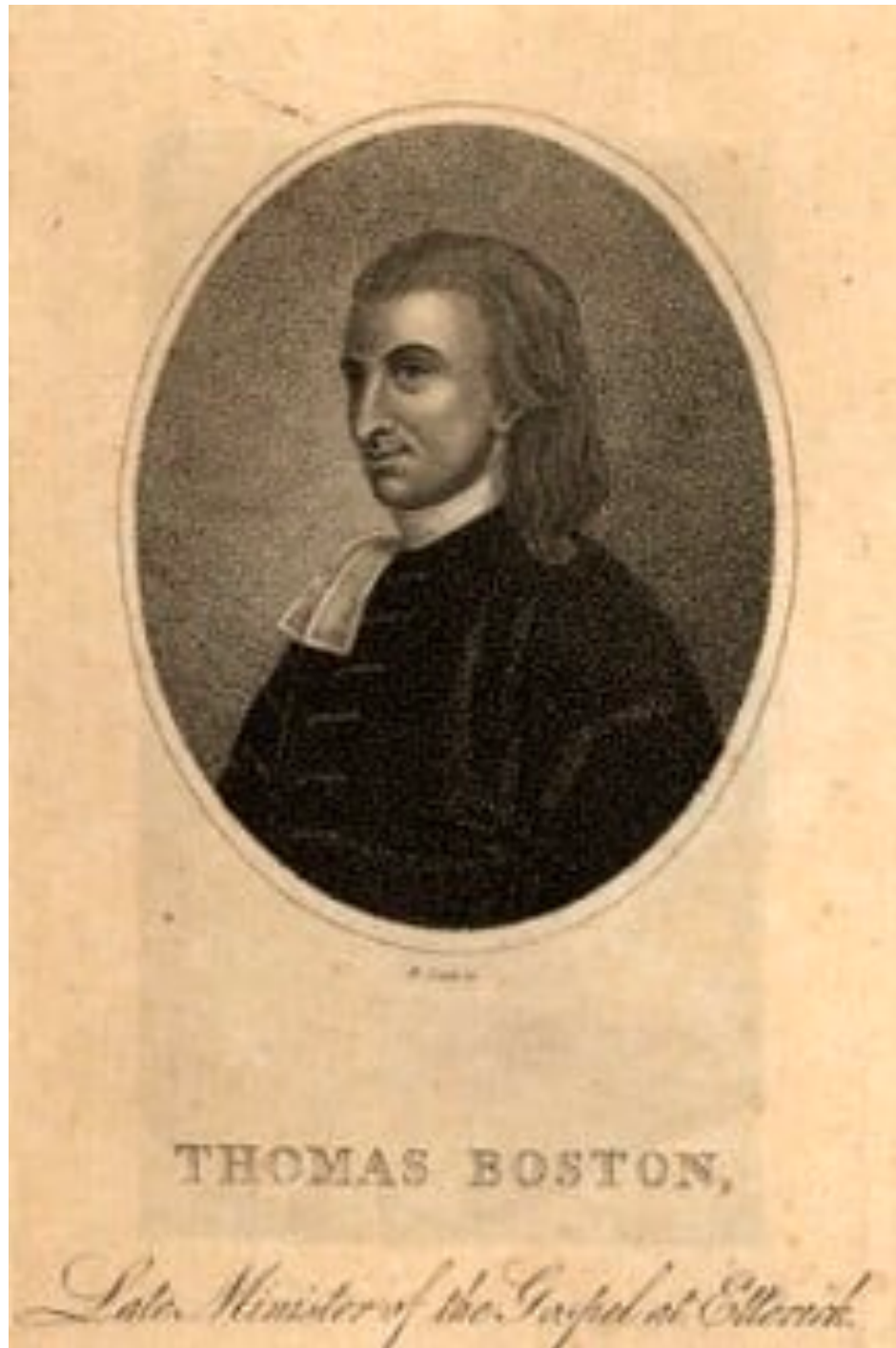


**“Come, everyone
who thirsts, come to
the waters.”**

A short biography on the life of Thomas
Boston (1676-1732)





Thomas Boston the Elder

by Robert Scott, after Unknown artist
stipple engraving, early 19th century
NPG D9311

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INTRODUCTION

After the Scriptures, perhaps the most fruitful ground for spiritual growth is the stories of believers down through the ages. Their troubles, victories, despairs and hope in God for the “better country (Heb. 11:16)” becomes the fibre that God uses to strengthen us in our own day.

Thomas Boston was timid by nature, yet he has left a great impression upon many lives. D.D.F. Macdonald said, “Boston did more to fan the flame of true piety in Scotland than that of any other single than any other single minister in his generation.” Boston’s friend, Ralph Erskine, said that he had a “golden pen.” Another contemporary, Thomas Davidson, said of Boston, “The acquaintance I had with him, and the frequent opportunities I had of hearing him preach, I look upon as one of the greatest privileges with which I was favored in my early days, and which I still reflect on with great pleasure.”

If this is true, then Boston is someone who we should greatly desire to know. We must ask: Why did he leave such a strong impression upon so many godly people? The answer is found in 1 Corinthians 11:1 where the Apostle Paul said, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” God’s design for us to grow in Christlikeness, involves imitating the lives of those closer to Christ than we are. Surely, Boston is such a person. The depth of imprint that he left is a legacy of God within his life.

This booklet is based on Boston’s memoirs, which he compiled in 1730, nearly two years before his death. He divided his memoirs into twelve sections, with each section covering consecutive periods of his life. In this booklet, I plan to devote a short chapter to each of these twelve sections.

We should remember that Thomas and his wife, Katharine, whom he dearly loved, had ten children born to them, however, only six survived infancy. The sorrow, which was their burden to bear, only God knows. Yet, in addressing his memoirs to his remaining children, he said this to them:

I own... but you will find yourselves children of the covenant, devoted unto the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ... therefore I charge... to cleave to this God as your God, all they days of your lives, as being His only, wholly, and for ever...

And now, my dear children, your lot is fallen in a sinning time, beyond the days of my fathers... [But I] beseech you... See the absolute necessity of regeneration, the change of your nature, by union with Jesus Christ the second Adam... Labour for the experience of the power of religion in your own souls... and cleave to the Lord, His way of holiness... If your mother, undoubtedly a daughter of Abraham, shall survive me, let your loss of a father move you to carry the more kindly and affectionately to her...

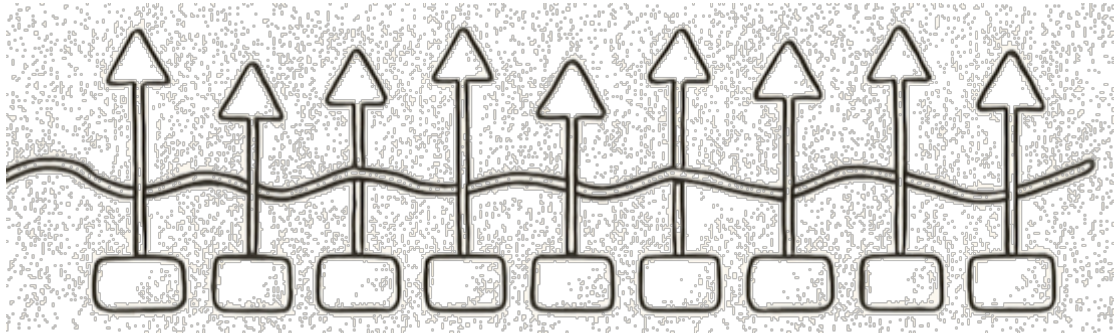
The Lord bless each one of you, and save you, cause His gracious face shine on you, and give you peace; so as we may have a comfortable meeting in the other world!
Farewell.

T. BOSTON

Let Boston's charge and blessing to his children extend to us as well.

God bless,

Graham Barnes



PERIOD 1 – 1676-1689

"I was born of honest parents, of good reputation among their neighbours."

Got good of the gospel

Thomas Boston's father, John, first "got good of the gospel" when he was a youth. He was a cooper by trade and the family lived in Dunse, Scotland, approximately thirty-five miles southeast of Edinburgh. In 1639, nearly forty years before Thomas' birth, the town had been a mustering point for the Covenanting Army opposed to King Charles I.

Thomas was born on 17th March 1676, as the youngest of seven children. His mother's name was Alison Trotter, "a woman prudent and virtuous." Politically, Boston's early years were part of a tumultuous period known as the 'Killing Times' from 1679 to 1688 when the Scottish Covenanters opposed the government forces of King Charles II and James VIII.

In 1680, John Boston was amongst many nonconformists who refused to yield to the established Church under the authority of the monarch, which had mandated worship in a

way that they considered out of step with the Bible. Rather than suffer his conscience, he submitted to imprisonment in Dunse gaol, as well as fines. One of Thomas' earliest memories was spending time in the gaol with his father. Whatever uneasiness or fear he may have felt, the experience impressed on him that one day he too could be imprisoned.

Deliver us from evil

Boston says that as a child he was a, "dexterous player at such games as required art and nimbleness." He was also skilled at mustering and soldier's drills, despite his timorous and reserved natural temperament. By the time he was seven years old, he was reading the Bible.

The Lord Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil (Matt. 6:13)." How often our Heavenly Father has answered that prayer, even whilst we have been unaware, we'll never know this side of heaven. It is enough for us to know that He does answer the prayer.

One time, when Boston was young, he went to a neighbour's house where there was a fortune-teller. However, before he entered the room, the Holy Spirit intervened and, "I was suddenly struck in my mind." It was a moment of decision as he was standing between the doors, before he slipped away without seeing the fortune-teller. Thus, he was saved from a sinful situation.

Absolute need of Christ

From the ages of eight to thirteen years old, Boston went to a grammar school in Dunse. The church at that time was episcopal, having a hierarchy of bishops and a set liturgy. Boston went to punctually to its services, however, spiritually nothing that he heard there had any effect upon him. He was "living without God in the world."

His life was to change when at nearly twelve years old, his father took him to a different church meeting. Preaching that day was Henry Erskine, and God spoke through to Boston with two particular passages. The first was John 1:29 - "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" – and the second was Matthew 3:7 - "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

Boston realised his lost state before God, his "absolute need of Christ" and he was "awaken" by God. With these words, he describes the most supernatural experience that can ever happen to a human being: the new birth. God in His kindness took him from being in dead in old Adam, and made him alive in Christ!

Blackadder water

What difference does this new life in Christ make to a person? Boston saw three ways in which God's transformation was seen within him;

Firstly, he realised that he was a sinner, and in humility he lay his sins before the Lord "that He may not remember them against me."

Secondly, He started to "pray in earnest." Whereas,

previously he had prayed at meal times and bedtime, now his prayer were of a different nature. He was truly seeking God.

Thirdly, he had a hunger to hear God's word preached.

At this time, Boston used to travel four miles to hear Henry Erskine preach. During the summer he often had others share the journey with, but he said that "in the winter, sometimes it was my lot to go alone, without so much as the benefit of a horse to carry me through Blackadder water, the wading whereof in sharp frosty weather I very well remember."

Any difficulties were gladly borne in order to hear God's word truly preached.

Zealous and raw

Boston's zeal for God grew, albeit "I was raw and unexperienced." With hindsight, he also saw "much of a legal disposition and way" within himself, and this was to become something that he would wrestle with later on. Nonetheless, his soul went out after Jesus Christ, "and the place of His feet was glorious in mine eyes."

In those days, the gospel light was dim in the established Church, such that "whenever one turned serious about his soul's state" they left. Boston did the same. He never returned to the established Church in Dunse.

Two friends

New life craves fellowship, and God gave Boston two friends whose hearts “the Lord had also touched.” Together with Thomas Trotter and Patrick Gillies, Boston would pray, read the Scriptures and encourage one another in the Lord. Gillies in particular, came from a home that was “ignorant and carnal to a pitch” of spiritual things, and as Boston observed, this made God’s grace within him shine more brightly.

The Bible is full of the encouragement that godly friendship brings. David and Jonathan shared a deep bond of friendship in the LORD (1 Sam. 20:42). The Apostle Paul left Troas for Macedonia in order to search for Titus (2 Cor. 2:12-13). Spiritually, the friendship of Paul shown in this costly way must have grown Titus tenfold.

Proverbs 27:17, “Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.” It is good to ask God to give us such friendships in the Lord.

Binding the Conscience

Sometimes in our zeal we can naïvely set a snare for ourselves. At this time, Boston made a promise that in hindsight turned out to be a spiritual hindrance to him. His promise was, “To bind myself in diligence in seeking the Lord, and to stir me up thereto. I made a vow, to pray so many times a day.”

As best as he could remember, the vow was to pray at least three times a day for a certain period of time, perhaps several months. But the vow did not help Boston at all: “It was really a hindrance to my devotion.” He found that constrained by the vow, his prayers became “heartless,” and he was

thankful when the time set for the vow ended and he was released from it. Boston concluded that he must not “bind up myself, where God has left me at liberty.”

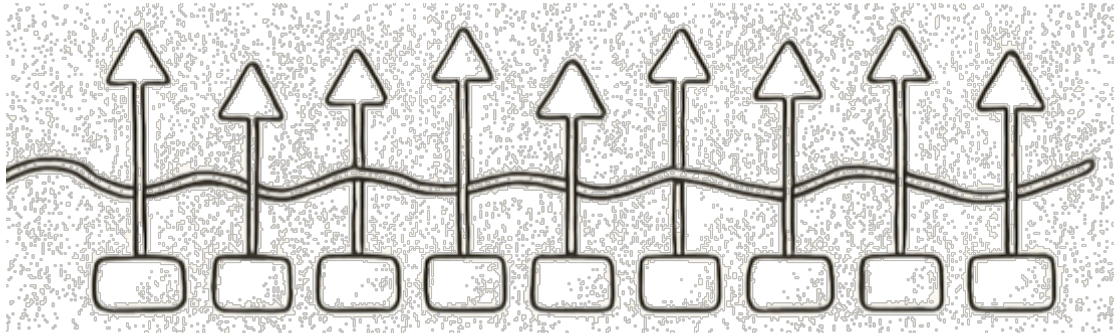
From this, there are some lessons for us to learn;

Firstly, we must fulfil what we have promised. In Daniel 1:8, Daniel would not “defile himself” with the food or wine of the King of Babylon, because of a resolution that he had made. It appears that this was a matter of conscience before God, and God blessed Daniel for it (Dan. 1:9). Boston took seriously the vow that he had made, despite it being unwise. Ecclesiastes 5:4-5 says, “When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.”

Secondly, whilst believers are commanded to pray, we are not told how many times a day we *must* pray. Daniel’s habit was to pray on his knees in his home, whilst facing Jerusalem, three times a day. He refused to break this practice, even when he was threatened and it would have been expedient to do so (Dan. 6:10). In 1 Thessalonians 5:17 we are told to “pray without ceasing.” This is shown in a spirit of continual communion with God. Discipline is good, and we are commanded to learn from the discipline of an athlete, and run with self-control, lest we be disqualified (1 Cor. 9:24-27). And yet, the Devil is crafty and we can be unwise so as to twist God’s good gifts out of shape from their intent. In doing so, we may lay a burden on ourselves.

Thirdly, we ought not to bind the conscience beyond the Scriptures. In 1 Corinthians 10:23, the Apostle Paul appears to be quoting from some who were saying, "All things are lawful." Paul's response to such an attitude was: "but not all things are helpful... not all things build up." We should not bind the conscience of another person, believer or non-believer, where the Scriptures give freedom. In addition, as Boston discovered, it may not be wise to bind our own conscience. It is best to leave the conscience free where God would not bind us. We may think that we are doing ourselves good, when instead we stunt our spiritual growth.

Richard Sibbes (1577-1635) said of avoiding unnecessary rules that the Apostle Paul "was so careful in the cases of conscience not to lay a snare upon a weak conscience... Christ came down from heaven and emptied himself of majesty in tender love to souls. Will we not come down from our high conceits to do any poor soul good? Will man be proud after God has been humble?"



PERIOD 2 – 1689-1694

"here began more remarkably my bearing of the yoke of trial and affliction"

A remarkable change

Boston graduated from the grammar school at the age of thirteen years old. Soon after, the Presbyterian form of church government was re-established in the Church of Scotland.

Sadly, in Dunse people had been living on a starvation diet spiritually, with preaching that was feeble and Christless. However, a fresh day for the gospel now dawned, as Henry Erskine was now able to preach in the church.

Boston said that "the purity of the gospel being new to many" had an impact. Amongst those changed was his mother, Alison, who "lamented her misspent time." He witnessed in her "a remarkable change." After years of dimness where Christ was little known, this was a time of spiritual awakening and renewal.

At a loose end

Despite this new spiritual vigour, Boston's first two years after leaving the grammar school were difficult. Although he had little finances, an opportunity opened for him to go to Edinburgh for further study. However, to his disappointment, this fell through when someone who had promised to recommend Boston to the college, forgot to keep his word, and so he was not accepted.

In many ways, he was now at a loose end, and this put him "to cry to the Lord in prayer." His heart was further weighed down when a local minister fell into adultery, causing many people to scoff "the way of religion." During these low times, Boston would retreat to a favourite place in order to pray in secret. Then, in 1691, when Boston was not yet fifteen years old, his mother died following a short illness. To the best of his knowledge, she was "not above fifty-six years of age."

