

## Denver Snuffer Podcast 152: Persuasion, Part 2

This is the second part of a series about Persuasion, in which Denver addresses:

- The tools and approaches we should and should not use when we go about seeking to persuade
- What we should do next, if we fail to persuade
- What specific human tendencies we should consider, in a self examination, whenever using persuasion
- When others seek to persuade us, how can we detect the “teachings of men” versus the teachings of true messengers?

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DENVER: Ether chapter 4, verse 11 (I’m going to the last sentence of it—Ether 4, verse 11):

*For because of my Spirit he shall know that these things are true; for it persuadeth men to do good. And whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do good is of me; for good cometh of none save it be of me. I am the same that leadeth men to all good; he that will not believe my words will not believe me—that I am.*

See, “he that will not believe my words will not believe me.” It’s a real simple test. Did the words you heard originate from God? You should be able to tell that. You should be able to say, sitting and listening, “I hear God in that.” And then whoever it is that is speaking, it doesn’t matter if she’s an elderly widow—it doesn’t matter. It doesn’t matter if he’s the stake president—it doesn’t matter. You have to hear **Him** in the words that come. And then, it ceases to be the woman or the man who is standing in front of you, and it becomes the Lord. And the person is simply... I mean, good for them; they resonated with Him, and they caught on to something.

Turn back to Moroni chapter 7; it’s the same thing. Moroni chapter 7, verse 16:

*For behold, the Spirit of Christ is given to every man...*

Wow, now there’s another thought. The Spirit of Christ given to everyone. You have a link to Christ. By virtue of the fact that you’re here, you have a link to Christ. K?

*The Spirit of Christ is given to every man [and in this sense, “man” means mankind; it’s not sexist], that he may know good from evil; wherefore, I show unto you the way to judge; for every thing which inviteth to do good, and to persuade to believe in Christ, is sent forth by the power and gift of Christ; wherefore ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of God. But whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do evil, and believe not in Christ, and deny him, and serve not God, then ye may know with a perfect knowledge it is of the devil; for after this manner doth the devil work, for he persuadeth no man to do good, no, not one; neither do his angels; neither do they who subject themselves unto him.*

The difference between persuasion and contention: Persuasion largely does not happen because you overcome the resistance with argument and contention. Persuasion comes by opening up an idea and letting it enter into the heart of the man or the woman, and then letting God take over and get the growth inside them. *"Contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, who stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another. Behold this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away."*(3 Nephi 11:29-30) He is saying, don't contend, don't make people mad, don't confront them, take a step back from that and I'll tell you what my doctrine is. And then, *"this is my doctrine, ...I bear record of the Father, and the Father beareth record of me, and the Holy Ghost beareth record of the Father and me."* (3 Nephi 11:32) Every bit of that is internal to the proselyte, every bit of that.

Preach, teach, exhort, expound, contend, bitch them into conversion; you've ignored what His doctrine is. It's internal to them. It goes on with Him and them. We facilitate but He is the one who ultimately becomes the object of their worship, the object of their adoration. It's like God lights a candle inside of you. You can hold the candle up and you can give people light but if they don't get their own candle, get their own flame, they're still dead. They aren't alive.

Your kids are going to make mistakes. It's not your job to force them to not make the mistake. It's your job to counsel them and to let them have the experience by which your counsel makes sense and is vindicated. You **hope** the mistakes that they make are not too serious. But even if they're serious and they involve lifelong struggles, it's **their** right to choose—and it's your obligation to teach and to persuade and then to **rejoice** when they return after they're tired of filling their bellies with the husks that the pigs are fed. It's your job to go and greet them and put a robe on their shoulder and put a ring on their hand and to kill the fatted calf. It's not your job to beat them and to chain them to the farm, so they can't go away and behave foolishly. They need to know that your bonds of love towards them are stronger than death itself. They need to know that they will endure in your heart into eternity.

And not only your children but one another—because we **all** make mistakes. Do not exercise dominion; do not exercise compulsion. Exercise long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, and kindness. Some of the biggest disasters come when you do not give people the right to choose freely, and you attempt to coerce them. Be wise, be prudent, be someone that they would respect and they would listen to.

