

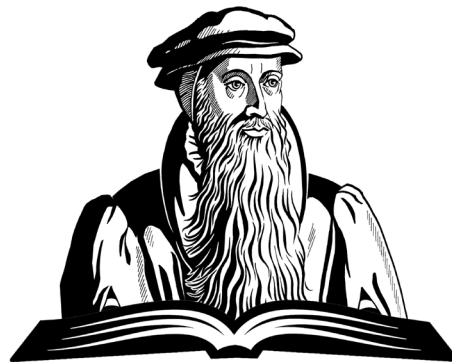
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# VIDEO LECTURE MODULE: THE APOSTLES' CREED

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## *LECTURE 7* ARTICLE 6: THE EXALTATION OF CHRIST

Lecturer Presenter: Rev. Cornelis Harinck



**The John Knox Institute**  
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*Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide*

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## *Module*

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# THE APOSTLES' CREED

## 13 LECTURES

Lecturer Presenter: Rev. Cornelis Harinck

1. Introduction
2. Article 1—God the Father and Creation
3. Article 2—The Lord Jesus Christ, God's Only Begotten Son
4. Article 3—The Conception and Virgin Birth of the Savior
5. Article 4—The Suffering of Christ
6. Article 5—The Resurrection of Christ
- 7. Article 6—The Exaltation of Christ**
8. Article 7—Christ as the Judge of the Living and the Dead
9. Article 8—God the Holy Ghost
10. Article 9—The Universal Church of Christ
11. Article 10—The Forgiveness of Sins
12. Article 11—The Resurrection of the Body
13. Article 12—The Life Everlasting

# 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 glistening"—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.