

## ***Lord's Day 8***

**24. Q.** *How are these articles divided?*

**A.** *Into three parts:  
the first is about God the Father and our creation;  
the second about God the Son and our redemption;  
the third about God the Holy Spirit  
and our sanctification.*

**25. Q.** *Since there is only one God,<sup>1</sup>  
why do you speak of three persons,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?*

**A.** *Because God has so revealed Himself in His Word<sup>2</sup>  
that these three distinct persons  
are the one, true, eternal God.*

<sup>1</sup> Deut. 6:4; Is. 44:6; 45:5; I Cor. 8:4, 6.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. 1:2, 3; Is. 61:1; 63:8-10; Matt. 3:16, 17; 28:18, 19; Luke 4:18;  
John 14:26; 15:26; II Cor. 13:14; Gal. 4:6; Tit. 3:5, 6.

## LORD'S DAY 8

### THE TRIUNE GOD

Text: Lord's Day 8  
Reading: Acts 2 : 22-42

Psalm 48 : 1, 4  
Hymn 4 : 2, 4  
Psalm 103 : 5; Psalm 132 : 6; Psalm 139 : 4  
Hymn 5 : 1, 2, 3, 4  
Hymn 59 : 1, 2, 3

Introduction: Beloved congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Last time, we listened to our confession concerning true *faith*. We began with looking at the necessary activity of faith and concluded with the contents of our faith, as summarized in the Apostles' Creed.

In Lord's Day 8, the Heidelberg Catechism again probes deeper into this matter. What we believe (Lord's Day 7) is not really a system of thought, a philosophy of life, or a doctrine of principles. Instead, when you "break down" the Apostles' Creed you discover that the Church simply *believes in God*. We do not believe in dry theories or dead principles, but we believe in a sovereign and divine Being. We believe in the *living God*! We believe in a God who has established communion with us in His wondrous covenant of grace, a God who is *active and alive*, who, even if He is invisible, is not far away, who, even if He is sovereign, is not aloof. We believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the only God with a clear identity, even if He remains incomprehensible.

We believe in the living God of heaven and earth, the one and only God. That is the point of Lord's Day 8. For if you examine more closely the Apostles' Creed, you notice that these "twelve articles" can be "simplified" even more. Basic is that we believe in the one God who exists in three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

So we come to the confession concerning the Holy Trinity. This is the confession which was established

already early in the history of the New Testament Church, in the struggle against Arius, who denied the divinity of Christ. It is a confession which is always under attack, especially from the side of sectarians and modernists. Therefore I summarize this Lord's Day as follows:

#### **The confession concerning the Triune God.**

##### **Evident in:**

- 1. the mighty works of God**
- 2. the simple word of God.**

1. The words, "I believe in God" form, then, the *basic confession* of the Church—of us all. However, many people, if not most, would say the same words, about believing in God, and yet *not* share your confession. In most world cultures there is an underlying belief in some super power, some determining factor above man, called "god". In some cultures there is even what we call "polytheism", the belief in *many gods*, a pantheon of good ones and bad ones, often arranged in a hierarchy, from top to bottom. If you would interview people with the question, "Do you believe in God?", most people would answer, "Certainly"! They would become rather indignant if you suggested that they did not! Why, of course, we believe in God! Who doesn't?

Still, many of these so-called confessors would become very puzzled if you asked them whether they believed in the *Triune God*, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And if you were so bold to ask them if they believed *the mighty works* of this Triune God,

many people would shrug off the implication and become rather sceptical.

People may say that “God” is there, in whatever form or fashion, and He may be feared or admired in various ways. He may “exist”, but for many people He does not *live*, He does not mean anything and He does not do anything. Therefore, many people do not really reckon much with God. He is there, perhaps, but He lives His own life, and we live our own life. God is God, and man is man, and never the twain shall meet. At best, God is at the very fringe of human attention and interest.

I wonder, sometimes, how much of this is apparent in our own lives? There is a great danger that, despite our knowledge of God’s Word, we still go our separate ways. The Lord has His life and we have ours. On Sunday we briefly meet, but during the week we go our own ways. God has His activities and we have ours! This is how it is with much so-called Christianity.

I think that here lies part of the reason for people’s easy misuse of the Name of God, a misuse widespread in our country. It is “God-this” and “God-that” with Jesus Christ before and after, but to many people that is just a manner of expression. When they say these words, it is out of habit, and they do not really *think* about what they are saying or of Whom they are talking. They have no idea of the mighty works of this Triune God! They do not know God’s Name or the riches of His works!

You may say what you will of those Jews of Jerusalem, but in Acts 2 we read that they were “devout men”—God-fearing—they knew of the *living covenant God*, who excels in mighty works! Perhaps they had not yet seen the very heart of those mighty works, but they at least knew that God works *mightily*!