JOHN: So you are calling for a more, not only just inclusive, but sort of a bold brand of Mormonism that isn't so scared, that isn't so afraid to be inclusive and have open dialogue and to even support disagreement or debate, but a robust discourse within the walls of the Church, right?

DENVER: Yes. In fact, that statement that we quote, about *"giving apostles and prophets... that we all may come to the unity of the faith"*, that Paul wrote, that statement is not so that in a police state we can cast away those with whom we have disagreements. That is a statement about persuasion. That is a statement about preaching and coming to a unity of

faith through a lively exchange of discussion, preaching, exhorting, expounding, until we all say, "Okay, I've heard enough now to make my mind up and I'm on board with..." or, "I haven't heard enough, I disagree with, I still retain this view," but you know what, someone who walks in, who has a different view than me, if I listen to them they will either persuade me that I have left something out of the equation I need to think about, or they will raise questions in my mind that will send me back to looking and studying and trying to come to peace with the issue. But what I shouldn't do, in my view, is to say, "Wait a minute, you're saying something I disagree with. Get away from me. You are toxic. Get away from me. My mind must be protected from what you have to say." But again, this goes all the way back to that beginning when I said I came into the faith from a polemical environment. I'm okay with the fact that people I love and respect – my own mother, my own sister – think my religion utterly false and worse than that, corrupt.

Almost invariably, the existence of control tends to lead, invariably—to lead, inexorably—to abuse. Because if all you have with which to work is persuasion, you're gonna find out that there are a lot of people who you will never persuade. There are a lot of people who will never get aboard.

Therefore, if you're limited to persuasion alone, you have to afford people the freedom to reject, to be contrary, to raise their hand and make a contrasting point, and not have someone say, "Your point isn't welcome here. You're not doing what you need to do!"

I think there are a lot of discontent people. I try to articulate what it was that the Restoration was originally intended to accomplish **and look like**, and I believe there are a number of people that look at what I have written and the source material that I draw from and who reach the same conclusion. No one has to accept anything that I've said, and I don't want a following. What I'm trying to do is get to the bottom of the truth, and if it persuades someone, then fine; we're in agreement. If it doesn't, then I'm interested in hearing the disagreement. I'm interested in hearing what the contrary view is.

**You** have compassion for all those around you who are ignorant. If you think you know a little more than them, then use gentleness and meekness to persuade them. Sometimes, what you try to persuade them of is going to offend them. Couple it with your own testimony of the truth. Don't let them simply go away offended. Let them know that when you give offense (and you surely will give offense), let them know that you did it because of your love for them, your love of God, and your faith in the things that God is doing. When you offend, do it kindly and while bearing testimony of the truth and with the compassion that should hail from a position of greater light and truth or intelligence. They don't know what they're doing. They don't understand it yet. So help them.

The atonement isn't like Tinkerbell spreading some magic dust that will make you rise up. The atonement will erase your sins and mistakes, but **you** must rise up. **You** must acquire those virtues. The glory of God **is** intelligence. And repentance requires you to acquire that intelligence—that glory of God. And you acquire it by the things that you do in His name and for His sake. And those that are here with you in need, they represent Him. And when you do it to even the least of them, He will credit that as having been done for Him. And no good deed will be gone unnoticed with Him. He even notices when the sparrows fall. So is

He not going to notice when your knee bends with compassion, praying for His mercy for someone that has offended you? And when you pray for those who have offended you, do you think for one moment that that doesn't change your own heart?

The reason to rejoice and be exceedingly glad when they “say all manner of evil against you falsely” is because it affords you the opportunity, with compassion (like our Lord, who forgave even those who were in the act of killing Him—not their brutality, but their ignorance; because when the day arrives that they see things aright finally, and they realize what offense they gave out—they had no intention of offending their Redeemer. They were carrying out the execution of a criminal. And so, He had compassion on them for their ignorance)—

What I have learned by sad experience is that the best way to approach someone is by your example and not by your mouth. And they can really hate what they are hearing you say, but if what they see you do is admirable, eventually they will reach the conclusion that what you're doing is the result of what you're believing. And if what you're believing is on display in what you do, that will touch them in ways that can't be opposed, can't be argued against.

