, God did not create man because he was lonely, but rather because he purposed to communicate his glory to them. He desired to make them partakers of his happiness. In contrast to Allah of the Islam, who is encapsulated in his stark solitude, the God of the Bible is triune. The warmth of a relationship is foreign to Allah. The God of the Bible is, however, a relational God. Internal to his being, there is a relationship between three persons, and he also has a relationship with man, and his angels.

The second truth is that the doctrine of the Trinity is connected with our redemption and salva-

tion. The apostolic epistles continually speak of the love of God the Father, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the communion of the Holy Spirit. The Trinity relates to our salvation. If God were not a Triune God, there could not be a God the Father, who sent his Son into the world. There could not be a God the Son, who assumed a human nature, and who made satisfaction for sin on Golgotha, on behalf of his church. There could not be a God the Holy Spirit to dwell in us, sanctify us, and make us partakers of the benefits Jesus has merited. The God of salvation is the Triune God.

The Trinity relates to the great story of redemption. It is the story of God the Father, who appointed our salvation; God the Son, who accomplished our salvation; and God the Holy Spirit, who applies our salvation. It portrays a Triune God at work for our salvation. This God is the God the Apostles' Creed holds up for our salvation. This God is where salvation begins. The Trinity is the basic reality of the Christian Gospel. We thus honor the unity in trinity, and the Trinity in unity.

The first thing the Apostles' Creed confesses about God is that he is Father. The Christian believes in God the Father. Fatherhood is essential to God's being. An impersonal God is foreign to the Bible. The Bible knows of no Allah who lives in isolation. The Bible speaks of a God who is Father, and then, in the first place, the Father of his Son Jesus Christ. Peter declares, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"—1 Peter 1, verse 3. In the Godhead, there is a relationship between a Father and a Son. On the one hand, we may think here of the relationship that exists between an earthly father and a son. On the other hand, we are here speaking about the eternal One. It is a fatherhood without beginning, and a fatherhood that will continue forever. The humanly relation between a father and his children is a shadow of the relation between God the Father and God the Son. At the same time, it transcends the humanly relation. We must also not think of this in terms of time, as if there was a time when only the Father was there, and not yet the Son. God the Father has never been without his Son, nor has his Son ever been without his Father. The Scriptures say, about the Son's eternal being, "The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old"—Proverbs 8, verse 22. John tells us that the Son of God, prior to his incarnation, was in the bosom of the Father. He writes in John 1, verse 18,

"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." Therefore we do know God, because Jesus has declared him. Jesus is the brightest mirror of the Father. Jesus could say, "He that has seen me, has seen the Father" (John 14:9). We know God the Father through Jesus Christ, his Son. The Son knows the Father comprehensively. Jesus said to the unbelieving Jews, "But I know him: for I am from him, and he has sent me"—John 7, verse 29. Jesus could say, I come from him; I was in his bosom, I know God, for he is my Father. Such is the language Scripture uses regarding the special relationship between God the Father and God the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a father-son relationship.

However, God is not only the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, he is also the God and Father of all true believers. But believers are not his natural children, such as is true for Jesus Christ, but rather, his adopted children. For Christ's sake, they have been adopted as God's children and heirs. It is only by the grace of God, that true believers are partakers of that great privilege. By nature, we are not at all the children of God. In Paradise, we had lost the privilege of childhood due to the sin of Adam and Eve. The Bible now refers to us as children of wrath, "We were by nature the children of wrath, even as others"—Ephesians 2, verse 3.

We also no longer have the nature and the heart of a child. Our nature has been infected and corrupted by sin. We must be born again and receive a new nature, in order to become a child of the living God. We need a new heart and a new spirit within us. We need not only the name of a child, but the heart of a child. By nature, as we are born, we do not have the heart of a child of God. We do not love God and do not desire to obey him.

We also do not have the right to call ourselves the children of God. We have lost the privilege of being a child of God, because of sin. We have been driven out of God's Paradise, yea driven out of his presence. Sin stands as a mountain between God and fallen sinners. It makes us the children of wrath. But in Christ, sinners are restored to the blessing of being called the children of God. The apostle John writes, "Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (1 John. 3:1).

The parable of the prodigal son teaches us this fatherly love of God towards a sinner, who has put his back upon him. The father not only granted forgiveness to his returning and repentant son,

but he also restored him as his son, with all the accompanying rights and privileges. He clothed him with the best robe and put the ring of childhood on his hand. It was an extraordinary display of grace.

Through faith in Jesus Christ, the believer is legally adopted as God's child and heir, as is written, in John 1, verse 12, "But as many as received him, to them gave he the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe upon his name." And by the renewing work of the Holy Spirit, the sinner again receives the heart of a child, so that a man again begins to love and serve God. We could say, faith in Jesus Christ restores the sinner the right to be a child of God. The renewing of the Holy Spirit bestows upon the sinner the nature and heart of a child. What a great privilege! Sinners become the children of God, by means of being adopted for Christ's sake. Neither our descent from Abraham, nor our membership in the Christian church will render us a child of God, but only the renewing work of the Holy Spirit, and faith in the crucified and resurrected Lord Jesus. Of such people, the apostle writes, "For you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus"—Galatians 3, verse 26.

Thus, the Fatherhood of God not only pertains to his Son, Jesus Christ, but God is also the Father of all true believers. He cares for them with fatherly compassion. "Like as a father pities his children, so the LORD pities them that fear him"—Psalm 103, verse 13. He will make all things work together for good. God's people may say with Asaph, "You shalt guide me with your counsel, and afterward receive me in glory"—Psalm 73, verse 24. What a comfort in life and death to know that the great God of heaven and earth calls us his sons and heirs, and to be able to cry, "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15).

The Apostles' Creed refers to God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and of earth. God is almighty. The Lord spoke to Abraham: "I am the Almighty God" (Gen. 17:1). God is not only mighty, but rather he is almighty. This God, who is almighty, is called, the maker of heaven and earth. The Apostles' Creed connects God's omnipotence with the creation of heaven and of earth. The creation of heaven and of earth demonstrates that God is almighty. God created all that there is from nothing. What a display of might!

Consider, as well, the ease with which God created. He used no instruments or tools. He only needed to speak, and it was there: "For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast"—Psalm 33, verse 9. The Bible says of God, he stretches out the heavens; he measures the waters in the hollow of his hands; he marks off the heavens with a span and he weighs the mountains in a balance (Psalm 104:2 and Isaiah 40:12). These are all certain and evident proofs of our Gods infinite power. Creation is an awe-inspiring display of God's omnipotence!

The Bible identifies God as the creator of heaven and of earth. The opening words of the Bible are, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). God is the origin of all things. There is ultimately only one answer to the question, Where did everything come from? The answer is, God! The Bible says, "In the beginning, God." Both heaven and earth have a beginning. There is only One who is without beginning, namely, God. Moses said regarding God, "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God"—Psalm 90, verse 2. This eternal, Almighty God is the creator of heaven and earth, of men and of angels, and of all that lives and exists. For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him"—Colossians 1, verse 16. Throughout all ages, men have attempted to explain the existence of creation apart from any reference to a creator. However, apart from a creator, the existence of men and animals, of plants and trees, and of the astonishing and immeasurable universe cannot be explained. Therefore we confess that we believe in "God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and of earth." Creation demands a creator.

When men refuse to acknowledge God as creator, they will attempt to formulate alternate causes to explain the existence of heaven and earth, of living creatures, and of plants and animals. Physicists and scientists have developed a variety of theories to explain the existence of heaven and of earth apart from the initiative of a creator. The best known of such theories is the evolutionary theory of Charles Darwin. The essence of that theory is as follows: All living creatures have their origin in one common organism; by way of natural selection, this organism has brought

forth all the various forms of life. According to this theory, such a process demands a great deal of time—even billions of years. According to this theory, man is the descendant of apes. Another theory posits that there has been a big bang, an original bang—a dramatic explosion of the original mass of the universe. That would have constituted the birth of the universe, and all forms of life would have originated in this big bang.

These theories deny the existence of God as creator. Such notions coincide with atheism. The word “atheism” means “without God.” An atheist is someone who does not believe in anything—not in the one true God, or any other gods. For them there is only this tangible life. The evolutionary theory and the big bang theory deny the existence of God as the creator of all things. Such theories have influenced many, and especially young people, thereby causing them to become estranged from God and the Bible.

However, these theories are not as impressive as they seem. They are based on numerous assumptions and presuppositions. The proponents of the evolution and big bang theories are therefore faced with immense problems. Their theories generate many questions. First, creation demands a creator, for the world could not have created itself. How can something originate in nothing? If everything originates in some primordial soup, then what is the origin of this primordial soup? And if the universe came into existence by way of the big bang, what is the origin of the original mass that exploded? Both the big bang theory as well as the evolution theory are irrational. How can something come from nothing? How is it possible that everything we see around us could originate in nothing? These questions are real and rational questions. Matters must be called into existence—it demands a creator to make something out of nothing.

Second, creation itself declares that there is a creator. The Belgic Confession says that creation is as an elegant book, in which everyone can read that there must be a creator. That confession says, “The universe . . . is before our eyes like a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to contemplate the invisible things of God, namely, his eternal power and divinity” (Article 2).

The existence of our planets in the immeasurable universe is in itself proof of the existence of an almighty, wise, and intelligent creator. Everything speaks of great intelligence. Let us only look at our earth. Life on earth demands a specific atmosphere and temperature—not too cold, not too hot. If the earth were closer to the sun, everything would burn up. If the earth were farther away from the sun, everything would freeze. If the earth’s revolutions around the sun were either slower or faster, there would be no day and night cycle. Furthermore, when we think of gravity, light, and fruitfulness, and so many other things, we must say, “O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches”—Psalm 104, verse 24.

Would all of this exist by chance, having its origin in either a primordial soup or in an explosion of the universe? Such a notion is irrational. Believing such theories is not a manifestation of wisdom. To believe in a creator is rational. And therefore, it requires greater faith to believe the theories of scientists and physicists than to believe the Bible, which declares, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1).

The entire creation affirms what the Bible teaches us in Genesis, namely, that the earth was made to be a happy home for mankind. When we observe flowers and animals, and especially when we consider ourselves, does not everything exclaim with Paul, in Colossians 1, “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist.”

Just as a watch requires a watchmaker, likewise creation requires a creator. Creation cannot be the result of chance, and it could not have come into existence spontaneously. Everything points to God our creator. Why are we capable of finding something to be either beautiful and good, or ugly and evil? What is the origin of morality? Who has determined what good and evil are? We observe the sun arise and go down. We observe the change of seasons, and after every winter, we observe the return of summer. We see beauty in flowers, and majesty in a tumultuous ocean. We observe the germination of seed and trees bearing fruit. We observe the birth of children, and the emergence of love and care. We observe being born and dying. All of this evidence exclaims, I am here, your creator and maker! See with your eyes, touch with your hands, and hear the voice of your creator.

The Lord declares, “I have made the earth, and created man upon it”—Isaiah 45, verse 12.

The world is not ignorant regarding the existence of God who has created all things. He who closes his eyes will do so deliberately. He who closes his ears will also do so deliberately. However, God reveals himself in creation as our maker, preserver, and ruler who is worthy to be served, honored, obeyed, and loved. Romans 1, verse 20, says, “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.” Man cannot escape God’s revelation of Himself in the realm of nature. He also cannot run away from himself and ignore his innate knowledge of God. Someone exists far greater than, and above and beyond, himself. There is a God! The book of nature, God’s creation, tells him this.

However, the Christian not only reads the book of nature. He also reads the Bible, God’s clearest revelation of Himself. And thus, looking at creation through the lenses of Scripture, the Christian confesses, “I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and of earth.”

THE APOSTLES' CREED

Rev. Cornelis Harinck

Transcript—Lecture 3

Article 2: The Lord Jesus Christ, God's Only Begotten Son

Beloved listener, the second article of the Apostles' Creed speaks about Jesus Christ. We read in this Article, "and in Jesus Christ, his only begotten son, our Lord." With these words the Christian confesses not only that Jesus is the Son of God, but also that Jesus is his Lord.

In Matthew 22, it is spoken of a group of Pharisees that approached Jesus with a question, saying, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" They wanted to know which of the Ten Commandments was most important. Since the Pharisees and scribes were preoccupied with such questions, they confronted Jesus and demanded that he would designate one of the Ten Commandments as being most important. Jesus's response to their question was: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets"—Matthew 22, verses 37 to 40). What an extraordinary answer! It expresses great wisdom and exceptional knowledge of Scripture. Jesus did not say, the first commandment or the tenth commandment is the most important commandment. He pointed at the very heart of the law, namely, love to God and the neighbor. Love is the fulfillment of the law. They could have known this, for Moses had already taught that the law mandates love to God, saying, "And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might"—Deuteronomy 6, verse 5. After that, Jesus countered them by asking the Pharisees also a question. He asked them, "What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?"—they replied—"The Son of David" (Matthew 22:42). The answer to this question was well known. Every Jew knew that the Messiah would be a descendant of David. Jesus then confronted them with a dilemma, saying, "How then does David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool?" These words are found in Psalm 110. There David speaks of the Messiah, both as his son and as his Lord. In light of David's reference to the Messiah, Jesus then asked the Pharisees, "If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?" (Matthew 22:43–45). They did not know how to answer this question. We also cannot comprehend how the Messiah can simultaneously be the son of David, and David's God and Lord. There is only one satisfactory answer: the Messiah is both. He is a descendant of David, as to his human nature, and he is the Son of God, as to his divine nature. Jesus is God and man.

Attacked by heresies who denied that Jesus was the eternal Son of the eternal God, the early church confessed about Jesus, in the Nicene Creed, in the year 325 AD: "The only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds. God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made; being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made." Jesus is truly God and truly man. Jesus, in his human nature, is flesh and blood of the Virgin Mary. As is true for all men, he was born of a woman and grew up from childhood to adulthood. Jesus experienced hunger and thirst, sorrow and joy, fatigue and pain, temptation, suffering, and death. Jesus was truly man. The Bible tells us that he became like unto us in all things, "Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren"—Hebrews 2, verse 17. There was but one thing in which he differed from us—he knew no sin. Hebrews 4, verse 15 says he "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Jesus could challenge his enemies by saying, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" (John 8:46) How delighted they would have been if they

could have charged him with being a thief, fornicator, or liar. However, they could not accuse him of one single sin.

Jesus is an historical person, a man of flesh and blood. Regarding this historical Jesus, a man of flesh and blood, who lived during the first year of our calendar, the early Christian church confesses in the Apostles' Creed that he is, "God's only begotten Son." The child Jesus, who grew up in Nazareth, the man Jesus, who preached the Gospel of the kingdom of God; who went about doing good, healed the sick, raised up the dead, died on the cross of Calvary, is the Son of God. He is God and man united in one person—Emmanuel, God with us (Matthew 1:23). Why does the Christian believe this? We believe this, not because we can comprehend it, but rather, because the Bible teaches it.

The Old Testament contains prophecies regarding the divinity of the Messiah. In Micah's well-known prophecy, the Messiah is referred to as the person whose being is from eternity, "Whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2). The prophecy of Isaiah speaks of the Messiah as the One whose name is, "Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace"—Isaiah 9, verse 6. These names are all applicable only to God.

The New Testament yields abundant proof of Jesus' divinity. God the Father spoke from heaven after Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). The Apostle John testifies of Jesus, saying, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Paul declares Jesus, "to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead;" that is, Jesus Christ our Lord—Romans 1, verse 4. Jesus himself frequently testified publicly that he was the Son of God. When he stood before the Sanhedrin, the high priest put Jesus under oath and said to him, "I adjure thee by the living God, that you tell us whether you are the Christ, the Son of God." And what was Jesus' answer? He replied, "You have said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall you see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." When the high priest heard this answer, he rent his high-priestly garment in utter dismay, and said, "He has spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses?"—Matthew 26, verses 63 to 65. He clearly understood that Jesus claimed to be the blessed Son of man, the Messiah, and the eternal Son of God, of whom Daniel had spoken, "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven"—Daniel 7, verse 13. After Jesus had spoken these words, he was condemned to death by the Sanhedrin, because he affirmed himself to be the Son of God.

Finally, the many miracles and works he performed testify of Jesus' divinity. He did works that only God can perform. Upon having calmed the wind and the sea by his omnipotent words, the disciples said in amazement, "What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"—Mark 4, verse 41. They were deeply convinced of Jesus' divinity, and therefore confessed, "We believe and are sure that you are that Christ, the Son of the living God"—John 6, verse 69.

The apostles had in their ministry many struggles, doubts and fears. They often had to say with Paul, "Without were fightings, within were fears"—2 Corinthians 7, verse 5. But they never doubted that Jesus was divine. They knew him to be the Son of God.

Jesus is very God and very man. The early church articulated this by saying, "Vere Deo, vere homo." The Bible repeatedly refers to Jesus as the only begotten Son of God. God's love for a lost world was made manifest in the giving of his only begotten Son, to be the Redeemer and Savior of the lost. In John 3, verse 16, we hear Jesus saying to Nicodemus, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Therefore the Apostles' Creed confesses that Jesus Christ is God's only begotten Son.

Jesus is called the only begotten Son of God, albeit that believers are also said to be the children—the sons and daughters of God. There is nevertheless a profound difference between the sonship of Jesus and that of believers. Believers, for Christ's sake, have become the sons of God by way of adoption. However, Jesus is the natural Son of God. He is of the same essence as God, being the only begotten Son of God. In this sense, God has only one Son. Jesus is therefore always referred to as the only begotten Son of God.

Thus, Jesus is the unique Son of God and has a unique relationship with God the Father. To the Jews, he declared, "The Father and I are one"—John 10, verse 30, thereby declaring himself to be

equal with the Father. Jesus spoke of God as his Father, in a very unique sense. He called him his “abba,” the name whereby little children, in the Aramaic language, did call their father. We can say that Jesus called God his own daddy. The Pharisees, scribes, and elders of Israel understood very well what Jesus was thereby saying. We read in John 5, verse 18, “Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his own Father, making himself equal with God.” Jesus would refer to God as his own Father, that is, as his personal and natural Father.

The Bible uses the word “begotten.” As the Son, Jesus is begotten of God, he is not the created Son of God, but the generated Son of God, never having been created, but eternally begotten of the Father. These are important expressions and qualifications. The heavens and the earth, men and angels, animals and plants, and all things visible and invisible have been created by God. The Son, however, has neither been created nor made. Thus, was it never so that the eternal Son of God was not with the Father, and thus that the Son did not yet exist. One could easily be inclined to think so. The Scriptures, however, speak of the Son being begotten of the Father, in the present tense, and thus in connection with God’s everlasting existence. The Father is eternally engaged in generating or begetting his Son, without there being a beginning, progression of time, or conclusion. It is an eternal and never-ending begetting. Jesus himself affirmed this by saying, “For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself”—John 5, verse 26. Thus, from all eternity, the Father communicates his identical nature to his Son. Jesus declares himself and his Father to be one, in the true sense of the words. They are one as to their Godhead, eternity, power, and glory. The Son is truly God together with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we believe, based on the Bible, that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God.

This does not mean that we can comprehend this eternal generation of the Son by the Father. It merely means that we believe what the Bible teaches, namely, that Jesus is the only and natural Son of the Father. God has many adopted children, but he has only one begotten Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Albeit that we cannot comprehend the eternal generation of the Son by the Father, nevertheless the confession that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God is of utmost importance. Salvation is at stake here. For if Christ be not truly God, we are not saved, for only a Savior who is truly God can save us.

During the apostolic period, heretics already denied the divinity of Christ. They attempted to arrive at a rational explanation why the Bible refers to Jesus as the only begotten Son of God. They could not explain with their philosophies why Jesus is God and man, and therefore they did not want to accept that Jesus is truly God and truly man. We already observe this in the epistles of the Apostle John. All who deny, either that Jesus is the Son of God, or that Jesus the Son of God became man, are designated by John as the antichrist. He writes in 1 John 4, verse 3, “And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.” A certain Arius, born around 250 AD, was a notorious heretic during the early history of Christianity, who concluded that Jesus was the most important of all creatures, but not the eternal Son of the eternal God. It caused a lot of unrest and strife in the Christian church. Others taught that the name “Son of God” must be viewed as an honorary title, rather than being taken literally.

Islam believes that Jesus was indeed a prophet, but it rejects the notion that he is God’s Son. They believe that Allah is alone and without any person being co-equal with him—and there’s also that he has no son. Though Jehovah’s Witnesses designate Jesus as the supreme example, and the superior witness of Jehovah, they do not acknowledge him to be God. He is merely the one who proclaims God’s message. However, at the baptism of Jesus, God declared audibly from heaven, “Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22). Modern theologians also deny that Jesus is the Son of God. They consider him to be the greatest Jew, a noble man, a humanist, or a role model for neighborly love, but not the Son of God. There are also quite a few religious factions who deny the Biblical testimony that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God.

What is actually at stake here? Why is the confession that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God so significant? The answer is that if Jesus is not truly God, then there is no Emmanuel, God with us (Matthew 1:23). Then the incarnation of God’s Son did not occur, and Jesus would be no more than a mere man, though he might be an extraordinary man. But if Jesus is not truly God, he

is not God manifest in the flesh, as Paul states, in 1 Timothy 3, verse 16. Then it would also not be true what Paul writes, in 2 Corinthians 5, verse 19, “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.” We would then neither be reconciled to God at all, nor redeemed by God. If Jesus would not be truly God, the resurrection would merely be the resurrection of a mere man, rather than the resurrection of the divine Redeemer, Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, and was raised again for our justification” Romans 4, verse 25.

In short, if Jesus were not the Son of God who suffered and died in our place, arose from the dead, and is now seated at God’s right hand, our hope would be a delusion. We would then have trusted in a mere man for our salvation. Our worship of Jesus would then be rank idolatry, for we would be rendering divine worship to a mere man. But thanks be to God! God himself, in his Son Jesus Christ, has come into this world to rescue sinners from eternal destruction. Jesus came forth from the Father. He is God’s only begotten Son. Why else would the Bible refer to God as Father, if he does not have a Son? Our Savior is the only begotten Son of God.

The Christian confesses also that he believes in *Jesus Christ our Lord*. In this Confession, we encounter the three preeminent names of our Redeemer, namely, *Jesus*, *Christ*, and *Lord*. The Redeemer’s personal name is *Jesus*, that is, “Savior.” The angel Gabriel said to Mary, “And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS” (Luke 1:31). The name *Jesus* means, “Jehovah saves!” The name Jesus reveals who Jesus is, namely, the Savior, who came into the world “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

Jesus is also called *the Christ*, that is, “the anointed one.” The Hebrew equivalent is “Messiah.” Andrew told his brother Simon, “We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ” (John 1:41). When we confess that Jesus is the Christ, we ascribe to him all that the Old Testament heralded of God’s Messiah. The apostles, in their preaching, continually proved from the Old Testament that Jesus is the Christ—the promised Messiah. Acts 17 tells us what the custom was which the apostle followed in the preaching in the Jewish synagogue, “Then Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ” (Acts 17:2–3). Jesus is the Christ, means he is the Anointed One.