When the Catechism now in this Lord’s Day speaks of “God”, the Triune God, it does not do so in abstract terms, but it immediately points to the *mighty works* of God! The first question is: how are these articles divided? And the answer is not merely: into three parts, the part of the Father, the part of the Son, and the part

of the Holy Spirit. Instead, the answer reads: “Into three parts: the first is about God the Father *and our creation*; the second about God the Son *and our redemption*; the third about God the Holy Spirit *and our sanctification*. We confess the Triune God in the unity and diversity of His wondrous and mighty works!

It is very important to note this carefully. God is not some distant, obscure or abstract factor, but He is the living God, from whom, through whom and for whom are all things! Such is the God in whom *we* believe. He is not a God who as it were, “hangs up in the air”, but who comes to us mightily and concretely in great and marvellous works, works of which the apostles joyfully spoke on the great day of Pentecost!

And it is not now the moment to go into each and all of these works of God. The Catechism will do so in the following Lord’s Days. Here in Lord’s Day 8 it is established that God, our God, is a God mighty in His works, and in those works lie the beginning, the continuation, and the perfection of our lives! Our God is not a distant factor, but one on whom our entire life depends, not an obscure being, but one whose vital works are clear to us!

We believe in God the Father, the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth. In Him lies the origin and the beginning of all things! Nothing and no one exists, except by His sovereign will! The Catechism makes this truth very *personal*. It speaks of God the Father and *our* creation. It is not so that God is “the power” out of whom the world came forth, some how, some way, but we, you and I, owe *our* personal existence to this God, the Father! He called the *world* into being—in itself already a mighty work! He also called *each one of us* into being and placed us on this earth—another mighty work! Without this Father, *we* would not be here. Each life is a gift of His sovereign pleasure.

And with “creation” came *government and providence*. This God did not just drop us off on the earth to let us putter along by ourselves. He determines our days, fills our lives, and directs our paths. He surrounds our lives as a Father with rich promises, with His covenantal care.

We believe in God the Son and our redemption. In Him lies our only help and hope. His work is the only ground for our salvation. We believe that when we fell away from God in utter rebellion and became totally depraved and fully condemned, unable to free ourselves from the bondage of sin and the curse of death, God the Son came to work *a mighty redemption!* He came to open and unfold to us the loving heart of the Father in heaven.

This Son is not some strange and distant person, but Jesus the Christ, Who became one of us, concrete and visible in the flesh, the God of *our* redemption. He is the Redeemer of His Church. He is our personal Redeemer. No man can be redeemed or saved, except by this God, the Son!

We embrace Him by faith as our personal Saviour and as the Head of His Church, the Mediator of the covenant, the great Shepherd of the flock, the Pioneer and Perfecter of the faith!

We believe in God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification. Especially in and around the time of Pentecost, this truth may stand out: The Spirit is our sanctification. God does not, as so many suggest, simply give us a chance to save ourselves, but God the Spirit, poured out over the Church of Christ, proceeds to sanctify us, to renew us in holiness, so that we begin to serve God. For God is a God of *holy people*; He is the God of our *personal* sanctification. We believe in God the Holy Spirit Who applies to us the riches of Christ, Who leads us back into the service of the Father, Who proceeding from both the Father and the Son restores our entire life unto the glory of God!

We believe a mighty work of sanctification, a work of regeneration so powerful that it equals the resurrection from the dead. God the Holy Spirit indeed takes dead people and makes them *alive* again. He takes unfruitful servants, and makes them bear fruit again! He takes unworthy sinners and makes them worthy in Christ!

You can hear it. We are talking about God and His mighty works in Whom lies our entire life! Take away the Father, and we do not exist. Take away the Son,

and we lie under the curse of sin. Take away the Holy Spirit and we can never begin anew serving God. The creation, redemption, and renewal of our life is only *in this God*, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is our God, O Israel!

We confess the Triune God, evident in His mighty works. The Church spoke of these works on the day of Pentecost, when God the Holy Spirit came to *live* in the midst of the Church. Of this God and His great works we speak at the baptism of every child in this church!

Shall we always be careful that we fully honour our confession when we *speak* of our God, careful that we do not adopt the casual and nonchalant style of the world in speaking about our God? Shall we constantly remind ourselves that His Name is *holy and glorious*, and His works are always praised!

It is easy to confess this God and to say, “Yes, I believe in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit”, but shall we then also live under the Father, through this Son, and in this Spirit, to the *glory of God*?

We confess God in the unity and totality of His great works. It is all or nothing. We can have no redemption without sanctification. You may not say—as some do—I’ll take the Son (I don’t mind forgiveness of sins) but I’ll leave the Spirit (who wants a new life to God’s glory and break with sins?). There is only *one God*, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and you either share in *all His work*, or you share in *none of it*. That is the simple Word of God. We come to the second point.