But if all you're gonna do is try to argue someone into agreement with you. Well heavens! There are people that make a living arguing against Mormonism. Well, They've had to spend a lifetime studying it in order to come up with the arguments against it. If information alone was going to persuade, some of our biggest critics would now be converted. But they're not because their hearts are hard. The way to get through to them is with kindness, is with the example. Christ in the Sermon on the Mount said: *“Blessed are [you], when men shall ... say all manner of evil against you falsely for my name's sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad: ... for so persecuted they the prophets [beforehand]”* (Matt: 5:11-12)

Most people have encountered “religious” folk (and I put religious in quotes) who talk a good fight, but who will not sacrifice to benefit others. If instead you stay the course and you live the example, they're going to at first assume that you're just another religious hypocrite, because that's what we have all encountered. When, however, that example persists, and it persists against mocking, against ridicule, against criticism—when that example persists.

I mean one of the questions that it was a vision, it was a dream and therefore we did not finish the story—but fill that great and spacious building with a bunch of real people who are mocking and ridiculing and laughing at the people that are at the tree of life and let them see the great example of the people who are at the tree of life. Before long there will be some who leave the building and go and join the people at the tree of life because that's what persuades, that's what convinces, that's what touches the heart.

So I would say less preaching and more self-sacrifice and example and even hard-hearted people will find themselves touched by what they **see** being done.

Because right now, the hearts of this nation—the hearts of this people—are harder, are more strident, are more resistant to— I mean, look, what's the tool? Gentleness, meekness, and persuasion—that's the tool. That's what you get to use. Why do you think the Savior took a beating and forgave them? I mean, he shows you the tool. He revolutionized the

world, ultimately, simply because he was unwilling to return to brutality anything other than kindness and forgiveness that would break the hearts of anyone who hears the story of who this man was.

It's really hard to sit inside your own life and be realistic about your own personal failings. We always tend to apply tests that are given in scripture outwardly and to say, "As long as I use persuasion and pure knowledge then I can beat you into submission and never yield the argument because I am doing what was said is the criteria." Gentleness—okay, I won't yell at you. Meekness—okay, I'll be polite enough to let you say what you have to say, I won't interrupt. Love unfeigned—okay, I love ya brother, *I LOVE ya brother*. Persuasion—okay, when I get my opportunity to present mine I'm going for the brass ring.

Wait a minute. What if that's God trying to get through to you? What if the way in which God is trying to persuade you is by the meekness of the humble Lord who speaks to us in plain humility; who comes to us, not to try and overawe us, but comes to us saying: "*You are me in embryo. I know what it took for me to become the Son of God, and I know you can do it, too.*" What if the Lord is your greatest cheerleader, and he wants nothing more than to try and get you to be more like Him. You can't be more like Him when the center of everything is yourself and you never self-examine. We all deserve criticism.

I believe every person we encounter down here, no matter who they are, wants to follow Christ. That's why we're here. The only reason they got here was because they want to follow Christ. Therefore, since they are predisposed to following Christ the reason they are not doing so at present is because no one has taken the time, no one has taken the trouble of giving sufficient cause to them to change, to turn, to repent, and to follow Christ. And by the way, at this point, none of us know enough in order to be able to truly follow Christ, because we are all riddled with half truths, part understanding, and the need for constant repentance, all of us. But if you're further along and you accept Christ, and you understand His will better than your brother or sister, then you have the obligation to present persuasively to them the same reasons that touched their heart before they ever entered this world when they elected to follow Christ into this dark abyss in the first place. They're here trying to find Him. If you can point to it and give them reason to believe, my view is that every single individual on earth has a native free disposition to turn and face Christ. We just have to figure out how to present that sufficiently persuasively so that it touches their heart and it resonates with that truth, that light that they came down here in the first instance possessing.

The light of Christ illuminates every single being that is in this world. Therefore, Christ is in them already. You just have to animate that so that they realize the truth that you express, the testimony that you bear, the one whom you worship is God indeed, and worthy of their worship, worthy of their acceptance as well.

The more we contend and dispute with one another the better we become at contention. We polish the rhetorical skills to oppose others. That spirit of contention can take possession of us and when it does, we are hard-pressed to be a peacemaker with others.

Christ said: *“Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.”* (Matt. 5:7-9).