At the same time, his father lay in the room next to her also close to death. Having to bury his mother and the possibility of also losing his father were heavy knocks for Boston. Yet, his eldest brother, Andrew, spoke wisely to him and "raised me up." In the end, John Boston recovered, and Thomas was comforted.

Stealing and Conscience

Soon after his father's recovery, Boston found work with a local notary, Mr Alexander Cockburn. Without explaining the situation, Boston says that Cockburn ended up owing him money, and whether he could not pay it, or would not pay, Boston was aggrieved. He felt that the situation was not fair.

And so, with telling Cockburn, he took a book that he saw lying in Cockburn's room. The book was a commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, and presumably Boston thought that this would be fair compensation for the money that he thought he was owed.

However, a pricked conscience is not likely to go away until it is dealt with, such is the persistence of the Holy Spirit. Boston says, "I saw my sin the matter, and could no more peaceably enjoy it, though he never paid me; so I restored it secretly, none knowing how it was taken away, nor how returned."

There are some lessons for us to learn here;

Firstly, we must never comfort a person who is unconcerned by their sin and refuses to repent, including ourselves. Ask the Lord that when we stray into sin, to mercifully make it taste so foul that we will see, with horror, our disobedience and be drawn back to Him in repentance.

Secondly, name the specific sin that you are caught in. It is our duty to repent of particular sins, particularly (WCF 15.5).

Thirdly, understand that the Holy Spirit only works in one direction: towards holiness and obedience to God's Word. Where we can, restore, confess and fix the wrong that we have done.

Remember that the promise of Christ Jesus is, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 2:8-9)."

Hand to the plough and not turning back

In late 1691, at the age of fifteen years old, Boston was able, through his father's provision, to attend college in Edinburgh. He lived meagrely, and suffered from fainting fits. Nonetheless, he studied "logics, metaphysics, ethics, and general physics."

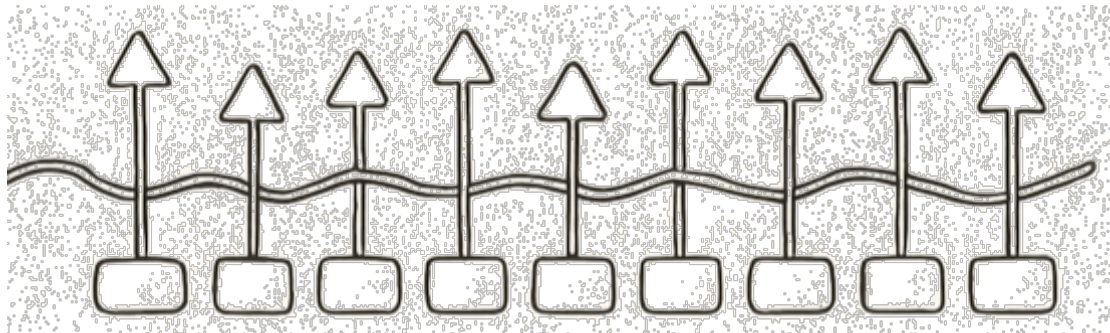
One time, he travelled from Edinburgh to his home in Dunse with a boy of the same age. As it happened, they looked nearly identical to one another. The resemblance was such that Boston himself remarked that they looked like twins. However, sadly their friendship soured as a result of a childish dispute. The other boy looked down upon Boston, and ignored him as he was from a poorer family than he was.

Despite this falling out, Boston never forgot the other boy, because at one point he had considered "the study of divinity." However, "in a little time he gave up with it, went to London, worked in book-keeping and went abroad, I suppose, and died."

In Luke 9:61, a man vowed to Jesus, "I will follow you, Lord." But the obstacle in his heart became clear when he added, "but let me first say farewell to those at my home." He wanted Christ, but on his own terms. Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God (Luke 9:61-62)."

The impression Boston leaves us is that whilst this boy had it easier in life, this proved spiritually dangerous to him. In 1 Timothy 6:10, Paul says, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs." Boston concluded that it was good and necessary for him to struggle as a youth. He now understood that this was God's school of learning for him. When God delays our plans – or brings them to ruin – it is because He is wise and He knows what is best for us.

Boston needed these years of difficulty and uncertainty in order to understand what was truly needful. Romans 5:1-2 says that all who belong to Christ Jesus can rest in the assurance of peace with God. Yet further to this, God's desire for us now is endurance, godly character and hope. The tool that He uses to achieve this is suffering (Rom. 5:3-5). Although this is mysterious, ask the Lord to use your hardships to shape godly character within you.



PERIOD 3 – 1694-1697

"I bless the Lord, who gave me counsel then and afterwards, to seek and value conversation with serious Christians, in the places where my lot was cast."

Taste and see that the LORD is good

This third period of Thomas Boston's life, from when he was eighteen to twenty-one years old, was one of significant spiritual growth. Books – worthwhile books – helped to grow him. His spirit was malleable in the hands of God, and yet often this growth often came about through unpleasant experiences.

In some ways, we only know the taste of good food by comparing it to bitter food. So too, the goodness of God becomes more alive to us when we see the emptiness of life without Him. As the Psalm confesses: "I say to the LORD, "You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you (Psalm 16:2).""

In early 1696, Boston accepted a job to teach at a school in Edinburgh. Here, he was introduced to "Mr B—" who managed the school. Yet, from the beginning Boston noticed

that his behaviour was “grievous and loathsome,” and this left him feeling uneasy.

Boston lived in Mr B-’s home, where he saw the emptiness and harshness of his, and his wife’s, lives – and it helped drive Boston closer to God. He cried out to the Lord to get him out of there, and the Lord did. After a month, he was able to leave in good conscience, albeit against Mr B-’s wishes.

The sweetness of spiritual kin

Psalm 16 also says, “As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight (Psalm 16:3).” It was on the back of this disappointment with Mr. B- that Boston saw the power and goodness of true Christian fellowship.

In particular, he met “an old, exercised, godly woman” named Janet Maclaunie. She left a lasting impression upon Boston. She supported him a modest amount financially, as a sign of Christian love. This caused Boston to say, “I bless the Lord, who gave me counsel then and afterwards, to seek and value conversation with serious Christians, in the places where my lot was cast.”

Although they were decades apart in age, she was able to encourage the younger believer, and he never forgot her generosity. She had given him what he needed at that time – an elderly Christian woman of warm and generous faith. Probably, in the wisdom and providence of God, she never knew the impact that her small gift had upon him.

God truly has made the body, with Christ as the head, to work together so that it “builds itself up in love (Eph. 4:16).”

Whatever our circumstances may be, ask God to be like this godly woman was to Boston. Learn to esteem the local fellowship of believers, as it is Christ's body.

Do not throw your pearls before pigs

Soon after this, Boston was employed as the governor for the nine-year-old grandson of Lady Mersington. The boy's name was Andrew Fletcher. As it turned out, Boston spent little time with the boy - "my business with him was no burden" – and sadly he died only a few years later.

Whilst Boston was employed in this way, he took it upon himself to "seek the spiritual good of the family... and see to their manners." To this end, he "kept up family-worship, catechised the servants, pressed the careless to secret prayer, reproved and warned against sinful practices, and earnestly endeavoured the reformation of the vicious." However, this did not have "the desired effect on some." A few of the servants mocked him and caused him trouble. Mockers love a ringleader, and in this case there was one servant - "an ill-disposed and incorrigible woman" who was particularly belligerent.

Boston bore their mocking quietly, not resorting to quarrelling or arguments. He learnt discipline of tongue, and he later said that this became, "a principle I have all along, in the course of my ministry, aimed to walk by." In this way, he heeded the example of the Lord Jesus: "When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly (1 Pet. 2:23)."

Declare it boldly, as I ought

Boston was employed for over a year as the governor for the young boy. When it came time for him to leave, he was given one last opportunity to speak to the servants. He regarded it his duty not to shrink from the opportunity, but to accept it. Therefore, he prayed earnestly for the right words to say, but he felt abandoned by God at this time of need, and at a loss as to what message to bring to the servants. This caused him much distress and crushed his confidence. He went outside to a field, where again he earnestly sought the Lord's help and guidance. Then, with no time to spare, he was "helped of God" to speak to the servants in a clear way one final time.

Although Boston was not in chains like the Apostle Paul, he had nonetheless learned to pray like Paul: "that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak (Eph. 6:19-20)."

The Lord's Supper

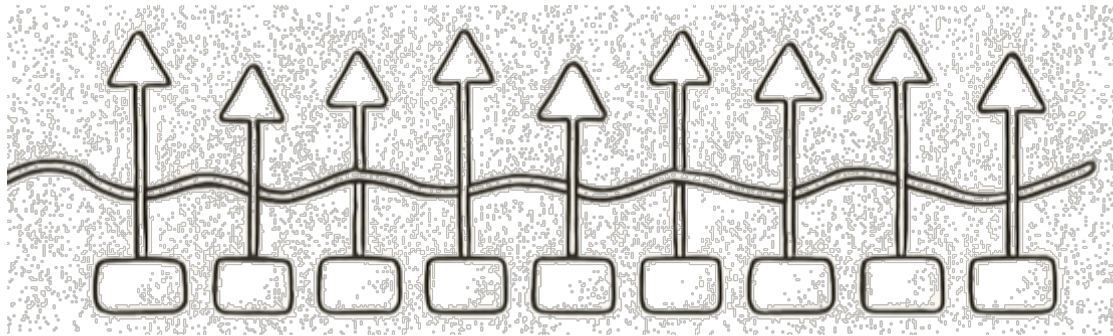
Christ Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, wherein believers spiritually share in the blood and body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16). It is a sign and sealing of His benefits to believers, as well as a mark of the bond that ties all believers together in Christ. Rightly understood, it truly is a thankful celebration. However, one Saturday evening in 1696, Boston decided to miss the Lord's Supper the next day at Culross. In God's mercy, a servant rebuked him, and he realised that his reasons for missing the Supper were wrong.

The next day, having been humbled, he went to “the table,” but struggled with his own unbelief. Yet God was gracious to him, and Boston “met with Him in such measure” that in future dark times, when he was tempted to think that God had abandoned him, the memory of that day at the Lord’s table in Culross helped him.

Our growth in Christ rarely follows a smooth path, and nearly two months later, Boston again went to the Supper, but wavered being unsure whether to partake or not. In the end, he did partake, but afterwards he “came away with that it had been better I had not gone.” His heart was heavy, but again, the Lord graciously strengthened him by showing him his need for Christ and giving him a longing for heaven.

The gift of the Lord’s Supper is for the “spiritual nourishment and growth” of those in Christ (WCF 29.1). It requires that we prepare by self-examination before partaking of the bread and wine, lest we eat and drink judgment upon ourselves (1 Cor. 11:28-29).

In the Supper, we declare the Lord’s death until He comes, and therefore it should only be taken by those who rightly trust in God. May the Lord in His kindness strengthen you the next time that you eat and drink. May His covenant promises, shown in the bread and wine, be precious to you.



PERIOD 4 1697-1698

"they were satisfied, and should have had their Christian right to choose their minister."

Entered on preaching of Christ

Boston was when he was licensed by his local presbytery to preach the gospel. His first sermon was on Psalm 50:22, "Mark this, then, you who forget God, lest I tear you apart, and there be none to deliver!" He was a passionate speaker, and in his own words, he would have "set fire to the devil's nest."

As Boston reflected on his first sermons, there was, by his own admission, something amiss, despite his zeal. It was at this time that another minister, John Dysert, suggested to Boston that if he "entered on preaching of Christ, you would find it very pleasant." Dysert himself was to face opposition to his preaching, and at Coldingham he carried pistols into the pulpit!

Yet, thank God for Dysert's small words of encouragement! Boston said it was, "the first hint given me, by the good hand of my God, towards the doctrine of the gospel."

Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) once cited Bishop Lavington as saying: "We have long been attempting to reform the nation by moral preaching. With what effect! None. On the contrary, we have dexterously preached the people into downright infidelity. We must change our voice; we must preach Christ and him crucified; nothing but the gospel is the power of God unto salvation." In and of itself, the law is powerless to change us. It seems that in Boston's early preaching he had been zealously pressing upon people how they ought to live and what they must do, but with little reference to the new life in Christ.

Christ keeps us from preaching mere morals or therapies. He is the key to salvation and to living. We realise that the purpose of preaching the law to the unregenerate is, ultimately, to lead them to Christ. And the purpose of preaching the law to the regenerate is so that they will become more conformed to the likeness of Christ. In this way, the Bible's commands are never separated from Christ, but come within the context of *who we are, or whose we are*.

The next time Boston preached, he was so nervous that he could not look at the people gathered. In fact, he nearly closed his eyes whilst preaching! If he hoped to receive some encouragement from preaching Christ, then he was disappointed because the opposite happened, as a prominent person within the parish treated Boston with contempt, accusing him of being a "railer," and a follower of Henry Erskine.

Boston could have easily shrunk back under the withering criticism of such an intimidating man. Yet, it only seems to have strengthened him in the truth of God's Word and filled him with greater boldness to proclaim it, as he ought.

Timothy seems to have faced similar opposition. The Apostle Paul had to urge him, "to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control (2 Tim. 1:6-7)." Boston's association with Henry Erskine was meant as a smear on Boston's character and judgment. But we ought always stand on the side of the Lord – and with all who truly belong to Him - and do so without shame.

A man of principle, moulded by God's Word

The Lord Jesus said to His disciples that they were to be as innocent as doves (Matt. 10:16). It is a call to integrity in every part of our lives. Elsewhere, Proverbs 10:9 says, "Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but he who makes his ways crooked will be found out." During this period of Boston's life, the Scriptures were increasingly moulding Boston's character and principles, even when it came at a cost.

At this time, there was a terrible practice of patronage, whereby the local heritors had to give their approval before a local congregation could accept a minister. Such a practice was elitist, and harmed the cause of Christ, as most patrons were hostile or indifferent to true preaching of the gospel. Some churches had what became known as "Laird's

loft” – a private gallery or pew reserved for the landowner and their family. Yet, James 2:1-4 says,

“My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. ² For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, ³ and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, “You sit here in a good place,” while you say to the poor man, “You stand over there,” or, “Sit down at my feet,” ⁴ have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?”

They shall have their Christian right

The ungodly practice of patronage was about to impact upon Boston. Having been licenced to preach the gospel by his Presbytery, it looked like he may settle at the church in Foulden. However, the local lord, Lord Ross, needed to give his approval, and before doing this he requested a meeting with Boston. Boston said, “I would have been content to have been providentially led to have preached in my Lord’s hearing: but to go to him directly on that purpose was what I could never digest... [T]he parish... should have their Christian right to choose their minister.”

In this way, Boston refused to see Lord Ross unless God would make the way possible. In the end, it wasn’t to be and Boston never went to Foulden. He stood by his principles founded on the Bible, over and against convenience or

pragmatics. He did this even when it meant that he had to stay out in the cold.

The Secession Church

The issue of patronage was to become a significant issue in the Church of Scotland in the following decades. The Church had long allowed presbyteries to fill church vacancies, if the vacancy continued for too long. The Presbyteries would do this in consultation with the congregation. Yet in 1732, the General Assembly voted to limit any consultation to heritors and elders, with the congregation severely limited in their rights to call a minister. For Boston and others, this brought dishonour on Christ as the Head of the Church, and it removed the right of God's people to choose their pastor.

The issue continued to be a sore point for many decades, and in 1733, a year after Boston's death, Boston's friend and son of Henry Erskine, Ebenezer Erskine, was rebuked and admonished by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. He had declared that the Church had given "the power of electing ministers... [into] the hands of a set of men who are generally disaffected to the power of godliness, to the doctrine, discipline, worship, and government of this church." He went on to say that such a situation made the sacred privileges of the Church to be "rendered exceeding cheap."

Erskine submitted a protest against the Church's admonition of him, but he was not given the opportunity to speak at the Assembly. Instead, his objections were merely written down and submitted to the Assembly Clerk, where they may have remained unseen, except that they accidentally fell to

the floor and in picking them up someone noticed the explosive nature of his claims. Eventually, Erskine and his supporters were suspended from their ministries. This led to them forming an Associate Presbytery, known as the First Succession, by the end of 1733.

Although the Church made some moves to ensure that a minister was not placed in a parish contrary to the will of a congregation, by 1735, Erskine and three other ministers – there were over a thousand ministers in Scotland at the time – decided to establish their own churches. By 1737, they had fifteen congregations, and by 1740 several more ministers from the Church of Scotland had left and joined the Succession Church.