During the Old Testament, the prophets, priests, and kings were anointed with holy oil. This signified that God had called them to their office, and it implied the promise that God would equip them for their work. Jesus has been anointed by God to be Prophet, Priest, and King. To that end, he was anointed with the Holy Spirit. Matthew tells us what John the Baptist saw after Jesus had been baptized by him, “And, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him” (Matthew 3:16). It had been prophesied that the Messiah would be anointed with the Holy Spirit. In Isaiah 61, the Messiah says, “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD” (Isaiah 61:1–2). When Jesus read this portion from Isaiah, in the synagogue of Nazareth, he said, “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears”—Luke 4, verse 21. Thereby Jesus designated himself to be the promised Messiah.

Jesus was gifted and empowered by the Holy Spirit to preach and to perform miracles. But not in the same measure as, for example, the prophet Elijah. Jesus had the Spirit without measure. John 3, verse 34 says, “For God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him.” In the home of Cornelius, the centurion, Peter declared that “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power”—Acts 10, verse 38. Jesus is God’s Anointed One—the Messiah, and in him is fulfilled, “And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD”—Isaiah 11, verse 2.

Jesus is also called *Lord*, that is, “possessor, owner, or master.” This title was used in Bible times for a slave owner. It is synonymous with the word “master,” and thus, a title that is expressive of possession and authority. God calls himself the Lord and Possessor of Israel. When Moses demanded of Pharaoh that he would set Israel free, he said to Pharaoh, “Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Let my people go” (Exodus 5:1). God referred to himself as Israel’s Lord and expressed

his exclusive claim upon the people of Israel. Already at his birth, the angels announced that Jesus is Christ and Lord. The angels said to the shepherds, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). Particularly following his resurrection, Jesus is referred to as *Lord*. Peter said, on the day of Pentecost, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). By raising Jesus from the dead, God demonstrated who Jesus was, namely, Lord, and Messiah. Thomas, therefore, confessed of Jesus, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). The title, *Lord*, is expressive of power and dominion. The apostle says, "For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living"—Romans 14, verse 9. Jesus possesses authority. Jesus said to his disciples, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:18). The day will come that all creatures will bow before him and confess him to be Lord, "At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"—Philippians 2, verses 10 and 11.

Most importantly, Jesus is the Lord of his church. He has purchased his church and delivered her from the power of sin and Satan, thereby establishing her to be his possession. It is said of the believers, "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot"—1 Peter 1, verses 18 and 19. He ransomed his people from hell with his blood. The elect are the reward upon Jesus' labors. It was prophesied, in Isaiah 53, verse 11, "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." Thus, Jesus became both Lord and possessor of his church. He paid the price for her redemption on Golgotha. Not only did he redeem his people by his blood, but he is also actively engaged in delivering them from the powers of sin and Satan, by the renewing ministry of the Holy Spirit.

We think ourselves to be free, but in reality, we are slaves. In Adam's fall, all men have come under the power and dominion of Satan. Rather than lords, we have become slaves. We are enslaved to our sins, even more than a drug addict. The Jews boasted of the fact that they were Abraham's descendants and had never been slaves. Jesus responded, however, by saying, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever commits sin is the servant of sin"—John 8, verse 34. Sin enslaves! Sin renders us not only to be its slaves, but also subjects us to the cruel bondage of the devil. Sin is the chain by which the devil binds us. Sin has brought us under Satan's cruel dominion.

Jesus delivers men from this slavery. This is the glory of Christianity. It sets sinners free from the dominion of sin and Satan. It makes them a new man. God's children have been delivered from the power of darkness. They have been translated into another kingdom. Colossians 1, verse 13 says, "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." Therefore the Christians call Jesus their Lord. God has delivered each of them from the power of sin and Satan by regenerating and renewing them by the Holy Spirit. He finds them often wandering far from God, fulfilling the desires of the flesh, blinded by Satan and without God in the world. But, so did the apostle write, "God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love whereby he loved us, . . . hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace you are saved)" (Ephesians 2:4).

When God converts sinners, he breaks the dominion of sin, dwelling within them, and pours forth his love into their hearts. Consequently, they will, with a godly sorrow, bid farewell to all former sins and evil ways, and they will begin to serve God in newness of spirit, as is said in Romans 7, verse 6. Jesus then ascends the throne of our hearts and will incline us to embrace him willingly, as Lord and Master. We will then have a new Lord and a new Master. Before being saved, the devil was our lord and master, but now Jesus is our Lord and Master. God's children wholeheartedly concur with the people of Israel, when, after they had been delivered from Babylon, said, "O LORD our God, other lords beside you have had dominion over us: but by you only will we make mention of your name"—Isaiah 26, verse 13. Jesus, the good Shepherd, sought them when a stranger, wandering from the fold of God. He sought and he found them and made them his willing subjects. This creates a blessed bond between Christ and the believing soul—a bond that never will be broken. A body cemented together by love. It is a sacred union, a bond of sovereign grace that never will be rent in twain. It makes the believers and Christ one body.

It is noteworthy that the Apostles' Creed, in confessing that Jesus is Lord, does not speak of *the* Lord, but rather, of *our* Lord. The Christian believes in Jesus Christ our Lord. The Christian does not merely acknowledge that Jesus is a Lord, but rather, that he is his or her Lord. This expresses amazement and gratitude. The Christian may know himself to have received a new Lord and new Master. The Christian confesses regarding Jesus, "He is my Lord!"

"What think ye of Christ?" (Matthew 22:42) Jesus posed this question to his disciples. Upon having heard what men thought of him, he asked his disciples very pointedly, "But whom say ye that I am?"—Matthew 16, verse 15. The question is, Who is Jesus for you? Has he become indispensable and precious to you? Is your heart knitted with him? The Jesus who saves is not merely the Jesus we confess with our lips. The Jesus who saves me is the Jesus who dwells in my heart by faith. Peter says, concerning believers, "Unto you therefore which believe he is precious" (1 Peter 2:7). Only a true faith, a faith of the heart, unites with Christ. True faith is known by accepting the whole Christ. It accepts Jesus not only as his Savior, but also as his Lord. How important it is to recognize that upon embracing Jesus as our Savior, we also embrace him as our Lord! You cannot have Christ for your Savior, unless you also have him as your Lord. The complete Christ must be embraced. A true believer will not embrace Jesus merely to be delivered from hell and damnation. He or she will also embrace him as King, to be governed by him and will manifest this by a new walk of life. Jesus said, Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but who does the will of my Father in heaven. He even spoke that on the day of his return, Many will say, Lord, Lord. And then I will declare to them: I never knew you, depart from me, you who practice lawlessness (Matthew 7:22–23). When we accept Christ as Savior, we also accept him as our Lord and King to rule over us. Jesus taught, "Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them" Matthew 7, verse 20.

THE APOSTLES' CREED

Rev. Cornelis Harinck

Transcript—Lecture 4

Article 3: The Conception and Virgin Birth of the Savior

Beloved listener, Article 3 of the Apostles' Creed reads: "who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary." These words call us to consider the incomprehensible fact of the virgin birth of Jesus. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary. Such was the manner in which Jesus came into the world. How is this possible? A human being cannot possibly be born without the involvement of a man begetting a woman. Many, therefore, ridicule the virgin birth of Jesus. They claim that Christians have fabricated this fact to elevate the status of Jesus, and that Jesus was merely the son of Joseph, or even of a Roman soldier. Throughout the ages, the virgin birth of Jesus, for many, has been an obstacle to believing the message of the Christian church. Many preachers, therefore, deem it wise to remain silent about the virgin birth of Jesus, and to consider it to be merely a myth.

Nevertheless the Bible clearly states that Jesus was born of a virgin. The Apostles' Creed articulated this same truth: "who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary." Scriptural proofs are abundant in support of this. When the angel Gabriel announced to the Virgin Mary that she would give birth to a son, her reaction was, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" (Luke 1:34). Mary had not known sexual intercourse. Her reaction was logical. How could a virgin give birth to a son? The angel then responded, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon you, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God"—Luke 1, verse 35. Matthew tells us that Joseph grieved deeply, when he suspected that Mary had become unfaithful to him. However, the angel sent to him by the Lord reassured him, saying, "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto you Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 1:20). The clear and unambiguous witness of the Gospels is that Mary was with child without the involvement of a man. Scripture informs us that the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: "When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost"—Matthew 1, verse 18. In the light of the information the Bible gives, Jesus' virgin birth is indisputable. One can only deny this by denying the facts as recorded in the Gospels.

The Apostles' Creed confesses: "conceived by the Holy Ghost." Mary's conception is attributed to the Holy Ghost. The Holy Spirit, who has formed human life within Mary, is the same Holy Spirit who once moved upon the face of the waters at the original creation, ordering created matter into a beautiful creation that fully emerged at the end of six days. The Holy Spirit who enabled seed to germinate and rendered the earth fruitful, created human life within Mary. God would envelope Mary with a protective embrace that would consecrate her for a unique service. She would conceive without the involvement of a man, and give birth to a Son—a Son who would be called the Son of the Highest (Luke 1:32). In this manner, the eternal Son of God would become human. Isaiah's prophecy would be fulfilled in Mary: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14).

Who is Jesus? To whom did Mary give birth? Whom did she wrap in swaddling clothes and lay in a manger? The Bible gives the answer: God manifest in the flesh! "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh"—1 Timothy 3, verse 16. Mary's son, the child born in Bethlehem, is God, having assumed the human nature. Scripture teaches this, and the Christian confesses it.

The child of Bethlehem, as to his divine nature, is the only child that existed before having been conceived and born. Jesus could say, “Before Abraham was, I am”—John 8, verse 58. John begins his description, of all that Jesus said and did, with these impressive words: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”—John 1, verse 1. Jesus is the eternal Word, who is eternally with God and who is God. This eternal, divine Word has become man through the instrumentality of the Virgin Mary.

The ancient theologians would express it as follows: He remained who he was, and became what he was not. He remained who he was, namely, God of God and Light of light. Albeit that he was born of a woman, was laid in a manger, crawled in the Garden of Gethsemane as a worm and no man, was crucified, died and was buried—in so doing, he did not relinquish his Godhead. He remained the eternal Son of God. What, then, did he do? He veiled his deity. He humbled himself and became God’s Servant. In Philippians 2, it is said, “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:6–7). He concealed his divinity behind his humanity, and although he permitted himself to be mocked, captured, and crucified, he remained God—the eternal Son of the eternal God. He became what he was not, namely, flesh and blood of the Virgin Mary. He became a man, having soul and body, who was capable of suffering and dying. And how did he become a man? In the Apostles’ Creed, the Christian confesses that he was “conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary.”

Jesus’ human nature was not created in the same manner as Adam’s human nature. He received his human nature as we all receive it, namely, by birth. Jesus was born as the fruit of Mary’s womb. He was really and truly man, having both soul and body. He was acquainted with fatigue and pain, with joy and sorrow, with fear and anxiety, and with suffering and dying. Scripture declares that he became like unto us in all things: “Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren”—Hebrews 2, verse 17. He became one of us, “Emmanuel, . . . God with us” (Matthew 1:23). Scripture points out that Jesus became man. Thus, he was not a man, but he became man in the fullness of time. John writes, “The Word became flesh”—John 1, verse 14. Paul writes, “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law”—Galatians 4, verse 4. Both of these passages speak of becoming, and of being made. Indeed, he became what he was not—he became man, a genuine man, with a human body and a rational soul.

Although Jesus became like unto us in all things, there was one exception—he did not become like unto us concerning sin. The apostle says of Jesus, “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin”—2 Corinthians 5, verse 21. Jesus knew no original sin, and no actual sins. How could this be? How could Jesus indeed be man, born of a woman, and yet be without sin? Our ancient Apostles’ Creed says that he was “conceived by the Holy Ghost.”

He, who brought forth the child Jesus was no earthly father, and thus, not a fallen man who passes on original sin to his descendants. The child Jesus was not infected with sin. The Holy Spirit brought about the birth of Jesus. Although Jesus had no earthly father, he did have an earthly mother. Mary was indeed involved in this conception, but rather than a man, it was the Holy Spirit, who achieved conception in her womb. And therefore Jesus was without sin. The sinless conception of Jesus is a holy mystery underscoring the supernatural nature of the Christian faith.

God is the author of all natural processes and laws. Children are born in consequence of the physical union of the husband and his wife. Nevertheless, God is not bound to this. Whenever God engages himself in a manner that cannot be reconciled with the laws of nature, we refer to it as a miracle. A miracle cannot be explained, or else it would no longer be a miracle. This particularly applies to the virgin birth of Jesus. God performed a supernatural miracle, albeit by engaging the Virgin Mary. Jesus, therefore, has a true human nature, being flesh and blood of the Virgin Mary, while at the same time not being contaminated with original sin. Jesus is “that holy thing which shall be born of thee” (Luke 1:35).

Jesus is God’s Son, born of the Virgin Mary, and conceived by the Holy Ghost. He is God and man. He is Emmanuel. He is a true God-man, One who is all that God is, and at the same time, all that man is. Christ was not half a God and half a man—he was perfectly God and perfectly man. The angel Gabriel said to Mary, “They shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is,

God with us” (Matthew 1:23). To say that Jesus is both God and man does not mean that we either have two individuals or two persons, but in Jesus, two natures are united in one person. He is the God-man then, qualifying him to be the Mediator between God and man, and thus to be the Savior.

Why did God’s Son have to become man, in order to be the Redeemer of his people? Could he not from heaven have fulfilled the promise of Paradise, to crush the head of the devil? Was it necessary for him to leave heaven, to be born of a woman, and thus to become man? We must answer this question, by another question: “Who has sinned?” Man has sinned, and therefore, man must also bear the punishment of sin. The human nature has sinned, and therefore, sin must be punished in the human nature. The Son of God had to assume the nature of his people, to enable him to be their substitute. The apostle speaks of this, saying, “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage”—Hebrews 2, verses 14. Jesus came on a mission. In order to carry out his mission of salvation, the Son of God needed to be clothed with humanity.

God’s justice demands that man, having sinned, must pay the penalty of sin. The renowned church father, Athanasius, speaks, in his book, *Incarnatione Verbi* (Incarnation of the Word), about the demand of God’s being. God’s holy being demands truth and justice. God is just, and therefore, he will not punish another creature for man’s sin. Consequently, the Redeemer had to be man, so that he could vicariously bear the punishment for the sins of his people. Thus, he also had to be a sinless man. The Mediator could not merely be a man; he also had to be free of sin. The Heidelberg Catechism says plainly that “one, who is himself a sinner, cannot satisfy for others” (Lord’s Day 6). A bankrupt man cannot help another bankrupt man. The judicial sentence of Scripture is, “None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him”—Psalm 49, verse 8. The Redeemer must, therefore, indeed, be man, but not a sinner. He must not only be free from any sinful deed, but also free from the pollution of original sin. As the atoning sacrifice in the temple had to be without blemish, so the Redeemer had to be sinless. Of every man who descends from Adam, it must be said, “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one”—Job 14, verse 4. Regarding Jesus, we read, however, that he is “that holy thing which shall be born of thee” (Luke 1:35). His conception was not by a father with a corrupt nature, but he was conceived by the Holy Ghost (Matthew 1:20). Hebrews 7, verse 26 says of Jesus, that he is “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” This qualifies him to be the Surety to render payment on behalf of sinners.

Jesus’ incarnation through the instrumentality of Mary yields much comfort. Not only did this qualify Jesus to take our place as Surety and Mediator, to pay the debt incurred by sin, but he could also be a compassionate high priest. Hebrews 2, verse 17 says, “Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God.” The epistle of the Hebrews informs us that God did not appoint holy angels to assume the office of high priest, but rather, weak, sinful, and fallen men: “For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God”—Hebrews 5, verse 1. God did not choose holy angels, but fallen men to be priests and high priest in the temple. What moved the Lord to do so? The high priest had to be someone who would understand and have compassion with the weak, sinful, guilty, grieving, contrite, and troubled Israelite, who would come to the temple to seek comfort, forgiveness, and peace. It had to be a high priest “who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity”—Hebrews 5, verse 2.

Such a high priest is Jesus! By way of his incarnation, he has become like unto us in all things. We will not encounter anything in life that Jesus also did not encounter. Whatever the strife and temptations of a believer may be, Jesus will have endured it as well. Jesus’ footsteps are to be found everywhere. He has been engaged in the same warfare, has experienced the same suffering, has endured the same shame, and has died the same death. Having been tempted in all things, he is acquainted with all temptations, and understands them. He has experience of it all. Therefore he can have compassion with his tried followers in all their temptations, suffering, and dying. Because of his incarnation, he can be the compassionate high priest for all who take refuge in him, with their sins, misery, temptations, and afflictions. It makes Jesus near and dear to them in all their afflictions. It makes the believer to say, “I will fear no evil: for thou art with me” (Psalm 23:4).

And Jesus gained the victory. He has overcome the enemy, for in all his temptations and sufferings, he remained without sin. The apostle says that Jesus “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin”—Hebrews 4, verse 15. We often sin in our temptations and afflictions, and are never free from guilt and defilement. But Jesus remained sinless. He obeyed his Father, “and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross”—Philippians 2, verse 8. The first Adam fell in the temptation, but Jesus, the second Adam, remained faithful and obedient to his Father. He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, “Not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39).

Jesus has indeed been tempted like as we are, but without sin. He remained in all this, the obedient Son of his Father. Therefore, he can sustain us in all our infirmities and temptations. The children of God may now boast in all their crosses and tribulations, and say with the Apostle Paul, “Nay, in all things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us”—Romans 8, verse 37. Such is the rich comfort to be extracted from the incarnation of God’s Son. For the believing Christian, the true humanity of Jesus does not diminish his glory and beauty. Instead, it makes him all the more glorious and precious. The incarnation makes Jesus an ultimate, sufficient Savior, for Jesus is not only very man, but also very God.

The Redeemer not only had to be a holy and righteous man, but he also had to be stronger than all men. He needed to be God. The work he had to accomplish, and the battle he had to fight was too strenuous for either a sinless man or a mighty and holy angel. Jesus had to take upon himself all the sins of his elect, and undergo what they were deserving of, to death due to their sins. He had to be subjected to the curse of the law, for a broken law pronounces a curse upon the transgressor. He had to bear the punishment that was due upon sin, for God cannot let sin go unpunished. He had to endure the wrath of God, for sin provokes the just and holy God to wrath. He had to die, for “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). He had to endure being forsaken of God, for the consequence of sin is being cast into a hell of banishment from God. He had to bruise the head of the old serpent, the devil, and to conquer death. How could he have endured and prevailed in all of this if, in addition to being very man, he had not been very God? Jesus would have succumbed under this heavy burden, although he was a righteous man, had he simultaneously not been true God. Jesus had to conquer enemies that only God is able to conquer. He had to conquer the devil, death, the grave, and hell. An ordinary man could not have achieved this. Only a divine Redeemer could prevail, as the prophet Jeremiah says, “Their Redeemer is strong; the LORD of hosts is his name”—Jeremiah 50, verse 34. Had Jesus not truly been very God, he would have succumbed in the Garden of Gethsemane, and on the cross. He would never have been able to exclaim, “It is finished” (John 19:30). Jesus’ divinity sustained him, and thus, he was enabled to succeed in his redemptive work.

We hear the Messiah saying, in Isaiah 63, verse 5, “And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my fury, it upheld me.” Jesus had to be God in order to assign infinite value to his obedience, his death, and the shedding of his blood. God is infinite, and therefore, sin committed against God, demands infinite satisfaction. Only One who is God is capable to offer the one sacrifice which achieves infinite satisfaction.

Furthermore, Jesus had to bring a sacrifice that would be sufficient not merely for a few. His sacrifice would have to be sufficient for a multitude that no man can number, and only a divine Redeemer is able to achieve this. Jesus must also be God, to make us partakers of his righteousness. He must be able to apply what he has merited, and make sinners partakers of his benefits. Persecutors like the Apostle Paul would have to be transformed into preachers. The heart of Lydia would have to be opened. The Christians in Corinth would have to be resurrected from spiritual death. And God’s Kingdom would have to be established among the nations. The work of redemption demanded a divine Redeemer, for Jesus would be a powerless Redeemer apart from his Godhead.

Jesus must also be qualified to judge the living and the dead. Only a person who is God, and possesses omnipotence, and is omniscient is able to do this. Jesus had to be worthy to receive divine honor, and thus, worthy to be worshiped as God, without which, the one doing so being guilty of idolatry. Indeed, everything stands or falls with the confession that Jesus our Redeemer is both God and man, united in the person of the eternal Son of God. Only such a person could be the “one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”—1 Timothy 2, verse 5. He alone, who was

God and man in one person, was capable of being the Savior of fallen man.

His humanity enables him to take the place of sinful men. His divinity enables him to bear the weight of their sins, and to satisfy God's justice. None but this high priest could heal the sin-inflicted breach between God and man. Peter testified of Jesus, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved"—Acts 4, verse 12. We cannot be our own saviour. All our righteousnesses are but filthy rags. Only God can reconcile us with God. God's church has been redeemed by God!

Being both God and man, Jesus is the qualified and all-sufficient Savior. "For such a high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens"—Hebrews 7, verse 26. His divinity gives an eternal value to the sacrifice he offered. His blood speaks of better things than the blood of Abel (Hebrews 12:24). It cleanses from all sin. As God and man, the Redeemer is qualified to save to the uttermost: "Wherefore he is able also to save to the uttermost that come to God by him"—Hebrews 7, verse 25. Jesus has the power and the ability to save without limit. He can save the worst of sinners. He can break the strongest bonds of sin and Satan. Jesus only—the Christ born in Bethlehem, who is both God and man, can be our Redeemer. Only the Holy One, the sinless Jesus, who was born of the Virgin Mary, and was made sin for us, can, by his holiness and by his innocence, be our covering before a holy God.

However, Jesus is not only the all-sufficient and suitable Savior, but we very much need such a Savior. The question for us is whether we feel that need. Have you already been confronted with the fact that we cannot stand before a holy and just God, and therefore need Jesus' atoning blood? Is the question of your troubled heart, "Who shall cover my sins in the presence of a holy and just God?" Is this your sole great need? Well then, the message of God's Son being born of the Virgin Mary will be to you "good tidings of great joy, . . . for unto you is born . . . a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord"—Luke 2, verse 11. A very qualified and willing Savior is preached unto you. Make, therefore, haste and flee to him, who can and will save to the uttermost all who come to God by him. And for your soul's sake, do not forget what the apostle says, all that come to God by him, for the sinners he saves are only those that come to him.

THE APOSTLES' CREED

Rev. Cornelis Harinck

Transcript—Lecture 5

Article 4: The Suffering of Christ

Beloved listener, the fourth article of the Apostles' Creed confesses the following concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, "suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell."