But peace should not be made at the cost of truth. Truth must be the only goal. Truth, however, belongs to God. Our desires, appetites and passions are prone to make us stray well beyond the bounds set by God.

- Therefore, when our pride is gratified, we should question if what we are advancing is truth.
- When our ambition is served, we should question if we are in the Lord’s employ or our own.
- When we insist upon control, we should question if we are like our Lord or instead like His adversary.
- When we use any means for compelling others, we should wonder if we are mocking the God who makes the sun to shine and rain to fall on all His fallen children without compulsion.
- When we display unrighteous dominion, we should question whether we are worthy of any dominion at all.

Our tools must be limited to persuasion, gentleness, meekness, love unfeigned, pure knowledge, all of them mustered “without compulsory means” to persuade others to accept the truth. And if we fail to make the persuasive case then the problem is not others, the problem is that we’ve yet to figure out how to be sufficiently knowledgeable so as to bring them aboard.

So many Latter-day Saint teachers resort to sentimentality and emotion in their teaching, talks, books and testimonies. Some are fooled into thinking an emotional reaction is the same as a witness of the Spirit. Emotions rarely communicate light and truth or intelligence. The Spirit bears witness of the truth, conveys light and intelligence, and may not at all be emotional. Or, if emotions are involved, it may be fear (*Isa. 6: 5*), dread (*Gen. 28: 17*), or even horror at what you encounter. (*Gen. 15: 12-18.*) Mere sentimentality is a false substitute for the witness of the Spirit. Joseph Smith explained it this way: *“When you feel pure intelligence flowing into you, it may give you sudden strokes of ideas, so that by noticing it, you may find it fulfilled the same day or soon; (i.e.) those things that were presented unto your minds by the Spirit of God, will come to pass; and thus by learning the Spirit of God and understanding it, you may grow into the principle of revelation, until you become perfect in Christ Jesus.”* (TPJS p. 151.)

The warning from Nephi about how you deny the power of God, you reject the gift of the Holy Ghost whenever you “hearken to the precepts of men” is based on this principle. You have the tools to detect when you are being taught by men using the arm of flesh to advance an idea or notion. You are accountable, hence the “wo” pronounced on you by Nephi. Ask yourself the following questions as you hear a teacher:

- Does he teach you to come to Christ?

- Do the teachings convey intelligence upon you, or just sentiment?
- Do they awaken inside you light and truth that you hadn't considered before?
- Are the teachings based on the revelations of heaven, or some study, analysis or tool developed by academics?
- Are you encouraged to seek for a confirmation from the Spirit?
- Did you learn something new, but find yourself feeling you have known it before?
- Whether it causes you dread, fear or even horror, does the Spirit tell you, nonetheless, it is of God?
- Are you more inclined to get on your knees and call upon God because of what you have learned?
- Does the speaker merely want you to honor her, or an institution?
- Does the speaker hold him/herself out as an expert or someone with impressive credentials?
- Does he rely on status or office as the reason to trust his teaching, or instead rely on the truthfulness of his message? No power or influence can or ought to be exerted by virtue of office or position, only by persuasion and pure knowledge. (D&C 121: 41-42.)
- Are the words noble and great, despite your view of the person who is delivering them?

You may be surprised when you ask such questions at what you learn. Nephi is saying it is your own responsibility if you will allow yourself to be taken in by the precepts of men. Wo unto you if you do.

Neither King Benjamin nor Christ anticipated complete agreement among their followers. All of us understand things differently, and in some cases more completely as a subject is studied. Even the same individual will understand things differently over time. As we study in good faith and confidence before God we may believe in a proposition that we will change our understanding about later. That is inevitable as we progress.

Assuming we take seriously the instruction from King Benjamin and Christ to refrain from contending in anger with one another, how do we proceed as brothers and sisters in sorting out our unavoidable disagreements? The answer, of course, is provided in counsel from Joseph Smith found in scripture clarifying how to deal with disagreements:

- by persuasion
- by long-suffering
- by gentleness and meekness
- by kindness
- by pure knowledge.

The inappropriate disputations and contentions condemned by King Benjamin and Christ would likewise fit Joseph's scriptural clarification. We are warned not to:

- cover our sins
- gratify our pride
- pursue our vain ambitions

- exercise control
- exercise dominion
- exercise compulsion
- persecute the Lord's saints.