John Wilison (1680-1750), who stayed within the Church of Scotland and was minister at Dundee, said in 1744, “It is well known that the church of Scotland hath ever since her reformation remonstrated against patronages, and asserts in her 2nd book of Discipline, chap. 12... *the intruding of persons this way into churches, hath no ground in the word of God, but is contrary thereto... Patronages are neither agreeable to the rules of God’s word, nor to the apostolical practice: seeing it is evident from the word, that it was only the church herself, with her officers, that exercised the power of nominating and electing ministers and officers to the church, according to the authority derived to them from Christ their Head and Founder.*”

Although the Succession Church grew in the decades following her split from the established Church, it also suffered from narrow-mindedness in regards to gospel preaching. It refused to cooperate with George Whitefield when he came to Scotland in 1741, because Whitefield would not break off

working with the established Church. Within a few decades the Secession Church itself had splintered into more groups. In regards to patronage, it would continue to be a problem in the Church of Scotland until 1874, when the Church Patronage (Scotland) Act was passed, which declared that, "the right of electing and appointing ministers to vacant churches and parishes in Scotland is hereby declared to be vested in the congregations."

Grief over pastors of ungodly character

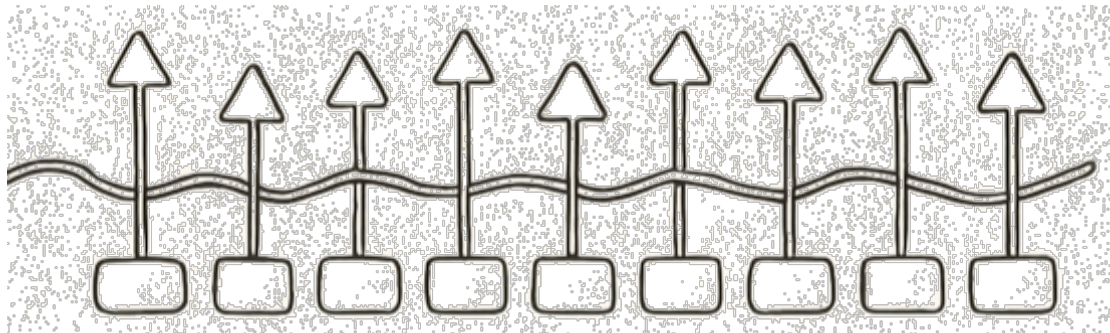
For Boston, however, there were further disappointments when the church at Abbay also did not call him. Boston had grown to love the believers of Abbay. Instead, the call looked like going to a minister who happened to be the Laird of Abbay – and who had the right social connections. To compound Boston's grief, this man was, in Boston's opinion, "weak and untender" and accused of drunkenness. Once again, to the grievance of many local people, the congregation were denied their right to call a pastor of their choosing to shepherd them in God's Word.

In the end, it was a third minister, Mr George Home, who was called, but the whole situation reeked of the problems of patronage and unbiblical warrant.

There are two offices in the Bible that are regulated: overseer and deacon. God's Word gives clear qualifications for those who are to be overseers. 1 Timothy 3:1-7, lists amongst other things, that an overseer must be, "above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not

violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.” They are to serve as under-shepherds of Christ Jesus, the chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4). This means humbly serving, following the example of Christ Jesus, the servant-King (Mark 10:41-45).

Pray for the ministers and elders of your church to be, as Paul says he was, like “a nursing mother taking care of her own children (1 Thess. 2:7).”



PERIOD 5 – 1698-1699

"On the 18th I went to God, and begged... [that] I might be helped to live by faith, above the world... My soul went out in love to Christ, followed hard after Him, and I saw much content, delight, and sweet in Him."

Learning contentment

By May 1698, Boston had moved to Ferrytown, near Edinburgh, where he lodged with Thomas Brown and his family. Boston was now twenty-two years old and the words of Paul to Timothy ought to be taken to heart: "Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity (1 Tim. 4:12)." Age is no barrier to knowing and honouring God.

Again, Boston needed to learn to deal with disappointment in a godly way. The presbytery under whose jurisdiction he came, denied his request to transfer to a neighbouring presbytery and "their refusal I did not take well."

Overall, this period of Boston's life was unsettled. He was invited to preach at several different congregations, some with

a view to calling him as their minister. On each occasion, Boston weighed his own motives and sought contentment with his lot. He said that the Lord Jesus' words to His disciples in Luke 10:7, warning them not to go not from house to house, "had weight with me."

Six Observations of a Christ-wrought soul

It was during this time that Boston, in preparing to celebrate the Lord's Supper at Larbert, recorded six observations about himself. He said;

- 1) I desire Christ without exception of any sin... I am content to part with all sin, and take Christ, to follow Him in His strength...
- 2) I desire union and communion with Christ...
- 3) I desire a whole Christ...
- 4) I esteem Christ above all: Give me Christ, and take from me what thou wilt.
- 5) Sin is a burden to me...
- 6) I endeavor, in some measure, to seek after Christ: Lord, Thou knowest. Therefore I have true faith.

In this, we see evidence of a Christ-wrought soul. The Heidelberg Catechism (1563), question 1, asks: "What is your only comfort in life and in death?" The answer: "That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Saviour, Jesus Christ." Then, having spoken of the way in which He brings salvation, it says that Christ, by His Holy Spirit, "makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him."

Similarly, the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), speaks of those God has given a new heart to, as going on to grow in sanctification by Christ's Word and Spirit living within. It is impossible for someone having been made new in Christ, to be the same as they were before. New life produces new fruit, such that, "the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified; and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord (WCF 13.1)." In this way, the "old man" is to be put off, and the "new man," shaped after the likeness of God, is to be put on (Eph. 4:22-24).

Katharine Brown

It is during this period of Boston's life that we first hear about a young lady named Katharine Brown. She was the sister of Thomas Brown, with whom he boarded at Ferrytown. Boston and Katharine were to marry nearly two years later.

In fact, Boston had first met Katharine a year earlier – he even recalled the exact date; 3rd March 1697 – and he said of her, "from the first time that I saw her... something struck with me." He was taken by Katharine's piety, beauty and "cheerful disposition" which fitted with his personality. Yet, he was unwilling for them to be married, until he could provide for her.

As it happened, on 3rd June, Boston was struck down with illness, being "particularly subject to faintings," and he fainted while Katharine was present. Katharine's father had been a "practitioner in physic," and so she suggested that he use boiled wormwood pressed against his stomach to help with his

ailments. This, Boston says, helped him. Yet, in the coming years, poor health was to plague both of their lives. At one point Boston was advised to cut his hair off for health reasons. He wore a wig for a while, until he found it too bothersome, and so regrew his hair.

One regret Boston had was not laying before the Lord his future with Katharine, but instead taking things in his own hand. By the end of 1698, Katharine, who had given a “favourable answer to my proposal,” was troubled that Boston was “not enough deliberate” concerning their future marriage. Boston admits that he was in the wrong, and regretted his lack of thoughtfulness.

A day in the life of Boston

In this section of Boston’s memoirs, he includes several daily entries. It seems as though, from time to time throughout his life, he had attempted to keep a journal. In one entry, 1st January 1699, he said,

I had more than an ordinary measure of God’s presence and help in preaching. In the morning in secret I was earnest with God for it, but had a temptation to think that God would leave me... [and] when I was coming home... Satan fell... again... tempting me to pride... It came three times... [but I repelled him by thinking] “What hast thou that thou hast not received?”

There is a spiritual lesson to be learned here: Temptation is usually never overcome but once. Instead, it must be resisted again and again, because our old Adam within us can be strong. As well as this, the Devil does not easily give us up to

the new life in Christ. Even the Lord Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane did not pray once to the Father, but three times, during His hour of temptation (Matt. 26:44). Yet, like a muscle, the more God's grace and strength helps us to overcome specific temptations, the more they lose their power over us.

Intruding thoughts

Another diary entry, later that same month on 21st January 1699, saw Boston begin the day by meditating on Jeremiah 31:3, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you." Boston recalled, "My soul grasped at it" and the verse stayed with him, even after breakfast. He thought that the Lord was "drawing me to Himself by the gospel in a loving way" as an evidence and token of His love.

But then later that day, Boston had a very troubling experience. He said, "My heart began to wander (I think, falling asleep); and I said in my heart the words of a curse against myself used by rude ungodly people. They came like a flash of lightning, and immediately made my very heart to leap for dread."

Every Christian will experience something similar. Suddenly, a sinful thought can burst into your mind, and you didn't want it – you hate it, in fact – but, it has come in nonetheless. It rattles us when this happens, and we will wonder where such wicked thoughts come from.

At such distressing times it good to understand that intrusive thoughts are different to *willful* thoughts. Both show the sinfulness of our nature, but willful sin is a more serious

matter, because it is a thought that we have encouraged. Yet, unwanted sinful thoughts must also be fought against. As soon as you realise that they are there, put them out of your mind immediately. Learn to pray, "Heavenly Father, please lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil. Rescue me from intrusive, evil thoughts." May God then, answer that prayer, even little by little. Above all, remember that God's love for us is unbreakable in Christ Jesus. Unwanted, intrusive thoughts cannot steal His love away from us. In the words of the hymn,

When Satan tempts me to despair
And tells me of the guilt within
Upward I look and see Him there
Who made an end to all my sin.

- Charitie Less Smith (1841-1923)

The Art of Man-Fishing

Boston had only recently begun to preach God's Word, and yet he wrote a soliloquy ("speaking one's thoughts aloud") called *The art of Man-Fishing*. He thought that it was "scribble" – and he said that it is unfinished, although what was lacking is unclear. It was not published until forty years after his death, but it has become a well-loved and helpful book. It is based on the Lord Jesus' words to Peter and Andrew, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men (Matt. 4:19)." Boston's desire was "to know how I might follow Christ, so as to become a fisher of men." There is much that aims at the heart of the preacher himself.

Boston begins with this confession,

"I am called out to preach this everlasting gospel, it is my duty to endeavor, and it is my desire to be (Lord, thou knowest) a fisher of men. But, alas! I may come in with my complaints to my Lord, that I have toiled in some measure, but caught nothing, for any thing I know, as to the conversion of any one soul. I fear I may say, I have almost spent my strength in vain, and my labour for nought... why does my preaching so little good?"

He answers the question by admitting his own weakness and failure, whilst still earnestly desiring to be led by the Lord in becoming a fisher of men. Amongst the points that he sets out are;

- **Christ does the catching.** He achieves this "by the power of his Spirit accompanying the word they preach, and the discipline they administer." Therefore, gifting is not enough – "A man may preach as an angel, and yet be useless. If Christ withdraw his presence, all will be to no purpose." The power of Christ is such that we should not despair of the conversion of any person, "be they ever so profligate... many times the wind of God's Spirit in the word lays the tall cedars in sin down upon the ground."
- **The gospel is the only net by which to catch souls.** The net is spread widely, and "God excludes none from the benefits of the gospel that will not exclude themselves, it is free to all."
- **Some people may come close to the Kingdom, but are not within it.** In this way, just "as fish sometimes come near and touch the net, and yet draw back; so many souls are somewhat affected at the hearing

of the gospel, and yet remain in the gall of bitterness, and the bond of iniquity." This is discouraging, but it should not surprise us that when we see "some affected in the time of preaching; and yet when they are away again, all is worn off."

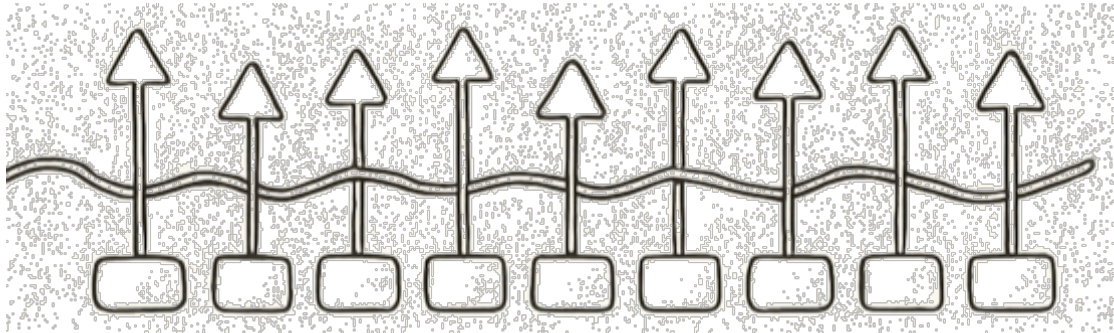
- **The fisher must keep going.** "Fishers may toil long, and yet catch nothing; but they do not therefore lay aside their work."
- **A fisher must follow Christ, which presupposes life.** As "a dead man cannot follow any person; a dead preacher cannot follow Christ; there must be a principle of life, spiritual life in him, or else he is nought."
- **The Lord's call to preach His gospel involves both an extraordinary and an ordinary call.** The ordinary call is made up of four parts: Knowledge of Christian doctrine above that of ordinary Christians, aptness to teach, a willingness to take on the work of preaching, and the call of the church.
- **Following the example of Christ, we must be much in prayer before and after preaching.** "Be busy with God in prayer, when thou art thinking on dealing with the souls of men. Let thy sermons be sermons of many prayers."
- **The fisher must never shrink back from the truth, and "beware of preaching smoothly" in order to impress people.** Christ must be in all: "Be edifying in

thy private converse. When thou art at any time in company, let something that smells of heaven drop from thy lips."

Always Boston draws us to Christ as the Great Fisher: "Christ wept, because people in their day did not know, i.e. do, the things that belonged to their peace... When he thought upon this their stupidity, it made the tears trickle down his precious cheeks."

Some fruit

By the close of this period of Boston's life, there was evidence that his preaching had been fruitful in the Lord's service. He heard from several people that the "Lord had made the word in my mouth to reach their own case, and to be a discernor of the thoughts of their hearts." It was enough encouragement to keep him going. Yet, by mid May of 1699, following a moving farewell with the believers that he had come to know, he returned, led by the Lord, albeit somewhat reluctantly, to his hometown of Dunse.



PERIOD 6 – 1699

"The bent of my heart to preach Christ continued all along... as I had opportunity: but for a considerable time I met with many rubs in my way."

Feeling useless

The sixth period of Boston's life covers the year of 1699. Boston was twenty-three years old and he had returned to his hometown of Dunse, having been called there by his family for a family matter that he does not elaborate on. For the first month, he did not go more than a mile from home, and he soon had a heavy feeling of uselessness. He begged God for "an opportunity serve Him, whatever pains it should cost me to accomplish it."

Sometimes, God in His providence would have us stay in a situation that we do not wish to be in. Yet, trusting Him, we are to serve Him in that station. Learn to serve God where you are today and not where you wish you were. Boston was able to preach at his local congregation at Dunse and also Langton.

It grieved Boston, who had been away from his hometown for some time, to see that most of his friends had no true

knowledge of Christ. Yet, his eldest brother Andrew, was truly an elder brother in the Lord to him. Andrew was wise, had true “experience in religion.” He often refreshed Boston.

A call from Simprin and tearing up the letter

Later that year, Boston’s situation changed when he was asked by a church to be their pastor. The place was the small village of Simprin, nearly fifty miles southeast of Edinburgh. Although it was not a smooth process, Boston was to pastor God’s people in that small community for eight precious years.

The idea of settling in Simprin was first proposed in May 1699. Boston was in a position to be able to support himself, in part, because his father gave “his interest in Dunse to him.” Then, in early June 1699, a letter was written suggesting that he would be a suitable minister for Simprin, but it was first given to Boston to approve of, before he was to send it on to the elders at Simprin. Boston, however, tore the letter to pieces. He did not wish to be seen as putting forward his case. If God was to settle him in Simprin, then it would be through His providence, and not through any pushing on Boston’s part.

Using the Lord’s Day evening well

Preaching God’s Word is no security against Satan’s attack, but on the contrary, it may open up a new avenue for the enemy to attack. Boston had a tender conscience, and he knew great spiritual highs, but he also felt the depths of his indifference, sin and unbelief more sharply than most believers.

So it was that he, to his horror, realised that three times he had preached against certain sins, and then himself fell into them! The first was laziness, which “quickly after I fell into this.” The second was unwatchfulness” and that same night “my heart fell a-roving.” The third was contentment, “and immediately after this, dissatisfaction seized me.”

Having realised “Satan has overcome me,” Boston said, “I resolved, in the Lord’s strength, from henceforth” to make his morning’s sermons the subject of his meditations each Lord’s Day evening. In this way, he would close the day by thinking about whatever he had fed his congregation earlier in the day.

Follow Boston’s example by making the most of God’s Word to us each Lord’s Day evening.

Insufficient, yet in bonds to preach

Boston admitted, “the bent of my heart to preach Christ continued all along... but for a considerable time I met with many rubs in my way.” One of these difficulties was that he felt spiritually dry for a time, especially in his preaching. He was asked to preach the week-day sermon by Mr Colden, but he admitted, “that preaching was become another kind of a task to me, than sometime it had been; that I was discouraged... arguing my ignorance of Christ... that my very body was affect, and my legs began to tremble beneath me.” A friend said that it was a temptation to drive Boston from preaching.

When Boston went home he was “very sorrowful” but “looking upward,” he saw “the emptiness of all things besides Christ, or without Him. The Lord was pleased to lay bands on my unstable heart... and He let me see my need of Christ.”

Soon after, Boston preached again and “was pressed with a sense of my insufficiency for that work.” Yet, for all this the Lord did not crush Boston. He gave him a growing desire to desire to know Christ, which flowed through to his preaching as he sought “to drive people out of themselves to Christ.” A preacher must never feel that they are equal to their work, and yet he had to speak God’s Word.

