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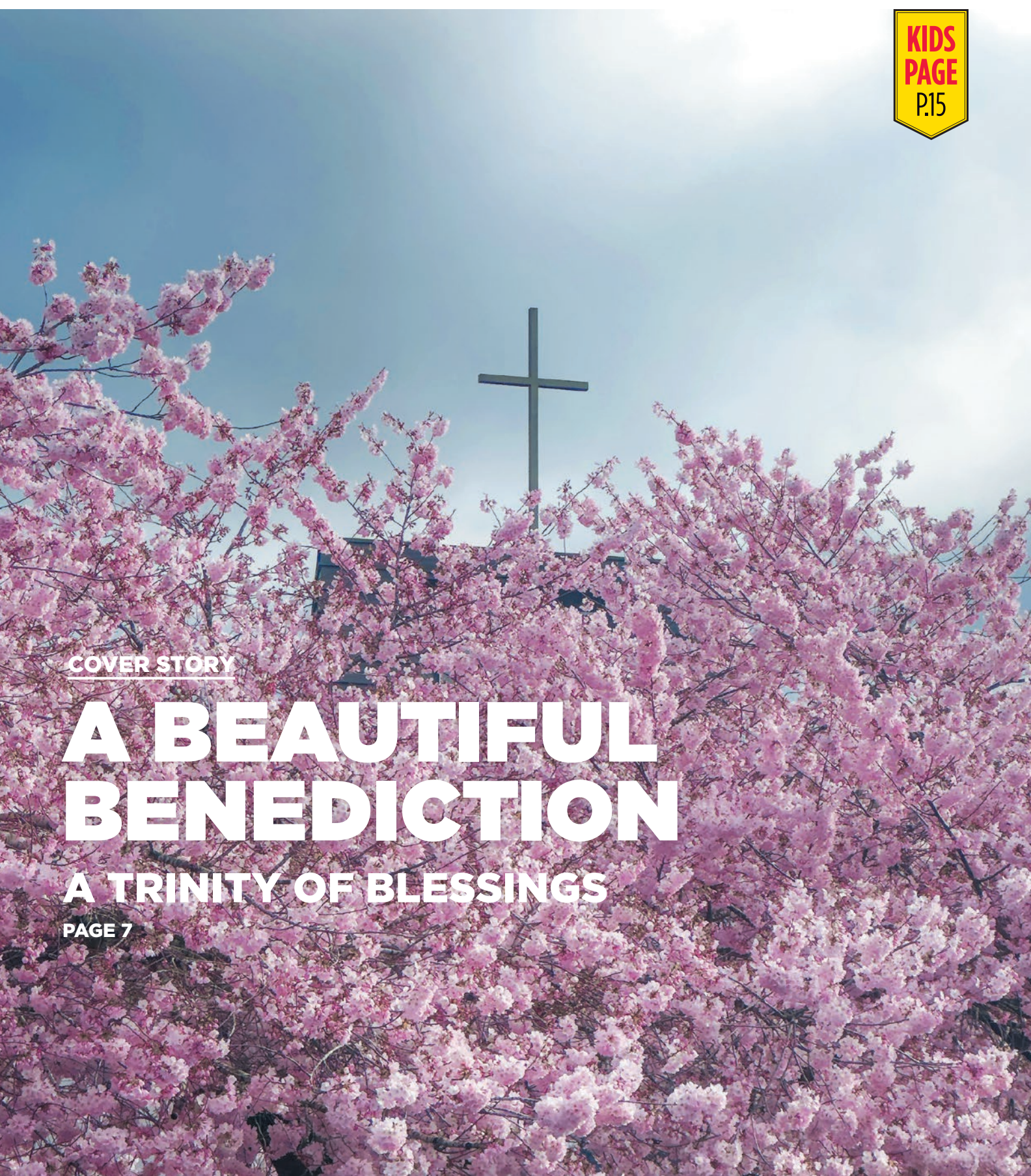
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THE STATE OF THEOLOGY

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UPCOMING EVENTS

AUGUST 15–20, 2026 CANADIAN CAREY FAMILY CONFERENCE

Main speaker: Christopher Crocker
Theme: Living for Christ in Post-Christian Canada: A Study in 1 and 2 Peter
Plan to attend the 2026 Carey Conference! Check the website to register and for full details.

Held at Braeside Camp, Paris, ON

sgfcanada.com/carey

SEPTEMBER 26–27, 2026 BAUMAN LECTURES

Speaker: Dr. Jonathan Griffiths

Theme: The Power of the Preached Word
Annual theological lecture series. See website for details.

Held at Jarvis Street Baptist Church, Toronto, ON

tbs.edu

SEPTEMBER 27, 2026 TBS CONVOCATION

Join Toronto Baptist Seminary as they launch the start of a new academic year.

Held at Jarvis Street Baptist Church, Toronto, ON

tbs.edu

OCTOBER 1, 2026 HERITAGE PREACHING LECTURES

Speaker: Dr. Matthew Kim

An event to equip and encourage pastors and other ministry leaders with the tools needed to sharpen their skills to serve their congregations.

Registration opens in August.

Held at Heritage College & Seminary, Cambridge, ON

heritagecs.edu

OCTOBER 16–17, 2026 SGF ANNUAL ASSEMBLY

Join with other SGF churches for the annual assembly. Please register on the website.

Held at Tilbury Baptist Church, Tilbury, ON

sgfcanada.com

MARCH 2, 2027 HERITAGE MINISTRY LEADERSHIP DAY

Speaker: Mark Dever
An event to equip and encourage pastors and other ministry leaders with the tools needed to sharpen their skills to serve their congregations.

Held at Heritage College & Seminary, Cambridge, ON
heritagecs.edu

APRIL 1–3, 2027 2027 LIGONIER NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Theme: The Glorious Attributes of God
Various speakers
Gather with Christians from around the world to hear teaching on God's divine attributes, sing His praises, and draw strength from His promises. As we grow in the knowledge of the Lord, we'll be equipped to serve Him faithfully and pursue His glory in every sphere of life.

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NEWSBYTES



The gathering at the 2026 Grace Pastors' Conference & Retreat in Cambridge, Ont.

+ 2026 Grace Pastors' Conference & Retreat, Cambridge, ON

On May 25–27, 2026 the annual Grace Pastors' Conference and Retreat was held at Countryside Camp and Conference Centre just outside of Cambridge, Ontario. Though advertised for pastors, it is not for pastors only but for any man who is interested in pursuing Christ and his Word. Reid Ferguson from Rochester, New York, was the keynote speaker. Reid spoke on "Glorifying the Master in Ministry" with four messages on "Christ our Exemplar" and "Knowing, Bearing and Pursuing the Glory of God". Along with Reid, Glenn Tomlinson spoke on how God demonstrates his power in weakness, Marc Bertrand on MAiD and Dave Theobald on "Bros and Their Beard Oil." We were fed well both physically and spiritually and sweet fellowship was had by all as we closed by singing the Doxology.—Dale Nevelizer

+ The upcoming 2026 SGF Annual Assembly



This year's SGF Assembly will be held on October 16–17, 2026, at Tilbury Regular Baptist Church (TRBC) in Tilbury, Ontario. TRBC is looking forward to hosting the Assembly and is hard at work in preparation for it. Keep an eye out on the SGF website in coming weeks for registration information. We encourage all of our churches to attend and to register early.