One of the strongest evidences Joseph Smith was in harmony with the Spirit of the Lord is shown through his words mirroring both King Benjamin and Christ. King Benjamin counseled his people after a lifetime of service and contemplation. Christ's counsel was given after His resurrection when He appeared to the Nephites. Joseph's inspired words came while he was confined to Liberty Jail in Missouri. Gracious words from all three, but Joseph's were composed in the worst of circumstances. This is a reason to respect Joseph.

The scriptures were written by or about prophets who took clearly opposing positions from those who were deceived. The clarity you read in scripture is because the views and opinions of prophets were used to tell about the events. But as the events happened, those living at the time had to have faith to distinguish between truth and error, to believe or to ignore a message from the Lord. It is no different for them than it is for the dilemma that we face today. Does the message invite or entice you to believe in Christ and to do His works? Does it get presented in a way that displays patience, long-suffering? Does it use gentleness and persuasion, meekness and love, and consistency with the revelations and commandments found previously in scripture? Or does it appeal to your vanity, to your arrogance? Does it make you proud of yourself, or does it make you instead wish you were a better person?

Humility is absolutely required to progress. The more we think we understand, the less willing we can become to receive more. Joseph said, *"It is the constitutional disposition of mankind to set up stakes and bounds to the works and ways of the Almighty."* He also said, *"I never heard of a man being damned for believing too much but they are damned for unbelief."* James 4:6 says, *"God resisteth the proud but giveth grace unto the humble."* Damnation is limiting progress or stopping progress. Setting up boundaries to what the Lord can do is voluntary damnation. No matter how much you believe you know, if you will be humble you will learn a great deal more. We must continue progression or, if we don't, we accept damnation and that, too, voluntarily.

The reason arguments arise is because men stop gathering light by righteous behavior. When they lose light they cease to understand the truth. They stray from the correct practice of the ordinance because they are unable to understand its importance. They see no reason to continue the ordinance in one form when another seems to work just as well. The result is a change to the ordinance. It is ever the same. By the time the change is made, the ones making it are unaware of any importance associated with the ordinance they change. They discard what they view is meaningless. It would require a good deal more light and truth for them to understand the importance of what was given them. But that light and truth has passed away from them because of their conduct.

Into the darkness the devil enters with arguments over the ordinances: *Why do it that way? It really doesn't mean anything. It is arcane and outdated. It doesn't really matter as long as you still have faith in Christ.* [That particular lie is very effective because it allows the person



to presume they have faith, when in fact they haven't the faith sufficient to obey Christ.] *People will get more out of the changes if we make them. People will have greater peace of mind if we baptize their infants. We'll save more souls, because by baptizing them when they're infants we include everyone who could die before getting baptized. Our numbers will increase. We'll look more successful by getting more followers by adding their numbers into the group. What we change isn't important, anyway. If it were important, we would know that, and since it doesn't seem to be important to us, it must, in fact, not be important. Those who rebel at change are not really faithful. This shows inspiration; it's faith affirming. Change is proof that God is still leading us. ...*And other such arguments and persuasions from our adversary.

On the other hand, Christ is saying to keep the ordinances unchanged. And further, don't even begin to dispute them. They are off limits for argument, dispute and discussion. When you open the opportunity to dispute over the ordinances, you are allowing the devil an opportunity to influence the discussion and change the ordinances.

Disputes lead to contention, contention leads to anger, and anger is the devil's tool. So don't start down that road. Accept and understand the ordinances. If you are perplexed by them, then let those who understand speak, exhort, expound and teach concerning them. As they do, you will come into the unity of faith and become one. Perplexity cannot exist when there is light and truth. Light and truth comes from understanding the ordinances, not changing them. So do not begin the process through dispute. The purpose of discussion is not to dispute, which leads to contention, which leads to anger.

When the Gospel and its ordinances turn into something angry and contentious, then the Spirit has fled, and souls are lost. It is the devil's objective to prevent you from practicing the ordinances in the correct manner. But, more importantly, it is his objective to prevent you from becoming one. When he uses arguments over ordinances to cause disunity, he is playing with two tools at the same time. First, changing the ordinances brings about cursings, and second, encouraging contention and anger grieves the Spirit, and prevents the Saints from becoming one.

