

The Beauties of Boston

This is a list of selections by Thomas Boston appearing in *Fire and Ice*. They are taken from M'Millan's book, *Beauties of Boston*, and appear here in modern language.

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A note about Thomas Boston, how his "Beauties" came to be collected, and a suggestion about their significance for today.

About "The Beauties of Boston"

by William Carson

From time to time in church history, there is a deadness in the accepted state of religion, and God causes His Biblical light to break through in new power. This is how He used Thomas Boston, one of the "Marrow Men."

Thomas Boston (1676-1732) was pastor of Simprin, a village in Berwickshire. Although his charge was small, he felt it was "rather superior" to his "small talents," by which he meant his burning desire to evangelise the people of his parish. His discouragement was made all the worse by the accepted theological position of his time, which forbade the indiscriminate preaching of the Gospel to all men. It was felt that the doctrine of God's Decree in Election was incompatible with the practice of offering Christ to all. Indeed, it was believed that the promises of salvation by Christ should be preached only to those who gave evidence of being elect.

While he was in the pastorate, he came across a copy of Edward Fisher's *Marrow of Modern Divinity*. This old book opened his eyes to the truth that "Jesus Christ is the Father's deed of gift to all mankind lost" and Boston began to preach with new power and freedom. Of course, the Church often has a real knack for resisting the Biblical light, and Boston and the few others like him, branded as "Marrow Men," had to weather controversy, opposition, and ecclesiastical persecution in addition to their pastoral labours.

Boston studied with his pen, and wrote out all his sermons in full. Although little of his writings were published in his lifetime, they were collected posthumously into 12 volumes, quite rare and valuable today. The editor of these volumes, Samuel M'Millan, desired to make the writings of Boston more available to people unable to obtain the entire set, and so made up a volume of extracts entitled *The Beauties of Boston*. The selections here in *Fire and Ice* are taken from that book.

I think there are two morals to be drawn from the story of Thomas Boston. The first is that even Reformed and Calvinistic Christians can keep to the form and lose the spirit of what we believe. Perhaps we have avoided the hyper-Calvinism of Boston's day, but do we allow our culture to tell us what to preach and how to preach it? Or perhaps we allow programmes and image to set our agenda, instead of the Bible? Let us have the courage of Thomas Boston to set forth Christ before men, and let the chips fall as they may.

Secondly, even though Boston was caught up in controversy, his writings speak only of *Christ*. Notice, for example, his writings on the [decrees](#) are full of sweetness, of comfort, and evangelistic warmth. He writes to glorify his Saviour, not to promote his position. Let us take a similar view and entrust our course to God; as Ralph Erskine said of Boston:

"Whose golden pen to future times will bear His fame, till in the clouds his Lord appear."

How We Ought to Think about God's Providence

by Thomas Boston

1. Beware of drawing an excuse for your sin from the providence of God; for it is most holy, and is in no way any cause of any sin you commit. Every sin is an act of rebellion against God; a breach of his holy law, and deserves his wrath and curse; and therefore cannot be authorised by an infinitely-holy God, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity without detestation and abhorrence. Though he has by a permissive decree allowed moral evil to be in the world, yet that has no influence on the sinner to commit it. For it is not the fulfilling of God's decree, which is an absolute secret to every mortal, but the gratification of their own lusts and perverse inclinations, that men intend and mind in the commission of sin.

2. Beware of murmuring and fretting under any dispensations of providence that you meet with; remembering that nothing falls out without a wise and holy providence, which knows best what is fit and proper for you. And in all cases, even in the middle of the most afflicting incidents that happen to you, learn submission to the will of God, as Job did, when he said upon the end of a series of the heaviest calamities that happened to him, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord," Job, i. 21. In the most distressing case, say with the disciples, "The will of the Lord be done," Acts, 21:14.

3. Beware of anxious cares and fearfulness about your material well-being in the world. This our Lord has cautioned his followers against, Matt. 6:31. "Take no thought, (that is, anxious and perplexing thought,) saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" Never let the fear of man stop you from duty, Matt. 10:28, 29; but let your souls learn to trust in God, who guides and superintends all the events and administrations of providence, by whatever hands they are performed.

