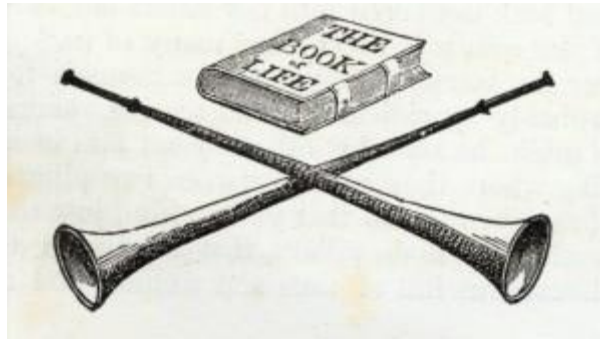


# The Reformed Baptist Trumpet



“For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for battle?”

1 Corinthians 14:8

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## Keach Conference: 2014 Reflections and 2015 Prospects



*Image: 2014 Keach Conference speakers: Jim Savastio (left) and Earl Blackburn (right)*

The 2014 Keach Conference was held Friday-Saturday, September 26-27 at Covenant Reformed Baptist Church of Warrenton, Virginia. The theme for the meeting was “Of Christ the Mediator” (Chapter 8 of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith). Conference messages from Jim Savastio and Earl Blackburn can be found [here on sermonaudio.com](http://sermonaudio.com).

Mark your calendar now. **The 2015 Keach Conference will be held on Friday-Saturday, September 25-26, 2015.** The 2015 theme will be “Of Free Will” (Chapter 9 of the *Second London Baptist Confession of Faith*). Meeting place: TBA. Speakers: TBA. Ω

## The Glory of the Mediator

Luke 1:30-35

By Jim Savastio

**Note: This is an edited manuscript from the opening message by Jim Savastio at the 2014 Keach Conference, preached on Friday, September 26, 2014.**

When you love someone, you want others to love that person also. There is a special joy in your heart when you hear others speak well of the object of your affection. I had breakfast recently with one of the brothers from my church, and he mentioned how much he enjoyed one of my children. To hear him praise my child was a blessing to this father's heart. I have the same experience when someone speaks well of my wife, or of my friends, or of my church. It brings me joy when others see what I see and appreciate what I appreciate.

This same sentiment is one of the things which binds all true Christians together. All believers love and speak well of the Lord Jesus. In this world, where his name is so often dragged through the mud, we find our hearts going out toward those who delight in him, who praise him, and who exalt him.

As we look at Gabriel's announcement to Mary in Luke chapter one, I trust that we will be able to join in the joy of angel and of the young Hebrew maiden, as something of the glory of Jesus is revealed. This is the first extensive prophecy of the person and work of the Lord Jesus to be given in the new era. In fact, it is the fullest one time disclosure of the person of the Messiah given up to this point in the whole history of redemption.

We can marvel at the purity of Mary and at her amazing faith. Whereas others in history laughed and doubted and even argued with divine revelation, this young woman bowed her heart immediately and fully to all of the holy will of God. She did not laugh like Sarah. She did not seek to bring about the fulfillment on her own as did Abraham. She did not argue with God as did Moses. She did not shrink back like Gideon. She did not scoff like the priest, Zacharias. In this, she is one of the greatest models of faith and discipleship to be found anywhere in the pages of God's word. As we examine this passage, however, we do not want to place the focus on Mary but on Jesus. We want to discover what this passage tells us about Jesus.

Six months earlier, this same angel had given a vivid prophecy of the forerunner of the Messiah. Now he exults in the glory of the God who created the forerunner, the God who is now about to don a garb of human flesh. What wonders this must have wrought in the mind of this angel! Since the time Gabriel was created he had been in the service of the Triune God. He incessantly adored the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He saw the glory of the relationship described in John

chapter 1. He saw the glory of the relationship of which Jesus speaks in John chapter 17. He knew the glory of God the Son. He worshiped and served God the Son.

This Gabriel had walked upon the earth before. He had interacted with men, and he knew their frailty and their feeble condition. He knew something of the stain and pollution of the world in comparison with the glories of heaven. He knew of the doubt and skepticism of some of the best of God's servant. Now he is announcing that his Lord and his God is about to enter this world. He would not enter this world upon clouds, not with thunder and lightning, not with the glory of his angels, but as a man. The God whose glory can neither be contained in heaven nor the heaven of heavens is about to enter this virgin's womb. The God who created the world is about to be given a body that will be created and fashioned in the womb. The one who sustains all things by the word of his power is about to be sustained by an umbilical cord.

It is Gabriel's task and his joy now to speak of his Lord. And what does this great one say about his Lord and Master? He tells Mary, and all of us, five things about him:

### **I. His Name**

His name is a matter of divine revelation. Mary and Joseph will have no part in the naming of this child. It is Gabriel who announces to Mary, you "shall call his name Jesus" (Luke 1:31). As with the earlier naming of John, the importance of the naming is twofold:

First, it shows the divine ownership of this child. When a daughter is born to a family it is the parents who have the honor of giving the child her name. How inappropriate it would be for the doctor who assisted in the delivery to announce to the parents, "She shall be called 'Eunice'!" She is theirs, and it is their right and their right alone to name their child. Notice that here it is God, through his messenger, who declares the child's name. The Father is saying, "He is mine. He belongs to me. You are watching over him for my sake."