—Dale Nevelizer

Do you have news to share of what God is doing in your church?
Please email your news to janicevaneck@rogers.com.

PAUL'S THREE PARTING WORDS



BY DALE NEVELIZER >> Epitaphs on tombstones can be revealing. Sometimes they are written about the person. Other times they are sayings of the person themselves, which may be humorous, sad or memorable. Either way, they give us a glimpse beyond the dates that are etched on the

tombstone and cause us to pay attention to the life and parting words of the person

Paul wrote to the Colossians to instruct them that neither legalism nor mysticism empowers us to live the Christian life, but that Christ is all and all that we need. As Paul closes his letter, he gives his final farewell to the Colossians. Though Paul would not die during his first imprisonment in Rome, neither he nor the Colosse Christians knew that. Listen, as Paul gives his parting words in Colossians 4:18 to cause these believers to pay attention not to drift into mysticism or legalism but to be centred on Christ who is all and all we need, "I Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you."

1. Scripture

What is so memorable about Paul saying, "I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand?" Paul often dictated his letters to an amanuensis or secretary such as Tertius in Romans 16:22. But Paul usually wrote at least a portion of his letters (1 Corinthians 16:21; Galatians 6:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:17; Philemon 19). Paul did this to authenticate his letters so those reading them would know they were not spurious writings but were authentic (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2). Peter recognized that as an apostle, Paul's writing had the same weight as the sayings of Jesus and the rest of Scripture (2 Peter 3:16). *Scripture* is Paul's first parting word. We do not need to make Scripture relevant. It already is relevant. We simply need to get back to the Bible.

2. Gospel

The *gospel* is Paul's second parting word as he commands them to "remember my chains." Paul was imprisoned for preaching the gospel of Christ (4:3). Though Paul was chained, the gospel was not. As Roman guards who were chained to Paul heard him preach the gospel, the good news of Christ permeated the Roman palace (Philippians 1:13). We should never be ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16).

3. Grace

Paul concludes his parting words as he began in 1:2 "grace be with you all." *Grace* serves as the bookends of the Christian life. We begin by the regenerating work of God, we continue by the sanctifying work of God and we will be glorified by God. And a theology of grace should produce a people of grace.

The plain things of the Scripture, the gospel and grace need to be the main things in our churches and lives, and these main things should be the plain things in our churches and lives. Paul, though dead, still speaks through the living Word of God. May his parting words live and bear fruit in us. **B**



Dale Nevilizer is pastor of Tilbury Regular Baptist Church, Tilbury, ON.



Pastor Tim Bayer preaching his first sermon as pastor at Grace Baptist Church.

GRACE BAPTIST CHURCH OF OTTAWA WELCOMES PASTOR TIM BAYER

Since Grace Baptist Church of Ottawa was founded in 2004, our elders have provided spiritual leadership to the church in a non-paid capacity. Our four elders are all either retired or looking forward to retirement. So, in 2021 the elders decided to make it a priority to search for a full-time salaried pastor. It was not until 2025, after much prayer and enquiries that our prayers were about to be answered when we received an application from Tim Bayer, a recent graduate from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He and his family were still living in Louisville, Kentucky, but he was invited to come to Ottawa and preach on August. 14 The congregation was impressed and voted to accept the elders' recommendation to invite Tim to be our full-time pastor. In due course, Tim and his family moved to Ottawa on December. 16, 2025

So, we are delighted and praising God for sending us a full-time pastor! Tim is thirty-five years old. He was raised in Cobourg, Ontario. He has a passion for ministry. His background includes a year-long Bible course in Germany and experience as a ministry intern, events coordinator and youth pastor with a Southern Baptist church in Maryland. He also completed a Christian Ministry degree through Liberty University Online. In 2020 he studied at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and in 2024 completed a

Master of Divinity degree with graduate certificates in Greek and Hebrew exegesis.

Tim and Laura have three young children; his second son being born only very recently on April 14. Tim enjoys reading, spending time with his family (especially in nature), and playing and watching sports. The Bayers are excited to be here, to get to know their new church family, and to see how the Lord works in the coming years. —Kent Boughton



The gospel call to repentance

A change of mind, sorrow and turning from sin **BY ROGER FELLOWS**

From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Matthew 4:17).

Where does the gospel begin? In one sense it begins in eternity—we were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). But in terms of announcing the gospel, note the first words of the book of Mark: "The beginning of the gospel" (Mark 1:1). He then goes on to speak about the ministry of John the Baptist. How did John begin his ministry? With the words: "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). Jesus began his ministry with the same words (Matthew 4:17). It seems then that the gospel had its beginning with a *call to repentance*. We will spend some time considering this. We will consider the importance of repentance, and then the nature of repentance.

The importance of repentance

The fact that Jesus began his preaching with a call to repentance surely shows how important that was and still is. As we saw earlier, John the Baptist began his public ministry with the same words, and when Jesus sent out his disciples to preach, there was no change (Mark 6:12). In the book of Acts, as Peter concludes that notable first sermon after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, he is asked by the crowd, "What shall we do?" and his answer is the same: "Repent" (Acts 2:38). To be honest, we do not find that exhortation in every message preached by the apostles, but we must understand that what is recorded in Acts is only an extract or summary of their preaching. Paul shows how important to him was the truth of repentance:

Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance (Acts 26:19–20).

Clearly this was Paul's usual message wherever he went—not necessarily the

exact words, but that was the essence of his preaching.

So, if Jesus, his disciples, John the Baptist and the apostles after Jesus' resurrection made repentance a vital part of their ministry, it must be important. Sadly, much of today's preaching does not emphasize repentance. It is so often a matter of asking Jesus into your heart, or coming to him. Certainly there is the need to come to Jesus and invite him into the heart, but that can be done without repentance. There is a need to get back to the biblical emphasis of repentance.

The nature of repentance

Repentance is literally a change of mind. However, that definition needs to be both broadened and narrowed. It needs broadening because repentance is not just a matter of the mind, but a *thorough* change, involving the whole being. At the same time, it needs to be narrowed, because it is a change of mind *about sin*. We might change our mind about which clothes we will wear today, but it would not be appropriate to call that repentance.

I suppose most of us don't like change. We get used to doing things the same way. But without change, we cannot become Christians; we cannot go to heaven. We are sinners by nature and practice, and God, being holy, will not allow us into his presence unless sin is dealt with.

1. Repentance involves a change of mind regarding sin

Before, we thought of sin as a normal way of life. We knew we did some things that were bad, but we felt that we did enough good things to balance that out. After all, we were not as bad as the man across the road. We had numerous ways of justifying what we did. But when the Spirit of God began to work in our lives, we saw how vile we were, and how far short we came of what we should be. Now we see sin, not by comparison with other people, but by comparison with God.