4. Do not think little of means, seeing God works by them; and he that has appointed the end, orders the means necessary for gaining the end. Do not rely upon means, for they can do nothing without God, Matt. 4:4. Do not despair if there be no means, for God can work without them, as well as with them; Hosea 1:7. "I will save them by the Lord their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen." If the means be unlikely, he can work above them, Rom. 4:19. "He considered not his own body now

dead, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb." If the means be contrary, he can work by contrary means, as he saved Jonah by the whale that devoured him. That fish swallowed up the prophet, but by the direction of providence, it vomited him out upon dry land.

Lastly, Happy is the people whose God is the Lord: for all things shall work together for their good. They may sit secure in exercising faith upon God, come what will. They have good reason for prayer; for God is a prayer-hearing God, and will be enquired of by his people as to all their concerns in the world. And they have ground for the greatest encouragement and comfort in the middle of all the events of providence, seeing they are managed by their covenant God and gracious friend, who will never neglect or overlook his dear people, and whatever concerns them. For he has said, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you," Heb. 13:5.

Search from the Book of the Lord

by Thomas Boston

Several things are implied in Isaiah 34:16, "Search from the book of the Lord, and read:"

1. That man has lost his way, and needs direction to find it, Psalm 119:176, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; Seek Your servant." Miserable man has blurred vision in a directionless world, which is a dark place, and has as much need of the scriptures to guide him, as one has of a light in darkness, 2 Pet. 1:19. What a miserable case is that part of the world in that lacks the Bible? They are vain in their imaginations, and grope in the dark, but cannot find the way of salvation. In no better case are those to whom it has not come in power.

2. That man is in danger of being led farther and farther wrong. This made the spouse say, "Tell me, O you whom I love, Where you feed your flock, Where you make it rest at noon. For why should I be as one who veils herself By the flocks of your companions?" Song 1:7. There is a cunning devil, a wicked world, corrupt lusts within one's own breast, to lead him out of the right way, that we had need to let go of, and take this guide. There are many false lights in the world, which, if followed, will lead the traveller into a mire, and leave him there.

3. That men are slow of heart to understand the mind of God in his word. It will cost searching diligently before we can take it up, "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me," John 5:39.

Our eyes are dim to the things of God, our understanding dull, and our judgment is weak. And therefore, because the iron is blunt, we must put too the more strength. We lost the sharpness of our sight in spiritual things in Adam; and our corrupt wills and carnal affections, that favour not the things of God, do blind our judgments even more: and therefore it is a labour to us to find out what is necessary for our salvation.

4. That the book of the Lord has its difficulties, which are not to be easily solved. Therefore the Psalmist prays, "Open my eyes, that I may see Wondrous things from Your law," Psa 119:18.

Philip asked the eunuch, "Do you understand what you are reading?" and he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" There are depths there in which an elephant may swim, and will exercise the largest capabilities, with all the expertise they may be possessed of. God in his holy providence has so ordered it, to stain the pride of all glory; to make his word the more like himself, whom none can search out to perfection, and to sharpen the diligence of his people in their inquiries into it.

5. That yet we need highly to understand it, otherwise we would not be commanded to search into it. "Of the times and seasons," says the apostle, "you have no need that I write to you;" and therefore he wrote not of them. There is a treasure in this field; we are called to dig for it; for though it be hid, yet we must have it, or we will waste away in our spiritual poverty.

6. That we may gain from it by diligent inquiry. The holy humble heart will not be always sent empty away from these wells of salvation, when it undertakes itself to draw. There are shallow places in these waters of the sanctuary, where lambs may wade.

Useful Directions For Reading and Searching the Scriptures.

by Thomas Boston

1. Follow a regular plan in reading of them, that you may be acquainted with the whole; and make this reading a part of your private devotions. Not that you should confine yourselves only to a set plan, so as never to read by choice, but ordinarily this tends most to edification. Some parts of the Bible are more difficult, some may seem very barren for an ordinary reader; but if you would look on it all as God's word, not to be scorned, and read it with faith and reverence, no doubt you would find advantage.

2. Set a special mark, however you find convenient, on those passages you read, which you find most suitable to your case, condition, or temptations; or such as you have found to move your hearts more than other passages. And it will be profitable often to review these.

3. Compare one Scripture with another, the more obscure with that which is more plain, 2 Pet. 1:20. This is an excellent means to find out the sense of the Scriptures; and to this good use serve the marginal notes on Bibles. And keep Christ in your eye, for to him the scriptures of the Old Testament look (in its genealogies, types, and sacrifices), as well as those of the New.