Second, we need to remember that for the Jewish mind the name was meant to be synonymous with a person's mission or character. The name "John" means grace. John the Baptist came to announce the grace of God manifested in the Messiah and in his coming kingdom. The blessed name of Jesus means "Savior."

In God's Word we read of others from the past who had meaningful names. There are names speaking of greatness, names speaking of judgment, names that would be a cause of terror and a cause of hope. There was a prophet who was to name his children "no mercy" and "you are not my people" (Hosea 1:6-9). One woman died in giving birth and declared that her son was "Ichabod"—the glory has departed (1 Samuel 4:19-22). Never, however, had God told any man or woman to give a child this one name and one name only—Yeshua—the Savior.

Imagine for a moment that you know a couple who have prayed and prayed for a child. At long last and with great joy, the couple discovers that the Lord has brought about conception in the womb. Some weeks later, the couple makes their way over to the doctor's office, and they have the ultrasound done. As they are performing the procedure the nurse catches her breath and lets out an, "Oh, no." The couple now finds their hearts are racing. They want to know what is happening. The doctor arrives and tells them that there are so many defects in the child that the baby will most likely not survive the process of birth. Even if she does survive, she will be dead within minutes. You can imagine the devastation of this couple, can't you? You can enter into their pain and grief, right? Imagine now that standing before them suddenly and gloriously is an angel with a message from God. The angel says, "You shall give birth to a child, and you shall call her, 'Healed.' Your nightmare shall come to an end! Every time you call her name, it will be a reminder to you of what the Lord has done!"

Now, imagine yourself as a sensitive and pious Jew like Mary. You know that the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away the pangs of conscience. You know that you need God to do something more. You have read in your Bible about the seed of the woman. You have heard about the one who will bless the nations. You have heard about the one who will be a prophet like Moses. You have heard about the one who will be priest like Melchizedek. You have heard about the one who will be a king like David. You have heard about the one who will be beaten and pierced through for our sins. You have heard that the Lord will lay upon him the iniquities of us all and that by his stripes we shall be healed. And you know that he will be your Savior, the Lord's anointed. And now you are told, "Call him 'Savior.'"

If you were Mary, every time you would coo his name as an infant, and every time you would call him into the house from his play as a boy, and every time you would hear a child or another mother or father speak his name, it would be as if someone was preaching to you—The Savior is here!

This is what he must be called, for this is his mission. As Matthew 1:21 points out, an angel tells Joseph the same things, "You shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." He is the One who will finally deliver his people from their sins. He shall be successful in his mission. He shall do what God calls him to do!

## **II. His Condition**

Next Gabriel declares, "He shall be great" (Luke 1:31). It was said of John that he would be great in the sight of the Lord (Luke 1:15). Of Jesus, however, there is no limitation on his greatness. He shall be great.

John himself testifies of this one, "I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit

and fire” (Luke 3:16). This is the one who is highly exalted. This is the one who has the name which is above every name. This is the one before whom the whole world—every person who has ever lived and ever will live, every angel, and every demon, the blessed and the damned—will kneel and confess to the glory of God the Father that this Jesus is Lord.

It is an interesting thing to behold the world seeking to grapple with his greatness.

Some years ago, *Time* magazine did a cover story about Jesus. The lead article was the writing of some wise pagan trying to figure out the identity of this man and his impact upon history. Listen to these words from the opening of that article:

The memory of any stretch of years eventually resolves to a list of names, and one of the useful ways of recalling the past two millenniums is by listing the people who have acquired great power. Mohammed, Catherine the Great, Marx, Gandhi, Hitler, Roosevelt, Stalin, and Mao come quickly to mind. There is no question that each of those figures changed the lives of millions and evoked responses ranging from worship to hatred. It would require much exotic calculation, however, to deny that the single most powerful figure—not merely in these two millenniums but in all human history—has been Jesus of Nazareth. . . a serious argument can be made that no one else's life has proved remotely as powerful and enduring as that of Jesus. It is an astonishing conclusion in light of the fact that Jesus was a man who lived a short life in a rural backwater of the Roman Empire,[and] who died in agony as a convicted criminal. . .

You take all the things that are normally associated with greatness, and none of it applies, humanly speaking, to Jesus. He leads no army. He publishes no book. He dies relatively alone. Humanly speaking, he dies as a failure. But he is great. He is the one that millions have suffered and died for. He is the object of our love and longing. He is the object of hundreds and thousands of songs. For him, men have left everything to follow him. They have risked their lives and spilled their blood, so that others can hear the name of Jesus. He is the only one worthy in heaven or on earth or under the earth to fulfill the Father's plan.

Those of us who have by grace been made to know him and love him, can we not testify, along with the angel, that he is great? Is it not the underlying ambition of your life to be more like him and to please him and to see him? Is not one of the greatest joys and hopes of your life to be finally and fully received by him? Truly, he is great.

### **III. His Position**

Next Gabriel declares, “He will be called the Son of the Highest” (Luke 1:32). In meeting him and seeing him and hearing him, people will recognize that he is something far more than a mere man.

Can you imagine getting to know someone and spending time with him, eating and drinking with him, travelling with him, seeing him in all sorts of situations, and then you are asked, "Who do you think this man is?" and you answer, "This man is the Son of God?" Some considered his greatness and came to the conclusion that he was Elijah or Jeremiah or one of the prophets or the resurrected form of John the Baptist. Those who knew him best, however, confessed, "This man is the Son of the Highest." This man sleeping in the front of the boat, this man passing me some bread, this man with whom I camp out under the stars, this man who is my friend, is the Son of the Most High!