2. Repentance involves sorrow for sin (Psalm 38:18)

When we truly consider our sin, we realize that we have influenced many people in sinful ways. How many heartaches have we brought about? How many reputations

have we destroyed? How many have we led into sin? We need to be sorry for our former behaviour, and apologize where possible. But what about our sins against God? Actually every sin against people is also a sin against God, because we have flaunted his laws. David had committed adultery and murder, grievous sins against Bathsheba and Uriah (2 Samuel 11), yet later he says, "against you, you only, have I sinned" (Psalm 51:4). Dreadful as were his sins against those two people, they were as nothing compared to his guilt before the Lord. When we see our sins, in deed, word and thought, we need to be truly sorry for those sins. But there is one step further.

3. Repentance involves turning from sin

I have observed people deeply sorry for their sins, who never actually turned from them. Often, they were concerned about the trouble that their sins had brought upon them, without seeing that their sins were against God himself. Amidst the plagues that came upon Egypt, it seemed on occasions that Pharaoh was sorry for his sins (Exodus 9:27; 10:16), but he was only concerned for the devastation that came upon the land. In the verse quoted above (Acts 26:20), Paul preached that people should repent and turn to God, but also perform deeds in keeping with their repentance. We are not saved by works, but we are saved to do good works (Ephesians 2:10).

Well, we need to ask ourselves, have we truly repented? Have we seen the awfulness, not only of the sins of the person next door, but the awfulness of our own sins? Are we truly sorry for our sins? However, the all-important question is: have we turned from our sins? Have we seen the end of the life that lives for self, and, by contrast, the wonderful blessings that come from a life of commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ, who loved us and gave himself for us on the cross? **B**

 Roger Fellows is a retired pastor and elder at Providence Baptist Church, Burlington, ON.



A BEAUTIFUL BENEDICTION

A TRINITY OF BLESSING—DELVING INTO THE RICHES OF THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THE LOVE OF GOD AND THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.
BY STEPHEN KRING

A benediction is a declaration of blessing from God that is meant to bring comfort and strength to his saints. There are many of them in Scripture. Perhaps one of the most familiar is found in Numbers 6:24–26, “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.”

All of the benedictions found in Scripture are worthy of our meditation, but the

one I would like to direct our attention to is found in 2 Corinthians 13:14. This is how the apostle Paul ends his letter to this beloved, yet troubled church:

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

This deserves special consideration for a number of reasons. First of all, Paul clearly breaks his usual pattern when closing an epistle. All of his other thirteen letters end with some form of “The grace of our Lord

Jesus Christ be with you all.” At first Paul’s letter to the Romans seems to be an exception to this rule. However, even Romans 16:20 still contains the words, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.” Here, however, in 2 Corinthians 13:14, we see an expansion on Paul’s regular ending. This should immediately make us sit up and take note of its fullness.

Secondly, we quickly notice that we are looking at a Trinitarian benediction. This blessing comes from the Lord Jesus Christ, God and the Holy Spirit. As has been often commented, while the word “trinity”

never occurs in the Scripture, the doctrine certainly does. This is one of those texts that emphasizes this amazing truth.

In that respect it is like Matthew 28:19, where the resurrected Jesus commissions his disciples: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” “Name” here is singular. God is One. But that one name includes a plurality of persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So also in our text. The benediction comes from our one God, who blesses us in a three-fold way.

Now, a question for you. Do you notice any features of 2 Corinthians 13:14 that at first may be a bit surprising? Is there anything about this particular Trinitarian arrangement that seems unusual?

What about the absence of “Father” in it? When we speak of the Trinity, we often speak about “the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” But here that is not the case. Where we might expect Paul to say, “the love of the Father,” he says, “the love of God.” Actually, this is not really that unusual. God the Father is often referred to as simply “God” in the New Testament.

Does that mean that the Son is therefore not “God”? Not at all! John 1:1 is crystal clear: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

Let’s elaborate on that a bit. In the New Testament Jesus is often referred to as “Lord.” A good example of this is 1 Corinthians 8:6, which says, “Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.” Is “Lord” somehow less than “God” as a name for Jesus? Not at all!

We are all familiar with Psalm 23:1, “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.” The Hebrew word for LORD there is Yahweh. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament (The Septuagint), they translate LORD with *kurios*, which is exactly the same Greek word used of Jesus a multitude of times in the New Testament. Jesus is LORD! He is the Yahweh of the Old Testament. He is the “I AM”! What an exalted name is his!

Next, does the fact that the Father is called “God” mean that the Holy Spirit is not God? No! When the apostle Peter is dealing with the lies of Ananias and Sapphira he asked, “Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit” and then states, “You have not lied to man but to God” (Acts 5:3–4). Clearly, to lie to the Holy Spirit is to lie to God, because the Holy Spirit is God.

However, when distinguishing between the persons of the Godhead, God the Father is the one who is frequently called “God.” Notice this pattern in 2 Corinthians 1:21–22: “And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.” It is “God,” “Christ” and “Spirit.”

Another example of this pattern is found in Ephesians 4:4–5: “There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.” Here, again, it is the Father who is called “God.” Therefore, when we discover in 2 Corinthians 13:14 that the

The apostle is presenting the order of the persons in the Trinity, not in a systematic theology way, but in the way we, as sinners, experience God’s salvation.

Father is simply referred to as “God,” it should not surprise us. It is the way the Scriptures typically speak about the Father.

Another feature of this beautiful benediction that may seem surprising at first is the *order of the persons of the Trinity*. Our usual way of describing the Trinity is to say, “God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.” But this benediction starts with the Lord Jesus Christ, continues with God (the Father) and ends with the Holy Spirit. Why?

A couple of reasons come to mind. First of all, Paul may be simply starting the same way he does all his other closing wish/prayers in his letters. So, he starts with “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Except this time, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he decides to add to it.

Another reason for this order is that the apostle is presenting the order of the persons in the Trinity, not in a systematic theology way, but in the way we, as sinners, experience God’s salvation.

Think about it. For so many of us, our salvation began with Jesus. And it began when we grasped with amazement the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Earlier in this same letter, Paul points us to that grace, by which we poor sinners have been blessed with spiritual riches beyond our wildest dreams: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

All that Jesus did is so undeserved by us. We see his grace in the incarnation. We see his grace in facing Satan with all his failed attempts to get Jesus to sin. We see his grace in living an absolutely perfect life, from conception to death on the cross. We see his grace in facing the opposition and mockery and cruelty of a sinful world. We especially see his grace as he dies on the cross. His becoming our propitiation is undeserved. His becoming the perfect and final sacrifice for our sins is undeserved. His paying the price for our redemption is undeserved. His becoming our Reconciler and Mediator and Surety is undeserved.

All of this and more is because of the *grace* of our Lord Jesus Christ. For so many of us, this is where our salvation has its starting point. Jesus died for my sins according to the Scriptures!