In some ways, Boston was experiencing to a lesser extent what Jeremiah experienced. Jeremiah’s complaint to God was that He had deceived him into proclaiming His Word (Jer. 20:7). People mocked him for his message. And yet, Jeremiah could not forsake his calling, and in fact, God’s Word was like a burning fire within Jeremiah’s heart and bones, and he could not hold it any more (Jer. 20:9).

In 2 Timothy 4:2, Paul tells Timothy to be ready in and out of season to preach God’s Word. Do not step back from the coalface. We are be always abounding in the work of the Lord, for our labour is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58).

Love for Christ and Heart-monsters

Boston’s spiritual highs and lows continued. Sometimes he soared: “I found my heart in prayer much going out in love to Christ; my heart was knit to Him as the dearly beloved of my soul; which made me to express my love to Christ, not in an ordinary way, as I use to do.” Yet, other times he sunk: “My heart-monsters, pride, worldly-mindedness, discontent, etc., stared me in the face, and my poor heart was overwhelmed with sorrow.”

There is nothing sweeter than the assurance of God's love for us in Christ Jesus, and knowing His comfort, yet why can it also be so difficult? The answer is found in a vision of God's holiness and our sinfulness.

Whilst ever we are in the dark, the grubbiness of our sin remains mostly hidden and seems insignificant to us. But in the bright sunshine, our sin is painfully seen for the hideous wickedness that it is. So it is with the heart drawn near to God. The closer we draw to the radiance of God's holiness, the more our sin is exposed. When Peter came close to Christ Jesus his sin was exposed, and he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord (Luke 5:8)." Yet, Jesus answered Peter, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men (Luke 5:8-10)." Peter was forgiven, changed and followed Christ.

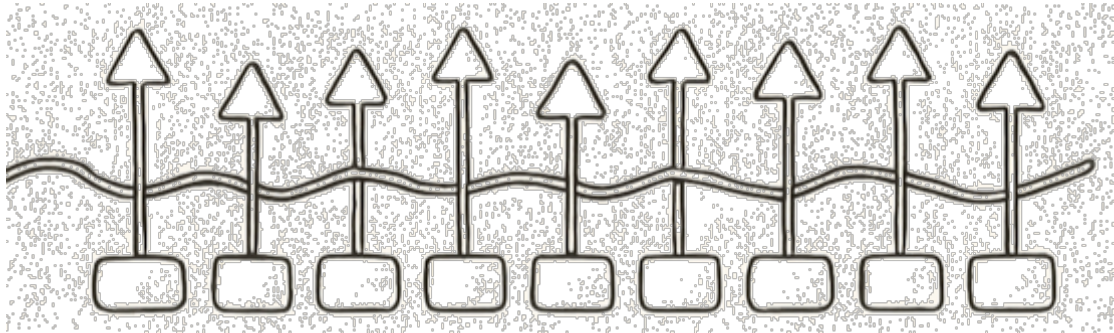
The call to Simprin

By July 1699, Boston had been asked to preach at Simprin. He must have remembered the letter, recommending him as their pastor, which he had torn up. The elders showed their eagerness to call Boston, but others discouraged him from settling at Simprin, as it was so small a community that they thought that he would have limited opportunities to serve God.

Boston recalls that Simprin's population at the time was eighty-eight adults. He said, "some think me happy because I have so few people, and these not unruly; some think otherwise, because of the meanness of the post and stipend." Part of his stipend was to be paid in grain.

For Boston, knowing God's call was necessary for standing against the discouragements that would surely come. Additionally, he reasoned, how would he be a benefit to the people of Simprin if God had not called him? How too, would he answer God? Yet, Boston saw God's hand providentially leading him to accept the call to Simprin, and he rested his heart: "My soul is well satisfied."

By September 1699, Boston was ordained, with the sermon preached at his ordination being on Acts 20:24, "But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God." He knew that God had given that verse especially for him. He received the right hand of fellowship from the ministers and elders who were there. No heritor was present.



PERIOD 7 1699-1700

"sinners... within or without the visible Church, have a real right to Christ..."

A disagreement over baptism

Not long after Boston had settled in Simprin, he visited a friend, Rev. George Mair at Culross. Boston held Mair in high regard and Mair would later marry Boston and Katharine. Despite this, Boston disagreed with him over baptism and the right of sinners to call on Christ. He explained it this way,

Mr. Mair taught, that all members of the visible Church have a general right to Christ, and the benefits of the covenant; and that baptism seals absolutely, that is, as I afterwards understood, that baptism seals that right to them all.

For Mair, the promises of the gospel were open to those who had been baptised, and so within the bounds of the visible church. However, he made no provision for salvation to those who were outside the visible church, having never been baptised.

Boston disagreed with his friend, saying, "But now I believe, that sinners of mankind indefinitely, within or without the visible Church, have a real right to Christ, and the benefits of the covenant, so as they may warrantably take possession thereof by faith."

Boston understood that the gospel call goes to all people, including those who have never belonged to a church. The prayer is that they would believe in Christ and lay claim to God's promises, including salvation. He stopped short of saying that that baptism was a necessary to seal, saying, "I could never be satisfied as to baptism's sealing of" God's covenant promises.

Later, Boston wrote more about this, including a short treatise, entitled *The Number of Sacraments, and The Nature of Baptism*. In it he explained that the purpose of baptism was "to signify and seal" to the person being baptised the "saving privileges and benefits for his eternal salvation," although he recognised that this is "not effectual to all" who are baptised.

What is it, then, that baptism points to? That is, what does the outward sign of water, signify and seal? Amongst those listed by Boston are;

- In-grafting into Christ, or union with him.
- Remission of sins by virtue of the blood of Christ.
- Adoption into the family of God.
- Regeneration by the Spirit of Christ.
- Resurrection unto life eternal.

Boston also encouraged people to, "Improve your baptism agreeable to the nature of it." The way to do this is by asking ourselves, "Into what was I baptised?" This is a lifelong

endeavor, and every baptism we witness should spur us on to growth in the Lord. According to Boston, improving our baptism will grow us in six ways;

- Thankfulness to God for His covenant promises,
- Strength against temptation by remembering that we are the Lord's,
- Humility under sin or trouble,
- Faith and confidence in Jesus Christ,
- Holiness, as we now have newness of life,
- Love, especially for other believers.

When you look back over your life since you were baptised, in what ways have you improved your baptism?

An elder brother

On several occasions Boston mentions his eldest brother, Andrew, as someone who gave wise, spiritual counsel to him. He encouraged Boston in the things of Christ Jesus and held a genuine concern for his welfare. During this period, Boston received a letter from Katharine to whom he was now engaged to marry. However, something undisclosed in her letter unsettled him. Boston shared it with Andrew, saying, "he was useful to me, encouraging me to trust in God, before whom I laid the case."

Proverbs 17:17 says, "A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity." True friends are faithful through thick and thin. In times of adversity, a brother steps up to help. Paul's description of Timothy is positive: "I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare (Phil.

2:20).” He had a sincere desire for goodwill towards other believers.

Boston’s brother, Andrew, did not offer him vain opinions or worldly advice when Boston went to him with his problems. Wise counsel that is true funnels the listener closer to God.

Visiting from house to house

The bible gives us an insight into how the Apostle Paul ministered God’s Word in various places. Whilst he was in Ephesus, Paul said, “I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house (Acts 20:20).”

Boston’s practice as a pastor was to visit each family in his parish twice a year. He gives us an insight into his method for such visits. Generally, he followed the following steps,

First, he would share with them of a point from his preaching of God’s Word the previous week. In doing so, he would exhort them to see their natural state of sin, and their need of Christ.

Second, he would encourage them to secret prayer, family-worship, and to faithfully fulfill whatever duties they had in life.

Third, he would pray with them, and if possible, have the head of household pray too.

Often these visits were spiritually a heavy load for Boston. He described one visit by saying; “I went and visited some

families with little satisfaction... it lay heavy on my spirit, having withal a sense of my utter insufficiency for that piece of work. I found it hard, yea, without a supernatural power impossible to bring people to a sense of their need of Christ."

Once at Ferrytown he says, "I was called to visit a sick man, whom I knew to have been a very profligate person, but found stored with a great deal of ill-grounded confidence. I applied myself to bring him to a sense of his sin and danger; but saw no success thereof." The warning is clear: all kinds of people may deceive themselves with false hopes and presumptions of being right with God. May we not be so deceived!

Yet, those that truly believe in the Lord Jesus and love Him in sincerity and good conscience may be "certainly assured that they are in the state of grace, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, which hope shall never make them ashamed (WCF 18.1)."

Battling the flesh and growing in assurance

At times, Boston had doubts of his own. Once, he was irritated to find that some furniture that he had acquired was not what he had wanted. In addition to that, someone upset him by their behaviour towards him. He brought the matter before the Lord, but the next day, a Lord's Day, his thoughts ran away from him "without bounds." He struggled to reign in his sinful thoughts and upset feelings.

After he had led God's people in worship and preached on humanity's ignorance to our sinful standing before God, he said, "My heart was discouraged... [I] said, "Why art thou cast

down, O my soul? It was answered, Because I have not assurance of God's love. I thought I had the testimony of conscience, but can never get the testimony of the Spirit to put me quite out of doubt."

He immediately "went to prayer" and he was grateful to be relieved of his doubts. Humbled before the Lord, he was sorry for his unbelieving heart. In addition, he pleaded the promises of God, in particular John 14:21, "he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." And yet, that promise only raised another doubt in his mind: What if his love for Christ was not a true or right love? And how would he know if Christ had shown Himself to him or not?

Boston answered these questions by saying that it is Christ's will to show Himself in different ways to different believers. For example, He did not show Himself in the same way to each of His disciples. Only three of His disciples saw Him transfigured on the mountain; Peter, James and John (Matt. 17:1-8). And yet despite this, after reading Psalm 45, Boston realised that a three-fold effect will be seen in *all* people who have truly known Christ.

First, they see Him as being "fairer" than all, and have a earnest desire to commend Christ to others.

Second, they realise that nothing in heaven or earth can satisfy but Christ alone.

Third, they are troubled when God hides His face from them.

Although Boston still struggled with assurance, by the evening he was able to say, "My soul blessed God for His

Word... It has loosed my bands, set me to my feet again, and put courage in my heart. My heart rejoiceth in His salvation, and in Himself."

Sin steals a believer's assurance and joy, and causes us to doubt God's promises. In Boston's irritation over the furniture and other people's behaviour toward him, we see the outworking's of "a continual and irreconcilable war, the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh (WCF 13.2)." This could set us on a downward spiral of despair, except that "through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part does overcome; and so, the saints grow in grace; perfecting holiness in the fear of God (WCF 13.3)."

John Bunyan, in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, helpfully illustrated this wonderful truth. He pictured a fire burning within a fireplace. Someone was standing in front of the fire, trying to extinguish the flames by throwing water onto it. This person was the Devil. Yet, despite his efforts, the fire grew hotter, because on the other side of the fireplace, hidden from view, Christ was feeding the fire with the oil of His grace. Thank Christ for His burning oil of sanctification that keeps alight all those who belong to Him.

Borrowed preaching

Boston's preaching never drew great crowds, yet he spoke some serious words for pastors and preachers. James 3:1 says, "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness." At times Boston was discouraged with "the

unsuccessfulness of the gospel.” This led him to pour out his soul before God “for a blessing on what He had helped to deliver.”

One time, Boston had prepared on Thursday to preach that coming Lord’s Day. His heart longed to preach God’s message, however when the time of preaching came, he felt that he had failed, due to some temptation.

On another occasion, he realised that he had misread and so misunderstood a verse from Song of Solomon. He said, “this gave me a sore dash, fearing that my light that I sometimes get be but delusion.” Despite this error, by God’s grace, Boston was not left emptied of confidence in God’s Word and his ability to understand it, but rather it served to strengthen his resolve never to deliberately twist or misuse God’s Word.

He observed that shallow, frivolous conversation is unworthy of the office of pastor. He recalled meeting with another minister whose “foolish talking afforded me heavy reflections, on the unedifying converse of minister, and my own among others, as one great cause of the unsuccessfulness of the gospel.” A pastor’s conversation ought never be shallow.

It was during this period that Boston also experienced a measure of spiritual refreshment. He says, “I went to Robert Fairbairn’s in Woodside... There I was refreshed with a heavenly society, the excellent ones of that part of the earth.” Meeting with other believers in whom the love of the Lord was evident, revived his weary soul. Yet, Boston also commented that these Christians were living “on borrowed meals,” by which he meant the preacher had come from another church.

Yet, in this there is a warning for every preacher. Poor preaching can leave God's people living of past meals – even from decades earlier. There can be such poor spiritual nourishment from what they are currently hearing that they are forced to survive on the past. Amongst the Lord Jesus' final words to Peter were the thrice given command, "Feed my lambs" or similar (John 21:15, 16, 17).

For those that preach, may we seek to feed God's people with true spiritual nourishment.

A Personal Covenant

On 25th March 1700, Boston made a personal covenant with the Lord. It began: "I, Mr. Thomas Boston, minister of God's word at Simprin." Then, after confessing his unfaithfulness and frequent backslidings, he affirmed his desire to "get my soul more confirmed in the Lord." In the last part of the covenant, he confessed and vowed the following,

"[I] do now, with all my heart and soul... give up myself... unto Christ; taking Him with heart and soul, upon those very terms, and no other, upon which He is offered in the gospel; resolving, and hereby engaging, in His strength, to cleave to Him and His truths, so long as I live, whatever be the hazard... [To this] I do with all willingness subscribe, the 25th day of March 1700."

This was, in fact, the second personal covenant that he had made until this point. The first he signed on 14th August 1699. He made a third personal covenant on 5TH December 1729, which he said was more thoroughly grounded in God's covenant of grace when compared to the earlier two covenants.

Perhaps we fear making such promises, knowing that we are weak and thinking of Peter's night of failure (Matt. 26:69-75). We ought never take rash vows (see Ecc. 5:1-5). The strength of Boston's personal covenant is that he looks to Christ as the founder and perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:2). In Nehemiah 9-10, over eighty leaders of the people of Israel bound themselves to God in solemn oath. They began by exalting the LORD God and confessing that in the past they had given the "stubborn shoulder" to His law (Neh. 9:26). They vowed, in a sealed document, their loyalty to God in marriage (Neh. 10:30), obedience to God in regards to Sabbath (Neh. 10:31), support of the service of the temple (Neh. 10:32), duty in serving God as priests (Neh. 10:34), their trust in bring their firstfruits (Neh. 10:35-39) and never to neglect "the house of our God (Neh. 10:39)."

Married to Katharine Brown

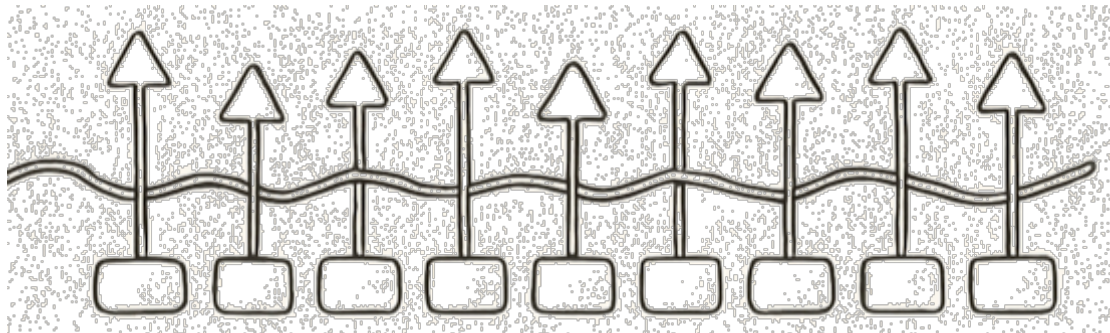
It was during this time that Boston and Katharine were married. They had some difficulties in their courtship, and yet the more time that Boston spent with Katharine, the more, "I was made often to bless God that ever I was acquainted with her."

Then, on 17th July 1700, "betwixt eight and nine o'clock at night," they were married: Thomas and Katharine Boston. He was "going on twenty-five years" of age, and Katharine was "going on twenty-seven years" of age. Their marriage service, led by Mr. Mair, seems to have been a simple ceremony. It was the marriage itself that they treated with the greatest joy and seriousness.

In one long, beautiful paragraph, Boston lovingly describes Katharine his wife after thirty years of marriage. He said she was,

A woman of great worth, whom I therefore passionately loved, and inwardly honoured: A stately, beautiful and comely personage, truly pious, and fearing the lord; of an evenly temper, patient in our common tribulations... wise and affable in conversation, having a good faculty at speaking, and expressing herself with assurance.

Surely, every marriage begins with high hopes for the future, despite not knowing what may come. Thomas and Katharine Boston were to face many difficulties in their lives, with Boston saying, "we have passed through a sea of trouble" and the shore still seemed far away. Yet, the hotter the fire, the purer the gold, and Boston says of Katharine that "the grace of God in her hath been brightened" despite the difficulties that she faced.