Gabriel goes on in v. 35 to declare that by virtue of his miraculous conception it will be right to confess Jesus to be "the Son of God." Yet even those who did not know how he was conceived would come to believe and to confess this about him.

In Mark 5:7, we find fallen angels calling him, "The Son of the Most High." When Jesus was arrested and tried what is it that the High Priest had heard about him, what was the burning question in his mind about this pitiful looking man before him? In Mark 14:61 it says the high priest asked him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" How did Jesus respond? He answered, "I am" (v. 62).

#### **IV. His Throne**

Gabriel declares, "and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David" (Luke 1:32). This harkens back some thousand years to the promise made to David through the prophet Nathan. In 2 Samuel 7, we read these wonderful words:

10 Moreover I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own and move no more; nor shall the sons of wickedness oppress them anymore, as previously,

11 since the time that I commanded judges *to be* over My people Israel, and have caused you to rest from all your enemies. Also the LORD tells you that He will make you a house.

12 When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.

13 He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

We read of this promise again in Psalm 132:11: “The LORD has sworn *in truth* to David; He will not turn from it: I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body.”

Isaiah rejoices in the same truth when he says of the coming King, “For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of *His* government and peace *There will be* no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this” (Isaiah 9:6). Again, Isaiah says in chapter 16:5: “In mercy the throne will be established; And One will sit on it in truth, in the tabernacle of David, Judging and seeking justice and hastening righteousness.”

The word of the Lord comes through the prophet Ezekiel some years later, and he writes in chapter 34: 23: “I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them—My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken.”

It is this Jesus who came from Mary's womb who is even now enthroned over the people of God, God's new Israel, comprised of believing Jews and Gentiles, the true children of Abraham. It is this Jesus who can say, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18).

Peter identifies the session of Jesus and the placing of him upon David's throne as the reward given to Jesus after his resurrection. Listen to what Peter says in Acts 2: 30: “Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses.”

This is why we find Jesus referred to as “the son of David.” The Jews anticipated that this king and his throne and his kingdom would be of this world. There are even some still who are disappointed to think that this is all there is. They speak as though a heavenly throne is somehow second class to an earthly throne, as though a throne in Jerusalem would somehow be superior to a throne in glory!

## **V. His Reign**

Finally, let us consider Gabriel's announcement, “And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:33).



This expression “the house of Jacob,” as already intimated, must not be limited in our thinking to physical Jews. That is not what the Bible teaches us. This expression, “the house of Jacob” is synonymous with the house of Judah and the house of Israel mentioned in the promise of the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31. To whom does the Lord apply that new covenant? Is it applied to physical Jews only? Or is it applied to spiritual Jews? Those who are circumcised in the heart? Who is this people over whom the Lord Jesus shall have perpetual reign?

He rules over his people forever. As it was two thousand years ago, so it is today. Jesus is our king. He rules over us, he defends us, he protects us, and he provides for us. Paul describes the “mighty power” of God in Ephesians 1:

20 which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*,

21 far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

22 And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church,

23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

The joy, dear people of God, is that this reign shall never end. As long as there is an earth, Jesus will rule and reign over his people. Come feast or famine, times of prosperity or times of persecution, there shall be a king on his throne. When our hearts are soaring or when they are breaking—he shall reign!

Is it any wonder that we can sing, “Hallelujah, what a Savior!” For those of you who are not yet Christians, can you understand why we follow him? Can you understand why we love him? Can you understand why we want to know him and to love him more? Do you see why we say that he is worthy of our lives and our worship?

And, dear Christian, do you remember why? When life is hard and pressure is hard and when aspects of the Christian life are hard and even disappointing, let us lift up our eyes and behold our great Savior and our King! Ω

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## ***The Bible: God's Word***

### **Chapter One – The Knowledge of God**

By W. Gary Crampton

**Note: Dr. Crampton wrote *The Bible: God's Word* in 1989. With his permission we will be presenting the book chapter by chapter in future editions of *The Reformed Baptist Trumpet*.**

John Calvin has written that true wisdom comes from knowing God and self. But one cannot properly know oneself until one knows God and what He says about man. Thus, the knowledge of God is of utmost significance.

All men are “religious.” Missionaries testify to religious elements among all pagan nations in the world. Scripture tells us that this is due to the fact that man is made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). Reformed theology has normally maintained that there is a two-fold image of God in man, which we might call the broad and narrow image.

By the “broad” image we mean that basic nature/metaphysical makeup which defines man as “man.” The “narrow” image consists of the moral/ethical aspects of man’s character. Since the Fall, even though all of man’s natural faculties have been marred, they still function. For example, with sin, memorization has become a much harder task, but it is still within man’s capacity. Man is still a rational being, of the same species as when he was created, despite the Fall. The latter ethical image, however, was totally destroyed in the sense of man’s original righteousness. Ethically, fallen man is no longer in the righteous image of the Lord. He is dead in sin and without the ability to do anything that pleases God (Psalms 51:5; Ephesians 2:1; Romans 3:9-18; 8:7-8). Everything that man does is tainted by sin.

Yet man still reflects God’s image (Genesis 9:6; James 3:9) and that makes him “religious.” By nature he has a desire to know his Creator and to have communion with Him. (The cognitive knowledge of God that fallen man possesses will be discussed in chapter 2.) But his faulty ethical bent turns man to false gods. This twist even affects his approaches to knowing and worshipping the true God.