4. Read with a holy attention, arising from the consideration of the majesty of God, and the reverence due to him. This must be done with attention, first, to the words; second, to the sense; and, third, to the divine authority of the Scripture, and the obligation it lays on the conscience for obedience, 1 Thess. 2:13, "For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe."

5. Let your main purpose in reading the Scriptures be practice, and not bare knowledge, James 1:22, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." Read that you may learn and do, and that without any limitation or distinction, but that whatever you see God requires, you may study to practice.

6. Beg of God and look to him for his Spirit. For it is the Spirit that inspired it, that it must be savingly understood by, 1 Cor 2:11, "For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God." And therefore before you read, it is highly reasonable you beg a blessing on what you are to read.

7. Beware of a worldly, fleshly mind: for fleshly sins blind the mind from the things of God; and the worldly heart cannot favour them. In an eclipse of the moon, the earth comes between the sun and the moon, and so keeps the light of

the sun from it. So the world, in the heart, coming between you and the light of the word, keeps its divine light from you.

8. Labour to be disciplined toward godliness, and to observe your spiritual circumstances. For a disciplined attitude helps mightily to understand the scriptures. Such a Christian will find his circumstances in the word, and the word will give light to his circumstances, and his circumstances light into the word.

9. Whatever you learn from the word, labour to put it into practice. For to him that has, shall be given. No wonder those people get little insight into the Bible, who make no effort to practice what they know. But while the stream runs into a holy life, the fountain will be the freer.

Praying in the Name of Christ

by Thomas Boston

1. Negatively. It is not a bare faithless mentioning of his name in our prayers, nor finishing our prayers with them, Matt. 7:21. The saints use the words, "through Jesus Christ our Lord," 1 Cor. 15:57, but often is that scabbard produced, while the sword of the Spirit is not in it. The words are said, but the faith is not exercised.

Praying at His Command

2. Positively. To pray in the name of Christ is to pray,

first, At his command, to go to God by his order, John 16:24, "Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive." Christ as God commands all men to pray, to offer that piece of natural duty to God; but that is not the command meant. But Christ as Mediator sends his own to his Father to ask supply of their wants, and allows them to tell that he sent them, as one recommends a poor body to a friend, John 16:24, just cited. So to pray in the name of Christ is to go to God as sent by the poor man's friend. So it implies,

1. The soul's having come to Christ in the first place, John 15:7, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you." He that would pray aright, must do as those who made Blastus

the king's chamberlain their friend first, and then made their plea to their king, Acts 12:20.

2. The soul's taking its encouragement to pray from Jesus Christ, Heb 4:14, "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

The way to the throne in heaven is blocked up by our sins. And sinners have no confidence to seek the Lord. Jesus Christ came down from heaven, died for the criminals, and gathers them to himself by effectual calling. He, as having all interest with his Father, bids them go to his Father in his name, and ask what they need, assuring them of acceptance. And from thence they take their encouragement, viz. from his promises in the word. And he gives them his token with them, which the Father will own, and that is his own Spirit, Rom 8:26,27, "Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

Praying to God through Christ

Secondly, It is to direct our prayers to God through Jesus Christ, Heb 7:25, "Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them," and in chapter 13:15, "Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name."

Praying Christ's name is depending wholly on Christ's merit and intercession for access, acceptance, and a gracious return:

1. Depending on Christ for access to God, Eph 3:12, "In whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him." There is no access to God but through him, John 14:6 "No one comes to the Father except through Me." They that attempt otherwise to come to God, will get the door thrown in their face. But we must take hold of the Mediator, and come in at his side, who is the Secretary of heaven.

2. Depending on him for acceptance of our prayers, Eph 1:6 "He has made us accepted in the Beloved." Our Lord Christ is the only altar that can sanctify our

gift. If one lay the stress of the acceptance of his prayers on his attitude, feelings, tenderness, and so on, the prayer will not be accepted. A crucified Christ only can bear the weight of the acceptance of either our persons or performances.

3. Depending on him for a gracious answer, 1 John 5:14, "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us." No prayers are heard and answered but for the Mediator's sake; and whatever petitions agreeable to God's will are put up to God, in this dependence, are heard.

Why Must We Pray in the Name of Christ?