The Creed states, in the first place, that Jesus suffered. The suffering in this world confronts us with profound questions. Throughout the ages, the question has been asked, how there could be so much suffering in a world that is governed by a God of infinite omnipotence and perfect goodness? As the omnipotent One, he should be able to keep us from being subjected to disasters, illnesses, suffering, and death. Should God, in his goodness, not be unwilling that his creatures should suffer as much as they do? And yet, God makes us to suffer. As soon as one speaks to an unbeliever about God, he or she will object by saying, "If your God is as good and as powerful as you say, why does he fail to do something about all the suffering in this world?" They will say to you, "I will have nothing to do with a God who allows people to suffer."

What should we answer such people? In the first place, that suffering has a cause. The Bible posits that suffering and death are the result of sin. Due to the disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve, a dreadful evil has invaded the world—namely, sin. Only when we take this into account, can we explain the reality of suffering and death. There was a time when there was no suffering—all was well. We read in Genesis 1, verse 31: "And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good." There was no suffering in the world God had created. However, by having sinned, man has brought suffering and death into the world.

After the fall in sin, God spoke to Eve, "I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in sorrow you shall bring forth children" (Genesis 3:16). And to Adam he said, "Because you have harkened unto the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree, of which I commanded you, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for your sake; in sorrow you shall you eat of it all the days of your life; . . . dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis 3:17 and 19). Suffering and death is the result of sin. Paul writes, in Romans 5, verse 12, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin." Were it not for sin, death would never have had a beginning. Sin is the womb of our sorrows and sufferings. We always must, with all our questions, go back to the fall of Adam and Eve in Paradise. All suffering must be traced back to that one act of representative disobedience of our first parents in the garden of Eden. We must view sin as being the cause of suffering and death. Where sin is, there must be suffering and death. Without taking this in account, suffering is a great mystery.

There is, however, one example of extraordinary suffering and fearful dying, to which this truth does not apply. It is the suffering of Jesus. There was no sin in him. Scripture speaks of him as he "who knew no sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21). He was sinless, perfect, and pure. Yet this perfect, undefiled, and holy Jesus suffered. The people despised and hated him. The devils tempted him. God forsook him. He died a criminal's death—the painful and cursed death of crucifixion. It is the mystery of all mysteries—the most profound and darkest of all God's ways. How could such a perfect man, who had never known or committed sin, but always loved God above all, and his neighbor as himself, suffer so intensely and die such a terrible death?

The only correct resolution of this mystery is articulated in the Biblical doctrine of the atonement, as secured by Christ's suretyship and substitution. In 2 Corinthians 5, verse 21, we read, "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of

God in him.” Jesus suffered. He is called the man of sorrows. Isaiah speaks of the Messiah as “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3). Jesus suffered physically. He underwent hunger and thirst, fatigue and pain. He was spit upon and degraded. He was flogged and pummeled, and he died a most grievous death by way of crucifixion.

However, Jesus suffered preeminently in his soul. He was mocked, slandered, scorned, denied, betrayed, and reviled. He suffered due to Satan’s temptations, the denial of Peter, the betrayal of Judas, and the rejection of his own people. He suffered due to God’s holy wrath that was provoked by sin. In the Garden of Gethsemane, he was so anxious and troubled about the cup he had to drink, that his sweat became as large drops of blood falling to the earth, and he declared, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death” (Matthew 26:38). He knew what lay before him. Jesus felt and bore the terrible wrath of God against sin. He suffered due to being forsaken of God on the cross. He cried out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46).

And why was he subjected to such suffering? It was because he took upon himself the sins of his people. In Psalm 40, we hear the Messiah say, “Sacrifice and offering thou did not desire; . . . Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me” (Psalm 40:6–7). When the Son of man saw that all the sacrifices could not take away sin and save the elect from the righteous vengeance of God, he declared himself willing to become their Substitute. Thus he had to endure God’s wrath against sin in their place. Peter testifies, “For Christ also hast once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God”—1 Peter 3, verse 18. Jesus’ suffering was vicarious. He suffered as the Surety and Mediator of his people. Isaiah spoke of this, saying, “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). His intense suffering was not due to his personal sins, but rather, due to our sins and crimes. He was wounded, not for his transgressions, but rather, for our transgressions. He was bruised, not for his iniquities, but rather, for our iniquities. He endured our punishment. He took upon him the curse of the law, which we had transgressed.

It shows us the amazing love of Christ, of which the apostle says, “For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commandeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”—Romans 5, verses 7 and 8. And as the good Shepherd, he gave his life for his sheep (John 10:11). The doctrine of substitution may be despised by the ungodly. Proud sinners may say, “Someone else need not to die for my sins.” However, it is the greatest amazement of the repenting and believing sinner, to behold Jesus dying for his sins. They look with wonder and say, “He took my place. He bore my sins and endured my punishment.”

The Apostles’ Creed says, “he suffered under Pontius Pilate.” Of the many forgotten names, the name of Pontius Pilate will always be remembered, as belonging to the man who was responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus. However, Jesus did not merely suffer under Pontius Pilate. His entire life was a life of suffering. Why then does the Apostles’ Creed confine his sufferings to that which occurred under Pontius Pilate? When the Apostles’ Creed confesses that Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate, the Creed does not mean that Jesus only suffered when he was humiliated, flogged and condemned by Pilate, the Roman governor. It is simply saying that the suffering or passion of Jesus occurred under the jurisdiction of Pontius Pilate. The designation is consistent with what is recorded in ancient accounts of martyrdom. We can read there that one martyr suffered under the Roman Caesar, Domitian, and another under Julian or Nero, etc. The Apostles’ Creed aligns itself with such language, in saying, “who suffered under Pontius Pilate.” Jesus had his passion under the jurisdiction of Pontius Pilate.

Jesus’ suffering and death on the cross are thus linked to history. It is confessed as an historical fact that Jesus suffered under the jurisdiction of the governor, Pontius Pilate. Thus, the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus is not just a story. The name Pontius Pilate makes it real and factual. Furthermore, it teaches us that a lawful judge was instrumental in Jesus’ passion, suffering, and death. Jesus was not killed by being stoned to death in a popular uprising. He was not thrust from a steep rock into a deep canyon, as the people of Nazareth wanted to do to him. Moreover, he was not, like John the Baptist, beheaded in the solitude of a prison. Jesus was sentenced to death by crucifixion, during a public trial, and executed by a lawfully-appointed judge. God so governed events, that

Jesus was condemned judicially. Pilate, the judge, affirmed judicially that Jesus was innocent, and declared, “I find no fault in this man”—Luke 23, verse 4. Nevertheless, he sentenced Jesus, though innocent, to be executed by crucifixion.

Jesus suffered as the innocent Lamb of God. In so doing, he caused God’s judgment not to be executed upon his flock, but on himself, the good Shepherd of the flock. He bore the curse of sinners, cursed by the law, in order to be the Savior of the accursed. There is safety in the atoning death of Jesus. Christ has made complete atonement. Therefore, wrath cannot fall on the penitent, trembling sinner, who seeks refuge at the cross. Twice payment God will not demand—first from the suffering Savior, and then again from the sinner who shelters in the righteousness of Christ. That is the blessed Gospel of saving sinners by means of substitution. The debt is paid and the curse has been removed. Romans 8, verse 1 assures us, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.”

The Apostles’ Creed confesses that Jesus was crucified. The people had cried, “Crucify him, crucify him” (Luke 23:21), and Pontius Pilate yielded the demands of the people and condemned Jesus to be crucified. Crucifixion was one of the most agonizing forms of dying. It was such a horrible death that the Roman government forbade the crucifixion of a Roman citizen. However, Jesus was subjected to the painful, grievous, and dreadful death by crucifixion.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter declared that this event did not happen by chance. He linked the death of Jesus to the eternal counsel and foreknowledge of God, saying, “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain” (Acts 2:23). It had been determined in God’s counsel that Jesus would die on the cross. What brought Jesus to the cross was ultimately not Pontius Pilate or the Sanhedrin, but God’s love and purpose. The inhabitants of Nazareth wanted to throw Jesus off the cliff, the angry Jews wanted to stone him, and the Sanhedrin wanted to kill him in secret. Nevertheless, all these attempts to take the life of Jesus failed, for God had purposed that Jesus would die a specific death—he had to die on the cross. He had to die an accursed death. The death on the cross was cursed of God. The law of God speaks, in Deuteronomy 21, verse 23, “He that is hanged is accursed of God.” Therefore, the body of the crucified person had to be taken off the cross, and be buried before nightfall. Otherwise, the curse that rested on the crucified one would now rest on the entire nation. Jesus died a death accursed of God, to remove the curse that rests upon us. The curse of God rests upon us all. He who violates the law of God will thereby subject himself to the curse of the law, for it is written, “Cursed is every one that continues not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them”—Galatians 3, verse 10. However, since Jesus died the accursed death on the cross, the apostle was able to write, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree”—Galatians 3, verse 13.

Jesus, and him crucified, therefore, now constitutes the heart of the Gospel. The apostle writes, “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God”—1 Corinthians 1, verse 23. The world’s one and only remedy is the cross.

The Apostles’ Creed states that Jesus died. Why did he die? He never knew, nor committed sin. How can there be death in the absence of sin? Is not death the punishment for sin? Does not the Bible say, “The wages of sin is death”—Romans 6, verse 23? How was it possible that the sinless Jesus died? Jesus did not die for personal sin, but rather, for the sins of his people. He died a surety’s death. In order to be the Savior of his people, he not only had to suffer and be crucified, but he had also to die as the penalty for sin.

God had said to Adam and Eve, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shalt not eat of it: for in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die”—Genesis 2, verses 16 and 17. The magnificent and luscious Garden of Eden was the home and domain of Adam and Eve. They were permitted to eat from all the trees and enjoy the fruits, except from one tree—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. By way of that tree, God taught them that they were subordinate to him, and that he would determine what is good and evil. Inherent in his Godhead is the fact that he determines what is good and evil. Adam and Eve were obliged to acknowledge the Lord as the God to whom they were subordinate. However, Adam and

Eve disobeyed God. They succumbed to the devil's temptation, and ate from the forbidden tree. The devil had told them that by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would become like God. He said to them, "For God doth know that in the day you eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil"—Genesis 3, verse 5. Man then ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, in order to become as God. However, instead of becoming like God, Adam and Eve were filled with anxiety and fear, and did hide themselves from God. They lost their innocence and inner peace. They knew themselves to have been deceived by the devil.

Death came into the world because of this sin, as stated in Romans 5, verse 12, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin." However loudly many may claim that death is an essential component of human life, and must be accepted as a natural fact, Scripture contradicts this view. It teaches us that death is God's punishment for sin. That is why Jesus, in order to redeem his people from death, had to die for them, in order "that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man"—Hebrews 2, verse 9. By the death of Jesus, death was put to death, and robbed of its power.

Jesus' death was more than the death of a good person. It was the death of the Son of God, who had assumed our human nature. It was the death of the God-man, the Mediator, Jesus Christ—the Substitute of his people. His death was not a fate that he suffered—his death was a premeditated act. Life was not taken from him—he laid down his life. He said, "I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again"—John 10, verse 18. Jesus' death was so much more than the death of a martyr. Jesus' death was a sacrifice for sin. He, as the Surety and Savior of his chosen people, bore the punishment that had been threatened in response to sin. He gave his soul and his life as a sin offering, so that he would thereby conquer death and merit life on our behalf: "For by one offering he has perfected forever them that are sanctified"—Hebrews 10, verse 14.

The sacrifice of Jesus had such a reconciling power, because it was the sacrifice of a holy and perfect life—a life consecrated to God and the neighbor. This sacrifice of perfect obedience to God's law satisfied the claims of God's justice. God was reconciled by the death of Jesus. In Romans 5, verse 10, the apostle says, "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son." Jesus' death has robbed death of its power. Death was put to death by his death. Christ's atoning death has taken the sting out of death. Death has lost its sting, when Jesus paid the penalty of our sins, and gave his life as a ransom for sin. His blood bore the curse away. The king of terror has been disarmed. For true believers, death is no more a dreadful foe. Jesus has made death a gateway unto eternal life. Now the apostle can say, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1: 21).

The Apostles' Creed says that Jesus not only died, but also that he was buried. God saw to it that Jesus was buried. The rich Joseph of Arimathaea had made his grave available. Prophecy was thus fulfilled: "And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death"—Isaiah 53, verse 9. Jesus Christ has died and was buried. His body was laid in the grave. The grave is the place of the dead. One's death is conclusively affirmed by being buried. Jesus' burial is the evidence that he had really died. Thus it is not true what is stated in Surah 4, of the Quran, that Jesus did not die, but was taken to heaven by Allah. Jesus indeed died, for he was buried. The Christian church embraces the testimony of the apostle Paul, "that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried . . . according to the scriptures"—1 Corinthians 15, verses 3 and 4. Jesus lived the life of his brethren—of all believers—from the beginning to the end. He lived life in the full sense of the word: he was born, died, and was buried.

Christ's burial is a source of comfort to God's children. It stripped the cold and dark grave of its terror. The grave is now, for the Christian, according to the angel's word on Easter morning, "the place where the Lord lay"—Matthew 28, verse 6. Jesus took the terror from the grave—he filled it with light. The grave has thus lost its darkness. It has been sanctified, and has become a resting place for the bodies of believers, where their bodies will rest until the day of the resurrection. The Lord said to Daniel, "You shall rest, and stand in your lot at the end of the days"—Daniel 12, verse 13.

The Apostle's Creed also confesses that Jesus has "descended into hell." What do we under-

stand this to mean? There are different opinions about this confessional statement. The Roman Catholic Church wants to marshal this confessional statement as proof of their doctrine of purgatory, positing that Jesus descended into purgatory to redeem believers from it. Martin Luther wanted to take it literally, and believed that it meant that Jesus had descended into hell, to proclaim to the devil and the damned his victory over the devil and death. John Calvin judged that “descended into hell” means that Jesus, during his life, suffered what we deserve to suffer in hell. He placed this event as having occurred before Jesus’ death. However, the chronological order in which the Apostles’ Creed lists these events, marks the descent into hell as a fact that occurred after Jesus had been buried. The Creed says, “was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into hell.” This begs the question, What happened to Jesus between Good Friday and Sunday morning? Where did Jesus reside? His soul was in the hands of God the Father, for Jesus, as he was dying, had committed his soul into the secure hands of his Father. In Luke 23, verse 46, we read, he “cried with a loud voice, . . . Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.” His body was buried and remained in the grave until the resurrection morning. How then are we to think of the “descent into hell” as having happened after his death? The word “hell,” as used in the Apostles’ Creed, is the Greek word, Hades, which refers to the abode of the dead. Hades is not the place of eternal punishment—Hades is the grave. “The dead” here refers to bodies without their soul. It is the state of separation between body and soul, also referred to as the intermediate state.

On the day of the final resurrection, soul and body will be reunited. Hence the designation of this state as the intermediate state. Jesus spent three days and nights in Hades, that is, in the grave, among the dead. In the grave, the body of Jesus had not seen decomposition. It had been prophesied, regarding the Messiah, that though he would reside in the grave, he would not experience the disintegration of his body. The Messiah says prophetically, in Psalm 16, verse 10, “Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.” Peter quotes this prophecy on the day of Pentecost, and applies it to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and preached to the people that Jesus had returned to life from the Hades—the grave, the realm of the dead, the abode of the dead bodies—and that his body had not decayed during the days between Good Friday and Easter. Peter preached on the day of Pentecost that, in Jesus’ burial, the words of David concerning the Messiah have been fulfilled, “Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.” This is the Biblical meaning of “he descended into hell.”

“Jesus suffered, was crucified, dead and buried; he descended into hell.” These words are the entire Gospel in a nutshell. Jesus engaged in all this, as the Surety and Savior of his church, the elect of God. The personal comfort of this truth is to know that he has done all that for me. The true believer may say, “Jesus did all this in my place. He suffered for me, was crucified for me, died for me, was buried and descended into the grave for me, so that I, the sinner, should have eternal life!” They shall never perish, who have put their trust in him. God’s people may sing:

I sing my Savior’s wondrous death;
he conquered when he fell.
Tis finished! Said his dying breath
And shook the gates of hell.

THE APOSTLES' CREED

Rev. Cornelis Harinck

Transcript—Lecture 6

Article 5: The Resurrection of Christ

We continue this series of lectures about the Apostles' Creed, by addressing Article 5. This article confesses the following regarding Jesus: "The third day he rose again from the dead."

In the world of the pious Jew, the learned Greek, and the proud Roman, the Christian church confessed that Jesus, their Lord and Savior, had risen from the dead. We read, in Acts 4, verse 33: "And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus." The apostles gave witness, that is, they spoke of what they had seen and heard.

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead was the dominant theme of their testimony. They spoke as men who had personally met the resurrected Jesus. Peter testified, on the day of Pentecost, "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses"—Acts 2, verse 32. The apostles had reassured that, in speaking of Jesus' words and deeds, they were not proclaiming a message fabricated by men, rather, they were talking about matters of which they had been witnesses. The apostle Peter wrote, "For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty"—2 Peter 1, verse 16. Before the tribunal of this world, they testified that God had raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead was not merely one of the many truths they proclaimed regarding Jesus, rather, it was the cardinal point of their message. In the resurrection chapter, 1 Corinthians 15, the Apostle Paul makes it clear that everything stands or falls with the authenticity of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. He argues that, if Jesus did not rise from the dead, everything Jesus did would be rendered null and void. Someone might counter by saying, "We would still have Christmas and Good Friday," however, these events would be of no redeeming and saving significance, apart from the resurrection. Without the resurrection of Jesus, the entire edifice of truth would totter. Easter, the resurrection of Jesus, proves that he is indeed more than a martyr, or someone who died for his ideals. The resurrection powerfully affirms the deity of Jesus, for thereby he was "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead"—Romans 1, verse 4.

The resurrection of Jesus is God's "amen" upon the sacrifice of Good Friday. If Jesus had remained in the grave, we would not know whether God had accepted the sacrifice of Good Friday, and whether the punishment upon sin had been fully borne. However, the Apostle can glory in saying, "But now is Christ risen from the dead"—1 Corinthians 15, verse 20. Although everything seemed lost on Good Friday, Easter morning affirmed that a complete victory had been secured! The resurrection of Christ proclaims to us the message that Jesus' sacrifice has been accepted, and that sin's guilt has been atoned. Death has been conquered, and Satan's head has been crushed.

Death could not retain its hold on Jesus. After all, he had finished his work! The devil had to let him go, for his power had been broken. Thus, by his death and resurrection, Jesus destroyed "him that had the power of death, that is, the devil"—Hebrews 2, verse 14. Death has been conquered, Satan defeated and eternal life acquired. The best news a lost world ever heard came from a graveyard. The stone has been rolled away. The grave of Jesus is open. Now Jesus has gone out, we may go into the empty grave, to see what happened. The tomb is empty! Jesus has risen indeed! Death has been conquered and salvation secured.

The Apostle now dares to challenge all the enemies and accusers of the children of God, and writes, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies. Who is he that

condemns? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again”—Romans 8, verses 33 and 34. The work is done, the fight is fought, the battle is won. God has raised his Son. To save us, Jesus died; to justify us, he arose. In Romans 4, verse 25, the Apostle says that Jesus “was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.” The resurrection of Christ is our receipted bill.

Christ’s resurrection is, therefore, of crucial importance! It is the most important Article of our faith. But for the resurrection of Jesus from the grave, all would be in vain. As the Apostle says, “And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, . . . and your faith is also vain” (1 Corinthians 15:14–17). Jesus’ resurrection from the dead is the most important article of our Christian faith.

And at the same time it is the most questioned and ridiculed article of the Christian faith. When Paul stood before the Roman governor, Festus, and testified of the resurrection of Jesus, this governor said, “Paul, you are beside yourself; much learning does make you mad”—Acts 26, verse 24. In other words, You are rambling, you are allowing yourself to be carried away by your great learning. That is how Festus thought about the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. It is no different today. Twenty-first-century man deems the message, that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead, to belong to the realm of fables. People who still believe in the resurrection are mentally deranged. They are out of their minds. After all, such things could not possibly have happened. Dead is dead—dead people do not become alive again.

Throughout the ages, the message of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead has been denied, rendered suspect, and ridiculed. Many have attempted to distort both the truth and the historicity of Jesus’ physical resurrection by recasting its meaning. In the Quran, Islam acknowledges Jesus to be God’s ambassador and witness. In spite of the fact that the Islam maintains that Jesus is inferior to Mohammed, they nevertheless deem him to be one of God’s witnesses. But they refuse to acknowledge that he rose from the dead. They give another explanation to his being alive after his crucifixion. According to the Quran, Jesus was indeed crucified, but he was not killed. He only appeared to be dead, and Allah elevated him into his presence. But he has never been risen from the dead. Modern theology posits that the disciples and women have merely imagined Jesus to have appeared in their midst. They were mentally so fixated on Jesus that they thought they saw him—just like seeing the image of your mother again, following her death. Others posit that it was not Jesus’ person, but rather Jesus’ doctrine that arose and lived on. Jesus was buried, but his teachings lived on. Thus, there are many denials of the actual and physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

However, the Bible explicitly refers to the physical resurrection of Jesus as a fact—a proven, historical event. God has surrounded the resurrection of Jesus with a multitude of proofs that can only be explained, as evidence of the actual resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. How strange it may sound, but the fact that the followers of Jesus did not expect Jesus to rise from the dead, is one of the strongest evidences of the reality of Jesus’ resurrection. Neither the disciples nor the women expected Jesus to rise from the dead. Jesus had told them repeatedly that he not only would suffer and die, but also would rise again from the dead after three days. Matthew tells us, “From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day” (Matthew 16:21). His disciples, however, did not understand this message. The Bible declares several times, “But they understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him”—Mark 9, verse 32. Peter even rebuked Jesus for speaking of his suffering and dying, and said, “Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee” (Matthew 16:22).

When the women went to Jesus’ tomb on Easter morning, they did not expect a resurrection. They were astonished that the stone that closed the opening of the grave had been rolled away. When they went into the grave and found it to be empty, they still did not think about resurrection. The angels then told them that Jesus was alive and had risen, and that, therefore, the tomb was empty. When they returned to Jerusalem and told this to the grieving followers of Jesus, they did not believe them. Luke tells us, “And their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not”—Luke 24, verse 11. Even when Jesus stood in their midst on that day, they did not believe it was Jesus. They thought they saw a ghost. Only after Jesus had showed them his pierced hands and feet, and ate a piece of fish and bread before their eyes, they did believe it was he. Jesus

proved by many appearances that he was alive and had risen from the dead.