Non-Christian religious historians claim that man’s religion evolved from superstition (i.e., the primitive) to animism to polytheism, etc., until it finally reached monotheism (i.e., the sophisticated). The Bible claims the opposite. The purity of monotheism in pre-fall man became

animism, polytheism, etc., in post-fall man. Nevertheless, man cannot escape the image of the Lord that is a part of his makeup; and in his fallen ignorance, he seeks to know Him.

### **The Problem of “Certainty”**

Intrinsic to man’s fallen condition is the problem of certainty. Quite simply, God created man to live with certitude. He created him to thrive in an environment where his knowledge was sure, and where he never needed to doubt. Whether it concerned the things he learned from God, or the thoughts he considered in his own mind, or even the observations he made, Adam had an assurance that his thoughts cohered with the world in which he lived. In the Garden of Eden, when Adam named the creatures, his every designation was correct (Genesis 2:19). The state of beatitude (or blessing), and the very presence of God in the Garden, guaranteed such certitude. But with the fall into “sin and misery,” every aspect of man’s knowledge became open to question. God no longer secured that aspect of Adam’s existence. Even today in the parameters of biblical Christianity, debates thrive concerning: (1) which epistemological approach best explains our present condition and (2) which approach truly regains certitude. Man does not just want to “think.” He wants assurance that his ideas are “true.”

### **Three Methods of Non-Christian Epistemology**

In the history of epistemology (the science of “knowing”), there have been three basic ways that fallen man has attempted to gain certainty without God’s help: rationalism, empiricism, and irrationalism.

**1) Rationalism** elevates the mind as supreme. Reason and logic provide the prime, or only, source of true knowledge. The senses are untrustworthy and our *a priori* knowledge (the knowledge we have before any observation or experience) must be brought to our experiences and not *vice versa*.

The basic problem with rationalism (not reason, per se) is that it does not deal with the real world of things (the world outside the mind). Likewise, fallen man can and does err in his reasoning (e.g., formal errors in logic). It is also possible for us to reason things, which are not actually true. For example, that there is one God who exists in only one Person; whereas the only true God, as the Bible teaches, is one God who exists in three Persons. Pure rationalism tends to deify the mind. In effect it says, “I can have certitude just depending on my own thought.”

**2) Empiricism** elevates the scientific method in order to gain certainty. This method is based on observation. The idea being that if some phenomenon can be observed (out there in the real world) it must be certain. Of course science emphasizes repetitive observation. With the repetition, “certainty” ought to be increased.

The logic used in science is called “inductive.” One collects data and draws inferences and conclusions. This knowledge is *a posteriori*: it comes after and through experience. One must be able to smell, taste, feel, etc., something to know it. Empiricism deals with the world outside of oneself. Once something is experienced then the mind can deal with it, categorize it, etc.

There are two main problems with empiricism. First of all, just because this method depends on the collection of data for its conclusions, it can never be sure that some new bit of data will not alter its previous conclusions. For example, some day scientists might discover a zebra, which has red stripes as well as black and white stripes. In this case all the past “knowledge” about zebras would have to be revised. That which had been thought “certain,” would later be recognized as “transitory.”

Secondly, the senses can and do deceive. No one can ever have the same experience twice. Heraclitus, an ancient Greek philosopher, spoke to this when he stated “man can never stand in the same river twice.” He meant that finite things continue to change. Thus, the empirical method of knowledge can never truly be verified. When we believe that the senses are sufficient unto certainty, we tend to deify them.

These problems also plague the epistemology of “subjectivism” (a semi-empirical movement) that is found in Christian and non-Christian thinking today. In this latter pseudo-discipline, experiences of visions, feelings, etc., are elevated above all else, including the Word of God.

**3) Irrationalism** is a form of skepticism. It is anti-rational (anti-logic) and anti-intellectual. Actual truth, say the skeptics, can never be attained; rational attempts to explain the world leave us in despair. Reality cannot be communicated propositionally; truth must be sought in inward experiences, i.e., subjectively. Even though one may never know if there is a god who gives purpose and meaning to life, say the irrationalists, he must live life as if there is a god, a higher being, a meaningful universe, etc., because not to do so would be worse.

The problem here is that when one divorces logic from epistemology, he is left with skepticism. Skepticism is self-contradictory, for it asserts that nothing can be known. Of course, if nothing can be known, we cannot know that we know nothing.

### **Christian Epistemology**

A Christian epistemology, on the other hand, begins with the Word of God as the sole source of truth for mankind. It reasons from the Bible. A Christian epistemology, therefore, has special revelation as its starting point. If we are to avoid the fallacies of pure rationalism, the pitfalls of empiricism, and the skepticism of irrationalism, we need another source of truth: revelation from the creator God, who is truth itself.

The fact is that every epistemological system must have its starting point, which is axiomatic, i.e., it cannot be proved. It is indemonstrable. If it were provable or demonstrable it would not be a starting point. Axioms cannot be deduced from or proved by previous theorems. The Christian epistemological system starts with the Word of God. This is the axiom: The Bible alone is the Word of God and it has a systematic monopoly on truth.

### **A Third Aspect**

The problem is that despite the original goodness of reason and sensation, since the Fall and the expulsion of man from the presence of God in the Garden of Eden, the conclusions of these faculties always lay vulnerable to doubt. A third aspect of ingredient is needed for the kind of certitude that man desires. As noted, this third aspect is the special revelation of God’s Word that thoroughly equips mankind for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17). This third aspect of

divine, special revelation is the core subject of the present book. Revelation is the voice of God, which dispels all doubt, and seals all answers in certainty.