But then we learned something else. We began to understand that the sacrifice of Christ was something that *proceeded from* “the love of God.” This is the next part of Paul’s benediction. We learned that “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). We came to understand that God’s love was not only a love for the “world” (John 3:16), but it was *personal*. God, in Christ, loved *me* and gave himself for *me* (Galatians 2:20).

This love of God, we learned, was also an *eternal* love. God loved me and chose me to become his holy and blameless adopted child before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4–5)! I was foreknown by him, a truth that includes in it not only knowledge, but also love (Romans 8:29). This love of God is a *faithful* love. He will never cease to love me. Absolutely nothing will ever be able to separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus my Lord (Romans 8:38, 39).

We also discovered, to our humble amazement, that God’s love is a *sovereign* love. I could well have remained a vessel of wrath prepared for destruction, but, instead, he included me in his vessels of mercy, which he prepared beforehand for glory (Romans 9:22–23). *Why me, Lord?* It was simply “to the praise of His glorious grace” (Ephesians 1:6).

The benediction is not yet complete. We experience the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God. What remains is “the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.” One of God’s great goals in our salvation is exactly this: *fellowship*.

First of all, it is to *restore* our fellowship with God himself. This delights the Spirit of God. He creates those bonds of love and communion between us and God. As Paul



reminds us, “you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Romans 8:15–16). Again, the apostle John speaks of that fellowship created by the Spirit when he says, “that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3).

How sweet is this fellowship of the Spirit! No wonder the hymnwriter, Fanny Crosby, penned these words,

O the pure delight of a single hour
that before Thy throne I spend,
When I kneel in prayer and with Thee,
my God,
I commune as friend with friend!

But, secondly, the Holy Spirit is also the *author* of our fellowship with one another within the body of Christ. “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:13). The Spirit’s role in breaking down former dividing walls between sinners is essential. Unity and fellowship would be impossible without his powerful working to bring that about. In Ephesians 4:3 believers are exhorted to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” The Holy Spirit creates the unity. We are called to maintain it. It is amazing to remember that all of those “one another” passages in Scripture are now possible due

to the fellowship created by the Holy Spirit of God!

Now, let’s pause for a moment. Let’s step back and look the big picture. Here, at the end of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, we come face to face with our triune God. Where is it in Scripture that we first see him at work in his triune being?

Is it not in Genesis 1:1–3? “In the beginning God created the heavens and the

This same triune God has accomplished and will bring to perfection an even greater work: a new creation!

earth.... And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said...” We see here God (the Father), the Spirit of God and “God said.” “God said” may not have been understood initially as a reference to God the Son, but John 1:1–3 makes it clear that it is: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.”

It took the united creative activity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit to bring about the first creation. But now this same triune God has accomplished and will bring to perfection an even greater work: a new creation! In 2 Corinthians we are reminded that this is so: “For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in

our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). And again, in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

Just as all three persons of the Trinity were involved the old creation, so, now, all three persons are involved in an even greater creation. From planning, to execution, to application and to consummation in the new heavens and new earth, our salvation is the work of our triune God. No wonder Paul states in another context: “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31). And one day in glory, God will be able to look at all he has made in the new creation and say, “Behold, it is very good!”

The new creation has begun. It already is full of the blessings of God’s grace, God’s love and a God-produced fellowship. May our experience of them all continue to grow until that perfect day!

The psalmist warmly invites us by saying, “Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!” (Psalm 34:8). Dear reader, perhaps you have not yet tasted and seen how good God is! In our text, you have set before you the *grace* of our Lord Jesus Christ, the *love* of God and the *fellowship* of the Holy Spirit! What more could you ask for? All of this can be “with you” for the asking: grace greater than all your sins, the love of God that removes all fear, and close fellowship and communion with God and other true believers. Come, taste and see! Come and dine! All things are ready. Come to the triune God and be amazed at what he freely gives to repentant sinners!

Believing brothers and sisters in Christ, no matter what you are going through right now in your life or in your local church life, here is a beautiful benediction waiting for you to rest your soul in. Looking at your present circumstances can be very discouraging. Problems may abound in your family life, your employment situation or your health. But into your troubled life comes this beautiful benediction from our triune God. May you welcome it today. May you rest in it and be refreshed by it.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all (2 Corinthians 13:14). Amen. **B**

Stephen Kring is senior pastor of Bethesda Baptist Church in Delhi, ON.

IRON SHARPENS IRON

BENJAMIN FRANCIS AND HIS FRIENDSHIP WITH JOSHUA THOMAS

BY MICHAEL A.G. AZAD HAYKIN

In the English-speaking world of the eighteenth century, there appears to have been an outpouring of what Keith Thomas called noteworthy “claims for the life-enhancing value of intimate friendship.” And in the words of George Haggerty, “friendship held a special place in the eighteenth-century imagination.” In many ways, this era—variously called the Age of Reason or the Age of Revival—saw what was tantamount to the emergence of friendship as a central value in Western culture. And pastors were not immune to these cultural forces. For instance, friendship for Samuel Buell (1716–1798), a pastor in East Hampton, Long Island, was “a divine and spiritual relation of minds, an union of souls, a marriage of hearts, and a harmony of designs and affections; and which is usually productive of happiness beyond expression.” Buell was thus confident that:

Friendship is one of the most considerable branches of our felicity.... Life without friendship and society, though attended with the utmost affluence of all other outward comforts, in their rich variety, would be a rayless gloom. Perfect solitude would wither all the glories of Eden, and turn it into a desert, and a palace into a dungeon. Paradise itself appeared in part unblessed, till joyous friendship crowned and consummated its blooming pleasures. Friendship is the bond of bliss in the upper world, where all is harmony, all is love; and in this our world, it affords a sort of life-sustaining power, and virtuous balm, for fainting minds, under over-bearing sorrows, and pours the lustre of day into souls over-clouded with afflictive night.



Benjamin Francis (1734–1799)

On the other side of the Atlantic, the Baptist poetess Anne Steele (1717–1778) similarly described “true friendship” as “the noblest earthly gift / Which heaven on man bestows.” Indeed, Steele affirmed, “Not mines afford a gem of equal worth.” In this article, we look at the way this emphasis on friendship in the eighteenth century impacted two Welsh Baptist pastors, Benjamin Francis (1734–1799) and Joshua Thomas (1719–1797), and how their amity illustrates the truth of Proverbs 27:17: “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” (NIV).

BENJAMIN FRANCIS

Benjamin Francis was in many respects a remarkable individual. He was the youngest son of Enoch Francis (1688–1740), the most respected Welsh Baptist minister of his day. Orphaned at the age of six, the

younger Francis was later convinced that he personally experienced God’s saving grace when he was but a boy. Baptized at Swansea when he was fifteen, Francis began to preach four years later.