PERIOD 8 1700-1707

*"My dear father... died that night, in the 70th year of his age...
It was a heavy death to me..."*

John Boston's death

John Boston, Thomas' father, was "a man of low stature... nimble, strong, and vigorous... one who in the worst of times retained his integrity." Following what seems to have been a short illness, he died in April 1701.

There is no doubt that John Boston had a great influence on his, Thomas. From spending time in prison with his father, to taking him to hear Henry Erskine preach, John Boston trained Thomas in the "way he should go (Prov. 22:6)." Now in death, his father had one last lesson for him: how to die trusting the Lord. John Newton's (1725-1807) prayer is true for all believers:

Show me what I have to do,
Every hour my strength renew;
Let me live a life of faith,
Let me die Thy people's death.

A dream about their dying daughter

Only five weeks after Boston's father died, Katharine went into labour with their first child, also named Katherine. She was born on 24th May 1701, and in the following years Thomas and Katharine were to have ten children born to them. Sadly, they were to bury six of them whilst still infants, including this baby daughter.

When young Katherine was born she had a double harelip. Boston was told this news, and it hit him hard: "my heart was struck, like a bird shot and falling from a tree." Several months later, Boston and Katharine his wife travelled to Barhill in order to deal with a family issue about his father's estate. By this stage, young Katharine's health seemed to be improving, and so they left her in the care of another.

One morning whilst they were away, Katharine lay down to rest, having recently been ill from a "ram's mutton" meal. There she "dreamed that she saw the child perfect, the natural defect being made up, and extraordinary beautiful." The dream left an impression on Boston and Katharine, and together they returned home as quickly as possible. They were "eight or nine miles from home" when the news came to them that "our dear child was dead and buried." It pierced their hearts.

They discovered that Katharine's dream had been on the same day and hour of the day, "as near as could be judged" that young Katharine had died. Their anguish was compounded by "an acquaintance" who said unfair things to them in their grief.

What do we say to this, but may God, who is the “God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction (2 Cor. 1:3-4),” be with all who grieve as they did.

The free offer of the Gospel – Marrow men

Boston’s name is closely associated with the Marrow controversy. It began in an unassuming way. Whilst at Simprin, he visited an old soldier who had been involved in the English Civil wars nearly sixty years earlier. Inside his home, Boston spied two books, one entitled *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* written in 1645 and commonly attributed to Edward Fisher, a barber-surgeon. The other was *Christ’s Blood Flowing Freely to Sinners*. Boston borrowed the books and whilst the second book didn’t impress him; the first book struck him powerfully, so much so that he bought it from the old soldier.

Boston had been thinking of his own tendency towards legality, and the offer of the gospel to sinners. He wrestled with the question of whether the sins of believers that they have not repented of, would make them liable to eternal punishment? But he had come to realise that believers are in a “state of grace” and therefore, forgiven.

The Marrow also made clear to Boston that the free offer of the gospel is simply come to Christ. We don’t bring anything to Him. We don’t even bring our repentance or faith to Him and offer them to Him. The Good News bids us, “Come,” with the confidence that God forgives and transforms.

Such an offer meant that Boston could say to the vilest sinner, “come to Christ,” without having to add a qualifier such as, “first you must fix your life up and then come to Christ.” We

do not make ourselves better in God's eyes and then come. The way to Christ must be unobstructed and free of clutter. Repentance is worked within us as we come to Christ, but not as a qualification or condition to be met before coming to Him. In the words of Augustus Toplady (1740-1778),

Foul, I to the fountain fly:
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.

The Marrow is a conversation between four people. One of the characters, *Evangelista*, says, "I beseech you consider, that God the Father, as he is in his Son Jesus Christ, moved with nothing but with his free love to mankind lost, hath made a deed of gift and grant unto them all, that whosoever of them all shall believe in this his Son, shall not perish, but have eternal life."

Later, another character, *Nomist*, who is a legalist, accuses *Evangelista*: "Why, then, sir, it seems you hold, that the vilest sinner in the world ought not to be discouraged from coming unto Christ, and believing in him, by reason of his sins." *Evangelista* replies, "Surely, if "Christ came into the world to seek, and call, and save sinners, and to justify the ungodly," as you have heard; and if the more sinful, miserable, and distressed a man judge himself to be, the more willing Christ is to receive him and relieve him; then I see no reason why the vilest sinner should be discouraged from believing on the name of Jesus Christ by reason of his sins."

To some, offering Christ crucified to all was akin to saying that He died for all. For Boston, Christ's death paid the penalty for sin for all who come to Him in repentance and faith. Although, not all will be saved, the gospel can genuinely be offered to everyone. Boston did not believe in universal

salvation, hypothetical or not. Rather, Christ died for His sheep, but the gospel call goes to all people. Boston loved to quote the prophet Isaiah;

“Come, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and he who has no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.”

- Isaiah 55:1

Against the charge of antinomianism – that is, that opening the way for sinners to come to Christ without first fixing up their lives, would lead to more sin, Boston would say that God’s grace is such that it never leads to more sin but rather obedience. We need never fear God’s grace, for such is His power and goodness that grace leads to obedience and holiness, and properly understood, never to more sin.

These questions concerning grace and law were to cause disruptions within the Church. In 1718 James Hog reprinted the first part of *the Marrow*. But by 1720 the Assembly condemned *the Marrow*, and ministers were prohibited from recommending it. Despite being censored, in 1726 Boston ensured that *The Marrow* was reprinted with his own theological notes annotating the text.

Family worship

For Boston, family worship was a vital and regular part of daily life. The head of the family was to set the tone for those

under his roof. Boston said, "The bond of all religion, is directed to head of families." When he first arrived at Simprin, he found only one home in which family worship was a regular part of the day. Through encouragement and example he sought to change that situation for the better. Reform within society would begin in the home, and that by starting with family worship. Each Christian home was to be a smaller model of the church. Family worship was organised around three main activities: reading God's word, singing Psalms and prayer. Additionally, family fasts were sometimes held.

The Apostle Paul too called on Christian fathers to step into their God given responsibility: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4)." Their role is restraint and nurture in the Lord. To do this, Christian fathers ought to lead in family worship. Let children see your love and trust in the Lord.

When it came to raising children, Boston knew that children don't fall naturally into the ways of God, but that they should be instructed and led in His ways. This requires parents to hold a clear doctrine of sin and grace. The Christian home is the training ground in the Lord. We ought to aim at the heart, because it is from the heart that behaviour flows.

Often these times of family worship and nourishment were extended to others. One time Boston was at the home of his eldest brother and joined him and his family in worship. Boston said of his brother, that afterwards, "to my great satisfaction, he came along with me to my chamber, and by our converse I was led to Psalm cxix. 96, "I have seen an end of all perfection," for my text, being to preach in Dunse the following Lord's day."

Another time, Boston commented: "I have this day found my heart bettered by a more conscientious preparing my heart for family-worship." In saying this, family worship did not always go as planned, and sometimes the time could be misused. One time, during family worship in the home of another minister, Psalm 23 was read, however the message was twisted away from the meaning of the text. It left Boston with a sour taste in his mouth. He said, "the which I looked upon as a sorry piece of service at best, and unbecoming a man of sense and consideration, in these circumstances."

Amongst Boston's works is *Seven Motivations for Family Religion* and *Ten Directions for Family Religion*. In them he said of children, "Their youth makes them raw and inexperienced, and disposes them to be rash and heedless. They have need of a monitor, and instructor, and guide. How shall they learn, if they are not taught?"

In regards to his directions for family worship, he said, "1st, Acquaint them with God's word." Boston advocated teaching children and servants to read, making use of good catechisms, especially the Westminster Shorter Catechism, and ensuring that practical spiritual lessons are learned. A whole world and life view, as well as encouragement to pray "by any means" was vital. Parents ought to "Make known to them how God is a God of exact justice, and purest truth." Therefore, we must abhor anything less than integrity.

Boston's final word is one of encouragement: "Be not discouraged, though ye see not the fruit. The fruit may come when ye are in your grave. Mind Manasseh's conversion, when his godly father was dead and gone [2 Chron. 33:1-16]."

Below are some thoughts and suggestions to encourage

you to establish family worship;

- Try to establish a routine for reading God's word, praying and singing together. It will not always go well or smoothly, but don't give up. Involve all who are under your roof.
- Let your children see you pray. Let them see what it means to seek after God. Example means so much.
- Don't simply teach them stories from the Bible, but teach them what these stories show us about God. Leave them with a sense of God's greatness.
- When you read the Bible, beware of feeding them too much or too little.
- Be close observers of your children. You may see early signs, good or bad, that will later bloom into fuller behaviour (Prov. 19:26). If the bud is good, then encourage it, but if it is bad, such as temper, then try nip it before it develops any further.
- Encourage them with good Christian books to read in addition to the Bible. A good Christian book should be deep, yet simple to understand and engaging.

Above all, pray for God's blessing and grace in all that we do. We look to God for His wisdom and seek to live out the gospel of Christ before children, knowing that it is God who changes hearts.

FAREWELL SERMON

When Boston had first preached in Simprin, in July 1699, his impressions of the people were disheartening. Some fell asleep, others went outside, and that was before taking into account that there were few people in attendance to begin with. However, eight years later, he preached his “farewell sermon” from a barn door to a great gathering of people. The passage was John 7:37, “On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.”

Boston said of this sermon: “as the Lord was with me in that place during my ministry there, so He left me not then, but was with me at that close of it, and much of God’s power appeared in it.” He was tightly bonded to the people. Their hearts were “knit to me, and mine to them.” The following is an extract of that sermon,

If any man be under soul thirst, Christ bids him welcome to come to him and drink. Or needy sinners are welcome to Christ, to get supply of all their wants... There is a bodily and a soul thirst. It is the spiritual thirst that is here meant. In all thirst there are two things:

1. Sense of want. The thirsty soul wants something, and knows that it wants. Every man is sensible that he is not self-sufficient, that he labours under some defects, and must be supplied from some quarter or another; but it is not every one that knows to what quarter to go for supply.
2. Desire of supply. The thirsty soul craves what may supply its needs, as the hungry infant seeks for the

breast. The soul of man is ever desiring, until it meet with that which does fully satisfy its desires...

We are invited to come to him and drink. "Let him come to me," says Jesus, "and drink." Our thirsty souls are desired to drink here. This spiritual drinking is also an act of faith, and denotes the soul's really and actually making use of Christ, for the supply of its wants. This points at three things in Christ.

1. The fullness that is in him for needy sinners. He is the well of living water, that is ever full and overflows; who is able to fill up all the wants of all that will come to him. "For it has pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell." "Yes, in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." There is in him a fullness of merit. His blood cleanses from all sin. There is a fullness of guilt on all of us. Our hearts, lips, and lives are all full of sin. Tears, prayers and rivers of oil, cannot wipe it away; but in Christ there is a fullness of merit, to take it off completely. What will not the blood of God do? "Here is a fountain open for sin and for impurity." The rock is struck, behold the water gushes out... From him all the saints on earth, and all in Heaven, have derived their graces: And yet there is bread enough...

2. It hath respect to the suitableness of Christ to the case of sinners; as drink is suited to the case of a thirsty man. There is in him a suitable remedy for every disorder. Here the dead soul may have life; the blind, light; the naked, a garment; the poor, riches; the scorched soul, refreshment; the pained, ease; the

weak, strength. Whatever be their case in life, death, time, eternity, prosperity or adversity, there is everything suitable in him.

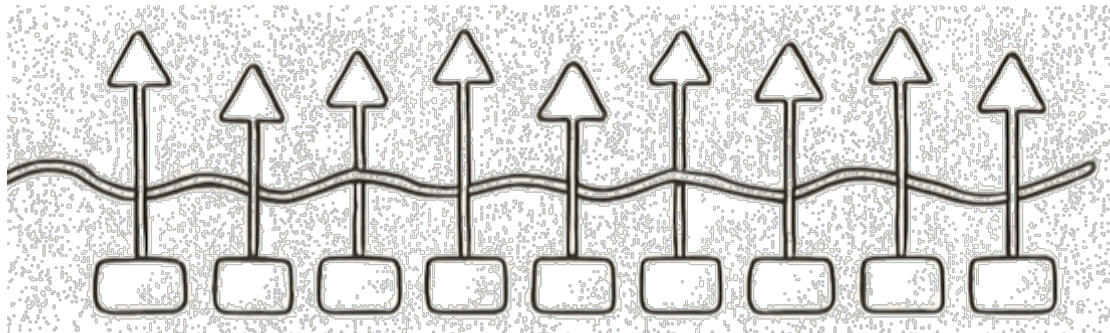
3. It points at his satisfactoriness. "Whoever," says Christ, "drinks of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst: but the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water springing up to everlasting life." The hungry infant set upon the breast, rests there, and desires no more... Christ himself is able to satisfy the soul: "Whom have in I Heaven but you, and there is none on earth that I desire besides you." Now this is spiritual drinking, or actual use-making of Christ for supply of our wants, implies these three things...

As I came to this place under a sense of a call from God, and dared not do otherwise; so I go from it under a sense of God's call, which for my soul I dared not disobey, whatever difficulties I may meet with, though I should die at the end of it. Pray for a minister from the Lord. Pray in secret. Meet together, and pray for one. And, in the meantime, make conscience of family duties; watch over one another, and live in peace together...

Above all, I exhort you to go to Christ, and be daily making use of him, for the supply of all your wants. I dare not say I have been useless here. I hope you and I will not forget the many sweet days we have had in this place. Christ has been with us at sermons, both on sabbath days and week days. We have had much of his presence at communions, and I bless God that ever put it in my heart to celebrate the sacrament in the winter. I hope you will

particularly remember, and never forget the sabbath after our last communion.

I have come so far short of my duty to you as a minister, that if God should enter into judgment with me on that account, I should undoubtedly be damned. But for pardon, I flee to the same blood of Jesus Christ, which I have preached to you. And I advise you to take the same course with respect to your shortcomings. Now, I beseech you, pray for me; and God forbid that I should cease to pray for you, that Simprin may always be as a field that the Lord has blessed. Now I will say no more, but conclude with the words of the apostle, Acts 20:32, "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among them that are sanctified." Amen.



PERIOD 9 1707-1712

Move to Ettrick

Boston first visited Ettrick, a small village forty-five miles west of Simprin, in November 1706. However, his visit left a poor impression on him. He said, "The desolation of that parish, ever since I saw it, hath had great weight on me, and I am convinced I should have more opportunity to do service for God there than here; but success is the Lord's."

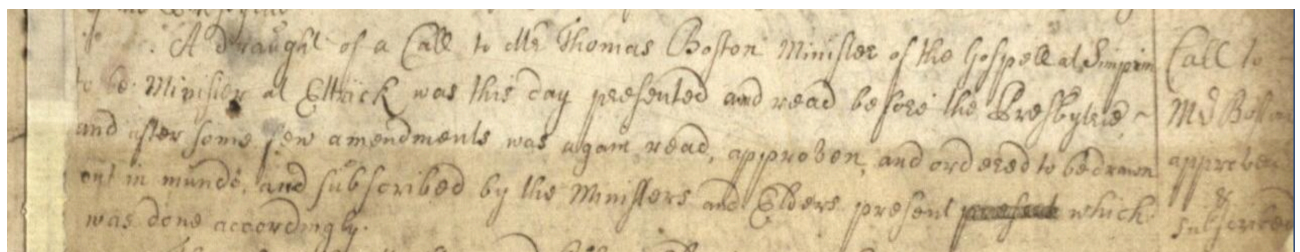
Ettrick was an isolated place in Boston's day, despite having a larger population than Simprin. In 1694, a Poll Tax census listed 351 people. The parish surrounding Ettrick covered a seven-mile radius.

The church had not had a minister since March 1703. As a result, church services had become infrequent, approximately once a month. The path for obtaining a minister still meant going through the "Heritors of Ettrick," and despite several names being recommended, nothing came of it. When Boston's name was first put forward, a petition in favour was signed by five elders and several heads of families. The heritor, Sir Francis Scott, raised no objection.

However, in May 1707 when it was announced that Boston would be the minister at Ettrick, several heritors wrote protests, and Sir Francis Scott complained to the presbytery that they had usurped his right of appointment. Boston even overheard Scott's messenger – a former classmate of his – say about Boston to someone else, "Have you told him that he will neither get meat nor lodging here? I will get up early and close the church doors."

Interestingly, Boston himself protested against being appointed the minister at Ettrick, as it seems that Scott and the other heritors had promised him support. In due time, Boston's integrity helped him to find favour with Scott. Notwithstanding though, Boston was admitted to Ettrick in May 1707. He was thirty-one years old, and he would minister there for twenty-five years, until the end of his life.

His first sermon was on 1 Samuel 7:12, "Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen and called its name Ebenezer; for he said, 'Till now the LORD has helped us.'" In a taste of things to come, the day on which he became minister of Ettrick, the Union of Scotland and England commenced, which Boston opposed.



The Presbytery of Selkirk minutes, January 1706, mentioning "Thomas Boston Minister of the Gospel at Simprin."