Man's faculties and revelation must go hand in hand. This has been the viewpoint of Reformed thinkers throughout the centuries. Augustine, Calvin, *et al.*, have stated that it is impossible for one to understand revelation correctly without reasoning. But it is also impossible to reason properly without revelation (i.e., the Word of God).

The Bible teaches that God reveals Himself to mankind by means of general and special revelation. These two means, which will be discussed more thoroughly in subsequent chapters, are in perfect accord with one another. They are both God's revelation to mankind. By "revelation" God discloses Himself to men. He reveals Himself and thereby provides His unique certainty.

General revelation is broader in audience and content, while special revelation is more specific. The former reveals God the Creator, whereas the latter also reveals God as Redeemer. General revelation reveals God conceptually through the innate knowledge that He has given to His creatures and through the things He has created. Special revelation reveals God verbally through the words He has spoken. Special revelation is also necessary for men to have a salvific (i.e., a "saving") knowledge of God, which is the richest meaning of the term "to know God." True knowledge and wisdom comes from this relationship (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10).

### **The Saving Knowledge of God**

The Bible speaks of knowing God in various ways. One may know of Him cognitively (Romans 1:18-21), or one may know a great deal about Him factually (James 2:19). But this is not the fullest "knowledge of God" possible (as in John 17:3). For knowledge to be full it must also be faithful and full of love.

The Reformers defined such faith by speaking of its three ingredients: knowledge (*notitia*), assent (*assensus*), and trust (*fiducia*).

**1) An intellectual knowledge of Christ** (Latin, *notitia*): a person must know facts and information about the One who came to redeem God's elect. Apart from such knowledge it would be impossible to be saved. Paul condemns a faith built on error when he condemns the unbelieving Jews. He said they had zeal for God but "not according to knowledge." (Romans 10:2). Correct information is a necessity.

**2) An assent to Christ and His Word as being true** (Latin, *assensus*): if one were to deny that Jesus Christ and the biblical revelation about Him is true then he could not be saved. But just because one acknowledges the truth of the matter does not necessarily mean he is saved. A person may agree with the truthfulness of the Scripture's message and yet not yield himself to its truth. The Scriptures predicate this of the devils (James 2:19).

**3) An acquiescence to the truth—trust** (Latin, *fiducia*): when one not only acknowledges the truth of the gospel message, but entrusts his life to the Christ of the message, i.e., both His capacity to bear the sin of His people and to provide them with the necessary righteousness to please God, then he is saved. He understands the message, assents to it, and in fact loves it in the sense that he depends upon it. Before the God of judgment he boasts of no other merit than Christ's alone.

When this third stage is reached the person "knows" God in the richest sense of the word. He knows God because he has come to be "known by God" (Galatians 4:9). This "knowledge" is practically synonymous with "love." It is a knowing that is personal and intimate. It is equated with the husband-wife relationship (Ephesians 5:31-32). This can be seen in Genesis 4:1 and Luke 1:34 (KJV, NKJV) where the word "know" is used for the sexual relationship between man and wife. There is a sense in which we can say that to be fore-"known" by God (Romans 8:29) is to be fore-loved by Him in a manner that produces salvific knowledge (John 17:3). One's knowledge (love) of God must be preceded by God's foreknowledge (fore-love) of him (Galatians 4:9). Scripture never speaks of God knowing unbelievers in this fashion.

When we speak of mankind knowing God, even in the purest sense of the term, we do not mean that man can ever know God fully. The Lord, being infinite, can never be known "exhaustively" by finite creatures. But He can be known through the propositional revelation of God's Word.

True knowledge of God, in the above sense, brings eternal life (John 17:3). This is the ultimate knowledge. There is nothing greater than this. At the same time this knowledge also brings man knowledge of who he is. When one comes to "know" God, he recognizes himself as an unworthy creature, humbles himself in the presence of his Creator (Isaiah 6:5; Luke 5:8), and seeks to live his life in obedience to God's Word. To know God is to love and obey Him (John 14:15, 21, 23; 1 John 5:3). Likewise, to obey God is to gain further knowledge of Him (John 7:17; Proverbs 1:7; 9:10).

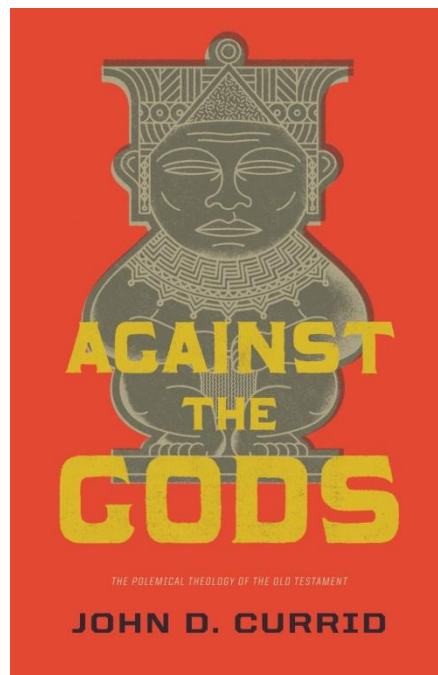
A true knowledge of God recognizes His Lordship over all things (Jeremiah 9:23-24; Romans 10:9-10). This knowledge inevitably produces increased holiness in the individual (Hebrews 12:14; Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10; Romans 8:29). It also gives him a greater understanding of the world in which he lives. Since God is Lord over His creation, redeemed man will seek to bring every thought captive to the obedience of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). This includes every part of man's endeavor in God's creation. Only one element is necessary: it is God's Word which thoroughly equips mankind for every exigency of life. It is the blueprint from which we must build in every area and institution of God's world (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Thus, the one who

knows God will seek to fulfill the dominion mandate given in Genesis 1:26-28 and restated by Christ in Matthew 28:18-20. The world must be subdued for the glory of God, under His Law.