His ministry began at a time when far too many English and Welsh Particular (or Calvinistic) Baptist congregations were stymied in their growth by Hyper-Calvinism or insular thinking or just plain apathy. Francis, though, went on to be trained at Bristol Baptist Academy where a vibrant evangelical Calvinism was not only preserved but also actively fostered. Due in part to this training at Bristol, Francis eventually played a significant role in the renewal and revival that came to the Particular Baptists later in the century. As British Baptist historian Raymond Brown has noted with regard to a number of the students who studied at Bristol:

Many of...[the] Bristol students brought an outstanding contribution to the life of the churches in the second half of the eighteenth century. Men like John Ash (1724–79) of Pershore, Benjamin Beddome (1717–95) of Bourton-on-the-Water and Benjamin Francis of Horsley were content to serve their respective churches for between forty and fifty years, pouring their entire working ministry into the pastoral care of rural congregations, faithful biblical preaching, the development of association life, the establishment of new causes and, in each case, the composition or publication of hymns. Their devotional hymnology, passion for associating, and evangelistic initiatives helped to divert many churches from high Calvinism and introduced them to these influences

which were powerfully at work in the Evangelical Revival.

Francis studied in Bristol from 1753 to 1756. When he first arrived in Bristol his knowledge of English was so slight that he could not even return thanks for his food in the language. Bernard Foskett (1685–1758), the principal of the Academy, was of the opinion that Francis should be sent back to Wales because of the language barrier. However, the younger tutor at the school, Hugh Evans (1713–1781), himself a Welshman and who had been converted under the preaching of Enoch Francis, pleaded that Benjamin be allowed to stay. By dint of study Francis eventually obtained a thorough knowledge of English so that he could preach with complete ease in either it or Welsh.

After he graduated, Francis preached for awhile in Chipping Sodbury, Gloucestershire. Eventually, in 1757, he moved to Horsley, where the following year he was ordained at the age of twenty-four. Although the church there consisted of 66 members, most of them were poor artisans and clothworkers and were unable to provide enough financially for his support. Francis once described the circumstances of most of the congregation as being “extremely indigent.” And near the end of his life, he remarked that his congregation was for the most part “poor, plain, and have not had the advantage of literature.” Thus, writes Gwyn Davies, “he was obliged to rear pigs, to grow his own fruit and vegetables, to keep a school, and to venture into the woollen trade (with disastrous financial consequences) in order to make ends meet.”

Alongside these monetary problems, Francis also experienced a long series of domestic trials. In 1765, his first wife and three of their children all died within the space of three months. He married again a year later to an Abigail Wallis. They had ten children, of whom they buried seven! In the midst of these deeply distressing circumstances, Francis drew comfort from the piety that a number of his dying children exhibited. For instance, when one of the children from his second marriage, Hester, was dying at the age of eleven in August, 1790, she told her mother: “My soul is as full of joy as it can contain—the Lord is become my salvation—the gates of heaven are open to me, and I shall soon be there.” Her last words to her father were: “I love you, but I love Christ more.”

Despite these deep trials, Francis proved to be a tireless evangelist, one, we are told, who delighted in “telling poor sinners the



Joshua Thomas (1719–1797)

unsearchable riches of his compassionate Redeemer.” During his time at Horsley, Francis baptized nearly 450 persons who had been converted under his ministry. At the time of his death the number of members in his church was 252. The meeting-house was enlarged three times during Francis’ ministry, so that by the early nineteenth century the church was one of the largest in the English Particular Baptist community. Francis attributed much of the success that attended his preaching to the Sunday prayer meetings the church held at

On only one occasion during these years from 1758 to 1770 was there a noticeable gap in correspondence. That was in 1765 when Francis lost his wife and his three youngest children.

six o’clock in the morning and in the afternoon before the afternoon service. Fifty or sixty came to the Sunday morning prayer meeting, while at the afternoon prayer meeting, the vestry would literally overflow with people.

None of Francis’ sermons appear to have survived. Describing his preaching, Flint emphasized that Francis was always concerned “to declare the whole counsel of God,” even when he preached for other denominational bodies. Firm in expressing his doctrinal convictions, he was also a compassionate preacher, who often openly wept for his hearers. While none of Francis’ sermons are extant, we do have some of his

poems, including a variety of polemical pieces, and a number of elegies, among them ones for John Gill (1697–1771) and George Whitefield (1714–1770). There is also a two-volume collection of his hymns in Welsh entitled *Aleluia*. Only a few of them, though, have ever been translated into English.

“QUERIES AND SOLUTIONS”

In the archives of Bristol Baptist College there is an unpublished manuscript that records a precious friendship, that of Benjamin Francis, and a fellow Welshman Joshua Thomas, who for forty-three years was the pastor of the Baptist cause in Leominster. The manuscript is actually a transcript, drawn up by Thomas, of letters that passed between him and Francis from 1758 to 1770.

The practice of Francis and Thomas appears to have been for one of them to mail two or three queries periodically to the other. Then, some months later the recipient mailed back his answers, together with fresh questions of his own. These answers were commented on, the new questions answered and both the comments and answers mailed back along with new queries, and so forth. All in all, there are sixty-eight questions and answers in two volumes—fifty-eight in the first volume, the remaining ten in Volume II. On only one occasion during these years from 1758 to 1770 was there a noticeable gap in correspondence. That was in 1765 when Francis lost his wife and his three youngest children.

It is noteworthy that at the beginning of the correspondence the two friends sign their letters simply with their names or initials. However, as time passes, their mutual confidence and intimacy deepens, and they begin to write “yours endearingly” or “yours unfeignedly” and even “yours indefatigably” or “yours inexpressibly.” It was in October, 1762, that Thomas first signed himself “your cordial Brother Jonathan,” and in the following February Francis replied with “your most affectionate David.” From this point on this is the way the two friends refer to each other. It is noteworthy that the eighteenth-century world, of which Francis and Thomas were a part, looked upon the friendship of David and Jonathan as the exemplar of true friendship.

The questions and their answers are extremely instructive as to the areas of personal theological interest among mid-eighteenth-century Calvinists. But what we also see in this text is the way that two pastors encouraged one another “as iron

sharpens iron” (Proverbs 27:17). For instance, the question is asked, “When may a Minister conclude that he is influenced and assisted by the Spirit of God in studying and ministering the Word?” Queries are raised about the eternal state of dead

A good number of the queries relate to what we would call “spirituality.”

infants, how best to understand the remarks in Revelation 20 about the millennium, and about whether or not inoculation against that dreaded killer of the eighteenth century, smallpox, was right or wrong.

A good number of the queries relate to what we would call “spirituality.” In 1763, for instance, Francis asked Thomas, “Is private fasting a moral or ceremonial Duty? and consequently is it a duty under the Gospel?” When Thomas sent his response to this question, one of his return queries was, “What are the best means of revival, when a person is flat and dead in his soul?” Other similar questions include the following: “How often should a Christian pray?” “When may a Christian be said to be active and lively in his soul?” “Wherein doth communion and fellowship with God consist?”

“LORD, TEACH ME TO PRAY!”