The first years at Ettrick were hard going. Spiritually, the people were dull and indifferent to the things of God. Boston said that the people, "generally speaking, were naturally smart, and of an uncommon assurance; self-conceited and censorious to a pitch." He saw that, "They have little desire for the gospel." Instead, they showed more interested in whatever was popular at the time, and he was shocked at how acid their tongues were: "I was amazed to find blessing and cursing proceeding out of the same mouth... [They were] horrid swearers at times."

Despite this, Boston trusted that God had called him to preach the gospel in that place: "though it was a small charge, yet it was my charge, and that I was not to look to be useful according to the number of those I spoke to, but according to the call of God to speak unto them, whether many or few."

Thank God that the spiritual tone did change as God worked through the preaching of His Word.

Schisms

It was during this time that one of Boston's most testing periods came. It concerned the issue of church separation, and therefore, the definition of the visible church. The Westminster Confession declares: "The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation (WCF 25.2)."

In 1701, John MacMillian (1669-1753) had been inducted into the Balmaghie parish of the Church of Scotland, but by 1703 he was removed over grievances that he had raised against the established Church. In 1706, he became the minister of the Covenanting Societies, which had dissented and separated from the Church of Scotland. MacMillian would often preach around Ettrick, including, at times, undermining Boston's preaching.

Boston's first encounter was with three of MacMillian's followers. Boston did not seek an argument with them, but almost immediately the tone was set: "one brought in the matter of separation; told that he understood I was an enemy to them, and preached against them." Boston admitted that he did not think that they were following God, whilst also confessing the corruptions that could be found in the established Church. One of them made the serious charge that the Lord was not with Boston. Boston brought them to see that Christ did not separate from the Jews even in time of "great corruption." In the end, Boston hoped to meet with MacMillian face-to-face, and he later learned that MacMillian was in the same house that day, but MacMillian refused to see Boston.

Within a short time, in January 1708, the situation erupted when Boston called on the Ettrick congregation to observe a fast that had been called by the civil magistrate, and not the Church. The fast was in response to fears of a French invasion, however, many in the congregation were upset that a minister would so align himself with the civil magistrate. There were some who deserted Boston's ministry – "several of whom never returned." To them, this was an encroachment of the civil magistrate upon them. Boston seems to have sympathized with them to some degree, regretting that the Church and civil

magistrate hadn't worked together in calling the fast. Whatever the case, it sowed further seeds of separatism within many people.

A troublesome oath

Within a few years, a second major concern regarding the visible church and civil authorities was to rear its head. In 1707, following the Union between Scotland and England, an Abjuration Oath was to be taken by all who held military and civil government appointments. The person taking the Oath was required to declare their loyalty to the protestant English monarch, as opposed to Catholic rivals. However by 1712, the Oath was to be taken by ministers in the Church of Scotland as well, and this threatened a division within the Church. There were some who supported the Oath, seeing it as supporting a protestant cause in the kingdom. But the "conscientious scruplers" disliked the imposition of oaths by civil authorities.

Interestingly, although Boston sided with those opposed to the Oath, at first he seems to have had few feelings on the matter. In fact, he only bought a copy of the legislation in order to find out what fine he might have to pay if he refused to take the Oath. However, very quickly he came to strongly oppose the Oath, saying, "my heart was turned to loath that oath which I had before scrupled." He realised that by taking the Oath it meant recognizing the monarch as supreme over the Church.

In the end, approximately two thirds of Scottish ministers accepted the Oath, although many with reservations. Additionally, some of those who refused to take the Oath, accused those who had taken it of disloyalty. One time Boston

was at a church service at Wamphray when everyone present was asked to show their loyalty to the National Covenant of the Scots by raising their hands. Boston felt uneasy about this – it was out of place - and he did not raise his hand. By the time King George I ascended to the throne in 1714, the offending clause in the Oath about his authority as head of the Church of England had been softened, and so much of the heat went out of the dispute.

Although Boston was amongst those who would not take the Oath – a *non-juror* – he did assist at services with those who had taken the Oath. There was an expectation that the government would impose heavy fines on those who refused the Oath, and therefore, Boston signed over his property, at “trouble and expense,” to his oldest son and a trusted servant, John Currie, as a way of protecting his family from loss. In the end, no government fines were issued.

Both the situations with the Abjuration Oath and John MacMillian show the struggle that Boston had with the Bible’s teaching on the visible church, including her relationship with civil authorities. What lessons may we learn from this? Below are some reflections from Boston on the matter;

The Lord’s servant must not quarrel - To be quarrelsome, especially behind another’s back, is a grievous sin. To Boston, MacMillian was schismatic. He dislike that MacMillian wouldn’t speak with him in open debate and had instead resorted to mean-spirited attacks. Titus 3:10-11 says, “As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.” In contrast, Paul told

Timothy, "The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness (2 Tim. 2:24)."

In disagreements, human nature tends to the extremes – This was Boston's observation following a conversation with a minister, Mr Thomas Hoy, who at first favoured separation, but later took the Oath. Boston concluded, "such a propensity there is in human nature to run to extremes." Whilst Boston opposed the Oath, he did not consider it an issue worthy to separate over. The foundation of his decision was "the holy Scripture."

Walk by a fixed principle of church communion – The Scriptures define the church; visible and invisible. The spiritual unity of the invisible church ought to be reflected in the visible church. Boston's observation was that the people of Ettrick held to "an indecent freedom both with church and state." Whilst not agreeing with everything that the Church did, he did not want to separate unless there was clear Biblical warrant to do so. Therein lies the tension. He saw "a need of walking by a fixed principle of church-communion, established from the holy Scriptures." Separation is sometimes necessary according to the Scriptures, but it is a grievous thing.

Although it was written in a later era, Samuel John Stone's (1839-1900) hymn still bears true;

The church's one foundation
is Jesus Christ her Lord;
she is His new creation
by water and the Word:
from heaven He came and sought her
to be His holy bride;
with His own blood He bought her
and for her life He died.

Elect from every nation,
yet one throughout the earth;
her charter of salvation -
one Lord, one faith, one birth:
one holy Name she blesses,
and shares one holy food;
as to one hope she presses
with every grace endued.

Though with a scornful wonder
men see her much oppressed,
by schisms rent asunder,
by heresies distressed,
yet saints their watch are keeping,
their cry goes up: 'How long?'
And soon the night of weeping
shall be the morn of song.

In toil and tribulation,
and tumult of her war,
she waits the consummation
of peace forevermore:
till with the vision glorious

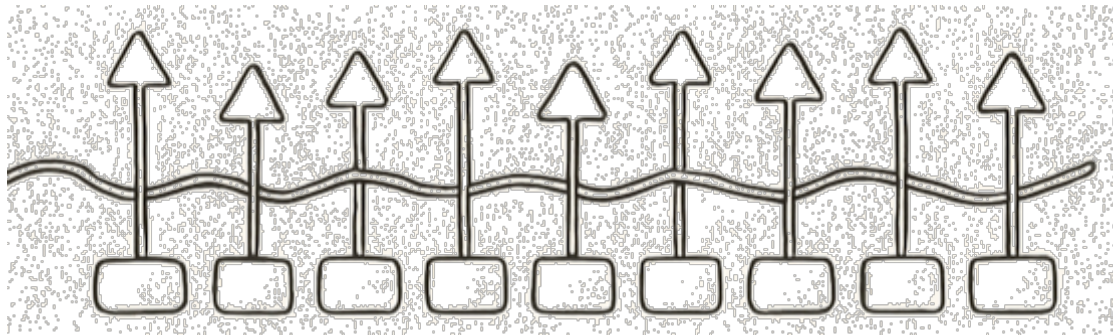
her longing eyes are blessed:
 at last the church victorious
 shall be the church at rest!

Yet she on earth has union
 with God the Three-in-One;
 and mystic, sweet communion
 with those whose rest is won:
 O happy ones and holy!
 Lord, grant to us Your grace,
 with them the meek and lowly,
 in heaven to see Your face.

From the mouth of infants and babes

In this part of his memoirs, Boston shares some short homely stories. On 9th December 1710, he was “in bad case.” Not being able to sleep, he wandered about his room “in heaviness,” when his “little daughter Jane” whom he had already put to bed, got up and told him that she had something for him to hear. She proceeded to recount Mary Magdalene going to Christ’s tomb and meeting the risen Christ. Boston remembered the way that young Jane “with a certain air of sweetness” recalled Christ’s words: “Tell my brethren, they are my brethren yet.”

Boston said, “It took me by the heart.” Despite his heavy heart and troubles, he thought, “and may I think that Christ will own me as one of His brethren yet?” In this way, from the lips of his young daughter, he was encouraged in the things of God.



PERIOD 10 1712-1717

"In partaking I was helped to the exercise of faith, took God for my God in Christ, claimed Him as my God..."

The body and blood of Christ

It was during this period that Thomas and Katharine's ninth child, and youngest surviving child, was born, also named Thomas. He was born on 3rd April 1713, and would go on to succeed his father as the minister at Ettrick before helping to form the Relief Presbytery in 1761, which opposed patronage in the Church of Scotland.

It is here too, that Boston gives us an insight into his sermon preparation. On 27th May 1715, he was preparing to preach on Christ's words in 1 Corinthians 11:25, "This cup is the new testament in my blood," desiring to "dip into the sweetness of it." However, he made little progress. He felt that God would not lead him forward in it, nor release him from it. Then, "about eight o'clock at night another text was given me" – Hebrews 10:2, "Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith." Boston said, "I was well guided to this."

Two days later, 29th May 1715, the Lord's Supper was celebrated despite heavy rain, and it was "a great day of the Gospel." Boston had learned from experience that preparation for administering the Supper is necessary, and two lessons stood out for him,

- **Firstly, the need for self-examination** – on the Saturday evening Boston said that he "got a humbling view of sin and a satisfying view of the grace of God in me."
- **Secondly, the need to guard against mixing an unhallowed spirit with the pure things of God** – on this occasion, the Lord heard Boston's prayer and gave him a "solid, serious feeling" in preaching and administering the Lord's Supper.

In all, God blessed that day and Boston said, "In partaking I was helped to the exercise of faith, took God for my God in Christ, claimed Him as my God, and laboured to improve the claimed interest by believing the promises of the covenant, which was the scope of the action sermon."

Lessons from death

Boston mentions meeting several people in the final stages of life, and this tested him. In February 1712, he visited a young man thought to be dying who had requested to see him. The man was still able to speak, and in fact spoke so much that Boston could "scarcely get a sentence spoken." He seemed confident of his eternal state before God, but Boston had some doubts, saying, "I judge there was something of vapours in the

case.” Some time later, the man made a full recovery, but the situation and another like it, caused Boston to say that whilst he did not want to insist on immediate obedience, a minister ought not to be “too credulous” either. There is a need to “try” each person to discover the foundation of his or her hopes.

Another situation occurred on 8th July 1715, when a godly, pregnant woman, Mrs. Martin, lay dying. She had only recently arrived in Ettrick with her husband, and Boston says that “her case lay very near my heart, and I was full of hopes that the Lord had not sent the good woman to die here.” However, she miscarried, and ten days later she too died. Her death challenged Boston’s trust in the sovereignty of God, especially as Katharine herself was about to give birth. Boston asked God “to provide for the worst,” but was assured “that God will do the best.”

Loyal to the local church

Boston was loyal to those whom God had called him to pastor. He was a servant of Christ to them – and they came, in time, to respect him for it.

This was made clear when another church, in Closeburn, desired to call Boston as their pastor, but Boston felt that he still had work to do for the Lord at Ettrick. They were still “a broken parish” and it wasn’t right to leave them in that state. He wrote a letter to a commission of the presbytery, which is recorded in his memoirs. In it he says,

I was persuaded in my conscience of the Lord’s calling me to Etterick; and my clearness as to my call to that place, was never overclouded.no not in my darkest hours, and

had I not had that to support me there, I had sunk under my burden... I have endeavored... to lay this matter before the Lord, for light, to discover His mind about it, labouring to wait upon Him in the way of His word and works. But I sincerely declare, after all, I have no clearness to accept the call of Closeburn... my ministry [in Etterick] is very dear to me...

The same love for God's people is seen in the Apostle Paul when he wrote to the believers at Thessalonica, "we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us (1 Thess. 2:7-8)."

Temper: Ongoing battles against sin

A Christian is no longer under the dominion of sin, but is a slave to God (see Rom. 8:22). Despite this, we will not be freed from the ongoing battle against sin until heaven.

One time, during a church service some people starting singing Psalms outside the building. This irritated Boston as some of those inside the building left the "solemn work" of listening to God's Word in order to join the singers. To Boston, this was a "disorder." Therefore, Boston says,

I went and put a stop to it, with a sharpness, which no doubt irritated the brother who was the cause of it. So we became snares to one another. And so quickly did my spirit go without bounds. I knew God was not the author

of this confusion; but the way of my spirit in removing it was, and is, humbling upon reflection. It hung about me most heavily, till, the whole day's work being over, I had occasion to shew him the sorrow of my heart, that Satan would soon have got advantage of us, and to intreat him to join with me in withstanding the progress of this flame that the tempter had kindled: and hereunto the good man shewed all readiness.

What should we say about this? Boston was frustrated with another Christian brother and lost his cool. Then, realizing his sin, he sought the brother out and apologized. Thank God that the other man willingly received it. Every believer knows acutely such failures. In Ephesians 4:31-32, Paul writes to those who are sealed by the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption and says, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." Thank God that what He commands He also gives the power to obey.

Hebrews 6 and a man who walked away

There is a warning in the book of Hebrews about people with a seemingly genuine faith, who fall away. After issuing a call to maturity in Christ, it says,

For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age

to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

- Hebrews 6:4-6

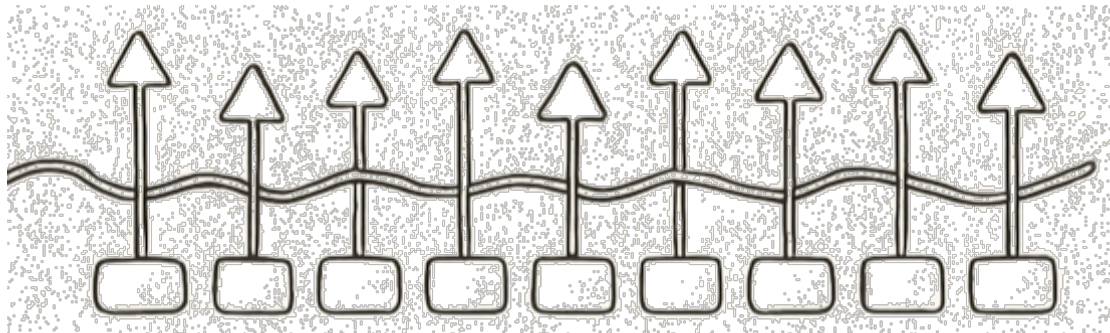
Boston recounts the story of a man – his name is left blank in his memoirs – who “had been educated under my ministry, profited from my knowledge, and gave hopeful signs of his seriousness; so that he was admitted to the Lord’s table.” However, Boston’s hopes for him were dashed when he fell into sexual sin and refused to repent.

Sin works exponentially, such that sin unrepented of, leads to more sin unrepented of. So it was with this man, as he “fell into one mire of filthiness after another... so that I had almost a continual fight with him for many years after. And to this day he continues an adversary; only he never deserted the ordinances.”

As in Hebrews 6, this man had tasted of the goodness of God, but fell away into unrepentant sin. He abandoned Christ for his lusts, with his hardness of heart now blocking the way to Christ for him. William Gurnall (1616–1679) rightly said, “A sheep may fall into a ditch, but it is the swine that wallows in it.” The sheep repents of the hurt that he or she has caused Christ; the swine does not.

In the end, Boston continued to hold out some hope for the man, saying, “I still think he hath some good thing about him, that may at length prevail against this profaneness, pride,

and vanity.” He knew as well as anyone, that some people may come close to the Kingdom, but never enter it. Only eternity will tell what happened to this man.



PERIOD 11 – 1717-1724

"My son Thomas... told me, he was troubled with ill thoughts... that God did not hear his prayers; and that for that sometimes he forgot his prayers at night: that he wondered why God made the devil... I informed, instructed, and directed him, in the whole case, the best I could."

Ill health

There are few things more fatiguing than physical illness. This section of Boston's memoirs opens with Katharine returning to her family home in order "to breathe her native air a while for her health."

Ill health was to mark the remaining years of Thomas and Katharine's lives. Indeed, they were advised that staying in Ettrick would be detrimental to their health – "the air of Etterick did not agree" with Katharine, and Thomas was told that "it would overcome me too at length." But trusting that Ettrick was where they were to serve God, they stayed.

In all, Boston list many illnesses that his family was to suffer from including fevers, smallpox, "gravel" – likely kidney stones, scurvy, headaches and toothache.

Friendship

True and loyal friendship is a gift from God. The friendship between David and Jonathan went from strength to strength. God was at its centre: "And Jonathan, Saul's son, rose and went to David at Horesh, and strengthened his hand in God (1 Samuel 23:16)."

A friend loves at all times,
and a brother is born for adversity.