2. Our Catechism now asks a second, important question in this Lord’s Day, “Since there is only one God, why do you speak of three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?”

Is the confession concerning the Triune God not a *confusing* confession? How are we to understand that *three distinct Persons* are *one God*? For it is clear from the Scriptures that there is only one God. That was common knowledge among Israel, as expressed e.g. in the Law: Hear, O Israel, the LORD your God is

*one*. You shall have no other gods besides Me! And the Apostle Paul wrote the same to the Corinthians. He said: there may be many so-called gods—idols of men—but we know that there is no God but one! One God, one divine Being called God. Why then speak of three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

Now the Catechism does not even *try* to explain this. As a matter of fact, if any doctrine is inexplicable, it is this doctrine. We cannot comprehend God, much less “explain” Him. We cannot understand the depths and intricacies of the divine Being and the Holy Trinity. *But this is no reason not to believe it!* Why do we speak of three persons? The answer of the Catechism is simple: “Because God has so revealed Himself in His Word.”

We see the confession of the Triune God evident in His mighty works. We see it also in His simple Word. The Bible tells us of the wondrous reality that in the one, true and eternal God are three *distinct* Persons. In the Bible this is so clear that it is beyond discussion, and yet so deep that it is beyond explanation!

Many have asked questions about the Holy Trinity, questions which often betray unbelief. How can three be one? If there are three Persons, will not one be greater than the others? What is the relationship between the three Persons?

Three *distinct* Persons, says the Catechism. For the Father is not the Son. The Father did not take upon Himself our flesh. He stayed in heaven. And the Son was not poured out like the Holy Spirit. The one is not the other, and yet the three are one, *the* one, true, and eternal God!

This is the *simple* Word of God. I'd like you to notice the uncomplicated manner in which the Scriptures speaks about the three Persons, for example, in the portion we read, out of the first sermon on Pentecost. The entire happening of Pentecost, says the apostle Peter, is the work of God, the Triune God. In Acts 2: 32 and 33 we read: “This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured out this which you see and hear”.

Did you hear the *names* of the three Persons in this passage, and yet realize that we are dealing in all this with the same God, the one God? We hear of the exalted Son, of the Spirit poured out, and of the promise of the Father. These are three *distinct* Persons, but they are one is essence, in Being, one in action and one in greatness! The apostle Peter does not ask all kinds of questions here, but just tells it like it is in a very uncomplicated manner.

We notice again how also a feast like Pentecost is not the feast of one of the three Persons, but the feast of the Triune God. The Spirit is poured out, by the Son, from the Father. This is no problem in the Scriptures, but a grand reality!

And our Catechism just leaves it at this uncomplicated way of speaking. It says that we confess the triune God because God has so revealed Himself in His Word. Throughout the Bible we get the same testimony, simply and clearly, that there is one God, in three Persons, and instead of questioning this, we see the Church more and more confessing this, rejoicing in it and finding rest through it!

The *Triune God*, says the Bible. And now I return to an earlier thought. We must realize that when we believe in God, we believe in Father, Son, and Spirit. In these three Persons, the *one* God comes to us. We cannot have the one without the other. We may not break the unity of the Trinity. That, too, is the simple Word of God!

Why was the Spirit poured out? Because of the promise and work of Christ. Why did Christ come into the flesh on our behalf? Because of the promise of the Father. Why did the Father make this promise? Because the one true God wanted to glorify Himself in this way!

Now if we want to be children of the Father, it must be through the Son. No one comes to the Father, said Jesus, except through Me! If we want to be servants of Christ, it must be through the Spirit. No one can say, Jesus is Lord, wrote Paul, except through the Holy Spirit! The way to the one God is the way of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. This is signified and sealed to us at every baptism, where we use the Name of the Triune God.

We are to be *children* of the Father above, Who cares for us and whose law we must obey.

We are to be *servants* of the Son, who has redeemed us from all the power of the devil.

We are to be *temples and instruments* of the Holy Spirit, Who has filled us so that we might be holy unto the Lord.

We are all this, or we are nothing!

Here is where the heretics of old and modern theologians make their basic mistake. Their false theology denies the divinity of the Son and the Spirit and questions the existence of the Father. They construct a self-willed image of God.

Creation is denied and evolution is taught.

The need for redemption is not seen, because sin does not exist for them. Who needs Jesus?

The Holy Spirit is replaced by the human spirit which on its own seeks to overcome all obstacles in life.

The denial of the confession of the Holy Trinity is the destruction of true religion. But where we confess God as He is, mighty in works, straightforward in His Word, there life begins to blossom under His blessing. There we begin to rejoice in the promise of the Father, in the work of the Son, and in the presence of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.