The reason of this may be taken up in these two things

1. There is no access for a sinful creature to God without a Mediator, Isa 59:2, "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear." John 14:6 "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." Sin has set us at a distance from God, and has bolted the door of our access to him, that it is beyond our power, or that of any creature, to open it for us. His justice rejects the criminal, his holiness the unclean creature, unless there be an acceptable person to go between him and us. Our God is a consuming fire: and so there is no immediate access for a sinner to him.

2. And there is none appointed nor fit for that work but Christ, 1 Tim. 2:5. It is he alone who is our great High Priest. None but he has satisfied justice for our sins. And as he is the only Mediator of redemption, so he is the only Mediator of intercession, 1 John 2:1 "If anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." The sweet savour of his merit alone is capable to procure acceptance to our prayers, in themselves unworthy, Rev. 8:3,4.

How the Spirit Enables Us to Pray

by Thomas Boston

It is by the help of the Holy Spirit that we are able to pray, Gal 4:6, "And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts,

crying out, "Abba, Father!" Rom 8:26, "Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

There Are Two Sorts of Prayers.

Firstly, A prayer wrought out by virtue of a gift of knowledge and utterance. This is bestowed on many reprobates, and that gift may be useful to others, and to the church. But as it is merely of that sort, it is not accepted, nor does Christ put it in before the Father for acceptance.

For, secondly, There is a prayer wrought in men by virtue of the Holy Spirit, Zech. 12:10, "And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication," and that is the only acceptable prayer to God. James 5:16, "Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." The word "effective" is from the Greek word "inwrought." Right praying is praying in the Spirit. It is a gale blowing from heaven, the breathing of the Spirit in the saints, that carries them out in the prayer, and which comes the length of the throne.

Spirit Helps Us to Pray Two Ways

1. As a teaching and instructing Spirit, furnishing proper matter of prayer, causing us to know what we pray for, Rom. 8:26, enlightening the mind in the knowledge of our needs, and those of others. The Spirit brings into our remembrance these things, suggesting them to us according to the word, together with the promises of God, on which prayer is grounded, John 14:26, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." Hence it is that the saints are sometimes carried out in prayer for things which they had no view of before, and carried by some things they had.

2. As a quickening, exciting Spirit, Rom. 8:26.; the Spirit qualifying the soul with praying graces and affections, working in the praying person sense of needs, faith, fervency, humility, etc. Psa 10:17, "Lord, You have heard the desire of the humble; You will prepare their heart; You will cause Your ear to hear,"

The man may go to his knees in a very unprepared attitude for prayer, yet the Spirit blows, he is helped. It is for this reason the Spirit is said to make intercession for us, namely, in so far as he teaches and quickens, puts us in a praying frame of mind, and draws out our petitions, as it were, which the Mediator presents.

Special Giftedness in Prayer?

This praying with the help of the Spirit is particular to the saints, Jam. 5:16.; yet they do not have that help at all times, nor always in the same measure; for sometimes the Spirit, being provoked, departs, and they are left in a withered condition. So there is great need to look for a breathing, and pant for it, when we are to go to duty: for if there be not a gale, we will tug at the oars but heartlessly.

Let no man think that a readiness and flowing of expression in prayer, is always the effect of the Spirit's assistance. For that may be the product of a gift, and of the common operations of the Spirit, removing the impediment of the exercise of it. And it is evident one may be scarce of words, and have groans instead of them, while the Spirit helps him to pray, Rom. 8:26. Neither is every flood of emotions in prayer, the effect of the Spirit of prayer. There are of those which puff up a man, but make him never a whit more holy, tender in his walk, etc. But the influences of the Spirit never miss to be humbling but sanctifying. Hence, says David, "But who am I, and who are my people, That we should be able to offer so willingly as this? For all things come from You, and of Your own we have given You," 1 Chr 29:14; and, says the apostle, "We have no confidence in the flesh," Phil. 3:3.