Let’s look closer at those questions and answers that relate to prayer: “How often should a Christian pray?” To this very vital question posed by Francis, Thomas had an extensive answer. He dealt first with what he called the “ejaculatory kind” of prayer—prayers that arise spontaneously during the course of a day’s activities—and then the prayers offered during times set apart specifically for prayer, what a later generation of Evangelicals would call “the quiet time.” In response to Thomas’ answer, Francis confessed to his friend—whom he called “my Jonathan”:

I wish all our brethren of the tribe of Levi were so free from lukewarmness, on the one hand, and enthusiasm, formality & superstition on the other, as my Jonathan appears to be. I am too barren in all my prayers, but I think mostly so in closet prayer (except at some seasons) which tempts me in some measure to prefer a more constant ejaculatory prayer above a more stately closet prayer, though I am persuaded neither should be neglected. Ejaculatory prayer is generally

warm, free, and pure, though short: but I find closet prayer to be often cold, stiff or artificial, as it were, and mixed with strange impertinences & wanderings of heart. Lord teach me to pray! O that I could perform the duty always, as a duty and a privilege & not as a task and a burden!

In another of Francis’ comments we find the same honesty and humility: “How languid my faith, my hope, my love! how cold and formal am I in secret devotions!” These remarks surely stem from deep-seated convictions about the vital importance of prayer. Francis would undoubtedly have agreed with Thomas’ remark that a believer’s “Great and chief delight, his meat & drink, the life of his life” is his closet prayer and communion with God.

Francis’ transparent remarks also have their root in Francis’ belief that because the Lord had led him to seek Christ at a very young age—and, in his words, “overwhelmed me with joy by a sense of his love”—he should have been more eager to pray out of a sense of gratitude. Instead, he confessed, “A stupid, indolent, sensual or legal temper sadly clogs the wings of my prayers.” Thomas sought to encourage Francis by reminding him that “closet prayer [is like] the smoke on a windy day. When it is very calm the smoke will ascend and resemble an erect pillar, but when windy, as soon as it is out it is scattered to and fro, sometimes ’tis beaten down the chimney again and fills the house. Shall I not thus give over? Satan would have it so, and flesh would have it so, but I should be more earnest in it.”

Francis sought to pray to God twice daily, but he confessed that his difficulties with following a discipline of a set time for prayer stemmed from his being away from his home a lot of the time. He also admitted that he had taken up “an unhappy habit

“A stupid, indolent, sensual or legal temper sadly clogs the wings of my prayers.”

of sleeping in the morning much longer” than he should have. And this cut into valuable time for prayer. He did not try to excuse such failings. How much has changed since Francis’ day—and yet how much remains the same: the same struggle with sin and poor habits that hinder our praying and devotion.

In 1767 Thomas asked his friend, “How may one know whether his Prayers are

answered or not?” Francis gave six brief reasons:

1. By the removal of the evil prayed against, or the reception and enjoyment of the good prayed for.
2. By the peculiar and extraordinary circumstances that may attend the removal of the evil or the reception of the good: as the success of Abraham’s servant, etc.
3. When one does not receive the blessing prayed for, but receives another, perhaps not thought of by him, yet more seasonable, needful & useful.
4. When he is assisted by the Spirit to pray, to pray in faith, and to wrestle with God. His prayer will then be answered, whether he perceives it or no, or whether he lives to see it or no, yea though he does not receive the particular good he prays for.
5. When God meets, that is, revives and relieves him in prayer, that is a speedy way in which God answers the prayer of his People. “I will not remove thy sore affliction, Paul, though thou hast intreated me thrice; but my grace shall be sufficient for thee to bear it.” Thus, God sometimes answers a prayer with a promise, but not the immediate blessing.
6. In general, one may conclude that God answers his prayers, when he is made more holy and resigned to the will of God, and enabled to persevere in all the duties of religion, and to rejoice in the God of his salvation.

The last of these six answers is especially important. It displays the mature realization that *four of the most important things for which we could pray are:*

1. growth in holiness;
2. unreserved commitment to God’s sovereign will over one’s life;
3. perseverance; and
4. a heart of joy in God.

When Francis died in 1799, it is noteworthy that what was remembered by his close friends in regard to his devotion were his “fervent prayers.” What they may not have known was the vital way that Francis’ close and intimate friend, Joshua Thomas, had helped Francis persevere as a man of prayer. And so, iron had sharpened iron. **B**

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CRITICAL THINKING FOR TODAY



BY DANIELLE GIGNAC >>

Inundated with a huge volume of information every day, it has becoming increasingly difficult to assess what we take in. Our intake of news, reading and research, has become primarily through digital devices, which encourage skimming rather than thorough reading. Along with the information we want, they bring almost unavoidable distractions. Checking sources and context takes more effort than most people care to expend. Legitimate news is littered with ads, fake articles and other misinformation, such that it can be difficult to tell which is which. It is therefore as important as ever to develop the skill of critical thinking.

We are instructed in God's Word to be wise, discerning and disciplined. We may be compared to sheep, but the only shepherd we are to follow is Jesus, and we need to distinguish his voice amid the many voices surrounding us. The book of Proverbs has much to say about gaining discernment, such as:

My son, preserve sound judgment and discernment, do not let them out of your sight; they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck. Then you will go on your way in safety, and your foot will not stumble (Proverbs 3:21–23).

The discerning heart seeks knowledge, but the mouth of a fool feeds on folly (Proverbs 15:14).

In order to know what is true, we need to be able to evaluate information in a rational way. Critical thinking helps us to step away from emotional reactions or unconscious biases in order to consider things from various vantage points, assess their validity and balance the response of our head and heart.

It can be difficult for any of us to think critically when presented with something that is either outside our current understanding, or goes against our views. It's easier to dismiss it, rather than assess it. And even when something aligns with our views, we ought to interrogate the accuracy of that as well, to avoid confirmation bias. It does no one any good if we do not take the time to reach an informed conclusion.

Erosion of critical thinking skills

There are countless ways our critical thinking has been eroded in recent decades, but I'll just touch on a few to illustrate the point. Enrollment in the humanities in Canadian universities has declined over at least the past decade, in favour of more specialist courses. This means that general knowledge of cultural history and the development of thought and philosophy through history is being lost. Reading Aristotle or Aquinas, we find that we have many of the same questions today, and that, "Whatever has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9). It is wise to learn the lessons of the past, or we will end up repeating the same mistakes. While specialist courses may be the most direct way to a specific job, their narrow focus cuts off subjects from their broader context. Post-secondary education becomes an information factory in which students are more focused on test scores than on expanding their minds. This in turn results in producing employees who are maximally efficient producers, but who may not have any idea what meaningful work can be. They do not have the ability to consider their tasks in light of the bigger picture, or to take responsibility for the outcomes of their work. It is lack of critical thinking in any number of situations that has led countless people to say, "I was just doing my job." Without individual critical thought, without empathy, we can even go down unthinkable paths. In my own architectural education, one of the first classes we took was a history of the Holocaust. It was architects, after all, who designed the concentration camps, gas chambers and crematorium that killed millions of innocent people. Every decision carries moral weight, if we have the eyes to see it.