How important is the true knowledge of God? It is the *sine qua non* of life itself. Without true knowledge of God life is counterfeit and useless. This being so we must be careful not to fall into the present day trap of some alleged Christian circles which deny the necessity of theology. Statements such as “give me Jesus, not exegesis,” and “I don’t need theology, all I need is Jesus,” abound. But they are clearly improper. A Christian, to be obedient to his Lord, needs to know and apply Scripture. Christian doctrine is essential to a fruitful walk with God. Paul avers that the “whole counsel of God” is to be taught within the church, not just a few basic beliefs (Acts 20:26-27). This is the strong meat of the Word that is necessary for believers to be mature in the faith (Hebrews 5:14). Ω

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### **Book Review**



**John D. Currid, *Against the Gods: The Polemical Theology of the Old Testament* (Crossway, 2013): 153 pp.**

John D. Currid is the Carl McMurray Professor of Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte and a Presbyterian minister. This book provides a popular-level introduction to scholarly comparison of religious texts from the ancient Near East (ANE) and the

Hebrew Bible or Old Testament (OT). Currid's central thesis is that the OT does not demonstrate a naïve literary dependence upon parallel ANE literature. Rather, it exercises a vibrant polemical theology meant to exalt the superiority of Yahweh, the God of the Bible, and the religion of the people of Israel over the false gods and false religions of the nations.

### **Summary of Content**

The book begins with two introductory chapters which provide, firstly, a brief history of Ancient Near Eastern Studies (chapter 1) and, secondly, an introduction to what Currid call "polemical theology" (chapter 2). The remaining chapters present an analysis of various parallels between the OT and ANE literature, which argues for an interpretation of these along the lines of polemical theology:

Chapter 3: Genesis 1 and ANE Creation Accounts like the Enuma Elish;

Chapter 4: Genesis 6—9 and ANE Flood Accounts like the Sumerian Flood Story, the Epic of Gilgamesh, etc.;

Chapter 5: Genesis 39 (Joseph and Potiphar's Wife) and the Egyptian "Tale of Two Brothers";

Chapter 6: Exodus 2:1-10 (the Birth of Moses) and the Sumero-Akkadian Legend of Sargon, etc.

Chapter 7: Exodus 2:11-22 (the Flight of Moses) and the Egyptian "Story of Sinuhe";

Chapter 8: Exodus 3:14 (the revelation of the divine name) and the Egyptian "Book of the Heavenly Cow." Note: Currid argues for this parallel as a kind of polemics in reverse, with the Egyptians mimicking the Hebrew "deification formula 'I am that I am.' By doing so the Egyptians were attempting to vanquish and mock the Hebrew God" (p. 109);

Chapter 9: The Rod of Moses in the Exodus narrative and its background in Egyptian culture;

Chapter 10: Exodus 14 (the parting of the Red Sea) and the Egyptian Westcar Papyrus ("King Cheops and the Magician");

Chapter 11: The OT and various Canaanite Motifs.

### **Analysis**

The opening chapter (pp. 11-23) provides a helpful historical overview of the study of ANE literature and its relationship to the study of the OT. Research in the field began with the first



archeological discoveries of ANE materials (1788-1872). This led to a “period of suspicion” (1873-1905) which resulted in many modern historical-critical scholars assuming that the Hebrew texts were dependent on the earlier pagan texts. The “New Horizons” period (1906-1940) came with ongoing discoveries at places like Nuzi and Mari and the expansion of the field of ANE studies apart from its relationship to Biblical texts. Currid describes the present age as one of “synthesis” (1945-present) in which “modern scholarship commonly views biblical history as invention and propaganda” (p. 22). He ends this chapter by suggesting that some evangelical OT scholars (e.g., Peter Enns and John Walton) have gone too far when they “emphasize the similarities and parallels between ancient Near Eastern literature and biblical writings,” but “they do not recognize, to any degree, the foundational differences between the two” (p. 23). Thus, Currid is attempting to offer a corrective to those who emphasize synthesis between the OT and ANE literature rather than distinction and contrast.

His alternative to synthesis is the aforementioned “polemical theology” as outlined in chapter 2 (pp. 25-32). He offers this initial definition:

*Polemical theology* is the use by biblical writers of the thought forms and stories that were common in ancient Near Eastern culture, while filling them with radically new meaning. The Biblical authors take well-known expressions and motifs from the ancient Near Eastern milieu and apply them to the person and work of Yahweh and not to other gods of the ancient world. Polemical theology rejects any encroachment of false gods into orthodox belief; there is an absolute intolerance of polytheism. Polemical theology is monotheistic to the very core (p. 25).