After having visited Jesus' grave, Mary Magdalene, the women, and Peter came to the followers of Jesus, who were gathered in the upper room in Jerusalem, with the message that they had seen the risen Jesus. When the men of Emmaus also arrived that evening, to tell that they too had met the risen Jesus, they were welcomed with the joyful message, "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon" (Luke 24:34). It began to dawn among the small group of women and disciples of Jesus that Jesus really had risen. Paul even speaks of more than five hundred brethren, who saw and met Jesus after his death on the cross. He had appeared to them on the mount in Galilee, as he had promised. We read about this promise of Jesus to his many disciples in Galilee, in Matthew 26, verse 32: "But after I am risen again, I will go before you unto Galilee."

Most of these witnesses were still alive when Paul wrote about this to the Christians at Corinth. He could say, "of whom the greater part remain unto this present"—1 Corinthians 15, verse 6. They could still be asked personally about how and when they had met the risen Jesus. Finally, Paul presents himself as a witness to the veracity of Jesus' bodily resurrection from the dead, and writes, "And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time"—1 Corinthians 15, verse 8. The risen Jesus met him on the road to Damascus. He transformed a persecutor into a preacher of the Gospel. The change in the life of Paul cannot be understood without the resurrection of Jesus. There is but one explanation for all these appearances: "The Lord is risen indeed" (Luke 24:34).

The Scriptures refer to these people as eyewitnesses. These eyewitnesses yield the most compelling evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. Rather than militantly arguing their case, they would simply testify, "We have seen and met Jesus after his resurrection." Each of them could say what John witnessed, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you"—1 John 1, verse 3. We may safely assume that all Christians who met Jesus, either before or after his resurrection, were a source of essential information for subsequent Christians. They are referred to as witnesses. They could say, "And we are witnesses of all things which he did"—Acts 10, verse 39. What sort of evidence would a court deem to be sufficient and conclusive? It would be the word of the witnesses, who were present at the crime scene, and who have thus witnessed the crime. The proof that they have indeed witnessed the crime is particularly evident from details that can only be known by someone who has been there and has witnessed all that happened and was said.

Legal experts have investigated the resurrection of Jesus on these grounds. They have come to the following conclusion: There is a plethora of explicit details that could only be known by someone who has met Jesus. For example:

- The followers of Jesus did not expect Jesus to rise from the dead.
- The women were surprised that the stone had been removed.
- They were astonished that the grave was empty.
- The soldiers charged with guarding the grave had fled.
- There was no evidence of the grave having been violated.
- Mary Magdalene was initially inconsolable.
- The clothes in which Jesus' body had been wrapped lay as neatly folded, as if someone had folded up his night garment upon arising.
- At least, Jesus also showed his followers the scars of the crucifixion in his hands and his feet before their eyes.
- He ate a piece of bread and a honeycomb.
- He spoke to them and also appeared to them several times.

Legal experts have thus concluded that such an account of events can only come from people who have both seen and met the risen Jesus. The German historian, Von Campenhausen, therefore concludes, "A dramatic change had occurred in the followers of Jesus. Their circumstances before and after Easter differ significantly. The crucifixion of Jesus had stripped them of all hope. Being very fearful of the Jews, they had gathered in the upper room. They were disappointed; they were confused and full of riddles. However, everything changed after Easter. They no longer deemed the cause of Jesus to have been a terminal failure. On the contrary! They spoke of him as the living Lord. They testified with power of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead." Von Campenhausen,

although a researcher critical of Christianity, concluded that something must have happened that brought about such a change. This change cannot be explained apart from the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Granted, our faith in the veracity of Jesus' resurrection is not contingent on the judgment of historians. However, it can and does affirm our faith. The faith of the Christian rests upon the testimony of all the men and women to whom Jesus appeared after his resurrection. They exclaim to us, "The Lord is risen indeed!" Had the resurrection of Jesus from the dead not occurred, the disciples would have gone back to their nets, or to their former occupations. They would never have gone into the world to proclaim the Gospel of the risen Savior. Without the resurrection of Jesus, there would have been no Christianity. Paul's conversion would have been unthinkable, apart from his encounter with the risen Christ. Everything testifies that the Lord is risen indeed!

Finally, every true Christian is a living proof of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The Apostle affirms this truth by saying, "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins"—Ephesians 2, verse 1. The Christians at Ephesus had been raised up together with Christ. A radical change, a spiritual resurrection, had taken place in the lives of the Christians at Ephesus. They were brought from death to life. They were transformed into becoming a new people. Christianity's glory is that people are transformed into becoming new people by the resurrection power of Jesus.

The blessings from Jesus' resurrection from the dead are many. Jesus, first of all, conquered death by his resurrection from the dead. In 2 Timothy 1, verse 10, the Apostle says, regarding the risen Christ, "who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." What an amazing victory! Death has been abolished and obliterated! Although Alexander the Great, Napoleon, and Gengis Khan achieved great victories, they could not overcome death. Jesus has conquered death! Many may mock with death, hate death, and be fearful of death, but they cannot overcome death. Neither money and power, nor fame and honor will avail here. Everyone must yield to death. Scripture says, "What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death?"—Psalm 89, verse 48. Death is a powerful enemy indeed! Death derives its power from sin: "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin"—Romans 5, verse 12. There was no death before man had sinned against God. For where there is no sin, death cannot come. However, when sin is present, death must follow. God had pronounced the threat, "In the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die"—Genesis 2, verse 17. When Adam and Eve violated this commandment of God, death followed.

However, Jesus conquered death. And how? He robbed death of its power to inflict death. The Apostle says, "The sting of death is sin"—1 Corinthians 15, verse 56. The sting of the sword with which death kills us, is sin. Jesus has robbed death of its deadly sword. He stripped death of its sting, by making satisfaction for the sins of his people. Jesus' atoning death on the cross has rendered death powerless. And by his resurrection, he has broken the chains of death. He can now say to sinners fearful of death, "Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and I have the keys of hell and of death"—Revelation 1, verses 17 and 18.

Jesus is alive. His work, therefore, did not end with his death on the cross.

He continues his work. There is a link between Good Friday and Easter. How clearly was this seen on the day of Pentecost. People who had cried on the day of Good Friday, "Let him be crucified," were pricked in their hearts and cried, "What shall we do?" They were baptized in the name of the selfsame Jesus they had crucified. Jesus proved to be alive, for Peter attributed everything that happened on the day of Pentecost to the Jesus who had risen. He said, "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he has shed forth this, which you now see and hear"—Acts 2, verse 33. The blessings Jesus had merited on Good Friday, he bestows after Easter. A dead Jesus would be incapable of doing that. However, Jesus lives, and is engaged on earth by the Holy Spirit! He works from heaven. By his Spirit and Word, he gathers unto himself a church from all languages and nations. He fulfills his own words, "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd"—John 10, verse 16.

He applies the salvation acquired by him to all his own. We express this truth, in theological

terms, by saying that Jesus is not only a Mediator of procurement, but also of application. It means that Jesus not only merited salvation, but he also makes his people partakers of this salvation, by the Holy Spirit. The salvation acquired by Jesus is not safely stored in a safe, or displayed only in a locked up display case. It does not uselessly remain stored in a warehouse. Jesus has arisen to distribute his gifts. He makes lost sinners partakers of his salvation, doing so from heaven, by the Holy Spirit and the preached Word.

He commanded his disciples, and in them, his church, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believes not shall be damned”—Mark 16, verses 15 and 16. By the foolishness of the preaching, he saves all who believe. By the ministry of the Word, and the operation of the Holy Spirit, Christ gathers unto himself a people chosen unto eternal life.

Beloved listener, this is an essential component of Jesus’ offer as a Savior. How indispensable it is for each of us personally to become partakers of the salvation Jesus has merited! What benefit do we derive from merely knowing that Jesus has merited salvation, if we are not partakers of it? Although the dinner table may be filled with delicious food, only eating this food will satisfy our hunger. It is not enough to know that there is water. Only by drinking will our thirst be quenched. So it is with the salvation merited by Christ. We must appropriate the salvation Jesus has merited.

The question is, are we capable of making ourselves partakers of that salvation, or do we need therefore the risen Jesus, to apply that salvation to us by means of the Holy Spirit? Many there are who say, “God has done his part by sending his Son into the world to save sinners. Jesus has done his part as well, by giving his soul as a ransom for many. He has conquered death, the devil and his whole dominion. Now we must do our part. We have to do the rest ourselves.” According to this theology, the application of salvation is not God’s work, but our work. It all depends on the willingness of man to accept this salvation or not. The decision is in our hands. The adherents of this view assume, saying, “Man has a free will and can decide whether he will believe in Jesus or not, accept Jesus as his personal Savior, or reject him. It is all in man’s own hands and power.” Now it is indeed biblical to posit that the salvation merited by Jesus must be received by faith. Without believing in Christ, no one can be saved. Jesus commissioned to preach, “He that believes not shall be damned”—Mark 16, verse 16. It is also biblical to say, “God commands that we believe in the only Son of God, in order that we may have life.” The hearer of the Gospel remains responsible for the Gospel he or she hears. The fault of unbelief lies at our own door. Unbelief originates in our refusal to have Christ reign over us. Unbelief is sin, even the greatest sin, and the rejection of an offered pardon.

However, faith is a gift from God, and not a human achievement. It is a grace to believe. God is always the first. If you have any desire for God, and hunger and thirst after the righteousness of Christ, it is God himself who put it there. Believing in, and receiving of Jesus, is not a matter that lies within our power. Many proclaim that salvation is contingent on man’s willingness to believe. They speak as if God’s hands are tied, and that he can do nothing without our cooperation. The Bible teaches that, if the efficacy of Jesus’ suffering and death depended on the cooperation and goodwill of man, all his suffering and death would have been in vain. Jesus was compelled to say about man, “Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life”—John 5, verse 40. Fallen men do not want to believe in Christ. They desire, at best, a Jesus that will bring them to heaven, but not a Jesus to rule over them as King. If man had to take the first step in God’s direction, God would forever wait in vain.

How precarious an enterprise salvation would be, if the fruit of Jesus’ coming into the world depended on the willingness of man to accept this! Jesus would then have to wait and see how much fruit his sacrifice rendered on the cross would bear. This is, however, not how the Messiah is presented to us in Scripture. In the prophet Isaiah, we read the following of the suffering Messiah: “When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed”—Isaiah 53, verse 10. Jesus knew that his labor would bear fruit, and that this fruitfulness does not depend on the so-called free will of man. God would see to that. When many left him, Jesus comforted himself with the knowledge that “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me”—John 6, verse 37.

Jesus lives and works! He not only made atonement for sin on the cross, but he also rose from the dead to work repentance and faith in people’s hearts, through his Spirit and Word. Peter says,

of the risen Jesus, “Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins”—Acts 5, verse 31. He makes sinners partakers of the salvation he has merited, demonstrating his resurrection power, by raising them to a new life, and breaking the bonds of sin and Satan. He works in them a heartfelt sorrow over sin, as well as faith in his name. He fulfills what he once said, “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me”—John 12, verse 32.

THE APOSTLES' CREED

Rev. Cornelis Harinck

Transcript—Lecture 7

Article 6: The Exaltation of Christ

Article 6 of the Apostles' Creed states the following: "He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty." Jesus has ascended into heaven. The ascension of Jesus and his session at God's right hand usually receive less attention than his birth, death and resurrection. In our eyes, Christ's birth, death and resurrection are more important than his ascension. Apart from Jesus' ascension and his being seated at God's right hand, however, Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter would be stripped of their meaning. Jesus' ascension and his being seated at God's right hand is the tangible evidence that God the Father has accepted everything that Jesus did. It is as if God the Father said, "Well done, my Son. Come and sit on the throne at My right hand."

Jesus remained on earth for forty days following his resurrection. He repeatedly appeared to his disciples during those days. Luke states that he spoke to them "of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God"—Acts 1, verse 3. He would suddenly appear, and then again, he would disappear. Jesus' resurrection body possessed other qualities. The body Jesus showed his disciples after his resurrection was the very same that had been crucified, dead and buried. As proof, Jesus showed his disciples the scars of the nails, whereby he had been nailed to the cross. Yet, his body was subject to laws other than those with which we are familiar. It was a glorious body, a body free from all the weaknesses of our fall, a body fit for the heavenly places. It was changed in its qualities, having become, instead of weak and mortal, glorious and imperishable.

The Bible teaches that after the resurrection from the dead, believers will possess a body like unto the glorified body of Jesus. Paul says, in Philippians 3, verse 21, "Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body." What glory will that be? We may form some idea of that glory, from what the disciples saw on Mount Tabor. They saw Jesus, whose "fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering"—Luke 9, verse 29. And Moses and Elijah also appeared in glorious bodies. Our frail bodies will become glorious bodies. Paul calls them celestial bodies. In 1 Corinthians 15, verse 49, he says, "And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." The bodies of the believers will not be of the same kind which they have now. It will be the same body but with other qualities. The resurrected bodies of the believers will be as the resurrected and glorified body of Christ. Our bodies, if they are to be immortal and imperishable, must be changed. Much is yet hidden for us, but it will be a body capable of living in the celestial glory.

The intervening days between Christ's resurrection and his ascension had been wonderful days for the disciples. First of all, Jesus had confirmed the reality of his resurrection. Luke says, "He showed himself alive after his passion, by many infallible proofs"—Acts 1, verse 3. Jesus, who had died and had been buried, appeared alive amid the small group of his followers. He did not appear to them every day, but rather intermittently. He also appeared in different places and at various events. Daily interaction with Jesus had been changed into intermittent appearances, with increasing pauses between them. They were thus prepared for the definitive departure of Jesus. What an indelible impression these appearances must have made upon the souls of the followers of Jesus! They had met the living Jesus, the risen Christ, the Savior who had overcome death. He had stood in their midst as the Living One.

Jesus' primary engagement during the forty days between his resurrection and his ascension had been the instruction of his disciples. The one thing that is emphatically stated is that he spoke

with them about “the things pertaining to the kingdom of God”—Acts 1, verse 3. Jesus had often spoken to them regarding the kingdom of God. He spoke about the keys of the kingdom of heaven, which they were to receive, and he spoke regarding the day when they would sit upon thrones in his kingdom. Even at the Last Supper, he spoke to his disciples about God’s kingdom. He said that he would drink the next cup of wine in the kingdom of his Father.

The kingdom of God was a prominent subject of Jesus’ teaching. In the four gospel accounts, Jesus spoke no fewer than sixty times about the kingdom of God. The disciples had interpreted that as referring to an earthly kingdom—a kingdom more glorious than that of David and Solomon. As so many Jews of their day, they believed that, in the days of the Messiah, a kingdom of peace would be established, in which Israel, with the Messiah in their midst seated as their king upon his throne, would have a prominent role in the international community of the nations. This dream had not come true, however.

The death of Jesus had greatly confused the disciples regarding the establishment of the Messianic kingdom. Their hope for the coming of the kingdom of God had been crushed by the death of Jesus on the cross. During the forty days between Jesus’ resurrection and his ascension, Jesus corrected their carnal and erroneous thinking about the kingdom of God. He explained to them the true nature of the kingdom of the Messiah. It would be a spiritual kingdom. Jesus would erect his throne in the hearts of sinners, and the full realization of his kingdom would only come at the end of the world.

First, he made clear to them that his death and resurrection were indispensable for the coming of God’s kingdom. He, therefore, said to the men walking to Emmaus, “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?”—Luke 24, verse 26. He showed them the necessity of his atoning death. The kingdom of God would not come without the Messiah first making atonement for sin—not until Satan’s head would have been crushed, and until death would have been conquered. It was predicted of the Messiah that he would first give his soul as a ransom for sin, and he would then rise from the dead, and see the fruits of his atoning death. Isaiah had spoken of the Messiah, “When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand”—Isaiah 53, verse 10. Jesus also reminded them of their calling to preach the gospel of the kingdom to all nations, and to be his witnesses in the world. He taught them that this kingdom only would come after all nations had heard the gospel: “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and then the end shall come”—Matthew 24, verse 14.

From the brief accounts of the conversations Jesus had with his disciples following his resurrection, we know that Jesus especially corrected their carnal thoughts regarding the Messianic kingdom. Forty days they were taught of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. What an insight they thereby received in the things of God! The forty days between his resurrection and ascension were as one big seminar for the disciples, during which they received additional training. Everything then fell into place for them. It made them fit to be the witnesses of his death and resurrection, and to preach the kingdom of God to the world.

At the end of the forty days, Jesus ascended into heaven. Luke tells us that Jesus was “assembled together with them”—Acts 1, verse 4. The Master gathered for the last time with his disciples here on earth. Jesus, also, on his final day on earth, spoke with his disciples about the kingdom of God, instructing them, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you”—Matthew 28 (19–20). After these last instructions, Jesus then went before them to the Mount of Olives. The disciples realized that great things were about to happen. It prompted them to ask Jesus the question, “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?”—Acts 1, verse 6. They were seemingly still clinging to the notion of an earthly kingdom that was limited to Israel. However, in this question resonates, above all, a yearning that all the glorious things the prophets had foretold about the Messianic kingdom would be fulfilled. It shows how intensely the disciples were longing for the fulfillment of these prophecies. They were asking whether all that the prophets had said, and all that Jesus had said to them about God’s kingdom would now come to pass. Would this be the moment that God’s promised kingdom would be inaugurated, and would Israel now be elevated from its humiliation?

Jesus rebuked them for this question. He did not rebuke them for desiring the restoration of Israel and the fulfillment of the prophecies regarding God's kingdom. He rebuked them for wanting to know when and by what means this would happen. He said to them, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father has put in his own power"—Acts 1, verse 7. They must leave to God "the times or the seasons," that is, the progression of history, as well as the exact moment of Israel's restoration. Instead of satisfying their curiosity regarding the restoration of Israel and the fulfillment of the prophecies, he reminded them of the task they were being called to perform. He said, "But you shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and you shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth"—Acts 1, verse 8. They would become witnesses to the world and testify of the atoning death and the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ. Their labors would not be limited to Israel. The great commission is, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature"—Mark 16, verse 15. In obedience to his Word, they would have to cast the net of the gospel into the sea of the nations, as occurred with the miraculous catch of fish a few days earlier.

Thus Jesus taught them: of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, until the last day of his stay on earth. After this final instruction, Jesus raised his hands to bless his disciples, and ascended into heaven. Luke describes Christ's ascension in plain language: "And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven"—Luke 24, verse 51. In the book of Acts, Luke adds: "While they beheld, he was taken up"—Acts 1, verse 9. In but few words, we are told what happened before the eyes of the disciples. Yet, what a profound impression this must have made upon them! Jesus was lifted up. His body became detached from the earth. He rose higher and higher, until a cloud took him out of their sight. What an inexpressible and extraordinary event! The disciples were accustomed to observing the miraculous. Extraordinary events were no longer a mystery to them. They had witnessed Jesus performing countless miracles. They had even witnessed Jesus raising the dead. However, what they now witnessed filled them with astonishment.

They watched as Jesus' feet became detached from the earth, and as his body ascended higher and higher, until a cloud blocked their view of him. It is said, "And a cloud received him out of their sight"—Acts 1, verse 9. Jesus' ascension was a genuine and real ascension into heaven. Jesus traversed from the Mount of Olives into the heaven of heavens. It was a visible event, for the disciples saw it happening before their eyes. It didn't occur in either a vision or a dream, but rather, while they were with him on the Mount of Olives. With their physical eyes, they saw him ascend into heaven. It was an observable and physical ascension into heaven. Jesus ascended into heaven with his human body.

The disciples understood where Jesus had gone. He had returned to his Father. They knew that God the Father had sent him into the world with a mission, and they realized that his task now had been accomplished. Matthew tells us they "returned to Jerusalem with great joy: and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God!"

Jesus was taken up into heaven. It was the culmination of his earthly labor. He had finished his work. Reconciliation had been made; death and hell had been conquered. Satan had lost all claims upon the elect, through the sacrificial death of Jesus. Jesus' atoning death had crushed his head and broken his power. His disciples had been instructed regarding God's kingdom, and Jesus had equipped them to be his witnesses. The Holy Spirit would come to teach them all things, to comfort them, and to abide with them forever. Jesus would establish the kingdom of God's grace among all nations by means of their ministry.

The Bible declares that Jesus is now seated at God's right hand. Mark says, "So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God"—Mark 16, verse 19. What does this mean? The right hand is the place of honor, favor, and power. The person sitting at the king's right hand is the king's special favorite. He shares in the honor, power, and majesty vested in the king. Jesus has received this place in heaven. God the Father spoke to him, "Sit at my right hand" (Psalm 110:1). The Apostles' Creed does not merely state that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God, but rather, it adds: "of the Almighty Father." Jesus shares in the power and glory of Almighty God. Thus the prophecy regarding the Messiah recorded in Psalm 110 has been fulfilled: "The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I

make thine enemies thy footstool”—Psalm 110, verse 1.

Ascension marks Jesus’ return unto the Father, who had sent him into the world to execute God’s redemptive purpose. God had purposed to redeem his church from destruction through the mediatorial work of Christ. Jesus repeatedly spoke of the commission he had received of his Father. He said, “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father”—John 10, verses 17 and 18. Jesus had now accomplished his work. He could say to his Father, “I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gave me to do”—John 17, verse 4. Therefore, upon his return to the heavenly realm, God the Father crowned him with honor and glory, and said to him, “Sit at my right hand.” The Christ who had been despised and crucified on earth is now crowned in heaven with honor and glory. Now there is neither ridicule nor reproach, neither contempt nor rejection, suffering nor abandonment, but rather, honor and glory.

Jesus is sitting at God’s right hand. The emphasis is upon sitting. The work has been accomplished. The assignment has been completed. The honor of God and the salvation of the elect have been secured. Jesus can sit down now. Jesus now sits upon the throne as King. Although he was always King, he is now King in a new way, as the Representative of his church. Jesus now sits, in our human nature, upon the throne in heaven. He has laid aside all humiliation, weakness, suffering, and pain, and, in heaven, he has now been crowned with honor and glory. Jesus’ exaltation is the crown upon his atoning suffering and death. It is said, “When he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high”—Hebrews 1, verse 3.

Jesus is now in heaven for the good of his church on earth. Sometimes we may utter the sigh, “If only Jesus were still on earth!” Somehow we think that this would greatly simplify matters. By ascending into heaven, Jesus has removed himself from his church on earth and has left her to defend for herself in a perilous and wicked world. We would deem it to have been better if he had remained with his church here on earth. Jesus, however, judged it to be for the benefit of his disciples that he should return unto his Father in heaven. He said, “It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you”—John 16, verse 7.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost is a rich blessing accruing from Jesus’ ascension. The prophets had predicted that the time of the Messiah would be accompanied by an abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The wall that separated Jew and Gentile would be taken away, and the Spirit would be poured out upon all flesh. Joel prophesied, “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh”—Joel 2, verse 28. The fulfillment of that promise was contingent upon Jesus’ return to the Father, and the completion of his redemptive work.