It's undeniable that the use of artificial intelligence by the general public has done much in little time to hamper critical thinking. Despite knowing the information it feeds back to us can hardly be relied upon—being scraped from the internet—we often turn off our critical judgement and believe it provides accurate information. After

using AI repeatedly, it is common for people to stop trusting their own thoughts and ability to think, believing that the "other" (i.e., AI) can do it better. Willingness to take risks in thinking or engage in trial and error is diminished, so originality, creativity and confidence suffer, since it is in the difficulty of working through ideas that we gain new perspective. Inherently limiting, AI models are designed to regenerate patterns that already exist, stifling the development of new trajectories. When AI is used to

summarize information, or to write essays or articles, the focus is not on learning, stretching our mind or producing new creative ideas, but on "saving time" or producing the "right" answer. But we must remember that expediency is not an end in itself, and critical

thinking is more about our conclusions being well-considered than simply correct. This can only be learned through real cognitive effort—no machine can do that for us.

Cultivating critical thinking skills

How do we cultivate critical thinking in our culture today? We can start by reading more. Reading not only exercises our ability to focus, but exposes us to new ideas and perspectives, allowing us to be immersed in them for a time, stimulating our thoughts and impressions. We then have to be disciplined in our thinking, as Proverbs teaches us. When presented with information, we can question and reason whether it is consistent with what we know is true, and we can be humble enough to be willing to change our views. This will take effort and practice, but it will enable the conditions for a creative, wise and enjoyable way of life. It allows us to engage with one other meaningfully—as we bring together differing views in conversation, we can come to new conclusions, and more importantly, understand one another better. But of course, these interactions need to be seasoned with love—the essential element to all critical thinking. As 1 Corinthians 13:1–3 reminds us, we may be eloquent, wise or self-sacrificing, but without love, we are nothing. **B**



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CLASSICAL EDUCATION AND THE LACK OF PASTORS



BY OWEN PIKKERT >> It is a well-documented fact that we are producing fewer pastors than we need. Older pastors are retiring, and there is not enough young men to take their place. Unsurprisingly, this crisis—and it is a crisis—has prompted many explanations. One explanation is *demographic*:

despite a few encouraging signs, Christianity is statistically on the decline. Another explanation is *economic*: fewer churches can support a full-time pastor, which in turn discourages young men from pursuing the pastorate as a career. And yet another explanation is *moral*: the alarming rise in certain vices, especially pornography, has taken out many young men who might otherwise consider the pastorate.

I agree with all of these explanations. But I would also add another: the slow and persistent *decline*, measured not over decades but over centuries, in *classical education*. What is classical education? In a nutshell, classical education aims at forming a person, not necessarily at preparing them for a specific job. This formation is largely, though not entirely, intellectual: learning how to read well (grammar), learning how to think well (logic), and learning how to communicate well (rhetoric). The typical means of formation is the study of great books. This is not because the plot line of, say, Homer's *The Odyssey* is particularly important. Rather, it is because grappling with Homer's *The Odyssey* is a great way of developing abilities in reading, thinking, and communicating. To struggle with *The Odyssey* is to grow as a person.

For centuries, many (most?) Protestant pastors received some form of classical education. Usually, this was in childhood and adolescence, well before they went to seminary. Often it was through a school or tutor; sometimes, it was self-taught. The basic rationale was that a classical education was advantageous for training leaders, whether in politics, the arts or the church. Presently, however, many (most?) Protestant pastors have not received any classical education: not in high school, not in university and not in seminary. I am happy to note some local exceptions to the latter: Toronto Baptist Seminary offers a course in the history of western thought, and the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton makes philosophy a mandatory subject for all first-year students. But many seminaries are busy replacing such courses with more “practical” subjects.

With the decline in classical education, prospective pastors have not been seriously taught how to read, think or communicate. Insofar as they have these abilities, they are due either to raw talent (which is rare), to the incidental byproduct of other pursuits or to the mercy of God. But reading, thinking and communicating are useful traits in being a pastor. Lack of space forces me to focus on a single example: preaching. Although there is more to being a pastor than preaching, just as there is more to preaching than simply reading the Bible, thinking about the Bible and

It is foolish to think we can produce preachers, in the numbers we require, without any intentional investment in their ability to read, think and communicate.



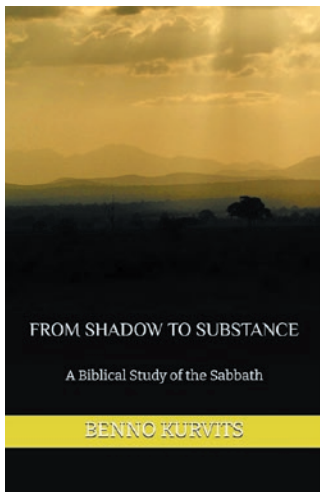
communicating the Bible, good preaching surely includes all three elements. Furthermore, there are indeed preachers, including several of my acquaintance, who, despite lacking any classical education, do an excellent job in all three areas. At the same time, it is foolish to think we can produce satisfactory (much less great) preachers, in the numbers we require, without any intentional investment in their ability to read, think and communicate. We cannot base long-term policies on God's glorious exceptions.

Let us now connect the decline in classical education with the current dearth of pastors. To even consider the pastorate, you must consider the possibility of preaching. Now the thought of preaching, especially if you have never done so, is understandably terrifying. But it is made far more terrifying by the sinking realization, however suppressed, that you simply do not have what it takes. You are not a good reader, you are not a good thinker and you are not a good communicator. Yet, as a preacher, you are expected to do a good job in reading a text, thinking about a text and communicating a text. It's a bit like being thrown onto a soccer pitch, in front of hundreds of people, without having basic cardio. Your ability to bicycle kick will not cover up your inability to run after the ball. Who can blame a young man for avoiding such a prospect, choosing instead to sit in the stands?

I have adopted an urgent tone, for the problem is an urgent one. We need pastors, desperately. And so many contributing factors seem beyond our control. But we can absolutely reverse the decline in classical education. If we can afford it, we can send our kids to classical schools. If we can't afford it, we can at least have movie discussion nights with our kids or kids at the church, where we watch a solid movie and have the kids chew on, and then communicate, its major themes—with enough snacks to make the whole event seem worthwhile to them. Will we be raising up the next Spurgeon? Probably not. But if enough of us do this, will we raise up a generation of young men who are less intimidated by certain crucial aspects of pastoral ministry? Definitely. The classical school near my house is booming. I hope yours is too. **B**

Owen Pikkert is associate pastor of discipleship at West Highland Baptist Church in Hamilton, Ontario.

A QUARTERLY review OF NEW & RECENT books



FROM SHADOW TO SUBSTANCE

A Biblical Study of the Sabbath

BY BENNO KURVITS

Self-published (2026); 332 pgs
ISBN 978-1069444714

Author, teacher, and former pastor, Benno Kurvits, in a humble, gracious and winsome manner, guides us through the controversial and potentially divisive issue of the Sabbath.

Beginning with its origin at Creation and culminating in the redemptive work of Christ, the writer skillfully and scripturally traces out the Sabbath rest theme that is progressively revealed in the Old and New Testaments.

From Shadow to Substance is theologically sound, solid in its exegesis, well organized and written at a level of the average Christian. A real strength of this book is the presentation of the New Testament's teaching on the Sabbath in the Epistles.