According to Currid, the OT writers did not merely borrow from the pagan myths and sanitize them by removing mention of the gods and substituting Yahweh, but they often intentionally drew upon these myths in order to repudiate them and to declare the superiority of Yahweh. In his opening discussion of the creation account in Genesis 1, for example, Currid concludes by noting that it stands in stark contrast to “dark mythological polytheism” (p. 46). This refrain is essentially repeated throughout the succeeding examples which are given. In fact, one criticism of Currid’s analysis might be that it sometimes comes off as repetitive. The argument becomes redundant. One fellow reader suggested that the book reads like a good article that has been somewhat forcibly expanded into a book.

In the end, I believe that Currid’s book fills an important void. It provides students and pastors with a non-technical, popular-level introduction to the study of various ANE parallels to Biblical literature, which some modern historical-critical scholars have used to downgrade the unique nature and authority of the OT Scriptures. In the book’s conclusion the author concedes that polemical theology “does not answer every question about the relationship of the Old Testament to ancient Near Eastern literature and life” (p. 141). Yet he also adds:

At times, however, polemical theology can serve as a solid and reliable interpretive lens by which one can properly see the significance of a parallel. In addition, and of utmost importance, is the truth that the Biblical writers often employed polemical theology as an instrument to underscore the uniqueness of the Hebrew worldview in contrast to other ancient Near Eastern conceptions of the universe and how it operates. In this day and age, when a considerable number of scholars seek to diminish the originality and uniqueness of the Old Testament, this is no small thing (p. 141).

Indeed, Currid's thesis is a needed corrective to those—including some evangelical scholars—who have too readily adapted a "synthesis" outlook. Perhaps the most important lingering question which underlies is whether or not conservative evangelicals can make any use of mainstream historical-critical methodology (whether ANE studies, source criticism, form criticism, literary criticism, etc) in OT studies and not be tainted in the end, at least to some degree, by it. Ω

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### ***Paradosis***

***Paradosis is the Greek word for "tradition." This is a recurring feature of The Reformed Baptist Trumpet highlighting voices from the Reformed, Puritan, and Baptist past.***



*Image: Benjamin Keach (1640-1704)*

Benjamin Keach was a Puritan Particular Baptist pastor who lived from 1640-1704. He is the namesake for the annual Keach Conference. Keach's *The Golden Mine Opened* was published in

1694. In the preface, the author notes that he offers this work in response to “the grand controversy” in his day over election and the final perseverance of the saints. He confesses, “I am sensible of my great insufficiency,” and then asks for the readers prayers’ that the printed words will be granted as much spiritual success as when they were spoken from the pulpit. Indeed, the book consists of some thirty-six sermons on four Biblical texts: Matthew 3:12 (two sermons); John 10:27-28 (sixteen sermons); Hebrews 6:4-6 (three sermons); and Hebrews 2:3 (fifteen sermons).<sup>1</sup>

In the last *RBT* we reprinted the introduction to the first sermon in his series on John 10:27-28 (pp 75-86). In this installment, we continue a transcription of this first sermon in this series, covering the first of six points. The text has been slightly modernized and edited to conform to contemporary standards for style, capitalization, and grammar. God willing, in future installments we will complete the text of this sermon.

## **The Blessedness of Christ’s Sheep**

John 10:27-28

**Doctrine One: All true believers are the sheep and lambs of Jesus Christ, and he is their Shepherd; they hear his voice, and follow him.**

Two things I shall (God assisting) do. Before raising any other point of doctrine, in prosecuting this, I shall:

(1) Open or explain this proposition. (2) Apply it.

In speaking of the first, I shall observe this method in explaining this proposition.

**1. I shall show you in what respect believers may be said to be his sheep.**<sup>2</sup>

2. I shall show what is meant by Christ’s voice.

3. I shall show what is meant by hearing his voice.

4. I shall show what is meant by his knowing of them.

5. I will give you some of the characteristics of Christ’s sheep and show how they follow him.

6. I will show what kind of Shepherd Christ is.

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<sup>1</sup> This information is a correction from which appeared in the *RBT*, Vol. 5 No. 2., p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> The text below will expound on the first (emphasis added) of these six points.

First, they are his sheep by choice, by virtue of election. Those who are Christ's are not only his sheep but his spouse also, according to another Scripture metaphor. Therefore, it is reasonable that that they should be his by his own free choice, and such as he can and does dearly love. They are not only such as the Father loved, but as he himself also loved. All that were elected from everlasting were beloved of the Father, and of the Son, from everlasting, with a purpose of grace and favor, or love of benevolence. The sign and fruit of Christ's love to his sheep is the choice he has made of them. "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (John 15:16). This Christ mentions here as an argument of his greatest love. Therefore, he does not refer to the choice of them as apostles, for so was Judas chosen, who was not comprehended in God's eternal election. "I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen" (John 13:18). Judas was chosen to the apostleship, but he was not chosen to eternal life. He was a devil, and, therefore, not to be one of Christ's sheep. "Have I not chosen you Twelve, and one of you is a devil?" (John 6:70).

Christ has no sheep but such that he was pleased to choose, or make choice of, for his own. He knows them before they know him, as the apostle speaks, "The Lord knows them that are his" (2 Tim 2:19). That is, he knows all whom he has chosen according to the decree of election.

Secondly, Christ's sheep are his by virtue of the Father's free donation. They are given unto him. "I pray not for the world, but for them thou hast given me" (John 17:9). "I have manifested thy name to the men which thou gavest me out of the world; thine they are and thou gavest them me" (John 17:6). They were given to Christ to be his sheep, to be his spouse and members of his mystical body. "Behold, I and the children thou hast given me are for signs and wonders in Israel" (Isaiah 8:18).