Jesus continues his work also from heaven. By his Word and Holy Spirit, he gathers unto himself a church from “all kindreds and tongues”—Revelation 7, verse 9. His ministry has now become global in scope. The promise made to Abraham is being fulfilled. All nations of the earth will share in the salvation of the Messiah, as God once had spoken to Abraham, “And in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed”—Genesis 22, verse 18. By his ascension, Jesus has brought our human nature into heaven. The apostle says that believers have thereby already been placed in heaven, namely, in their Head and Representative, Jesus Christ. It is said in Ephesians 2, verse 6, he “hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” Jesus has already taken possession of heaven on their behalf, and he has promised his people, “I go to prepare a place for you”—John 14, verse 2.

Jesus is now in heaven. And how is he present there? He is there as the Intercessor and Advocate of his church on earth. Paul says, “Who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us”—Romans 8, verse 34. God’s children have an Advocate with the Father in the highest court, where God is seated upon his throne, and thus in the place where all things are governed. Christ represents the interests of his church in heaven. The apostle says, “Who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us,” and his atoning sacrifice gives sanction to his claim.

We hear him praying, in John 17 (verse 11), “Holy Father, keep through thine own name those

whom thou has given me,” and that he is praying now in heaven. He is fulfilling what he has promised: “And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”—Matthew 16, verse 18. How rich is this consolation for believers on earth! In their warfare with the world, the devil, and their sinful flesh, they may know that Jesus is praying for them. He prays for them in like fashion as he promised Peter, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not”—Luke 22 (31–32). When they stumble and fall into sin, they need not despair, for they may bring to mind the words of the Apostle John, “And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins”—1 John 2, verses 1 and 2.

Jesus has ascended into heaven and now resides there at God’s right hand. As to his humanity, he has departed from his church and is no longer with her. As the glorified Son of man, Jesus is now in heavenly glory. As to his deity, he is still with his church on earth. He fulfills what he promised before he ascended into heaven: “And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world”—Matthew 28, verse 20. By means of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is always with his church on earth. The Holy Spirit, the other Comforter, has established his residence among believers here on earth. And in this manner, Christ is present with his church, in all her struggles, persecutions, reproach, and suffering, until the end of the world.

THE APOSTLES' CREED

Rev. Cornelis Harinck

Transcript—Lecture 8

Article 7: Christ as the Judge of the Living and the Dead

Beloved listener, in the Apostles' Creed, the Christian confesses: "from where he shall come to judge the quick and the dead." Jesus is coming back. He did leave the earth, and is now seated on the throne, at the right hand of God. However, one day he will return. When Jesus ascended into heaven, the angels spoke to the disciples, "You men of Galilee, why stand you gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). One day, Jesus will return in power and glory, as he has promised his church, "Behold, I come quickly"—Revelation 22, verse 7.

His second coming will not be in humility to shed his blood, but in exaltation to reign forever in the kingdom of peace. Believers expect the return of Christ to establish the eternal kingdom of peace, of which the Old Testament prophets had said, "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea"—Isaiah 11, verse 9. There will come a new heaven and a new earth—Revelation 21, verse 1—the Apostle John says, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth passed away."

The first Christians longed intensely for Jesus' return, and the establishment of the eternal kingdom of God. They expected Jesus every day. Some didn't even work anymore. Every day they anticipated Jesus' return. The apostle Paul had to correct them regarding their mistaken view. He wrote, "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition"—2 Thessalonians 2, verse 3. Paul warns the Christians not to foster an unrealistic expectation of Jesus' return, as if that day could be tomorrow. He points out that, according to Jesus' words, certain things must happen first.

There will first be a great apostasy. Vast multitudes will abandon the Christian faith. The man of sin, the Antichrist, must also come first. A power—a person will arise that will subjugate the whole world. He will turn against Christ and his church, and will seek to destroy her. It will be the last effort of the devil to defeat Christ and ruin his kingdom. Presently, persecutions occur in specific localities, but in the last days, the church will be persecuted worldwide. Jesus speaks of this as the great tribulation. He said, "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be"—Matthew 24, verse 21. Only after all these events have occurred will the end be, and Christ shall return. Despite all these signs by which we can anticipate the approaching return of Jesus, we ultimately do not know the day when the Lord will return. Consequently, Jesus exhorts us, "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come" (Matthew 24:42). That day lies hid that every day we be on the watch.

There are certain Christians who do believe in a twofold return of Jesus. He will first return to establish a thousand years kingdom upon earth, and after that he will return a second time to judge the living and the dead. They base this opinion on Revelation 20. In Revelation 20, we read, "And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years" (Revelation 20:1–2). This passage of Scripture speaks about the so-called "millennial kingdom." The distinguishing feature of that period in history will be that Satan will be bound and restricted, so that he will no longer be able to deceive the nations. Based on what we

read in Revelation 20, regarding Christ's millennial reign, some teach that Jesus will return two times. The first time, he will return to establish a kingdom of peace that will last 1000 years. Jesus will then be victorious over the antichristian powers. He will bind Satan, bring Israel to repentance, and from Jerusalem, he will reign with the saints for a thousand years, as King over a Messianic kingdom of peace on earth. The proponents of this view are called millennialists.

Proponents of such a millennial empire differ significantly among each other, as to what this empire will look like. Some even posit that there will be a restoration of temple worship, whereas others view this millennium as being merely a time of great spiritual revival. Most millennialists believe in a twofold return of Jesus. They believe that Jesus will come to earth once more before his second coming to establish a millennial kingdom. Satan will then be bound and have no more power over the nations of the earth. Following these thousand years, Satan will be unshackled, and a time of great tribulation will ensue, which will be followed by Jesus' return. Most proponents of a literal millennium insist on such a reading of Revelation 20.

However, the Apostles' Creed does not refer to such a millennium. The Christian church generally has always confessed that there will be only one single return of Jesus, namely, as the Judge of the living and the dead. Jesus spoke of only one day in which he would return. Therefore, the Apostles' Creed makes no mention of a twofold coming of Christ to establish a millennial kingdom on earth. We must, therefore, reject such a notion. This erroneous view is founded upon a very literal exposition of Revelation 20.

Revelation 20 speaks of matters that transpire in heaven and not on earth. It speaks of the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus—Revelation 20, verse 4. The focus is on souls rather than on bodies. The thrones occupied by martyrs are not earthly, but rather, heavenly thrones. They are set up in heaven. The thousand years point to a certain period—it does not literally mean a thousand years. Satan will, during this period, be kept from seducing the nations with his lies, and will be restricted in his power. However, of a twofold return of Jesus is not spoken in Revelation 20. The entire prophecy focuses on the reign of the ascended Jesus. He now rules from heaven as King over his church. The devil is now bound and his influence restricted.

Before the first coming of Christ, Satan had power over all nations except Israel. His rule as king was unchallenged, and he seduced the nations through the dark forces of idolatry. However, Jesus, now having triumphed over Satan by his death and resurrection, reigns as King in heaven, and Satan's grip on the nations is restricted. Revelation 20 teaches that Christ's resurrection and victory over the old serpent, the Devil, would bring a significant change. The gospel would be preached to all nations, and Satan's hold on the nations would be broken. Christ would plant his church in the Gentile world, and deliver sinners from the power of Satan. The church would no longer be limited to the descendants of Abraham. Instead, it would be established among all nations. Revelation 20 describes this metaphorically and symbolically. Therefore, Augustine already posited, in the early church, that the millennium started with Jesus' ascension, and the preaching of the gospel to all nations, and that it will end with Jesus' return to judge the living and the dead. The millennial kingdom symbolizes the New Testament era, and thus, the period in which we are currently living. The gospel is now being preached to all nations. The devil's dominion over the nations is being broken. Jesus is planting his church where previously the devil had his dominion.

Some old theologians have said of the thousand years, of which is spoken in Revelations 20, as a period of great prosperity for the church. They believed that the period immediately preceding the second coming of Christ would be a time of prosperity for the church. They base their view on various unfulfilled prophecies, mainly from the book of Daniel, and on what the apostle Paul wrote about the future conversion of the people of Israel. They believe that the time will come when the church will expand significantly. They refer to the many prophecies that have not been fulfilled, such as, for example, Isaiah 11, verse 9: "For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea." The proclamation of the gospel will result in the Gentiles acquiring a knowledge of the true God. They believe that there will come a time when the church will be victorious over the powers of Satan. After all, Revelation 20, verse 3 says that the mighty angel was ordered by God to take hold of the dragon, and to bind him for a thousand years. The influence of the devil will be restricted in that period. They also anticipated that the Jews would repent of their rejection of Christ and accept him as the Messiah, for Paul taught: "And so all Israel shall be

saved”—Romans 11, verse 26. They believed that Israel was destined to have a prominent position in the world community. On the basis of the prophesy of Zechariah 8, verse 23, they believed that an era would come when the Jews would teach the nations God’s ways: “In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you.” The converted Jews would prove to be an enormous blessing to the world.

Thus, there are many differing views about Revelation 20, and the millennial kingdom mentioned there. Notwithstanding the different opinions, all sound biblical theologians reject the idea that Jesus himself then will return to earth. Jesus will return only once, and he will do so to judge the living and the dead. The Apostles’ Creed, therefore, confesses: “from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.”

The Scriptures speak only of a twofold advent of Christ. He came the first time in deep humiliation to become the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world. He will come the second time to judge the living and the dead. The apostle teaches us that Jesus came “once” “to bear the sins of many”—Hebrews 9, verse 28. He uses the term “once.” Furthermore, the apostle continues, and teaches that Jesus will come to earth a second time. He says, “And unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.” The apostle emphatically uses the words “once” and “the second time.” At his first advent, he came as the Lamb to make atonement for sin. At his second advent, he will appear as the Judge, to judge the living and the dead. The Bible only speaks of a twofold coming of Jesus: once as Savior, and once as Judge.

Jesus spoke many times of his return and the day of judgment, particularly, toward the end of his life on earth. In Matthew 24 and 25, we have a detailed account of how Jesus spoke about his return. The first thing one will notice is that Jesus identifies himself as the Son of man, saying, “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him”—Matthew 25, verse 31. Jesus often used this title in reference to himself. This title is derived from Daniel 7, verse 13. There we read, “I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven.” By using the name, Son of man, Jesus is referring to the figure spoken of in Daniel 7. Jesus claimed that he is that exalted person whom God vests with the power to judge all creatures. Jesus declared that he will return as the Son of man, that is, the Son of God, who has become the Son of man, by assuming our human nature, to judge the living and the dead.

Scripture teaches us that he will appear visibly in his human nature. He will appear as the Son of man. Revelation 1, verse 7 says, “and every eye shall see him.” Moreover, Jesus taught that he would appear in his glory. He will not appear as the Son of man in his humiliation, but he will appear as the glorified Son of man. He will be the Son of man as John saw him: “And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters”—Revelation 1 (13–15).

On the day of his second coming, Jesus will appear as the glorified Son of man, surrounded by his holy angels. The second coming of Jesus belongs to the exaltation of Jesus. A great white throne will be established in the universe. All people who ever lived and will still live on that day, will be gathered by angels and be summoned before the judgment seat of Jesus. They will be judged according to all that they have done in their lives. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad”—2 Corinthians 5, verse 10.

Jesus will return as King and as Judge of the living and the dead. What homage will be paid to the Jesus who had once been so despised! He will be afforded the honor of rectifying everything in the world, to bring to perfection God’s eternal purpose regarding the world; to determine the eternal destiny of all people; to triumph openly over all of God’s enemies; and to lead into heaven the church he purchased with his blood. Jesus, therefore, always spoke of the day of his return as the day of his glory: “And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory”—Luke 21, verse 27. On that day, the glory of the maligned and crucified Christ will be seen.

On the last day, the day of the final judgment, a separation will manifest itself among the people. Jesus taught, “And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one

from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats”—Matthew 25, verse 32. All people who have ever lived will first be gathered in full number, and be summoned before Christ. Then Jesus will separate them from each other. He will put the sheep—that is, the true believers, at his right hand, and the goats—the unbelievers, at his left hand. Thus, in the end, there will only be two types of people.

Since Paradise, there are already on earth only two types of people. Those who serve God, and those who do not serve God. There is neither a third category today, nor will there be on the Day of Judgment. We belong either to the seed of the woman, or to the seed of the serpent. We either bow before Jesus, or we reject him. There is no middle ground. Jesus said, “He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathers not with me scatters abroad”—Matthew 12, verse 30. Jesus will position the believers at his right hand and say, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”—Matthew 25, verse 34. During their lives, they responded to Christ’s invitation, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”—Matthew 11, verse 28. They came to him weary and heavy laden, weak and wounded, sick and sore. And they found in him the promised rest—rest in the finished work of Christ. They followed Jesus and served him, by living according to God’s commandments, and bearing the yoke of discipleship—very deficiently on their side, but yet, sincerely. On the Day of Judgment, they will hear a far more glorious invitation, namely: “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”—Matthew 25, verse 34. And they will be ushered into God’s eternal and blessed kingdom.

Jesus will place the wicked on his left hand. During their lifetime, they served sin and disregarded Christ’s call to repentance, and despised his gracious gospel invitation. They preferred their fields and oxen to Jesus, and refused to depart from the broad way of sin. They did not want Jesus to be their King. Jesus will say to them on the Day of Judgment, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels”—Matthew 25, verse 41. During their lives, they preferred the fellowship of the devil to the fellowship of Jesus and the godly. They will then spend a never-ending eternity in hell, in the company of swearers and devils.

What a day, the day of Jesus’ return shall be! What a division Jesus will bring about among the mass of humanity! Jesus will separate the wicked from the righteous, the nominal Christian from the true Christian, the hypocrite from the upright. The last words of the prophecy of Malachi shall then be fulfilled: “Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serves God and him that serves him not”—Malachi 3, verse 18. The second coming of Christ will be a day filled with awe-inspiring events. It will be the great day of the Lord—a day anticipated by all other days. It is called the day “in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat”—2 Peter 3, verse 10. On that day, will be fulfilled that which Jesus taught, “And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”—Matthew 24, verse 30.

God’s children, however, need not fear Jesus’ return. The Jesus who will appear in his glory will be the same Jesus to whom they have taken refuge, as penitent and believing sinners, and in whose blood they have found peace with God. He is their Savior, King and Redeemer. Their sins are covered with the robe of his righteousness, and they belong to his sheep. They will therefore be acquitted of guilt and punishment, on that day, by the great Judge of heaven and earth. It will be declared publicly that they are the people whom God has embraced as his children and heirs. They will witness how their enemies and persecutors will be thrown by God into the lake burning with fire and brimstone. This great day shall end as follows: “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal”—Matthew 25, verse 46. However, today is still the day of salvation—the day in which God offers peace and pardon to sinners. Therefore, “Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts” (Hebrews 4:7).

THE APOSTLES' CREED

Rev. Cornelis Harinck

Transcript—Lecture 9

Article 8: God and the Holy Ghost

Dear listener, we have arrived at article 8 of the Apostles' Creed. The Christian confesses, in Article 8 of the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in the Holy Ghost."

When the Christian confesses this, in whom and what does he believe? He thereby professes to believe in the divine person who is called, the Holy Ghost. The name, Holy Ghost, or Holy Spirit, is not only characteristic of the third person of the Trinity, but also explains his nature. He is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of holiness. The Bible speaks of the Holy Spirit, as God. When Ananias lied about the price he received for his field, Peter says, "Why has Satan filled your heart, to lie the Holy Ghost? . . . you have not lied unto men, but unto God"—Acts 5, verse 3. Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit. He made it appear as if the Holy Spirit had moved his heart to do what Barnabas had done. Barnabas had sold his field to support the poor brothers and sisters in the faith. Ananias wanted to imitate this act and, like Barnabas, acquire the reputation of being an exemplary Christian. However, he didn't have the heart of Barnabas. He was duplicitous regarding the proceeds from the sale of his field, and thus, he kept most of it for himself, but he told the Apostle Peter that what he gave him was the full price of his field. Peter then said that by committing this sin, Ananias had lied against the Holy Ghost. He and his wife dropped dead before the feet of Peter. This dramatic event clearly shows that the Holy Spirit is neither the power of God nor a divine agent, but rather, he is God himself.

The Scriptures refer to the Holy Spirit as a person. Qualities are attributed to him that can only be descriptive of a person. He knows our deepest needs and desires. Paul says, in Romans 8, verse 27, "And he that searches the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit." The Holy Spirit is described as having a will, "But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will"—1 Corinthians 12, verse 11. He is described as a person of love. "Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit"—Romans 15, verse 30. All this cannot be said of an impersonal force. The Holy Spirit is revealed to us in the Bible as a person who sees, hears, speaks, testifies, glorifies, guides, convinces, comforts, seals, assures, reveals, and so much more. In short, Scripture attributes qualities to the Holy Spirit that are only applicable to a person.

The Holy Spirit was actively engaged in creation, and the orderly arrangement of the world. In Genesis 1, verse 2, we read, "And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." The Holy Spirit made the chaos into a splendid world. He, with the Father and the Son, is the creator of heaven and earth. Psalm 33, verse 6 says, "By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth." The Holy Spirit is here called the Spirit of the breath of God's mouth. We read of Jesus, when he appeared to his disciples after his resurrection, that he breathed upon them, so that they might receive the Holy Ghost: "And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost"—John 20, verse 22.

Based on this testimony, the early church confessed, regarding the Holy Spirit, in the Creed of Nicaea, in 325 AD, "I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and giver of life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son." The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, by a continuous divine procession, setting forth the unique manner of subsistence of the Holy Spirit. This subsistence is beyond our understanding. The Bible primarily intends to communicate to us that the subsistence of the Holy Spirit is always integrally related to the Father and the Son. That is what Scripture has

revealed to us regarding the person of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus calls the Holy Spirit “the other Comforter.” The word “comforter” (in Greek *parakletos*), means, “a person who defends the oppressed.” Thus, we can think of either a helper or an attorney. The Holy Spirit engages himself on behalf of oppressed and tried believers, when their sins and shortcomings, the law of God, their own conscience, death and grave, and especially the devil distress them.

He then comforts them with Jesus, who is the propitiation for our sins, and the conqueror of the devil, death and hell. The Holy Spirit brings comfort down to the sinner who grieves for sin. He shows the penitent the Father’s boundless love, and the merits of the Son. He kindles hope and faith in Christ. He shows that there is forgiveness in the blood of Jesus. He heals the wounds and sores of sin with the balm of Jesus’ wounds. He tells the backslider that he is welcome to return to his God and Father. He strengthens the afflicted with the faithfulness of God. He comforts the heavy heart with the promises of God. He makes us feel the power of the promise within: “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overthrow you”—Isaiah 43, verse 2. He wipes away the mourner’s tears. And he fills the heart with heavenly joy. What a blessed Comforter is the Holy Spirit!

Thus, God’s children have an advocate who intercedes for them in heaven, namely, Jesus Christ at the right hand of God—1 John 2, verses 1 and 2. And they have an advocate residing in their hearts, namely, the Holy Spirit. Jesus called the Holy Spirit, “another Comforter” (John 14:16), that is, someone other than himself. The word “other” here does not mean someone entirely different from Jesus himself—it means the exact opposite. Jesus is saying, Though he is different, yet he is of the same sort as I am. Jesus is referring to a person who can act on his behalf, and who can replace him. All that Jesus has thus far been for his disciples—their Master, Comforter, Teacher, Lord, God, and Savior—the Holy Spirit will be to them both now and in the future. The Holy Spirit can take Jesus’ place and be the other Comforter, because he is most intimately associated with Jesus and his work as Savior.

The Bible shows us continuously the close relation between Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary. We read in Luke 1, verse 35: “And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon you, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow you: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of you shall be called the Son of God.” Jesus was baptized with the Holy Spirit at the commencement of his public ministry. Luke 3, verses 21 and 22 says, “Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him.” Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. Luke 4, verses 1 and 2 says: “And Jesus, being full of the Holy Ghost, returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being forty days tempted of the devil.” During Jesus’ entire earthly, public ministry, the Holy Spirit rested on Jesus. The Holy Spirit enabled him to preach the Gospel of the kingdom of God. Jesus said, in the synagogue of Capernaum, that in him the prophesy regarding the Messiah was fulfilled, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor” (Isaiah 61:1 and Luke 4:18). The Holy Spirit empowered Jesus to heal the sick and cast out devils. Jesus said to the Pharisees, “But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you”—Matthew 12, verse 28. Jesus offered himself, by the Holy Spirit, to God as a sacrifice for sin. Hebrews 9, verse 14 speaks of “Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God.” Jesus was raised from the dead by the Holy Spirit. In Romans 8, verse 11, it is written: “But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you.” All that Jesus spoke and did, he spoke and did by the power of the Holy Spirit. From his birth to the end of his life on earth, the Holy Spirit was upon him and with him. All this shows the intimate relationship between Jesus’ work of redemption and the Holy Spirit.

However, especially after Jesus had left the earth and ascended into heaven, the Holy Spirit is intimately associated with Jesus and his redemptive work. When Jesus spoke to his disciples about his return to his Father, they were sad. Jesus comforted them with the message, “I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever”—John 14, verse 16. Jesus would leave them, and he would no longer be physically present with them.

However, he would not leave them comfortless, for another Comforter would come—a person who would always abide with them, and even dwell within them. Jesus promised, “He abides with you and will be in you”—John 14, verse 17. Jesus would remain with them through the Comforter. The Holy Spirit would take his place as another Comforter. Since, however, the Holy Spirit and Christ are one, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers would, in fact be, the indwelling of Christ himself in their hearts. That is why Jesus could promise, “I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you”—John 14, verse 18. He would come to live within them by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the author of the great mystery of Christianity, of which we read in Colossians 1, verse 27: “Which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Paul could therefore say, “Christ lives in me”—Galatians 2, verse 20. Jesus’ nearness through the Holy Spirit is even superior to his bodily presence. Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, living in the Christian, is even a more intimate bond than his physical presence. The Holy Spirit is none other than Christ within us. He resides in the heart of the believer. What a glorious guest is the Holy Spirit! He makes Christ present in the heart.

The work of the Holy Spirit is far more comprehensive than we can briefly discuss here. Let us mention his most important works. The Holy Spirit is the author of the Holy Scriptures. The apostle writes, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness”—2 Timothy 3, verse 16. Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit, that is, it is breathed by the Holy Spirit. Though the writers of the Bible are fallible people, whatever they have written, has been written under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Two Peter 1, verse 21 reads: “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” The Holy Spirit is the author of all the spiritual gifts that believers possess. Of all the different spiritual graces that were present in the church at Corinth, the apostle says, “And all these work that one and the selfsame Spirit”—1 Corinthians 12, verse 11.

The Holy Spirit seals to the believer’s heart that he or she is a genuine Christian indeed. In Ephesians 1, verse 13, says the apostle, “In whom you also trusted, after that you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that you believed, you were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.” The presence of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers is the proof that they belong to Jesus. He unites them with Jesus. The Holy Spirit witnesses with their spirit that they are the children of God. Romans 8, verse 16 says, “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.” He grants them the confidence to approach God as their loving Father. He leads believers: “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God”—Romans 8, verse 14. He is the pledge of our eternal inheritance: “Which is the earnest of our inheritance”—Ephesians 1, verse 14. His indwelling is the warranty of their blessed bodily resurrection: “But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus dwell in you, he that has raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwells in you”—Romans 8, verse 11. The Holy Spirit lives in the hearts of all true believers: “Know you not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you”—1 Corinthians 6, verse 19. The Holy Spirit is God within us. What a glorious guest! What a wonder that the Holy Spirit will reside in such sinful hearts as our hearts are!