The Purpose of God's Decrees

by Thomas Boston

And this is no other than *his own glory*. Every rational agent acts for an end; and God being the most perfect agent, and his glory the highest end, there can be no doubt but all his decrees are directed to that end. Rom 11:36, "For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever." "that we....should be to the praise of His glory," Eph 1:12 In all, he aims at his glory; and seeing he aims at it, he gets it even from the most sinful actions he has decreed to permit. Either the glory of his mercy or of his justice is drawn from them. Infinite wisdom directs all to the end intended. More particularly,

God Glorified in the Creation of the World

1. This was God's purpose in the creation of the world. The divine perfections are admirably glorified here, not only in regard of the greatness of the effect, which comprehends the heavens and the earth, and all things in them; but in regard of the marvellous way of its production. For he made the vast universe without the concurrence of any material cause; he brought it forth from the womb of nothing by an act of his efficacious will. And as he began the creation by proceeding from nothing to real existence, so in forming the other parts he drew them from infirm and inert matter, as from a second nothing, that all his creatures might bear the signatures of infinite power. Thus he commanded light to arise out of darkness, and sensible creatures from an insensible element. The lustre of the divine glory appears eminently here. Hence David says, Psalm 19:1. "The heavens declare the glory of God." They declare and manifest to the world the attributes and perfections of their great Creator, even in his infinite wisdom, goodness, and power. All the creatures have some prints of God stamped upon them, whereby they loudly proclaim and show to the world his wisdom and goodness in framing them. Hence says Paul, Rom. 1:20, "The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead."

God Glorified in the Creation of Men and Angels

2. The glory of God was his chief purpose and design in making men and angels. The rest of the creatures glorified God in a passive way, as they are evidences and manifestations of his infinite wisdom, goodness, and power. But this higher rank of beings are endowed with rational faculties, and so are capable to glorify God actively. Hence it is said, Prov 16:4, "The LORD has made all for Himself" If all things were made for him, then man and angels especially, who are the masterpieces of the whole creation. We have our source and being from the pure fountain of God's infinite power and goodness; and therefore we ought to run towards that again, till we empty all our faculties and excellencies into that same ocean of divine goodness.

God Glorified in Election and Predestination

3. This is likewise the end of election and predestination. For "having predestined us....to the praise of the glory of His grace," Eph 1:5,6. That some are ordained to eternal life, and others passed by, and suffered to perish eternally in their sin, is for the manifestation of the infinite perfections and excellencies of God. The glory and beauty of the divine attributes is displayed here with a shining lustre; as his sovereign authority and dominion over all his creatures to dispose of them to what ends and purposes he pleases; his knowledge and omniscience, in beholding all things past, present, and to come; his vindictive justice, in ordaining punishments to men, as a just retribution for sin; and his omnipotence,

in making good his word, and putting all his threatenings in execution. The glory of his goodness shines likewise here, in making choice of any, when all most justly deserved to be rejected. And his mercy shines here with an beautiful lustre, in receiving and admitting all who believe in Jesus into his favour.

God Glorified in the Work of Redemption

4. This was the purpose that God proposed in that great and astonishing work of redemption. In our redemption by Christ, we have the fullest, clearest, and most delightful manifestation of the glory of God that ever was or shall be in this life. All the declarations and manifestations that we have of his glory in the works of creation and common providence, are but dim and obscure in comparison with what is here. Indeed the glory of his wisdom, power, and goodness, is clearly manifested in the works of creation. But the glory of his mercy and love had lain under an eternal eclipse without a Redeemer. God had in several ages of the world pitched upon particular seasons to manifest and reveal one or other particular property of his nature. Thus his justice was declared in his drowning the old world with a deluge of water, and burning Sodom with fire from heaven. His truth and power were clearly manifested in freeing the Israelites from the Egyptian chains, and bringing them out from that miserable bondage. His truth was there illustriously displayed in performing a promise which had lain dormant for the space of 430 years, and his power in quelling his implacable enemies by the meanest of his creatures. Again, the glory of one attribute is more seen in one work than in another: in some things there is more of his goodness, in other things more of his wisdom is seen, and in others more of his power. But in the work of redemption all his perfections and excellencies shine forth in their greatest glory.

This is the goal that God proposed in their conversion and regeneration. Hence it is said, Isa 43:21, "This people I have formed for Myself; They shall declare My praise." Sinners are adopted into God's family, and made a royal priesthood according to this very design, 1 Pet 2:9, "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light."