- Prov. 17:17

It was at this point in Boston's life that Boston was bound with two others, Mr Henry Davidson and Mr Gabriel Wilson, in a "bond of strict friendship." It was Christ that bound them together and grew their friendship. Speaking of Wilson, Boston described him as, "a man of great gravity, piety, and tenderness; learned and judicious; well acquainted with books; a great preacher, delivering in a taking manner, masterly thoughts, in an unaffected elevated style; endowed with a gift of prayer, in heavenly oratory, beyond any man that ever I knew; extremely modest. And reserved in his temper; but a kind and affectionate friend."

Such friendship may be like rare jewels, but the Lord will bless us with them as He knows best. May we be loyal friends of others, with Christ at the centre.

Arson and horse troubles

Amongst the pastoral problems that Boston faced in Ettrick were two situations of attempted arson. Although someone, or even more than one person, was suspected of committing the crime, they were never convicted. At the Lord's Supper, Boston publicly declared that those responsible for the fires should be barred from the Lord's Table, and he led the congregation in a prayer of confession and read Deuteronomy 21:1-9 concerning expiation for unsolved murder. Notwithstanding, the person or persons suspected of the crime sat down at the table and participated in the Lord's Supper.

Although not all problems were spiritual in nature, nonetheless, they do show the groan of creation longing to be freed from its bondage to corruption (Rom. 8:22). In the entirety of his life, Boston did not travel more than a hundred mile radius from his place of birth. For most people throughout time and history, travel has been a dangerous and laborious difficulty, and Boston too, had his share of troubles.

One time he travelled from Ettrick to Penpont in order to celebrate the Lord's Supper; a distance of less than fifty miles. He was accompanied by his close friend Henry Davidson, when Davidson's "horse was some way wounded in the foot" and bled the rest of the way to the nearest village.

Later, on the return journey, it was Boston's turn to have trouble – "my horse crooking." After caring for his horse, they continued on their journey, but then "lost our way in the hills beyond Moffat, going through mosses, etc., till in our greatest extremity, not knowing what hand to turn to, by kind

Providence we saw a lad who set us on the way. Under night we lost the way again; but at length got to a house, where we were provided of a guide."

Eventually, they arrived safely at Ettrick. Boston wondered if their difficulties had been the work of evil spirits, yet he trusted God, knowing that "nothing can fall out without the supreme management of my Father; and from his hand I take it, as a deep of holy Providence."

In all of life's difficulties, we must trust in the sovereignty and goodness of God, even though His ways often remain a mystery to us.

Pastor-scholar

Martin Luther once said, "Let us be sure of this: we will not long preserve the gospel without the languages. The languages are the sheath in which this sword of the Spirit [Eph. 6:17] is contained." Luther feared that if we "let the languages go" then we shall lose the gospel.

Boston, for his part, said, "'I bless my God in Jesus Christ ... that ever he gave me the blessed Bible, and brought me acquainted with the originals, and especially with the Hebrew text." He had studied Hebrew whilst a student in Edinburgh in 1696, but he had not excelled in it.

He had acquired a Hebrew Bible towards the end of his time at Simprin and from then on, "I plied the Hebrew original close, with great delight, and all along since it hath continued to be my darling study."

His study helped him to understand the Old Testament in deeper and fresher ways. Then, from September 1717 onwards, he concentrated his study on the Hebrew accentuation marks, being convinced that they were part of the original Hebrew text and divinely inspired. On 8th October 1720, he wrote, "I am of their opinion who think the Hebrew text is most accurately pointed; and from my own observation, as well as from books, I am convinced the sacred stigmatology bears the signature of a Divine hand." From his isolated Scottish village, Boston communicated with scholars in Europe, and his finished book, which he translated into Latin, was published in Amsterdam in 1738 – four years after his death.

In the end, scholarly opinion has rejected Boston's claim of divine inspiration of the accents on the grounds that early Christian writers quoting the Old Testament do not use them, and Jewish sources say that they originated in the fifth century in Tiberias as a way of aiding pronunciation. Despite this, we should not think that Boston's labour was in vain. His close study of the Hebrew Scriptures brought a greater depth to his understanding, and this, in turn, grew his love for the Lord. Undoubtedly, this flowed through to his preaching and those he shepherded. On 10th September 1724, he wrote, "I have had much sweetness in the original text; and it made me this day to think how inconceivably sweet must the personal Original of the original text be! How sweet to see, by the light of glory, the glory of God in the face of Jesus!"

Family troubles

We cannot understand a man such as Boston, except to see that he was a man of prayer before all else, especially closet prayer (Matt. 6:5-6). Ephesians 6:18, calls upon believers to be “praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.” Follow every impulse to pray, whether in the daily chores of life, or in conversation with others, or resting quietly. Constant prayer is living in communion with God.

Much of this section of Boston’s memoir records Boston in prayer for various people and situations. One of his prayers was for God’s help with his son, John, who was saying at Edinburgh. On 1st February 1721 he said, “I spent some time in prayer, for... Divine guidance to my son at Edinburgh; in which I had much ado to fix my feet; for at this time there is such a current carrying the young generation to folly, as, I think, I never observed before, and seems to be ominous.” Despite his desire to solve the folly of his son, prayer was needed.

Human Nature in its Fourfold State

Some preachers are natural poets. Boston once composed “a kind of a poem on friendship,” however he judged that it, as well as his other attempts at poetry, were so poor that he committed them to the flames. Boston’s strength was his deep theology and clear communication.

During his lifetime, he had two books published; one was his annotated notes on *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, published in 1726. The other was *Human nature in its Fourfold State*, first published in 1720. It is his clearest attempt at explaining the

unfolding of salvation through four states: innocence, depravation, grace and eternal happiness or misery. Each section builds upon – and only makes sense – in the light of the previous section. Below is an outline of the book.

State 1: Innocence

“See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.”

- Ecclesiastes 7:29

Adam and Eve, “our first parents; the archetypal pair, the root of mankind... was made right... without any imperfection, corruption, or principle of corruption in his body or soul.”

This state of innocence in creation was according to God as “the supreme rule.” In creating Adam and Eve, there must have been a law “to which man, as a rational creature, were subjected in his creation; and that this law was revealed to him.” Thus, our first parents had “perfect knowledge of the law” and of their duty to obey it.

For Adam, this law was “written upon his mind... God impressed it upon his soul, and made him a law to himself.” Citing Romans 2:14-15, Boston sees the law of God as still remaining, to some degree, in every human being.

Adam’s affections were “orderly, pure, and holy” – as indeed was every part of him. Yet, despite being created in this state of innocence, “it was mutable; it was a righteousness that might be lost.” God had set Adam’s will to do good, but he did not fix it so that “it could not

alter.”

In this state, Adam was perfectly happy, for “happiness is the result of holiness.” He was at peace with God, the created world and himself.

In applying this doctrine to us, Boston observes that God must never be blamed for our sin and unhappiness, for His creation is good.

State 2: Deprivation

“The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

- Genesis 6:5

This state is as sad as the first state was glorious. Sin exposes a “corrupt heart... The heart is ever framing something; but never one right thing.”

In this way, “Adam’s fall has framed all men’s hearts alike.” The result is that we are liable to the wrath of God, sinful by nature, and “condemned before we have done good or evil; under the curse, before we know what it is.” It is this corruption of every part of our being that makes human laws necessary.

Every part of our being is now corrupted – understanding, will, affections, conscience, memory and body. In this state of deprivation we are enemies to Christ as prophet in that we do not listen to Him; as priest in that we stumble and reject “Christ crucified,” thinking, “according to the spider’s motto” that we can “climb up to heaven on a thread spun out of their own bowels.” This leaves us

in a state of wrath before God. We are an enemy to Christ in His kingly office in that we do not submit to His kingship.

Answering the question as to “how man’s nature was corrupted,” Boston says, based on Romans 5:12 and 19, that “Adam’s sin corrupted man’s nature... The root was poisoned, and so the branches were envenomed... Adam, by his sin, became not only guilty, but corrupt; and so transmits guilt and corruption to his posterity.”

Amongst many warnings, Boston also gives hope: “Turn your eyes, O prisoners of hope, towards the Lord Jesus Christ; and embrace him as he offereth himself in the gospel.”

State 3: Grace

“...you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.”

- 1 Peter 1:23

Only God has the power to free us from bondage in Adam. Thus, every person who now stands before God in a state of grace has been born again.

Boston warns against a falsely thinking that we belong to God’s kingdom when we do not: “All that are baptised are not born again... One may engage in all the outward duties of religion, and yet not be born again... Yea hypocrites may have the counterfeit of all the graces of the Spirit.” Despite this, we need never doubt that “regeneration is a real thorough change, whereby the

man is made a *new creature*... It is a supernatural change; he that is born again, is *born of the spirit*."

God's work is "an universal change." Where before sin infected every part of our being, now "regenerating grace, which is the salve, goes as far as the sore." The born again person "gets not only a new head to know religion, or a new tongue to talk of it; but a new heart to love and embrace it, in the whole of his conversation. When the Lord opens the sluice of grace on the soul's new birth-day, the waters run through the whole man, to purify and make him fruitful." Mind, will, affections, memory and conversation are all turned to God.

In applying this, Boston realises that some people may ask, "How shall we know whether we are born again or not?" Boston replies by analogy: look to the sun and when you see its heat and light then you know that it has risen. So too, "Grace is light, and discovers itself." He urges us to look to God and see the grace wrought change within, namely in a new knowledge of God and love for Him, and His people.

He considers several cases, including;

"CASE 1. I doubt if I be regenerate; because I know not the precise time of my conversion... *Ans.* Though it is desirable to be able to give an account of the beginning, and the gradual advances of the Lord's work upon our souls... yet this is not necessary to evidence the truth of grace... Likeas, when we see flame, we know there is fire, though we know not how or when it began; so the truth of grace in us may be discerned, though we know not

how or when it was dropt into our hearts."

"CASE 2. If I were a new creature, sin could not prevail against me as it doth? *Ans.* Though we must not lay pillows for hypocrites to rest their heads upon." Yet, as to ongoing sin within a believer, Boston explains, "The new creature doth not yet posses the house alone; it dwells bedside an ill neighbor; namely, remaining corruption... These struggle together for mastery." Boston urges us that if we be born again, then let not our ongoing sin lead us to conclude that we are not children of God, but rather let it humble us to be more watchful and thirst more "intensely after Jesus Christ."

"CASE 3. I find the motions of sin, in my heart, more violent, since the Lord began his work on my soul, than they were before that time... *Ans...* These stirrings may consist with a change of your nature." Boston likens this to the sun shining through a window into a home and showing up residual grime, which was not seen before. "Sin is not quite dead in the regenerate soul, but it is dying; and dying a lingering death, being crucified, no wonder there be great fightings..."

"CASE 4. But when I compare my love to God with my love to some created enjoyments, I find the pulse of my affections beat stronger to the creature than the Creator. How then can I call him Father? ...*Ans.* It cannot be denied, that the predominant love of the world, is a certain mark of an unregenerate state." Yet, Boston also says that nevertheless, we ought to beware of measuring our love for God merely on feelings. He gives the example of a man meeting a friend who has been away

for a long time and feeling on that occasion more feeling for his friend than for his wife and children. Does that mean that he loves his friend more than his family? No. His love for his family is of a deeper and stronger level than his affections for his friend, and so it can be with our love for God.

Boston gives additional cases that may cause us to doubt whether we be truly regenerate. In each case, he presses us to examine ourselves seriously, and then draws us to God's covenant promises.

The state of grace is a result of our union with Christ, reflected in the marriage of a husband and wife and becoming one flesh; so with Christ, "true believers... become one spirit," and none can separate us from Christ. Of the benefits of being united to Christ, Boston lists the following:

- **Justification**, as "the person united to Christ is justified."
- **Peace** with God, and with our consciences according to the measure of our understanding our peace with God.
- **Adoption** into God's family, which includes "seasonable correction" which is our "privilege as sons."
- **Sanctification**, including putting to death sin within us, and feeding on Christ.
- **Grace**, the believer will grow in grace as from a child to a young man to a father.
- **Fruitfulness**, as "faith is always followed with good works."

- **Holiness**, as every true Christian will “offer the sacrifice of praise, and they do good.”
- **Establishment**, such that “the Christian cannot fall away.”
- **Support** as “the believer leans on Christ.”
- **Special care of the Gardener**, as “believers, by virtue of their union with Christ, are the object of God’s special care and providence.”

State 4: Eternal happiness or misery

“For I know that you will bring me to death
and to the house appointed for all living.”
- Job 30:23

All must die. In regards the death of the wicked, “death roots up their delusive hopes of eternal happiness... death makes their state absolutely and for ever hopeless.” The “bright side” of the cloud, is that death is the way by which the godly are taken to their eternal state, “happy and hopeful... Jesus Christ, their best friend, is Lord of that land to which death carries them.”

Some saints may die “full of fears, and have little hope.” Yet, “the hopeless of a saint” does not mean that his state is hopeless.” True faith will not fail in the end.

The resurrection of Christ is the assurance that God will one day raise the living and the dead to eternal judgment. In regards to qualities of the bodies of the wicked at the resurrection, Boston admits “I find the scripture speaks but little of them,” except that they shall be unsatisfied (Luke 16:24-25), weak yet never dying under God’s wrath (Rev. 14:11), and without glory (Dan.

12:2). God's judgment will be "righteous and impartial, accurate and searching, clear and evident."

Regarding heaven, Boston says, "There we will see Adam and Eve in the heavenly paradise freely eating of the tree of life; Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and all the holy patriarchs, no more wandering from land to land, but come to their everlasting rest... There will we see our godly friends, relations, and acquaintance, pillars in the temple of God." Most of all, there "they shall have... glorious communion with God and Christ, which is the perfection of happiness."

Boston closes by exhorting his readers "improve time, while you have it."

Groaning, but not begrudging

Boston was faithful in the little things. Travelling on horseback, he would visit those who were sick. Yet, sometimes he begrudged that this took him away from his home and study. One time, he put off visiting someone who was sick, and they died before he was able to see them. This shocked him, as he felt convicted of the "secret grudge" in his heart. He repented of his sin, and resolved, "hereafter cheerfully to be ready at my Master's call."

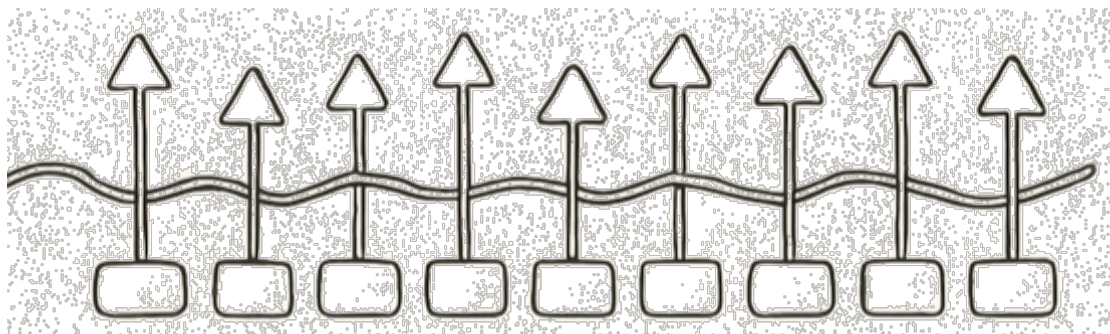
Family life also became increasingly difficult due to ill health. Katharine's illness meant that she was often bed-ridden. In fact, the 10th May 1720, "was a day remarkable above many to me and my family; being that wherein my wife was seized with that heavy trouble, which hath kept her all along since that time unto this day, in extreme distress: her imagination being

vitiated in a particular point... accompanied with bodily infirmities and maladies, exceeding great and numerous." He could see the Devil's hand in the matter.

Later, Boston wrote, "This summer, 1724, has been the most trying time that ever my family had since we were a family." He renovated the home, "turning the barn into a kitchen, the hall into a cellar" and so creating two additional bedrooms, in order to make the situation easier for Katharine.

Despite their desperate situation, Boston could also say, "I was sensibly helped to the exercise of faith in the time of our first distress; and had a sweet view of the Lord Jesus as administrator of the covenant, being a skillful pilot to carry us through the deep waters... I saw therein a palpable difference between groaning and grudging. For while in my agony I could not help groaning and crying... yet in my heart... [I] kissed the rod, for the sake of Hi who groaned and died on the cross for me, and I was even made to weep for joy in His dying love to me."

The Christian may groan to God, but must not begrudge God. Even as his family's health was beginning to break down, the cross of Christ was Boston's source of strength and joy.



PERIOD 12 – 1724-1731

"I see that I believe the gospel, with application to myself; and find, that my expectations from it do ultimately resolve themselves on the faithfulness of God in the word of the promise of the gospel."

The groaning part of my life

Boston called these final years of his life, "the groaning part of my life." He was forty-eight years old, and he and Katharine were often shut in at home due to illness. He suffered from scurvy – a lack of vitamin C in his diet. As a result his teeth fell out, and those that did remain in place "become blackish." He kept his lost teeth in a box. Having no teeth made it hard for him to eat, and to speak as a preacher, as it "marred my pronunciation in some measure."