Above all, however, the Holy Spirit is the person who will see to it that Christ’s redemptive work bears fruit. He brings the work of Jesus to full fruition and gathers to him a congregation, chosen to eternal life, of all generations, tongues, and nations. The Holy Scriptures focus preeminently on making sinners the partakers of the salvation Christ has merited. It is the most important aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus has finished his redemptive work, and thereby has merited the rich, spiritual, and eternal blessings for his church. However, how do we become partakers of these blessings? The scriptural answer is: by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit unites the sinner with Christ, and thereby makes him a partaker of all Christ’s benefits.

Jesus spoke to his disciples about the work of the Holy Spirit, and told them what his ministry would be. He said, “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you”—John 16, verses 13 and 14. Jesus said, “He shall glorify me.” These words sum up the core

aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does not set himself in the place of Christ. He seeks not his own glory—this is evident sign of a false spirit, whatever it pretends to be. Of the Holy Spirit, Jesus said, “He shall not speak of himself.” He shall magnify and glorify Christ in the hearts of sinners, in order that they shall know what a blessed Savior and Redeemer Jesus is.

Jesus also taught how the Holy Spirit would accomplish this task. He said, “For he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. Jesus speaks about receiving “of mine”—that is, all that belongs to Jesus, and thus everything Jesus has merited. The Holy Spirit will apply all this to the believers. He reveals to the souls of sinners the good things of the covenant of grace, which the Father has provided and the Son purchased. He shows to us mercy, grace, forgiveness, righteousness, acceptance with God, and he lets us know that Jesus has procured all these blessings for us.

He makes this not only known, but he grants us faith to embrace all this and make it our own. And so it will be fulfilled what Paul writes: “Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God”—1 Corinthians 2, verse 12. Jesus identifies this as the great work of the Holy Spirit. He will make us the beneficiaries of Christ, and all that pertains to him. To this end, the Holy Spirit will unite us, by faith, to Christ, and everything that pertains to Jesus will thus become our portion. The blessings of Christ can thus not be divorced from Christ himself, and they are therefore not obtainable apart from our union with Christ. It is in and with Christ that the benefits of Christ are bestowed upon us. Paul says, in 1 Corinthians 1, verse 30, “But of him are you in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” In Christ, believers are partakers of all these mercies. Just as all our misery proceeds from our union with Adam, likewise all our salvation proceeds from our union with Christ.

The great theologian of the Reformation, John Calvin, said the following about this task of the Holy Spirit: “And then we must first and foremost consider that all that Christ has suffered and accomplished for the salvation of the human race is of no benefit and no importance to us as long as he remains external to us, and we are separated from him. Thus, to make us partakers of what he has received from the Father, he must become ours and dwell within us.” (Institutes 3:1:1). The Holy Spirit’s primary objective is to glorify Christ. His will is that the glory, the virtues, the excellence, the grace, the love, the atonement, as well as the victory of Christ over the devil, death, and hell, and the grave, be proclaimed in the world. He wants Jesus’ glory to be known among the nations. He will see to it that Christ is preached in the world.

However, that is not all. He will also see to it that sinners will believe in Christ. The apostle exclaims in amazement, “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory”—1 Timothy 3, verse 16. Jesus will be believed in the fallen world. The Holy Spirit will begin his work with the spiritual resurrection or regeneration of the sinner.

The Bible declares every man on earth to be spiritually dead. The apostle says of the believers in Ephesus that they were once dead: “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins”—Ephesians 2, verse 1. To the Christians at Colosse, he writes, “And you, being dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him”—Colossians 2, verse 13. Fallen man is flesh, that is, depraved, and thus incapable of doing any good, and prone toward all evil, and thus, unable and unwilling to believe in Jesus for salvation. The apostle writes, “So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God”—Romans 8, verse 8. Man must be raised from this spiritual death, that is, from this inability and unwillingness to serve God and believe in Christ, and be made willing and capable to close with Christ for salvation. The Bible calls this the new birth. Jesus said to Nicodemus, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God”—John 3, verse 3. Jesus told Nicodemus that without the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, a sinner can neither understand nor delight in the things of the kingdom of God. Paul says, in 1 Corinthians 2, verse 14, “But the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God.” Every true Christian was once dead in trespasses and sins. Love of God and sorrow for sin were unknown—there was no need for Jesus the Savior, and no desire to live according to God’s commandments.

Every Christian has the backstory of being a stranger to God in his heart. It was the Holy Spirit who turned their hearts away from love of sin and the world. To every genuine Christian, these

words are, therefore, applicable: “But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost”—Titus 3, verses 4 and 5. The Holy Spirit works in sinners a true faith that unites us to Christ. He brings the sinner and the Savior to each other. He makes the sinner see his need for Jesus. He makes Jesus necessary and precious to us. To achieve this, he will do what Jesus said of the Holy Spirit, “And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment”—John 16, verse 8. When the Holy Spirit comes in us, he will do a great work. He will make men to whom he comes know what sin is. We so easily say, “I am a sinner,” but we do not know what sin is. David knew and felt what sin is. He confessed, “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight” (Psalm 51:4). Sin is transgression of God’s holy law. Sin is committed against a holy and righteous God, who will not let sin go unpunished. When this becomes real for us, we will pray with David, “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according to the multitude of thy tender mercies”—Psalm 51 (verse 1).

In conversion, the Holy Spirit will open our eyes to our lost state, and to the sins we have committed against God. He will work a heartfelt sorrow for sin in our hearts, and a hungering and thirsting after the righteousness of Christ. He will make us conscious of being in danger of losing our soul and perishing forever. He will show us the dreadful reality of God’s holy wrath toward sin. He will tell and show us the truth about ourselves. The Holy Spirit will shine with his light into our hearts, and uncover to us the depravity of our hearts. He will strip us of all hope of self-deliverance, and he will make us agree with the prophet: “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away”—Isaiah 64, verse 6. However, his objective in bringing down all that is exalted in us is to glorify Christ within us. The Holy Spirit has one only goal, namely, to glorify Christ. He will make Jesus necessary and precious to the heart.

He will, through the Gospel, reveal to the heart of the contrite sinner the Savior, who came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost—1 Timothy 1, verse 15. He shows us ourselves in our sins and corruptions, in order to show us Jesus the Savior in his dying love. For where sin is not seen, Jesus is not sought. He will shed light upon Jesus’ person, excellence, fullness, suitability, and ability to reconcile us with God. He will speak to us of the power of Jesus’ blood to cleanse us from all sins, as well as of his satisfaction of God’s justice to deliver us from the just wrath of God. He will shed light upon Jesus, and will set him before us as a willing, full, and complete Savior. He will cause our contrite heart to consider the invitations that came forth from Jesus’ mouth, assuring us that he who comes to him will in no wise be cast out—John 6, verse 37. He comforts the heavy heart with the message, “The Master has come and he calls for you.” He will kindle a true faith in our hearts to embrace Jesus as Savior, and to make him our righteousness before God. The Holy Spirit ties the blessed knot between Jesus and a sinner. He causes Christ to dwell in our hearts by faith. How indispensable is this saving work of the Holy Spirit, personally and experientially!

The Holy Spirit glorifies Christ. He will not cause light to fall upon himself, but rather upon Jesus. He will focus all attention upon Jesus. Think of a beautiful painting that is being illuminated by a lamp. No one will look at the light that illuminates the painting—all eyes will be on the painting itself. Such is the nature of the blessed work of the Holy Spirit. He will cause all attention to be focused on Christ. In so doing, he will make Christ exceedingly precious to our hearts, and make us partakers of Christ and all his benefits. He will teach us to say, “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ”—Galatians 6, verse 14.

The Holy Spirit will remain with the church on earth. Jesus promised, “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever”—John 14, verse 16. The church will never be without the Holy Spirit. That is the glory of the Christian church, and it is the warranty of her continued existence. The Holy Spirit is to the church as a whole, and to each believer individually, as the cloudy and fiery pillar of which we read in Exodus 13, verse 22: “He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.” Despite all their murmurings, and all their unfaithfulnesses, the cloudy and fiery pillar remained with the people of Israel, until they came into Canaan. God will bring each of his children to the heavenly Canaan. He will finish what he has begun. He has promised, “I will be

with you: I will not fail you, nor forsake you”—Joshua 1, verse 5. The Christian wholeheartedly confesses, “I believe in the Holy Ghost.”

THE APOSTLES' CREED

Rev. Cornelis Harinck

Transcript—Lecture 10

Article 9: The Universal Church of Christ

Dear listener, we have now come to article 9 of the Apostles' Creed. In this article the Christian confesses, "I believe in the holy catholic church, the communion of saints." It is noteworthy to see that this confession about the church follows the confession, "I believe in the Holy Spirit." It is not without significance that the Holy Spirit is mentioned in connection with the church. The existence of the church is the result of the Holy Spirit's work in the hearts of men. He gathers a church of all generations, tongues, and nations. He sees to it that Jesus' suffering and death bear fruit by making sinners partakers of the salvation merited by Christ.

We notice, that the Christian does not say, "I believe in the church," but rather, believes that there is a church. He believes in God and in Christ. He does not believe in the church. The Christian does not base his faith on the church, as if the church would be able to save us. Such is the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, namely, that the church will secure your salvation as long as you comply with her dictates. The Christian believes in the existence of a church. He or she specifically believes in the existence of one church—one holy, catholic (universal), Christian church.

In this world there is a church. The church exists amidst a world estranged from God, consisting of a people who fear God, believe in Christ, and anticipate the eternal salvation. The word "church" is not such a suitable description of what the church is. The word "church" is too reminiscent of either the building, organization, and denomination. Therefore, the designation "congregation" is more biblical than the designation "church." The church is not made of wood and stone, but rather, she consists of living people. It is the gathering of all true believers. All believers in the world are identified as the church. Jesus promises, in Matthew 16, verse 18, "Upon this rock I will build my church: and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

The word "church" does not point at a massive building, or to a large number of people. It points to the gathering together of the believers. It can also describe a small house church, as, for instance, in Romans 16, verse 5, "Likewise greet the church that is in their house." The word "congregation" is always used in the book of Acts and the letters of the apostles. It is the translation of the Greek word "ekklesia," which means "a gathering of the people." In Greek cities, a herald would summon the citizens to assemble for a public discussion. This assembly is called a congregation. The Christian church, or rather, the church of Christ, is an assembly of people who have been called into fellowship by God. They are the citizens of God's kingdom who have been called forth from the inhabitants of the world.

We do not naturally belong to the church of Christ, but rather, to the fallen generation of Adam. The Bible, therefore, speaks of the church as "the called"—the ekklesia. God has called them "out of darkness into his marvellous light"—1 Peter 2, verse 9. Although there are various churches with different names and views, in reality, there is but one church. It is one family—her members are all brothers and sisters, "of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named"—Ephesians 3, verse 15. The apostle writes regarding the identity of believers, in Ephesians 4, verses 5 and 6: "One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." They constitute the brotherhood of the church of Christ. The church is a gathering of people who are journeying toward their eternal salvation. "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved"—that is what we read in Acts 2, verse 47. After all, like the patriarchs, they are "strangers and pilgrims on the earth," looking "for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God"—Hebrews 11:10, 13.

The Apostles' Creed speaks of a "holy" and "catholic" (universal) Christian church. These adjectives describe the character of the church. The Christian church is holy. The word "holy" in the Bible has the meaning of being set apart and consecrated unto the service of the Lord. The Sabbath, the firstborn, the people of Israel, Mount Zion, the temple, and all the instruments of the temple are designated as holy, that is, set apart for the service of the Lord. They belong to the Lord, are selected for his service, and are therefore holy.

In the New Testament, believers are called "saints." In his letter to the Christians at Corinth, Paul therefore writes, "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours"—1 Corinthians 1, verse 2. The apostle addresses Christians as those who are "called to be saints." They have been called by God out of the masses of the world, to be God's particular property. They are, according to the words of Peter, "A chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people" (1 Peter 2:9). Peter calls them saints in Christ Jesus. They are not holy in themselves, but rather, they are sanctified in Jesus Christ. They are made holy because of being inwardly renewed by the Holy Spirit, and the washing away of sins through the blood of Christ. The word "holy" defines for us the nature of the church. The church consists of people who have been called out by God, from a sinful world that has rejected God. Their sins have been washed away by the blood of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit has renewed their nature. The church is, therefore, a holy Christian church—a people set apart by God.

The Christian church is "catholic" or "universal." It means that she is no longer limited to the descendants of Abraham, for she consists of men of every people, race, and language: "For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek"—Romans 10, verse 12. In Christ, the wall of separation between Jew and Gentile, between slaves and freemen, as well as between men and women, has disappeared. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus"—Galatians 3, verse 28. There is no racism in the church. The ancient words of Genesis 22, verse 18, have been fulfilled: "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." The church has become worldwide in scope. The church of Christ is universal and therefore not limited to either a particular nationality, race, or skin color. As the great Shepherd of the sheep, Christ gathers his congregation from all nations. Upon the conclusion of the history of this world, there will be a church from all peoples, languages, and nations: "After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb"—Revelation 7, verse 9.

Finally, the church is "Christian." The church is Christ's church. He bought his church, not with silver or gold, but with his own blood: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot"—1 Peter 1, the verses 18 and 19. These believers had once been the devil's captives and slaves, but Jesus redeemed them—he paid the ransom for them. They are the wages upon his labor. Jesus is the head of the church: "And he is the head of the body"—Colossians 1, verse 18.

The early Christians confessed, "Jesus is kurios," that is, he is Lord. It was the highest title one could ascribe to a person in the culture of the ancient East. Jesus was, for Christians, the undisputed Lord of all things, and then particularly of the church. It was an inexpressible privilege to belong to him. No one can assume that position without dishonoring Christ. The pope of the Roman Catholic Church appropriates to himself the title that he is the head of the church of Christ on earth. It has been said, in so doing, he beheaded the church. However, we confess that, just as the man is the head of the woman, Jesus is the head of the church—1 Corinthians 11, verse 3. The church is Christ's church. No pope, no earthly king or ruler may or can say, "I am also king of the church." In the church, Christ is King and Lord. He rules there, and no one else. Jesus has said, "One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren"—Matthew 23, verse 8.

The church has a task in the world. The church has been commissioned by God to proclaim the Gospel to all people and nations, and to instruct and nourish her members through the Word. How can she fulfill that task in a world where nations are often ruled by governments that do not recognize Christ as King of the church? How often this results in conflict, oppression, and persecution!

But in the midst of all this opposition, the church is God's instrument of spreading the Gospel of Christ in a lost world.

In the Bible, the church is called "the body of Christ," as well as "the temple of the Holy Spirit," in which God dwells. In connection with the sin of fornication, the apostle asks the Christians in Corinth, "Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ?"—1 Corinthians 6, verse 15. And in verse 19, he says, "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you?" These names teach us that the church is so much more than either a building or an organization. The church is an assembly of people who are the body of Christ, and in whose hearts the Holy Spirit dwells. These are spiritual matters that are invisible to us. We cannot say the Holy Spirit dwells in this man or woman, and not in that man and that woman. We see that which is visible, but God alone beholds what lives in the heart.

Nevertheless, invisible graces do not remain hidden. In one's walk of life, it will become visible who is a member of Jesus' spiritual body, and in whose heart the Holy Spirit dwells. Jesus taught, "Ye shall know them by their fruits"—Matthew 7, verse 16. The invisible work of the Holy Spirit becomes visible in the world, when believers form a congregation—that is, when they come together to pray, sing, hear God's Word, and provide for the poor. Thus, wherever the ministry of the apostles was blessed, congregations were instituted, office-bearers were appointed, and a place of worship was established.

In the apostolic epistles, we read of shepherds and teachers, elders, and deacons—Ephesians 4, verse 11. As for the elders, a distinction is made between teaching elders and ruling elders. We read about this distinction, in Acts 11, verse 30, and 1 Timothy 5, verse 17. Regarding the deacons, we read that they assisted the poor—1 Timothy 3, verses 8, 10 and 12. When Paul writes a letter to the congregation of Philippi, he addresses it to "all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons"—Philippians 1, verse 1.

The church thereby became, and becomes, visible in the world. Therefore, we speak of both a visible and an invisible church. The visible church is that which becomes manifest when people profess the name of Jesus Christ. Together they constitute the visible church, which becomes visible when she assembles in her church buildings, forms a community, and ministers to one another. The invisible church is that aspect of the church only seen and known by God. It consists of the hidden work of the Holy Spirit in the heart, whereby people are born again and believe in Christ. The visible church, with her offices, the ministry of preaching and teaching, and her care for the needy, constitute the divinely ordained manifestation of the Christian church in the world. The Scriptures call the visible church, "the pillar and ground of the truth"—1 Timothy 3, verse 15. The visible church manifesting herself in the preaching of God's Word, the administration of the sacraments, the education of the youth, the care for the needy, and overseeing life and doctrine of believers, is God's chosen instrument to bring sinners to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, as well as to nourish and instruct believers.

John Calvin's famous and entirely Biblical saying is: "Whoever has God as his Father must have the church as his mother." That is how we ought to think about the church. God's redemptive work becomes visible in the church. The church manifests herself in the world as an entity that differs radically from the kingdoms of the earth. She is a spiritual entity, for she is a revelation of the kingdom of God. It is thus a kingdom amid the kingdoms of the world. She has Jesus as her Lord and King and lives in conformity to his commandments. She has no national borders, races, and languages.

The question follows, What relationship is there between that spiritual kingdom and the secular, earthly powers and kingdoms? I believe it is fitting to say something here about the relationship between church and state. Scripture shows us that both are of divine origin and have divinely mandated responsibilities. The government is called God's servant, "For he is the minister of God to thee for good"—Romans 13, verse 4. God, who rules the world as King, has established governments and powers that rule over men in his name. To that end, he has vested them with authority. Although powers and governments may think that they derive their power from themselves, it is God who has given them that power. They have been vested with that power to protect the good and to punish evildoers. The church is a divine and spiritual institution. Her existence originates in God. Jesus rules as the King over the church: "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of

Zion”—Psalm 2, verse 6. She is the church of Christ, “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone”—Ephesians 2, verse 20. She is called the wife, the body, the bride, and the church of Christ. The church is the manifestation and revelation of God’s redeeming intervention in a fallen world. The church is God’s property.

God gathers unto himself, from a fallen human world, a church chosen to eternal life. He initiated this work immediately after the fall of man, and will continue to be thus engaged until the last day—the day of Jesus’ return. We can, therefore, view the church as consisting of people who have been called by God to be his particular property. The church of Christ is of divine origin and has a spiritual character.

Scripture shows that church and state have different tasks. The church is a society or community that is distinct from all other authority structures known on earth. In obedience to Christ’s will, believers unite with other believers to constitute a congregation by making a public profession of their faith. Faith does not remain hidden in their hearts, and also is not limited to the living room—instead, it is openly confessed and practiced by a Christian walk of life. The calling of the church is to bear witness to her faith in the world. Jesus gave his disciples—and in them, to his entire church—the commission, “Ye shall be witnesses unto me”—Acts 1, verse 8. In the arena of the world, the church testifies that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. She testifies of his death and resurrection, and declares, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”—Acts 4, verse 12. The church is engaged in the world among men, to preach to them the Gospel, and to make them disciples of Christ. Jesus commanded, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you”—Matthew 28, the verses 19 and 20. The state may not hinder the church in this, but rather, its calling is to promote this work.

Besides the church, there is another society on earth, differing in nature and character from the church, namely, the state, or civil government. It has been instituted by God to uphold justice, order, and discipline in the world. The question is, how do these two powers relate to each other? Are they meant to assist each other, or to be in conflict with each other? Scripture teaches that both societies are established by God, to accomplish his plan of salvation. The church’s calling is to preach the Gospel, and to promote the spiritual wellbeing of men. The state promotes the physical wellbeing of people, and its calling is to keep the world from descending into chaos, by maintaining law and order. The church will thus be enabled to accomplish her task in the world.

The church and the state represent two different kingdoms. Jesus said to Pilate, “My Kingdom is not of this world”—John 18, verse 36. The ancient Scots said to King Charles, “There are two kingdoms in Scotland. There is the Kingdom of Scotland, of which you are King. But there is also the kingdom of God, in which Christ reigns as King.” It resulted in war and persecution. The state or civil government does have a calling to protect the church, so that Christians can freely profess their faith. However, the state has no authority in the church. Conversely, although the church has no jurisdiction in the state, nevertheless, she must teach the state. She must stir up the government to rule according to God’s laws. She must pray for all levels of government, and must teach Christians to honor and obey their government.

However, there is always a limit to the extent of the church’s obedience to the government. If the state demands disobedience to God and actions contrary to his commandments, the Christian must obey God more than the state. When the Jewish authorities demanded that the apostles stop speaking about Jesus, Peter refused to oblige, for he said, “We ought to obey God rather than men”—Acts 5, verse 29. In the past, and in some countries today, this has led to oppression of the Christian church, and even the persecution of Christians.

The Apostles’ Creed speaks about “the communion of saints.” The Christian believes in the communion of saints. The word used in the Greek New Testament for the communion of Christians is “koinonia,” which means to participate—to partake. It is expressive of solidarity. A common cause unites Christians. The communion of saints is a union rooted in their being united to a person, namely, Jesus Christ. The believer is, first of all, united to Christ, and in Christ, united to other believers. Christ is at the very center of the communion of saints. A person’s faith is a faith that first and foremost unites him or her to Jesus Christ. However, it also unites the believer to

every other believer. The redemption the believer has experienced in Christ is not a self-centered redemption. It is a redemption that one desires to share with others. Believers long to speak of, hear of, sing about Christ their Lord, and praise God with fellow Christians. The believer will not isolate himself. He or she will never be a solitary Christian. The Christian seeks fellowship and finds it with other believers. The Holy Spirit unites us with Christ, but also with each other.

The children of God all over the world are united to Christ with the same faith, the same love, and the same hope. They will all have escaped the same peril, and have been saved by Jesus from sin, death, and destruction. They have all been cleansed from their sins in the blood of Jesus, and are anticipating the eternal salvation of soul and body. They also have the same struggle with sin, the world, and the devil. They fight the same battle with the remains of the old man. They have so much that binds them together! When they meet, speak, pray, and sing, as well as listen to the preaching of God's Word, and partake of the Lord's Supper, they do experience this spiritual communion. It is a communion that not only leads to sharing each other's hope, faith, and love, but also to the sharing of each other's joy and sorrow. Paul writes, "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep"—Romans 12, verse 15. It is a communion that even prompted the young Christian congregation in Jerusalem to share their property with the poor: "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common"—Acts 4, verse 32.