Thirdly, they are Christ's sheep by purchase. He bought them all, and that too at a dear price. He paid heartily for them. Every sheep cost one and the same price. Even the meanest, poorest, and weakest of them, cost more than ten thousand millions. Nay, that which was in value more than ten thousand worlds. "Ye are not your own, but you are bought with a price" (1 Cor 6:19-20). We had sold ourselves to other masters, and they had possession of us. "I am carnal," Paul says, "sold under sin" (Rom 7:14). He was formerly sold and was hardly yet got out of the tyrant's hand. "Behold, for your iniquities have you sold your selves; but ye shall be redeemed without money" (Isa 50:1). We were all sold to sin, sold to Satan, and there was no way to redeem us from the wrath of God, without a great ransom. Justice will have a satisfactory price. And since corruptible things, like silver and gold, will not do it, no nor a thousand rams, nor ten thousand rivers of oil, nor the fruit of the body, which could not make atonement for the sin of the soul, Christ must come to the price proposed to him, and demanded of him, if he will purchase these sheep, and that was his own precious blood. "Take

heed therefore unto your selves, and to the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, that ye feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28; cf. 1 Peter 1:18-19). “I lay down my life for my sheep” (John 10:15). This was the price. So dearly did Christ buy his sheep. And this day, beloved, the tokens of this price, or sacred signs or symbols of this purchase is to be set before your eyes: pray remember that believers are Christ’s sheep by purchase.

Fourthly, believers are Christ’s sheep by renovation or transformation. In this lies a great mystery. They had not once a sheep-like nature, but by grace their swinish and evil qualities are changed. He has infused new and holy dispositions into them, so that, in this respect, Jesus Christ excels all other shepherds, for they cannot turn swine, bears, or tigers into sheep. But the Lord Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, makes such to become his sheep, or to have sheep-like natures and dispositions, that were before as vile, filthy, and abominable as the worst of sinners. The Holy Spirit compares them before grace and regeneration to dogs, swine, etc., since they have like evil qualities with those unclean and filthy creatures: “Such were some of you . . . .” What kind of such were they? “Thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners, effeminate, etc. But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus (that is, by the power of the Lord Jesus) and by the Spirit of our God.” Christ does not have one sheep which he has not made so to be. He, as God, made them at first, and they, having lost their first excellent and holy nature, he makes them new, forms them again, or transforms them into his own holy, humble, meek, and gentle nature. “This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise” (Isa 43:21). We are “created in Christ Jesus unto good works” and thus they may be said to be his sheep (Eph 2:10).

Fifthly, believers are Christ’s sheep by a holy covenant or contract made with the Father. By virtue of this covenant they were given to him. By virtue of this covenant he died for them. By virtue of this covenant they became his, and he calls them, renews them, and changes them. “He shall see his seed” (Isa 53:10). It was by the blood of this covenant that the Great Shepherd of the sheep was raised from the dead, that they might be raised, quickened, and justified. By virtue of this covenant “he gathers them, and carries them in his arms, and lays young and tender ones in his bosom, and gently leads such as are with young” (Isa 40:11). By virtue of this covenant he puts his “fear into their hearts, that they may not depart from him” (Jer 31:33).

Christ as mediator in this covenant is God’s servant and undertakes the office of Shepherd, to take care of, *feed*, *heal*, and *preserve* all those who were given him by the Father.

Sixthly, believers are Christ’s sheep by conquest. They were fallen into the enemy’s hand, in the hands and under the power of a most cruel tyrant, who designed to tear them in pieces and devour them. They were in Satan’s hand and under the power of sin. They were mere bond-slaves and in fearful slavery to these enemies, having their eyes put out, their fleece torn off, of

stripped of their robes, being dangerously wounded. And although Jesus Christ, to redeem them from wrath and misery, laid down a great price (as you heard before) to satisfy God's justice; yet, alas, Satan takes no notice of that. They were in his hand, who like a strong man armed keeps the soul, and has power over them. Therefore, Jesus Christ puts forth his almighty hand to vanquish and subdue this cruel foe and, thereby, redeems and recues all his sheep out of slavery and bondage, by which means they come to be his by a blessed conquest of their enemies and by overcoming them. For he subdues their hearts, bends and subjects their rebellious wills, by the power of divine grace, before he can have one of them. All the sheep of Christ yield themselves up to him, as being conquered by him, overcome by his love, and the power of his Spirit. This brings me to the next thing.

Seventhly, and lastly, believers are Christ's sheep by virtue of a holy resignation of themselves to him. They have chosen him to be their Shepherd. Other sheep cannot make choice of their shepherd, but Christ's sheep can do this, their eyes being enlightened to see the excellency of Christ, the greatness of his love, and what he has suffered and undergone for them. They commit their souls to his care and keeping, that they may watch over them, feed and lead them: "They gave themselves first unto the Lord, and unto us by the will of God" (2 Cor 8:5).

First, they gave themselves to the Lord (by the power of the Spirit) to be his, and no more their own, but to be his people, his spouse, his sheep; and then gave themselves to his church, to be of his flock. Christ has no member, no sheep of his visible church or fold on earth, but such who know him. "I am known of mine" (John 10:14). They are not ignorant persons, or such who are unable to give themselves up to him. Others are not required to them: No, no. They must be able to give or resign themselves to him, (as being overcome by his love) and thus they become his sheep also. Ω