Kurvits concludes with ten practical applications for believers as they seek to live out the freedom of the New Covenant and live in fellowship with the people of God.

This book is interesting and informative, edifying and Christ-glorifying. I highly recommend it.

From Shadow to Substance is available on Amazon in two formats: paperback and e-book.

—DON THEOBALD



COME, THOU FOUNT OF EVERY BLESSING

Hymns for Little Ones

BY ROBERT ROBINSON

Harvest Kids (2026); 20 pgs
ISBN 978-0736991872

What a delight it was to come across this board book at a local Christian bookstore, Reformed Book Services in Brantford, Ont. Part of a series—Hymns for Little Ones—designed to introduce classic Christian hymns to young children, this particular one contains the well-known hymn by the Particular Baptist author Robert Robinson (1735–1790). The text contains simply the original hymn. Across eighteen pages, the words of the first stanza are printed alongside illustrations, and then at the end there is the familiar tune, “Nettleton,” and the words of all three stanzas.

I was amazed and pleased to see Robinson's original words, including such archaisms as “Thou” and “Thy,” and even, in the second stanza, his reference to 1 Samuel 7:12, “Here I raise mine Ebenezer.” Besides these words that will need explaining, there are also a number of challenging words for little ones: “melodious,” “flaming,” “interposed,” “constrained” and “fetter.” But what a great opportunity this presents parents: to teach not only the meaning of such words as these but also to acquaint their children with one of the great hymns of our faith and to talk about what it means to be a Christian and the joy that awaits all of God's children. Highly recommended for ages 0–5. —MICHAEL A.G. HAYKIN



KIDS' DEVOTION

Does God hear our prayers?

Do you ever wonder if God hears your prayers? Does it sometimes feel like you are just saying words, but no one is listening?

Grown-ups can feel that way sometimes too. But let's see what the Bible says about that. In Psalm 34:15 and 17, David says:

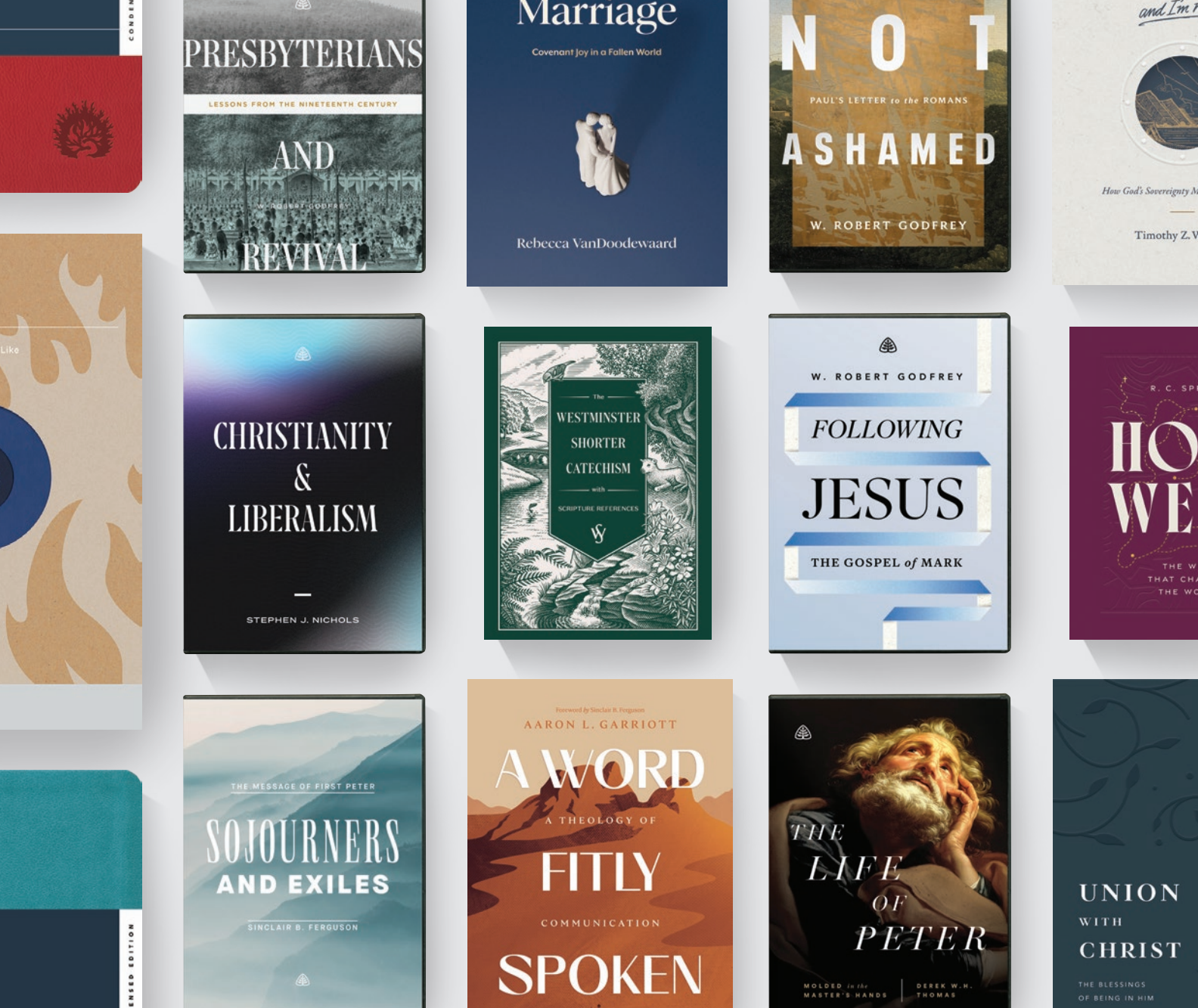
The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous,
and his ears are attentive to their cry
...The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them;
he delivers them from all their troubles.

David is telling us from his own experience, that God sees what is going on in our lives and he hears us. And, amazingly, he doesn't just hear but he is “attentive.” That means he *hears* each specific word, each cry, each request for his help. He is a God who cares deeply for us.

The Lord God is also a God who *acts* on our prayers. As we cry out to him, David says “he delivers them.” God is able to do what is needed to care for us in a way that brings deliverance and relief from our troubles.

Now, we should also note something else. David speaks of “the righteous.” He says God's eyes are on “the righteous” and God hears “the righteous.” What does it mean to be “the righteous”? Well, it is certainly not because we are so great or so perfect! This means someone who has repented and put their trust in the righteousness of Jesus Christ—his perfect life, and his life-giving death on the cross. The Bible tells us that when we trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins, the righteousness of Jesus *is put on us*. Can you believe it? Now, when God the Father looks at us, he sees the perfect life of Jesus. When we pray or cry out to God, God hears because of all that Jesus did. This is what it means to be “the righteous.”

God desires the very best for you, so he doesn't forget about you or ignore you, his eyes are always on you, and he is listening closely for your prayers. —JANICE VAN ECK



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