The apostolic epistles continually admonish Christians to maintain communion with one another: "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"—Ephesians 4, verses 1 through 3. The division among Christians is a serious indictment of the church. It contradicts Jesus' prayer for unity: "That they all may be one"—John 17, verse 21. That is what Jesus prayed. It does not mean, however, that we must unite with believers who deny the fundamental truths of Christianity. However, it does mean that we must seek unity with all who profess the doctrines of the Bible. Despite the sad division among the different denominations, we nevertheless continue to believe in the communion of saints.

If it were possible to gather all the true believers of the world together in one place, and let them speak to each other about their hope, faith, love, and struggles, they would still feel united—even though they never before had seen or known each other. In heaven, this communion will be fully realized and experienced. Therefore, we confess, "I believe an holy catholic church, the communion of saints."

THE APOSTLES' CREED

Rev. Cornelis Harinck

Transcript—Lecture 11

Article 10: The Forgiveness of Sins

In Article 10 of the Apostles' Creed, the Christian confesses, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins." Though short, it is an article with extraordinary content. Much is said in few words. It appears as if this confession was taken directly from Psalm 130. In this Psalm, the question is asked, "If thou, LORD, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" (Psalm 130:3) The answer is, none. For we "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). "There is none righteous, no not one" (Romans 3:10). All the world is guilty before God. However, then a confession of faith follows: "But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared" (Psalm 130:4). What a blessed confession this is! Here a statement is made regarding God that is of vital importance for each of us, namely, that there is forgiveness with God. God forgives! He forgives sin and iniquity. Psalm 130 declares, "With thee, there is forgiveness." The Psalm speaks of forgiveness as being as consistent with God's character as light belongs to the sun. It says, "forgiveness is with thee"—it belongs to God.

Forgiveness is a foundational component of God's essence. Forgiveness proceeds from his gracious nature. The Lord proclaimed in Moses' hearing, "The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin"—Exodus 34 (verses 6 and 7). Infinite goodness and grace are the fountain from which forgiveness issues forth. "For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive"—Psalm 86, verse 5. If God were not infinitely good, there would be no forgiveness. Scripture proclaims God to be the God of forgiveness: "But thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not"—Nehemiah 9, verse 17. Psalm 103 says, regarding God, "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities" (verse 3). And Isaiah testifies of God, "He will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:7).

Forgiveness is designated as the great promise of the New Covenant: "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more"—Jeremiah 31, verse 34. The New Testament declares John the Baptist to have been born "to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins"—Luke 1, verse 77. Jesus forgave people their sins. He was vested with the authority to forgive sins. He forgave the sins of the lame man, and said to the scribes and Pharisees, "that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins"—Luke 5, verse 24. He sent his disciples into the world to proclaim God's forgiveness: "And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations"—Luke 24, verse 47. The forgiveness of sins was the chief content of the proclamation of the gospel. Peter declared about Jesus, in the house of Cornelius, "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins"—Acts 10, verse 43. Forgiveness is a grace acquired by Jesus. Ephesians 1:7 says, "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.

Forgiveness assumes the presence of evil. There is an evil that needs to be forgiven, namely, sin. If it remains unforgiven, we will have to suffer for it eternally. So horrible is the evil of sin. But God be praised—there is forgiveness with God. Jesus said to the penitent sinner, "Thy sins are forgiven"—Luke 7, verse 48. Jesus taught us to pray, "Forgive us our debts" (Matthew 6:12). Forgiveness is thus associated with sin and guilt.

People think lightly about sin. They do not view sin as a transgression of God's holy commandment. They see sin more as a mistake, a weakness, a wrong decision, the result of certain

circumstances, or as caused by other people. At best, we may still view it as an evil that we inflict on other people, but not as an evil committed against God. The notion of sin has been annulled. We fail to see how great an evil sin is in the eyes of a holy and righteous God. What is sin according to the Bible? The Scripture uses different words for sin and the commission of sin. The word most commonly used for sinning means, “to come short of,” and it primarily refers to a coming short of the goal one should have achieved. It thus expresses failure and miscarriage. According to the Bible, man comes short of his created purpose when he sins, that is, when he neither loves God above all, nor his neighbor as himself. He fails to achieve his objective, departs from the path of life, and will die. He thereby comes short of a blessing, and will be accursed instead. God says, “All they that hate me love death”—Proverbs 8, verse 36.

Sin has been brought into the world by Adam and Eve, and in them we all sinned. For we all were in the loins of Adam, and he was our federal head. Their sin is thus the sin of all humanity. The apostle teaches, “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners”—Romans 5, verse 19. We were created to find our happiness in God, that is, to honor and love God as he is. Having listened to the devil, and desiring to be like God, we have come short of our purpose and destiny. Fallen man no longer fulfills the purpose for which God created him. The apostle concludes his sad account of the sinfulness of fallen man by saying, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”—Romans 3, verse 23.

Another word the Bible uses for sin and the commission of sin means, “to deviate from the right way.” It is a description of something crooked and wrong, and stepping over the border. When one does something that is not right, he sins. John writes, “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law”—1 John 3, verse 4. The Bible views sin as a violation of God’s law. It is to step across a line that God has drawn in his law, by saying, “Thou shalt,” and “Thou shalt not.” The Ten Commandments clearly draw that line and establish boundaries. When we cross that line, we are sinning. The result is death. Any act that deviates from the divinely prescribed path leads to perdition: “For the wages of sin is death”—Romans 6, verse 23. Sin, in the Bible is not merely a tangible and actual transgression of God’s law. Sin proceeds from a wrong inclination—from man’s fallen and evil disposition. Jesus taught, “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within, and defile the man”—Mark 7 (verses 21–23).

Finally, the Bible designates sin as a rebellion—a mutiny against God and his law. It is the exclamation of what we read, in Luke 19, verse 14: “We will not have this man to reign over us.” Sin is rebellious disobedience. It is rebellion against God, as the King of kings. In this manner, it is spoken of sin, in Psalm 2, verses 2 and 3: “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.”

Sin is ultimately a going astray. It is to believe the lie the devil imposed upon Adam and Eve, namely, that one can find happiness apart from God. The devil proposed to Adam and Eve that nothing would make them happier than to be their own god, and determine what is good and evil. He said, “For God does know that in the day you eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil”—Genesis 3, verse 5. What a lie! Adam and Eve believed this lie, and thereby departed from God, from the good Shepherd and his safe pasture. And we still believe this lie. Sin is therefore described as such, in Isaiah 53: “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way.” These Biblical references make clear what the evil nature of sin is. It is opposition to God’s will, rebellion against his kingship, a disregard for his goodness, contempt for his love, and a betrayal of his faithfulness. Sin is wanting to be as God. Sin is arrogant pride. Instead of honoring God, it is an honoring of self. Sin has been correctly summarized as an evil that opposes God and all that pertains to God.

God, therefore, hates sin, for sin conflicts with his holy nature. There is nothing as contrary to God as sin. He neither is able nor willing to do anything other than punish sin. God would contradict his very being if he were indifferent to sin. Sin has consequences, for it provokes God to wrath and renders us liable to the judgment of damnation.

Sin also defiles us. It is an infection that has affected our entire nature. Sin has darkened our

minds, has rendered our will abhorrent of good, and has defiled our passions. Sin is the greatest evil—even worse than death and hell. If there were no sin, there would be neither death nor hell. Sin provokes God to wrath: “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men”—Romans 1, verse 18. It leads to the questions, how can God ever forgive such evil? how can my sins be forgiven?

When people are either wrong or fail, they will commonly say, “After all, I am only a sinner.” People will readily confess that they are sinners. They will admit that they are not perfect and that all is not as it should be in their lives. Yet people are not very concerned about that. After all, there is forgiveness with God. Most people take it for granted that God forgives sins. Is he not God for that very purpose? Others are of more serious mindset. They deem penance, confession of guilt, repentance, and especially faith in Jesus Christ to be essential in securing forgiveness from God. There are but few who believe in the necessity of blood—of reconciliation through the blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son.

The question is, how can a holy God forgive sin? The forgiveness of sin seems to contradict the holiness and justice of God. God reveals himself as a holy God in the Bible. He cannot tolerate evil in his presence: “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity”—Habakkuk 1, verse 13. Scripture emphatically teaches that God cannot leave sin unpunished. When the Lord proclaimed his name and nature to Moses, he said, “The LORD, The LORD God, . . . that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation”—Exodus 34, verses 6 and 7. How then can God forgive our transgressions of his commandments, so that he will never again remember our sins? How can he proclaim, as we read, in Isaiah 43, verse 25, “I, even I, am he that blotteth out your transgressions for my own sake, and will not remember your sins.” How can God maintain his holiness and justice, and forgive the sinner?

Here God’s love and wisdom have found a way to punish sin and save the sinner. It is the adorable way of the vicarious death and substitution of Jesus Christ, depicted in the sacrificial ministry of the Old Testament, and preached in the gospel of the New Testament. Abraham’s words to Isaac have been fulfilled, “My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering”—Genesis 22, verse 8. God has provided a sacrificial lamb. He appointed his Son to be a Surety and Mediator for sinners. He punished the sin of his elect church in Jesus, the Surety and Savior, so that he could forgive sinners. “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him”—2 Corinthians 5, verse 21. God’s forgiveness is grounded in the satisfaction of Christ. Jesus’ vicarious suffering and dying on behalf of sinners is the foundation of God’s forgiveness.

The apostle, therefore, says of Jesus, “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believes in Jesus”—Romans 3, verses 25 and 26. In Christ, God executes judgment on sin, and acquits the believer. In Christ, God can forgive without contradicting his holiness and justice. Grace has gained the upper hand, however, not at the expense of, but rather, based on righteousness. In Romans 5, verse 21, the apostle shows that righteousness and grace have met each other in Christ. He says, “That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.” This is the adorable way of redemption that God reveals to us in Jesus Christ in the gospel. It is a way of redemption that testifies of unspeakable love. “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all”—Romans 8, verse 32. It is the revelation of God’s adorable wisdom. “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!”—Romans 11, verse 33. His wisdom has found this way of salvation.

These are the things that the angels were desirous to look into—1 Peter 1, verse 12. It is called the mystery of the gospel, of which Paul speaks, saying, “That I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel”—Ephesians 6, verse 19. The Greek word for mystery, “mysterion,” refers to a secret that is revealed. The New Testament uses this word for various things, such as the mystery of the end of the ages, the resurrection of the dead, and the future of the people of Israel. However, most often, this word is used for the preaching of the gospel. The

preaching of the gospel is the revelation and proclamation of God's plan of redemption. It is the revelation of a mystery.

The sin problem has been solved in the God-man Jesus Christ. There is forgiveness with God. Sin has been judged in Christ, and God's justice has been satisfied. The great redeeming work is done. Sin is done away, and everlasting righteousness is brought in. Now there is forgiveness of sins for everyone who believes in the crucified Christ. What a joyful sound is the preaching of the Gospel! There is forgiveness with God for transgressors doomed to die. The door of God's mercy stands open all day. Everyone who comes seeking mercy and forgiveness shall not be sent back empty.

The apostles went forth into the world with that joyful message—a message that brought salvation to a world lost in sin and guilt. In Psalm 32, verse 1, David says, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." The man whose sins are forgiven is a blessed man. Knowing forgiveness of sins is the greatest of all blessings. It is a blessed man who can say, I am a sinner that is forgiven. But how does one become the recipient of that blessing? The Bible links the forgiveness of sins to the knowledge of sin, to repentance, and to faith in Jesus Christ. There is a way that leads to forgiveness. It is of utmost importance not to lose sight of this way. To simply assume that Jesus died for our sins, apart from repentance, faith in Jesus Christ, and renewal of life is an illusion and a dangerous deception. Our spiritual wounds will thereby not be truly healed. Forgiveness is, in the Bible, inseparably linked to the knowledge of sin, repentance, and faith in Jesus Christ. Knowledge of our sins and our sinful existence leads to a seeking of God's forgiveness. You cannot expect people to pray for the forgiveness of sins, of which they are ignorant. In Psalm 51, David says, "For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me." God brought David to this acknowledgment. God had to convince him of his horrendous evil. David himself did not realize the great evil he had committed.

David first became aware of the sin of his adultery with Bathsheba, and the murder of Uriah, when the prophet Nathan brought this to his attention. Before that, he closed his eyes to his sin, and considered his behavior to be normal. After all, did not all kings do such things? Why then could he not do it? However, when Nathan came to him and told him what God thought about his murder of Uriah, and adultery with Bathsheba, he confessed, "I have sinned against the LORD"—2 Samuel 12, verse 13. Man will come to a right knowledge of his sins, only when he comes face to face with God. We will not perceive what sin is in the eyes of an infinitely holy and just God, until God shows us. Moses said this already, "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance" (Psalm 90:8). The first thing we need is for God to illuminate our hearts, and show us that we are transgressors of his holy commandments, and that by our sins, we have provoked God to wrath. We must be confronted with our sins. As long as a person does not see his sins, he will not seek forgiveness. The knowledge of the disease is the first step to healing. Though God will determine the depth of that knowledge, the measure of the knowledge of one's sin and sinful existence must be such that he will be compelled to seek God's forgiveness.

The Bible also links the forgiveness of sins to repentance. Although Jesus commissioned his disciples to proclaim God's forgiveness to all the people, they were not to do so without calling them to repentance. He commanded them, "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name"—Luke 24, verse 47. The Greek word here translated as repentance is "metanoia." It has the meaning of a different way of thinking about God and yourself, and a returning to God with sorrow for sin. Jesus linked the forgiveness of sins to this repentance. Repentance makes forgiveness sweet. When David sought to cover his sins and not confess them before God, his conscience accused him, and a sense of God's displeasure consumed him. How everything changed, when he confessed his sin before God! He says of it, "I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah"—Psalm 32, verse 5. His confession of guilt and sin led to forgiveness. All of Scripture highlights this link between repentance and forgiveness. The apostle John writes, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"—1 John 1, verse 9. A conviction of the evil of our sins, accompanied by a heartfelt sorrow, is the way that leads to the forgiveness of sins.

Furthermore, the forgiveness of sins is linked to faith in Jesus Christ. When Paul addressed

Jews in the synagogue, who believed that they could be righteous before God by the keeping of the law, he said, “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things”—Acts 13 (verses 38–39). The great blessing of having our sins forgiven is not secured by either good works, acts of penance, tears of repentance, or earnest prayers, but rather, by simply believing in Christ. We become righteous in God’s sight by casting ourselves upon the blood and righteousness of Jesus. We are not justified before God by the deeds of the law, but only through faith in Jesus Christ.

The gospel proclaims forgiveness of sins to all who believe in the crucified Christ. The forgiveness of sins is, therefore, intimately connected with the atoning death of Jesus. Romans 3 says that we are “justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (verse 24). Jesus declared of himself, “For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many”—Mark 10, verse 45. He came to pay a ransom and to redeem slaves of sin and Satan. Isaiah says of Jesus the Messiah, “But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). John the Baptist identified Jesus as “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world”—John 1, verse 29. The Apostle John says of Jesus, “And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin”—1 John 3, verse 5. The apostles have proclaimed boldly that there is no forgiveness of sins apart from faith in Jesus Christ. Faith in the forgiveness of sins rests on the promise that everyone who believes in the crucified Jesus will receive forgiveness of sins. Peter said to the people gathered together in the house of Cornelius, “To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins”—Acts 10, verse 43. Not in the way of working or meriting, but by believing in the atoning passion and death of Jesus, we obtain the forgiveness of our sins.

Unfortunately, this liberating Biblical teaching is often misused. Many will say, “You just have to believe that you are a sinner; that Jesus is the Savior, and that your sins are therefore forgiven.” However, such intellectual faith does not minister the true forgiveness of sins and peace with God to our hearts. True and Biblical faith is the focal point here. Such faith is linked to the knowledge of sin, repentance, and a resting in the finished work of Jesus. The faith that ministers the forgiveness of sins and peace with God to our hearts is a repentant faith. Faith and repentance are like Siamese twins. When you separate them, both of them die. You can only look to the cross of Calvary, and to a Jesus crucified for sin, as a guilty and contrite sinner. To behold Jesus suffering and dying for our sins, brings peace to the contrite heart. It is therefore called the “life-look.” Here, only a look is sufficient. To our comfort, it may be said that our salvation does not depend on the strength of our faith, but rather, on the Christ who is appropriated by faith. The woman with the issue of blood was healed, only by touching the garment of Jesus.

Finally, the forgiveness of sins is accompanied by a forsaking of sin. Jesus came to save his people from their sins, but not in their sins. He does not leave us in sin, but rather, he frees us from the power of sin. Nothing is so capable of breaking the power of sin, and fuel a love for God’s commandments, as the knowledge of the love of Christ, who sacrificed himself for the remission of our sins. The Christian walk of a renewed life is the best evidence that our sins have been forgiven.

What a blessed Confession: “I believe in the forgiveness of sins.” When Martin Luther was deeply troubled by God’s holiness and the sight of his sins, Abbot Von Staupitz asked him whether he had recited the Apostle’s Creed that morning. He had naturally done so, for it belonged to the monastery ritual. Von Staupitz then asked the desperate Luther, “Have you not confessed, “I believe in the forgiveness of sins”?”

THE APOSTLES' CREED

Rev. Cornelis Harinck

Transcript—Lecture 12

Article 11: The Resurrection of the Body

In Article 11 of the Apostles' Creed, the Christian confesses, "I believe in the resurrection of the body." When Jesus, after the death of her brother Lazarus, met sorrowful Martha, he said to her, "Thy brother shall rise again." Martha answered, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (John 11:23–24). She misunderstood the words of Jesus. She did not think that Jesus had presently come to raise her brother from the dead. Instead, Jesus's words prompted her to think of the general resurrection of the dead, at the end of the world. Yet, her answer reveals that the resurrection of all the dead was widely believed among the Jews.

Based on the words of Moses and the prophets, the Jews believed in the truth of the resurrection of all the dead. We must acknowledge that the doctrine of the continued existence of the soul and body after death is revealed less clearly in the Old Testament than in the New Testament. The apostle argues, in 2 Timothy 1, verse 10, that this truth has been revealed more clearly in the New Testament, due to the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. He says, "But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."

The gospel of the New Testament is a clearer revelation of the truth of the resurrection of the body, than the Old Testament. Let us only think of what is said, in Revelation 20, verse 13: "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works." The New Testament gospel message speaks very clearly of the existence of soul and body after death. Believers expected a glorious resurrection of the body. The resurrection of Christ gave the Christians a hope that reached beyond death and grave.

Christ, their Savior, is called the firstfruits of the resurrection. This implies that the full harvest will follow and that the resurrection of the people of God will be like that of their heavenly Lord. His resurrection was a bodily resurrection, and theirs will be of the same kind. In Romans 8, verse 11, we are told explicitly that God, through his Spirit, will raise up the mortal bodies of the believers. "But if the Spirit of him that raised up Christ from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwells in you."

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer is the warrant of a glorious resurrection of their mortal bodies. The same Spirit which quickened them out of their spiritual death, and is now dwelling in them, shall raise up their bodies from bodily death. With his divine energy, the Holy Spirit will quicken our mortal body. He will remodel, reanimate, and reenter his former abode, replenishing it with his glory through eternity.

Although the godly, in the Old Testament, focused very much on experiencing God's favor in this life, the belief in the resurrection of the dead is not absent from the Old Testament. The Old Testament speaks of the conscious and continuing existence of man's body and soul, in a place of either eternal happiness or of eternal misery. We already read of Enoch: "And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him"—Genesis 5, verse 24. He was taken from the earth in both body and soul, and where else could he have gone, but to heaven? However, the life of the ungodly will end in eternal darkness. "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God"—Psalm 9, verse 17. They have no part in the salvation of the godly. The godly of the Old Testament professed their expectation of a blessed eternal life after death in both soul and body.

The resurrection of the dead is an essential component of what is called "the hope of Israel."

When Paul was summoned to testify before the Jewish council, knowing that one part of the council was made up of Sadducees who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, and the other part of Pharisees who did believe in the resurrection of the dead, he exclaimed to the council, “Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question”—Acts 23, verse 6.

The hope of the resurrection was, for Israel, the hope of immortality, that is, the hope of one’s continued existence in body and soul, in God’s eternal kingdom. In Psalm 16, David speaks of this hope, saying, “Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore”—Psalm 16, verse 11. In Psalm 17, he testifies, “As for me I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness”—Psalm 17, verse 15. We also think of Job, who declared, “For I know that my redeemer lives, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God”—Job 19, verses 25 and 26. Asaph confesses, in Psalm 73, “Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory” (verse 24). Isaiah proclaims, “Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body, shall they arise.” He then even exhorts the dead that have returned to the dust to rejoice, saying, “Awake and sing, you that dwell in dust: for your dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead”—Isaiah 26, verse 19. These Old Testament Scriptures speak of experiencing joy in communion with God after death.

Death was not the end for Old Testament believers. The end of life did not culminate in destruction, but rather, in resurrection. In Daniel 12, verse 13, God says to Daniel, “But go you your way till the end be: for you shalt rest, and stand in your lot at the end of the days.” The Old Testament declares the resurrection of the dead to be an act of God’s omnipotence. This is set before us very graphically, in what Ezekiel saw in his vision. In Ezekiel 37, we read that the prophet stood before a valley filled with the bones of dead people. Regarding these dead bones, it is emphatically stated: “And, lo, they were very dry” (verse 2). Not a trace of life could be detected. In response to the Lord’s question, as to whether these dead could again live, he could only answer, “O Lord GOD, Thou knowest” (verse 3). It seemed so impossible! However, the Lord raised these bones to life by saying to them, “Thus says the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live: and I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the LORD”—Ezekiel 37, verses 5 and 6. Upon God’s command, the dead will be made alive, so that all creatures might know that he alone is the Lord. The resurrection of the dead is a supernatural work that only God can accomplish.

As for the resurrection of the dead in the New Testament, we must say, the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead is taught emphatically and abundantly in the letters of the apostles. The faith and hope of the Christians were that, one day, they, like their Lord and Savior, would bodily arise from the dead: “Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you”—2 Corinthians 4, verse 14. In the Book of Revelation, John testifies, “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works”—Revelation 20, verses 12 and 13. The witness of the New Testament is pervasive and irrefutable regarding the fact that a day is coming, when there will be a general resurrection of the living and the dead, and a final judgment.

In Matthew 22, we read of a debate between Jesus and the Sadducees. The Sadducees were a political and religious association within Judaism, during the time of Jesus’ sojourn. It was a modern movement in Judaism, consisting mainly of aristocrats, scholars, and the wealthy. Many priests were found among them. For example, Annas, the high priest, was a Sadducee. They were enlightened Jews, who were strongly influenced by Greek philosophy. Like the Greeks, they regarded the mind as the primary part of man. The body was just ballast. The body, material matter, was evil. It was the prison of the soul. The Sadducees, like the Greek philosophers, they viewed death as the liberation of the spirit, for the spirit was then set free from the body. Therefore, they neither believed in the resurrection of the dead, nor in the existence of angels and spirits. A phys-

ical resurrection would be regression rather than progress. After all, the soul would then have to return to the dungeon of the body.