He tried what remedies he thought would help, but to no avail: "Having read Dr. Cheyne's book on health, I had set myself to regulate my manner of living accordingly for the cure of scurvy, so I ate very sparingly at dinner, and took no supper. This course I used, I think, more than a year about this time—going to bed withal about nine, and rising early, about four or

five, making the time of dinner late in the afternoon, and thereafter doing nothing until I went to bed again. Thus my work indeed went on, but my body was brought to that low pass." His strength was running out.

Despite his own ill health, Boston's greatest grief seems to have been Katharine who was also suffering greatly. She was often confined to a small room in the house, which Boston called "the inner prison."

The Crook in the Lot

One of Boston's most well-known books is *The Crook in the Lot*. It was first published in 1737 in Edinburgh, five years after his death. It began as seven sermons, the first three of which were founded on Ecclesiastes 7:13, "Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked?"

As a pastor, Boston understood that he was not merely to react to people's problems, but to prepare them to face difficulties in life. Sound theology and faith lay the foundation for facing life's crookedness. In the opening sentence of the book, Boston says, "A just view of afflicting incidents is altogether necessary to a Christian deportment under them: and that view is to be obtained only by faith, not by sense."

A crook for Boston is a divinely-made bend in one's life whose nature can be as broad as the troubles of our lives. Some of the crooks in our lives are the result of our sin, but some are "pure and sinless crooks." God in His sovereignty and goodness mars the smoothness of our condition. Such sinless crooks of life are not accidental, but made by God's wise providence. Trusting in the goodness of God, Boston

nonetheless observes that, "A crooked thing is wayward... Crooked things are unpleasant to the eye: and no crook in the lot seems to be joyous, but grievous, making an unsightly appearance (Heb. 12:11)."

The scar of sin upon our lives and our world means that every person will have a crook in their lot in life. Yet, the crook will not be the same for all people. Whilst we may seek to improve our lot, under God's humbling we ought to see that, "What God sees meet to mar, we shall not be able to mend in our lot."

Importantly, for a Christian, the crook is not automatically sanctifying. Affliction of itself has no gracious efficacy. Boston said that it is not "sufficient of itself, and as it stands alone, to produce that effect." In fact, many are made worse by the very thing by which others are made better. The crook may harden some, but soften others, depending on the heart. To some it proves a means of good, to others an occasion of sin.

Submission to God under trial is the key that opens the door to sanctification. In this way, our response to God in the face of troubles is what makes them health or harm to our spiritual growth. Whoever is brought to a humble submission under the crook will find it medicinal; but he who stands upon his own will find it but a plague to him.

How should a Christian respond to the crook in the lot? Boston says that a Christian having been brought low will;

First, submit to it as just.

"I will bear the indignation of the LORD because I have sinned against him, until he pleads my cause and executes judgment for me."

- Micah 7:9

"There are no hardships in our condition, but we have procured them to ourselves; and it is therefore just we kiss the rod, and be silent under it, and so lower our spirits to our lot. "

Second, quietly bear under it as tolerable.

"It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD."

- Lamentations 3:26

"While the unsubdued spirit rageth under the yoke as a bullock unaccustomed to it, the spirit brought to the lot goes softly under it... They take up the naked cross, as God lays it down, without those over-weights upon it that turbulent passions add thereunto; and so it becomes really more easy than they thought it could have been, like a burden fitted to the back."

Thirdly, draw comfort from the Lord.

"Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines... yet I will rejoice in the LORD."

- Habakkuk 3:17-18

"Thus did David in the day of his distress, 'he encouraged himself in the Lord his God. (1 Sam. 30:6). "

Fourthly, understand that it is fit and good by seeing it as necessary spiritual medicine.

"For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

- 2 Corinthians 12:10

"These lowly souls consider their afflicted lot as a spiritual medicine, necessary, fit, and good for them; yea, best for them for the time, since it is ministered by their heavenly Father."

Fifthly, willingly wait until the Lord removes it.
"Then the king said to Zadok, "Carry the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the eyes of the LORD, he will bring me back and let me see both it and his dwelling place. ²⁶ But if he says, 'I have no pleasure in you,' behold, here I am, let him do to me what seems good to him."

- 2 Samuel 14:25-26

"A humble soul will be afraid of being taken out of its afflicted lot too soon. It will not be for moving for a change, till the moving of the heavens bring it about; so this hinders not prayer, and the use of appointed means, with dependance on the Lord; but requires faith, hope, patience, and resignation (2 Sam. 15:25, 26)."

In his own life, Boston knew the crook in the lot well, including his father's financial difficulties when he was young, his mother's death when he was fifteen years old, the loss of six of his ten children and Katharine and his own health problems. Looking back, he came to see that these griefs and sorrows were held together in the sovereign and good hands of God. They became part of the refining work that God did upon Boston. A less theologically able man, or less experienced man, may not have been able to write such a helpful book

Katharine's confession

It was during this period of life that Boston recorded Katharine's confession of faith in God. Please remember that she had suffered the awful loss of six children as infants. How this impacted her we will never know, but God knows.

Her health too was declining, and by March 1726 she was constantly confined to bed. Boston hoped and prayed for her deliverance, yet one Friday evening in early March 1728, he "lay that night in the folding-bed in the room where she lay," thinking that she was close to death. He ordered an express message to be sent to his eldest son in Edinburgh, calling him home. Yet, "by the good hand of God" Katharine recovered, and later that month she gave her husband "an account" of "a sweet calm" that went through her soul. This confession is the only recorded words of Katharine, and they declare her faith in, and communion with, Christ Jesus. She said,

I have often aimed at embracing the everlasting covenant held forth in the gospel, and saw my welcome thereto; and willing also to betake myself to it, with my whole heart, and often essayed it. My defect still lay in the want of confidence of faith, that the covenant should be made forthcoming to me, according to my needs, for time and eternity; fear still prevailing, and keeping me as it were standing on loose ground. But on 21st March betwixt two and four o'clock in the morning, on my bed of affliction, it pleased the Lord to stir me up and help me to essay it again, and to get that gap in some measure filled up. Being deeply convinced of the sin of my nature, and judging it to be the source of my unfixedness, I did, in the first place, make confession of the sin of my nature, life,

and practice, being as particular therein as I could reach; especially confessing my predominant sin, and laying my heart open to the omniscient God, to search and try it, in the most retired corners thereof; that if there was any lust or idol that I knew not of, I might be made sensible of the same; and I judged and condemned myself, as deserving nothing but the utmost of God's indignation. Then I looked to the way of salvation held forth in the word of the gospel; beheld Jesus Christ, a Saviour every way suited to my needs, my lost and undone condition. I saw an absolute need of him, in all his offices; and a glorious fitness in them, and each of them, for my case. So I did, with the whole bent of my soul, embrace the everlasting covenant held forth to me in the word of the gospel of grace; cast myself over on the Lord Jesus Christ, and receive him in all his offices; take God for my God in him; and, with my whole heart give up myself, soul and body, to be the Lord's for ever...

Katharine continued by asking the Lord for pity and help under her spiritual load. Yet, if it was to continue, then she asked that He "would keep me near himself in it; that his grace may be sufficient for me, and I may be kept from sinking into despondency, still believing in the worst of times, that God is my God in Jesus Christ the Mediator, and will with the temptation give an outgate, or strength to bear it."

She concludes by saying, "I begged, that his Spirit... might all along direct, guide, and assist me in my addresses to him for the supply of my wants, and to aim at and seek my fruit, by sticking to the root Jesus Christ, and not from my sincerity, nor any thing else in myself; looking on the Lord Jesus... from whence I was led into a sweet view of my union and

communion with him."

Psalm 71

All of Scripture is breathed-out by God, yet as part of His work within us, many Christians will have beloved verses. Psalm 71 is the testimony of an aging saint, renewing their trust in the Lord, and several times in his memoirs, Boston mentions this Psalm. At one point he said that its words "used to come slipping in, as it were, into my mind." Indeed, John M'Neilage in the 1899 edition of Boston's memoirs, claims that Psalm 71:20-21 was Boston's favourite text. In the Scottish Metrical Psalter of 1650, which was used daily by Boston for family worship, it says;

²⁰ Thou, Lord, who great adversities,
and sore, to me didst show,
Shalt quicken, and bring me again
from depths of earth below.

²¹ My greatness and my pow'r thou wilt
increase, and far extend:
On ev'ry side against all grief
thou wilt me comfort send.

Tests of assurance

In general terms, the Gospel of John tells us how we become a Christian (see John 3:16; 14:6; 20:31), and the letter of 1 John tells us how we can *know* that we are a Christian. Often this is summarized into three tests of assurance;

- **Doctrine:** we must believe that Jesus is the Christ who came in the flesh (1 John 1:1-4; 2:18-27; 4:1-6; 5:4-12).
- **Obedience:** we must obey God and walk in His light (1 John 1:5-2:6; 2:15-17; 28-29; 3:3-10; 5:16-17).
- **Love:** we must love the brothers (1 John 2:7-11; 3:11-20; 4:7-5:3).

These tests of assurance are combined in 1 John 3:21-23, "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us."

As Boston neared the end of his earthly life, he applied these tests of assurance to himself in order to see the proof that he truly did belong to God, and that God had truly worked His grace within his life.

After singing Psalm 16:5 – "The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot" – he set about to "gather some evidences" for heaven in his soul. He listed six such evidences;

1. I see that I believe the gospel... and find, that my expectations from it do ultimately resolve themselves on the faithfulness of God in the word of the promise of the gospel...
2. I find my soul acquiesceth in, being well pleased with, the covenant of grace, as God's plan of salvation in Christ; and that I have come into it with heart and good-will; taking my offered place in it in Christ the second Adam...

3. I find my heart so far at odds with sin... And is not this the work of the sanctifying Spirit of Christ in me?...
4. I have a hope of heaven, through Jesus Christ; and the Lord knows, it moves me to desire, long, and seek after being made meet for it, in purification from sin...
5. I love the purity of the divine image expressed in the holy law, and every line of it, so far as I discern it; and even there where it strikes against the sin that most easily besets me...
6. I have a measure of confidence, that I will get complete life and salvation; but that confidence is not in the flesh; for, God knows I am heartily out with myself, with respect to all the periods of my life, any one of which, I see, would undoubtedly ruin me, and that most justly.

Nobody, being changed by God, is the same person that they used to be. As Paul told the believers in Thessalonica, "our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction (1 Thess. 1:5)." Sincerely, and with sober humility, we ought to examine ourselves with an eye to seeing the same evidence of salvation and sanctification within us too.

Unresolved dispute

Not every pastoral situation resolved itself well. Whilst Boston had been at Simprin over twenty years earlier, there was an elder of the church named Adam Linton who was, "a good man, and he and his family from the beginning really friendly,

and those of them who remain continue so still; but they had about them a great measure of the harshness of the temper of the country."

In 1729, Adam Linton – possibly the same man – was "in great distress" with his wife and son. Despite being followers of John MacMillan, Boston was concerned for them, and so he sent word to them, asking if he could visit them. They refused to allow him to visit them, and soon after, Adam died.

Such a rejection could have caused bitterness or an arrogant self-righteousness within Boston. His pride hurt, he may have sunk into uncharitable thoughts about them. But instead it grieved him that they had so separated themselves – in living and dying – from him. All that he could do was say, "O my soul come not thou into their secret in the matter of church communion! unto their assembly, mine honour be not thou united in point of separation!"

My preparation for death

On Tuesday 2nd December 1729, less than three years before his death, Boston said, "I kept a secret fast, in order to my preparation for death." Rising early in the morning – "long before day" - he drew up a third personal covenant before the Lord. In it he said, "I... do solemnly covenant and engage to be the Lord's and make a solemn resignation and upgiving of myself, my soul, body, spiritual and temporal concerns, unto the Lord Jesus Christ." He pledged himself to "take and receive Christ" in all His offices: Prophet, Priest and King.

Boston carefully reviewed what he had written, examining his heart at each point. Then, he went "and kneeling at my

bedside, did, in prayer, then and there, solemnly, and in express words, according to what I had written with my hand, take hold of God's covenant of grace, for life and salvation to me, with my whole heart."

After laying before God His covenant promises, and rising from prayer, he lifted his eyes to the Lord and silently read the covenant before Him. Then, Boston signed with his own hand the covenant he confessed.

A watch run out

We have come to the end of Boston's memoirs. By the summer of 1730, Boston's health was so low that he said, "I ran out like a watch after six o'clock at night." He struggled to make it to family worship in the evenings. His health was failing, and yet with the strength that he had, he continued on in the Lord's work.

As he recalled his life and his service of the Lord in Ettrick – knowing that the end of near - these were the final words that he recorded in his memoirs;

I never had the art of making rich; nor could I ever heartily apply myself to the managing of secular affairs. Even the secular way of managing the discipline of the church, was so unacceptable to me, that I had no heart to dip in the public church management. What appearances I made at any time in these matters, were not readily in that way. I had a certain averseness to the being laid under any notable obligation to others, and so was not fond of gifts, especially in the case of any whom I had to deal with as a minister. And Providence so ordered, that I had little trial

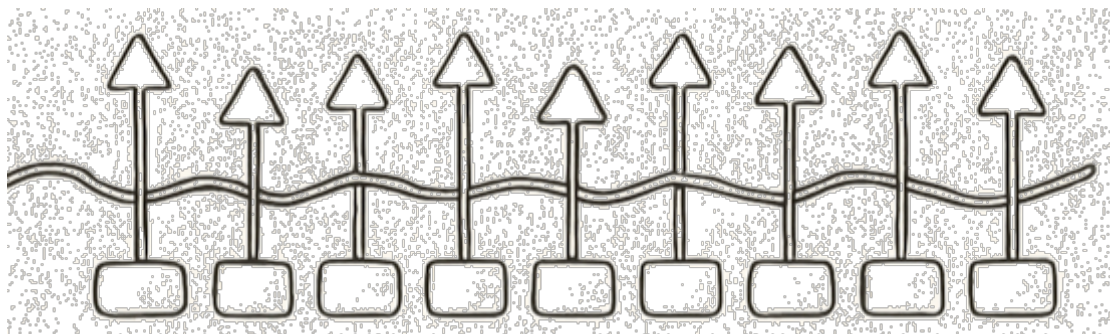
of that kind. I easily perceived, that in that case, "the borrower is servant to the lender."

As to the parish, there are few now alive that subscribed my call; nor are there, that I know, above two of the congregation of my hearers, paying rent this day, that were so doing, when I came among them, twenty-three years ago, [viz. from May 1, 1707, to Oct 24, 1730]. They are by far more polished in their manners, than at that time; and much more tractable, and easy to me; and fewer scandals fall out among them. The old dissenters continue immoveable; but their increasing is ceased. There is still a handful of serious Christians among them, as there hath been all along; and I have often observed, that as some such, from time to time, have been one way or other carried away, there came others in their stead; and whatever the Lord laid to my hand to preach on unto them, I used not to be straitened on their account; judging I would be understood, on any subject I was led to treat of. The late sickness is now, by the mercy of God, abated.

And thus have I given some account of the days of my vanity, being this 24th of October, 1730, 54 years, 7 months, and one week old.* Upon the whole, I bless my God in Jesus Christ, that ever he made me a Christian, and took an early dealing with my soul; that ever he made me a minister of the gospel, and gave me some insight into the doctrine of his grace; and that ever he gave me the blessed Bible, and brought me acquainted with the originals, and especially with the Hebrew text. The world hath all along been a stepdame to me; and wheresoever I would have attempted to nestle in it, there was a thorn of uneasiness laid for me. Man is born crying, lives

complaining, and dies disappointed from that quarter. "All is vanity and vexation of spirit.—I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord."

T. BOSTON



CONCLUSION

Death

Boston died on 20th May 1732, at the age of fifty-six years old, and nineteen months after he had completed his memoirs. He continued to preach during this time, and when he was physically unable to go to the church building, he preached from a window in the house, with those listening standing outside. His trust in the sovereignty and goodness of God remained firm to the end of his earthly life.

Six weeks before Boston's death, his friend Gabriel Wilson was unable to see him, but he wrote to him, encouraging him by saying that the Lord had, in fact, prepared him for this time by earlier giving him His truth. Furthermore,

The Son of God, you Lord and Master, is with you in the furnace, though not always visible, and will never leave you nor forsake you... Dearest Brother, I desire to remember your bonds, as bound with you. Great grace be upon you. I am, with love to all yours, Dearest Sir, yours,

GAB. WILSON.

From Boston's part, his last recorded words were a letter written to William Hog, whom he had corresponded with for twelve years. He finished the letter by saying,

The eternal God be your refuge, and underneath the everlasting arms, and plentifully reward your twelve years' most substantial friendship.- I am, my very dear Sir, Yours most affectionately, etc.

Burial

Boston was buried in Ettrick churchyard, with his memorial saying,

As a testimony of esteem for the Revd. THOMAS BOSTON, Senior whose private character was highly respectable, whose public labours were blessed to many and whose valuable writings have contributed much to promote the advancement of vital Christianity. This monument by permission of his relatives is erected by a religious and grateful public AD 1806. He was born in Dunse March 17th. 1676, ordained to the Pastoral Charge of Simprim Sept 21st. 1699, removed from thence to Ettrick May 1st. 1707 and died May 20th. 1732 aged 56 years leaving a widow and four children.

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