As a result, disputes or discussions over ordinances, which could lead to changing them, should not be entertained. As soon as the ordinances are open to dispute, reconsideration, alteration or to being changed in any way, then you are opening the door to this whole process. It culminates in the souls of men being lost through apostasy. Once the ordinances are changed, the earth is cursed ([Isa. 24: 5](#)) and Israel is scattered rather than gathered ([Jere. 31: 36](#)).

The devil knows this, even if men do not. Men are urged to take steps they presume have little effect, all the while being lied to by the enemy of their souls.

When men arrive at the point they are angry in their hearts with one another, they are not united by love as they are intended to be. These are the end results of the two paths. One leading to love and joy ([Hel. 5: 44](#)), and the other to anger and wrath ([D&C 76: 33](#)).

Disputes over ordinances are caused by the devil. Ordinances that preserve symbolic truths and have power to save are turned into tools for the devil by disputations. It is a complete

victory when discussions about changing the ordinances are allowed to take place. Even good men are taken in by such disputes.

If we manage to bring someone aboard by persuasion and out-arguing them and beating them in a scripture bash, how long do they remain aboard when someone else with a better argument comes along to persuade them contrary-wise? If you make a convert because they felt the presence of God with them, you can beat them with a crowbar and they're not going to give that up.

Taking the message of the restoration to people and being rejected by 900,000 readers, and having one person show up, is a perfect model. If you had 30,000 people show up and you baptized them, my guess is that in short order the abuses and the mess you would have on your hands would be shameful. It's the quality of the conversion process, and it's the presence of the Spirit.

Another more-benign way of attempting exactly the same thing is to say, "You are free in all your thinking, in all your beliefs. We require very little of you." We believe in the Doctrine of Christ, which was read to us here today. It's very short: belief in Christ, belief in His Father, acceptance of the Holy Ghost, being baptized in faith, and then allowing that Holy Spirit/that Holy Ghost to animate you in your search for truth. And if we begin with diversity, then we begin with appreciation for that diversity, because coming together in the unity that Paul speaks of, in the dispensation of the fulness of times, is not because someone beat you into submission. It's because someone had something to say that resonated as truth to you in such a compelling way that you found yourself persuaded, you found yourself enticed to accept it, you found yourself prizing it, and you welcomed it, and you embraced it. And if someone has not yet embraced it, you explain to them why it's delicious to you. And if they reject it for a season, that's okay, too.

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The foregoing excerpts were taken from:

- Denver's talk titled "Personal Revelation", given in Sandy, Utah on August 16, 2008
- Denver's comments during an assembly on "Missionary Work" in Eden, UT on July 2, 2016
- Denver's *40 Years in Mormonism Series*, Talk #9 titled "Marriage and Family" given in St. George, UT on July 26th, 2014
- Part 2 of Denver's interview on the "Mormon Stories Podcast", recorded February 12, 2012
- Denver's *40 Years in Mormonism Series*, Talk #10 titled "Preserving the Restoration" given in Mesa, AZ on September 9th, 2014
- A KUTV television interview that aired on June 15th, 2015
- Denver's *40 Years in Mormonism Series*, Talk #3 titled "Repentance" given in Logan, UT on September 29th, 2013

- His remarks at “A Day of Faith and Connection” youth conference in UT on June 10th, 2017
- Denver's fireside talk titled “Constitutional Apostasy”, given in Highland, UT on June 7th, 2013
- His comments at the “Unity in Christ” conference in Utah County, UT on July 30, 2017
- A fireside talk titled “That We Might Become One”, given in Clinton, UT on January 14th, 2018
- Denver's book titled *Removing the Condemnation*, pages 188-189 and 389-391, recorded for this podcast on January 23, 2022
- Denver's book titled *Preserving the Restoration*, 216-217, recorded for this podcast on January 23, 2022
- Denver’s conference talk titled “Things to Keep Us Awake at Night” given in St. George, UT on March 19th, 2017; and
- Denver’s *Christian Reformation Lecture Series*, Talk #7 given in Boise, Idaho on November 3, 2018.