These Sadducees came to Jesus and asked him a trick question, “Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother”—Matthew 22, verse 24. It was the so-called levirate marriage, spoken of in Deuteronomy 25. They then said to Jesus, “Now there were with us seven brethren,” all of whom died after their marriage to this woman. Thus, that woman had had all seven brothers for a husband. Then they asked Jesus the question, “Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her”—Matthew 22, verse 28. It was a question designed to render belief in the resurrection of the dead, and life after death, to be absurd. And what did Jesus answer? “Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven” (verses 29 and 30).

Life in heaven is not like life on earth. The levirate marriage law is for this life, and not for the life hereafter in heaven. The mutual bonds of love are no longer carnal, but spiritual. Jesus, therefore, said to them, “Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures nor the power of God.” He was thereby saying, “You are ignoring the many statements of Scripture that speak of the resurrection of the dead. And you also do not realize the power of Almighty God, who is able to raise up the dust of the bodies that lies in the earth.” Jesus then proceeded to say, “But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living”—Matthew 22, verses 31 and 32. What a profound answer! Jesus said Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are not dead. They live! They live, as to their souls, with God in heaven. They expect a glorious resurrection of their bodies in the future. This is how we should think of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the believers who have passed away. They live as their souls in heaven and wait for the resurrection of the body.

The unbelieving world mocks the idea that one day all the dead will arise. When Paul spoke of the resurrection of the dead in Athens, he was ridiculed. In Acts 17, verse 32, we are told, “And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked.” Many consider it utter nonsense to believe that all dead humans will be resurrected. What has already happened to all of these bodies? Some people have been eaten by wild animals, others have been burned to ashes, and their ashes have been scattered on the earth. There is nothing left of them. Some bodies have been buried in the depths of the seas. Others have died long ago. What is left of the human body after these thousands of years? It contradicts common sense to believe in the resurrection of all the dead.

Indeed, many questions surround the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. Is such a thing possible? What sort of body will all these people receive? These questions were also prevalent among Christians. The apostle addresses this matter in the mighty resurrection chapter of 1 Corinthians 15. It is the most detailed account of the resurrection of the dead in the Bible. The apostle addresses the questions that were on the front burner in the church of Corinth. These are questions that were asked then, and are also asked today, in the discussion about the resurrection of the dead.

Therefore, the apostle starts his defense of the resurrection of the dead with the question, “But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?”—1 Corinthians 15, verse 35. The question is, what sort of body will people have when they shall arise from the dead? It cannot possibly be the same body. How much will have happened to the body? And what will then be left of it? This was the question in Corinth. The question was not about the resurrection of the soul in regeneration and conversion, but how can flesh rise? A spirit would be capable of rising, but how can matter rise? We observe here that a pagan, philosophical, and rational mindset caused some Christians to deny the resurrection of the dead.

Today is no different. Pagan thoughts about the body, philosophical considerations about the liberation of the spirit through dying, and intellectual reflections about the possibility of the resurrection of the body make people, then and now, deny and mock the resurrection. We could suffice with Jesus’ response to all those human considerations, and say, “Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God”—Matthew 22, verse 29. After all, nothing is impossible for the Lord. Is it that much more impossible for God to resurrect a body from a little matter, than it is to call forth all things from nothing? However, that argument is not sufficient for the apostle. God’s

Spirit has compelled him to shed light on the resurrection of the dead, and specifically to speak of the blessed resurrection of the children of God.

Paul begins his statement with a rebuke. He says, “You fool, that which you sow is not quickened, except it die”—1 Corinthians 15, verse 36. Seed first dies in the field and only then comes to life. He who denies the resurrection of the dead will ridicule and deem impossible that which occurs regularly in nature. The kernel of wheat that dies in the field will bring forth new grain. We think the sown grain is gone. We can find nothing back of it. But it will germinate and bring forth new grain. The apostle says, “So also is the resurrection of the dead”—1 Corinthians 15, verse 42. A dead body that has turned to dust in the earth will God raise from the dead. The cemetery is not a garbage dump, but a sowing field—a graveyard—a yard with seed in it.

Next, Paul argues how the body is sown, and how it is raised. He says, “It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption”—verse 42. The body is given over to destruction—the beautiful body of man, the crown jewel of creation—a body in its upright stature, so different from the bodies of other creatures—a body with a regal stature. That body dies and returns to the dust. It is given over to destruction. What a disgrace! It is God’s sentence on man’s sin: “For dust you are, and unto dust shall you return”—Genesis 3, verse 19. This is how our bodies will be sown: “It is sown in corruption”—it is given over to destruction. However, it has not disappeared and vanished forever. The apostle says, “It is raised in incorruption.” The dead body has not merely been disposed of in a garbage dump, but rather, lies dormant in a field called earth. God will one day raise it up in incorruption. The body will then no longer be subject to corruption. It is the same body, but now no longer subject to the consequences of sin. It will no longer be subject to illness, infirmity, suffering, pain, and death. Jacob will limp no more, and Lazarus will no longer be covered with boils.

The apostle continues by saying, “It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory”—1 Corinthians 15, verse 43. It is a judgment from God when a man is not buried. It was God’s curse on Jezebel, the wicked wife of Ahab: “The dogs shall eat Jezebel”—1 Kings 21, verse 23. When seen in this light, it is an honor to be buried. However, in light of our glorious creation, it is a dishonor. Our body is subjected to the greatest dishonor imaginable. The body of the man who has been created to rule as king over God’s creation is placed in a tomb for the purpose of its decomposition. What a dishonor! It is indeed “sown in dishonor.” However, it will be “raised in glory.” The body with which believers will arise shall be glorious, for God “shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body”—Philippians 3, verse 21. Our decomposing body will not be annihilated, but rather, it will be transformed. The Bible teaches that the bodies of believers will be made like unto the body of the resurrected and glorified Christ. Jesus will clothe their bodies with his own glory. What a grace! The body of a wretched sinner made like unto the body of God’s Son! It shall be a body of flesh, blood, and bones—a body as Jesus had after his resurrection, and presently has in heaven. It shall be a glorious body clothed with immortality and holiness. The body will be restored more gloriously than it was sown into the earth. It will be, as the apostle says, “raised in glory.”

The apostle is not finished yet. He continues, “It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power”—1 Corinthians 15, verse 43. The body is dismantled. The body is “sown in weakness.” But, as the apostle writes, “it is raised in power.” A strong body returns. It will be a body that is no longer weak, mortal, and perishable. It will be a body that is no longer dependent on food and drink. It will be a body that is no longer subject to the weaknesses of our fallen nature. It will be a body suitable for life in heaven, and the enjoyment of communion with God.

Thus, the apostle highlights the difference between the bodies of God’s children at death, and when they are resurrected. He contrasts corruption and incorruption, dishonor and honor, and weakness and strength. He concludes by saying, “It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body”—1 Corinthians 15, verse 44. What does the apostle mean by this? Does this mean that believers, in the resurrection, will not have a physical body, but will be like unto the angels? No, the apostle does not say that. The body that is entrusted to the earth after death is only natural and material. There is neither soul nor life in it. However, the resurrected body will indeed have a soul. Soul and body will be reunited. Therefore the apostle says, “it is raised a spiritual body.”

This union will mark the completion of the restoration of fallen man. God’s children will receive a glorious body indwelt by a redeemed soul. They will be equipped to serve and glorify

God, in both soul and body. We must therefore conclude by saying, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is”—1 John 3, verse 2. God’s children will receive a body gifted with all those perfections that are necessary to live in the celestial world. No longer weak and mortal, but glorious and imperishable. They will never get tired and never hunger or thirst: “They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes”—Revelation 7, verses 16 and 17.

The resurrection will be twofold. The final resurrection will not be the same for everyone. Jesus spoke of a twofold resurrection of the dead: a resurrection unto life, and a resurrection unto eternal death. He said, “The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation”—John 5 (28–29). Since the fall of Adam in Paradise, humanity consists of the seed of the woman, and the seed of the serpent; of the righteous and the wicked; of believers and unbelievers. In the resurrection of the dead, this distinction will become visible, in a resurrection unto life and a resurrection unto death. Believers will go up to heaven with soul and body, and the wicked will go to hell with soul and body.

There will be a general resurrection of the dead. Earth will return the dead to life. The dead will come to life. 1 Thessalonians 4 teaches that there will be a specific order in the resurrection of the children of God. The bodies of dead believers will rise first. Those believers who will still live on earth on that day, will then, without having to die, be taken to meet the Lord in the clouds. They shall be caught up in the clouds and united with the saints, who will have been raised from their graves already. We read in verse 17, “Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.” The apostle concludes, “And so shall we ever be with the Lord”—1 Thessalonians 4, verse 17.

What a day that will be! It is the great Day of the Lord. John Calvin says, “It is the day for which all other days are made.” It will be the end of world history. All the dead who have died from the day of creation will arise from their graves. They will be judged, every one according to his works. We will all experience the reality of that day. We shall belong to those who will rise unto life or who will arise unto damnation. The decisive factor will be whether, in this life, we have been united to Christ by a true faith. In the resurrection chapter, 1 Corinthians 15, the apostle points to this essential union with Christ and says, “But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming”—1 Corinthians 15, verse 23. You must be Christ’s—not affiliated with either Paul or Cephas, or any church, but rather, we must be Christ’s. A glorious resurrection awaits God’s children because they are Christ’s.

THE APOSTLES' CREED

Rev. Cornelis Harinck

Transcript—Lecture 13

Article 12: The Life Everlasting

The concluding Article of the Apostles' Creed reads, "and the life everlasting." The Christian believes in the life that will never end.

Based on God's promises, the Christian believes that eternal life begins after death. For the Christian, life does not end with death. The Christian walks upon a pathway that ends in eternal life. David says, in Psalm 16, verse 11, "Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." This verse has been called a heavenly verse. It expresses a foretaste of heaven. It speaks of eternal joy and blessedness. And where are they to be found? David says, "in thy presence." Communion with God is man's greatest joy.

God created us for this joy. God is the purpose of our existence. Augustine exclaimed, "O God! Thou hast made us for thyself, and our heart remains restless until it finds rest in thee." We lost that purpose and satisfaction, when we sinned against God. Sin has disrupted our fellowship with God. It has come between God and our hearts. We have lost our true happiness. We fail to achieve the purpose of our existence. The apostle writes, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God"—Romans 3, verse 23. Jesus, by his death, has restored life for all who believe in him. He could promise, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that hears my word, and believes on him that sent me, has everlasting life"—John 5, verse 24.

God's children have a blessed hope. They have the hope of eternal life. The apostle says of this hope, "which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began"—Titus 1, verse 2. The hope of eternal life is the foundation of faith. A Christian faith void of the expectation of eternal life is like a ladder that leads to nowhere. Churches who only speak of being a good man and trying to better the world, and do not teach anything about the future and eternal life have become theologically bankrupt.

Is there life after death, or is this life all there is? These are the questions of all ages and all nations. There are also just as many answers to that question. All these questions and answers prove that man cannot break free from the idea that death is not the end. There must be something after death. The notion that the spirit of man lives on after death is widely believed. Every culture fosters the notion that there is life after death. The denial of life after death is absent in ancient civilizations. Only modern and secular man denies this fact.

Modern man believes that our existence ends with death. When a person dies, he disappears like a ship disappearing in the fog. Man, thinking that he has risen far above his primitive ancestry, exclaims, "There is no God, no soul, no hereafter, no heaven, and no hell. We only believe what we can see and touch." All that matters to secular man is the here and the now. Man's slogan therefore is, "Since we live only once, you should enjoy it as much as possible." However, it is more the language of the lip than the language of the heart. Even devout atheists cannot erase the innate awareness that death is not the end.

The Bible clearly teaches that there is life after death. The godly of the Old Testament knew about life after death. The fellowship with God that they enjoyed would not end with death and the grave. Asaph says, in Psalm 73 (verse 24), "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory."

The expectation of the believer of eternal life is related to the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Jesus' resurrection from the dead is the warranty of their resurrection and eternal life. Jesus promised, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believes in me, though he were dead,

yet shall he live: and whosoever lives and believes in me shall never die”—John 11, verses 25 and 26. When the apostle comforts believers regarding their loved ones who have died, he tells them not to mourn like unbelievers who have no hope. Those who are united to Christ by faith are now with the Lord, as to their souls, and will one day, like Christ, rise again with their bodies. “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him”—1 Thessalonians 4, verse 14. Even death cannot break the believer’s union with Christ. The apostle speaks emphatically about life on earth, and life after death, “For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you”—Philippians 1, verses 23 and 24.

The Scriptures clearly teach that there is life after death. When believers die, they will enter eternal life, but unbelievers will enter eternal death. The parable of Lazarus and the rich man shows us where Lazarus resided after death, and where the rich man resided after death. Lazarus died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom. The rich man died and then opened his eyes in hell, “being in torments”—Luke 16, verse 19. Jesus taught that after death, there are only two places where the souls of men will go. They will enter either into eternal life, or into eternal death. He said, “It is better for you to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire”—Matthew 18, verse 8.

There is a link between eternal life and heaven. Jesus promised the rich young man a treasure in heaven if he would sell everything and follow him. He said to him, “Thou shalt have treasure in heaven”—Matthew 19, verse 21. When we speak of eternal life, we think of heaven. Where is heaven? Heaven is a specific place in God’s creation. It is the place where God dwells. The Bible calls this place heaven: “But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased”—Psalm 115, verse 3. Although God is omnipresent, heaven is his special abode. His throne is there, and there he is surrounded by thousands of angels. God says of himself, “The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool”—Isaiah 66, verse 1. Jesus taught us to pray, “Our Father which art in heaven” (Matthew 6:9). After completing his work on earth, Jesus ascended into heaven, “who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God”—1 Peter 3, verse 22. When we hear the word “heaven,” we instinctively look upward. The Hebrew word “heaven” denotes that which is high and lofty. Elijah ascended into heaven—2 Kings 2, verse 11. Jesus was taken up into heaven—Luke 24, verse 51. The disciples watched Jesus until a cloud took him out of their sight: “And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight”—Acts 1, verse 9. Paul was drawn up into the third heaven—2 Corinthians 12, verse 2. The word “heaven” is always associated with a place high in God’s universe.

Heaven is a real place in God’s creation. Some modern theologians want to see heaven only as a spiritual disposition—almost like the pagan idea of a spiritual abode. Although the Scriptures speak of heaven as a place where one delights in God, heaven is not merely a certain state of mind. It is a real and physical location. When Jesus ascended into heaven, he went from one place to another. He left the earth and was taken up into heaven. Of Jesus’ ascension is said: “And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven”—Luke 24, verse 51. When Stephen was stoned, he saw Jesus in heaven. He testified, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God”—Acts 7, verse 56. Stephen was not speaking of a state of mind, but rather, his eyes were opened to a dimension, a reality, which is still hidden from us now—a real dimension that exists in time and place. Heaven is a place to which Jesus went with his body. He promised his disciples that he would go to heaven to prepare a place for them. They would one day be reunited with him in heaven. “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also”—John 14, verse 3. All these scriptures teach us that heaven is a real place—the place where God lives.

The Bible says different things about heaven. It is a place of eternal joy, of knowing and enjoying God, of praise and adoration, and of always being with the Lord. Above all, it is the place where God’s glory shines brightest. The greatest display of God’s glory is in heaven. It is the place where God makes known his glory, and where angels and redeemed saints worship him. Asaph expected to be taken up into God’s glory: “Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory”—Psalm 73, verse 24. Regarding Jesus, the apostle not only says that he will

bring his people into heaven, but also that he will bring “many sons unto glory”—Hebrews 2, verse 10.

Heaven is the place of God’s glory. God’s glory is the brilliance and magnificence of his perfections. God permitted his glory to pass before Moses. What did Moses then see and hear? He heard who God is. He heard how God himself proclaimed his name: “The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty”—Exodus 34. In heaven, God displays his full glory. Heaven is, therefore, a place of great splendor. God’s glory is seen there. The glory of God is the happiness and bliss of the inhabitants of heaven. The pinnacle of heaven is: “And they shall see his face”—Revelation 22, verse 4. It makes heaven to be heaven. It makes heaven a place of joy and gladness. They will “come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy, and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away”—Isaiah 35, verse 10.

The Christian confesses, “I believe in the life everlasting.” Where will that eternal life be? The Bible speaks of a new heaven and a new earth. After the final judgment, believers will enter into the perfect joy of living in the presence of God. They will be in God’s presence forever. “He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God”—Revelation 21, verse 3. They will enter a kingdom of which the Bible says, “And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever”—Revelation 22, verse 3 to 5.

There will be a new heaven and a new earth—a fully renewed creation. Believers will live in it. The Old Testament already makes mention of this event. The Lord says, in Isaiah 65, verse 17, “For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth.” Peter points to this Old Testament promise and writes, “Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness”—2 Peter 3, verse 13. In the vision that John received of the events following the Last Judgment, he tells, at last, what he saw, “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea”—Revelation 21, verse 1. The visible creation will be renewed and purified from sin. There will be “a new heaven and a new earth.”

This question is frequently asked, “Will the earth be destroyed and replaced by an entirely new earth, or will the existing earth be renewed and cleansed of all the consequences of the fall?” Some passages in the Bible seem to imply the destruction of the present heaven and earth. Peter writes, “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up”—2 Peter 3, verse 10. In Revelation 21, verse 1, we read, “The first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.” These scriptures seem to point toward an ancient heaven and earth that will be destroyed and cease to exist.

A more in-depth study will reveal that the visible heavens we know as the clouds and the starry sky, together with the earth on which we dwell, will be cleansed of all traces of sin. The old earth, which brings forth thorns and thistles, where so much blood has been shed, and where so much iniquity has been committed, will be renewed. God’s message is not, “I will destroy the earth and the visible heavens,” but rather, “Behold, I make all things new!”—Revelation 21, verse 5. He will cleanse it by fire. It will be a new earth upon which the heaven of God’s glory will descend. “And I John saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God—Revelation 21, verses 2 and 3.

The New Jerusalem descends from heaven to the earth. It comes from heaven and is given a place on the new earth. Heaven returns to earth, so the earth will become new. The separation caused by sin will be canceled. The New Jerusalem, the new kingdom, will descend to earth in great glory. Scripture says, “like a bride adorned for her bridegroom.” The congregation of true believers will inherit the earth as the bride of Jesus. The old promise to the faithful was: “his seed

shall inherit the earth”—Psalm 25, verse 13. Jesus spoke of the regeneration of the earth, “In the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory”—Matthew 19, verse 28. God will pitch his tent—his tabernacle—among his people, and dwell among them. There believers will dwell in the presence of God, and will live eternally, serving and worshipping him.

The apostle teaches that creation eagerly awaits that day: “For the earnest expectation of the creature waits for the manifestation of the sons of God”—Romans 8, verse 19. What will redeemed believers do in life eternal? The full enjoyment of God makes heaven to be heaven. God’s fellowship and nearness will be the supreme joy of God’s children. This was already the case when they lived on earth. God’s children will echo Asaph, saying, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee”—Psalm 73, verse 25. But now it will become forever their joy and happiness.

The enjoyment of God and the complete absence of sin will make heaven to be heaven. There, believers will be free from sin. They will also be free from sorrow. In heaven, there will be neither sorrow, sickness, death, mourning, pain, cross-bearing, suffering, nor mourning. “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away”—Revelation 21, verse 4. In heaven, believers will no longer have to fear any devil or enemy. Believers in heaven will be those who have overcome. “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony”—Revelation 12, verse 11. But what will believers do in heaven? Life in heaven will not consist of eternal idleness. In heaven, believers will serve God as they never were able to do on earth.

Heaven is, above all, the place of worship—the worship of God. Heaven will be filled with redeemed sinners who worship God and the Lamb. In Hebrews 8, verse 2, Jesus is called the High Priest and minister of the true tabernacle: “A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man.” The tabernacle in the wilderness was erected in conformity to God’s prescription, and yet it was constructed by men. The heavenly tabernacle is constructed by God, and is constructed with a purpose. It means that there will be worship in heaven, and on the new earth. John saw the temple of God in the midst of the New Jerusalem. God’s temple is the center of the new heaven and the new earth. There will be temple worship. There will be worship activities that will involve priests, worshippers and sacrifices.

God will be served and glorified. He will be glorified as the Creator of all things. Revelation 4 shows us how all of creation, as well as the believers of the Old and New Testaments, will fall down before God and honor him as Creator: “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created”—Revelation 4, verse 11. God will be worshiped as Redeemer. The redeemed will sing the song of salvation: “And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation”—Revelation 5, verse 9.

God will be glorified for how he has led his church and each individual believer. “Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints”—Revelation 15, verse 3. God will be glorified in the judgments he will execute upon the wicked: “Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: for true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand”—Revelation 19, verses 1 and 2.

The redeemed will be kings and priests in heaven: “And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth”—Revelation 5, verse 10. They will rule as kings and serve as priests. It is too great and too much to comprehend. The apostle expresses this by saying, “It doth not yet appear what we shall be”—1 John 3, verse 2. Much about eternal life is still hidden and is now beyond our comprehension. However, the very best will be the following: “But we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is”—1 John 3, verse 2. We shall see Jesus as he is, and we will comprehend the love with which he has loved us.

Rutherford longed to see the head that for his sins was crowned with thorns, and the face that for his sins was spit upon. The Creed ends on a high note for those who hope in the Lord. It makes

us to climb a high mountain, to stand at the vista of eternity, and behold what God has in store for those who love him, and say, “I believe in the everlasting life.” It is so beautifully expressed in the Heidelberg Catechism, Answer #58: “That since I feel in my heart the beginning of eternal joy, after this life I shall inherit perfect salvation, which ‘eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man’ to conceive, and that, to praise God therein forever.”

However, this present life will be determinative for eternity. Our eternal and future state depends on who we are now. Our eternal destiny will be determined during this short and often laborious life. The apostle, therefore, says that God will recompense every person according to his deeds; that is, whether he or she has either rejected or embraced the truth of the gospel and kept God’s commandments. God will, according to the words of the apostle, “render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: but unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath”—Romans 2, verses 6 to 8. It is a great delusion to think that one can live wickedly, reject the gospel and God’s offered grace, and still inherit a blissful life in the end.

The message, with which Jesus sent the apostles into the world, is twofold: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned”—Mark 16, verse 16. The flip side of eternal life is eternal death. Much about life after death is still hidden from us. However, this much is clear—there are only two roads and two destinations. There is a way that ends in eternal life, and there is a way that ends in eternal death. The road on which you are now traveling will determine the outcome. No one knew this better than Jesus. Therefore, he said with urgency, “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leads to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads unto life, and few there be that find it”—Matthew 7, the verses 13 and 14.