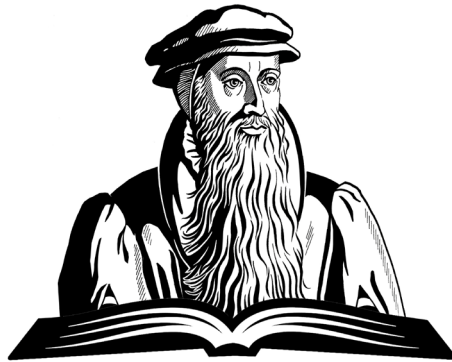

VIDEO LECTURE MODULE: THE APOSTLES' CREED

LECTURE 2
**ARTICLE 1: GOD THE FATHER
AND CREATION**

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

THE APOSTLES' CREED

13 LECTURES

Lecturer Presenter: Rev. Cornelis Harinck

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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.