The Properties Of God's Decrees Explained

by Thomas Boston

1. *They are eternal.* God makes no decrees in time, but they were all from eternity. So the decree of election is said to have been "before the foundation of the world," Eph. 1:4, "just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love," Indeed, whatever he does in time, was decreed by him, seeing it was known to him before time, Acts 15:18, "Known to God from eternity are all His works." And this foreknowledge is founded on the decree. If the divine decrees were not eternal, God would not be most perfect and unchangeable. Weak like man, he would have to change his plans and would be unable to tell every thing that would come to pass.

2. *They are most wise,* "according to the counsel of his will." God cannot properly deliberate or take counsel, as men do; for he sees all things together and at once. And thus his decrees are made with perfect judgment, and laid in the depth of wisdom, Rom 11:33, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" So that nothing is determined that could have been better determined.

3. *They are most free,* according to the counsel of his own will; depending on no other, but all flowing from the mere pleasure of his own will, Rom 11:34, "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?" Whatsoever he decrees to work outside of himself is from his free choice. So his decrees are all absolute, and there are none of them conditional. He has made no decrees suspended on any condition outside himself. Neither has he decreed any thing because he saw it would come to pass, or as that which would come to pass on such or such conditions; for then they should be no more according to the counsel of his will, but the creature's will.

God's decrees being eternal, they cannot depend upon a condition which is temporal. They are the determinate counsels of God, but a conditional decree determines nothing. Such conditional decrees are inconsistent with the infinite wisdom of God, and are in men only the effects of weakness; and they are inconsistent with the independence of God, making them depend on the creature.

4. *They are unchangeable.* They are the unalterable laws of heaven. God's decrees are constant; and he by no means alters his purpose, as men do. Psalm 33:11, "The counsel of the Lord stands forever, The plans of His heart to all generations." Hence they are compared to mountains of brass, Zech. 6:1. As nothing can escape his first view, so nothing can be added to his knowledge. Hence Balaam said, "God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" Num 23:19. The decree of election is irreversible: "The

solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," 2 Tim 2:19

5. *They are most holy and pure.* For as the sun darts its beams upon a dunghill, and yet is no way defiled by it; so God decrees the permission of sin, yet is not the author of sin: 1 John 1:5. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." James 1:13, "God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone," and verse 17, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning."

6. *They are effective;* that is, whatsoever God decrees, comes to pass infallibly, Isa 46:10 "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." He cannot fall short of what he has determined. Yet the liberty of second causes is not hereby taken away; for the decree of God offers no violence to the creature's will; as appears from the free and unforced actions of Joseph's brethren, Pharaoh, the Jews that crucified Christ, etc. Nor does it take away the contingency of second causes, either in themselves or as to us, as appears by the lot cast into the lap. Nay, they are thereby established, because he hath efficaciously foreordained that such effects shall follow on such causes.

Important Lessons Drawn from the Decrees of God

by Thomas Boston

1. Has God decreed all things that come to pass? Then there is nothing that falls out by chance, nor are we to ascribe what we meet with either to good or bad luck and fortune. There are many events in the world which men look upon as mere accidents, yet all these come by the counsel and appointment of Heaven. Solomon tells us, Prov. 16:33. that "the lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD." However disordered and fortuitous things may be with respect to us, yet they are all determined and directed by the Lord. When that man drew a bow at random, 1 Kings 22:34, it was merely accidental with respect to him, yet it was God that guided the motion of the arrow so as to strike the king of Israel rather than any other man. Nothing then comes to pass, however random and uncertain it may seem to be, but what was decreed by God.

2. Hence we see God's certain knowledge of all things that happen in the world, seeing his knowledge is founded on his decree. As he sees all things possible in the telescope of his own power, so he sees all things to come in the telescope of his own will; of his effecting will, if he hath decreed to produce them; and of his permitting will, if he hath decreed to allow them. Therefore his declaration of things to come is founded on his appointing them Isa 44:7, "And who can proclaim as I do? Then let him declare it and set it in order for Me, Since I appointed the ancient people. And the things that are coming and shall come, Let them show these to them." He foreknows the most necessary things according to the course of nature, because he decreed that such effects should proceed from and necessarily follow such and such causes: and he knows all future contingents, all things which shall happen by "chance," and the most free actions of rational creatures, because he decreed that such things should come to pass contingently or freely, according to the nature of second causes. So that what is casual or contingent with respect to us, is certain and necessary in regard of God.

3. Whoever may be the instruments of any good to us, of whatever sort, we must look above them, and see the hand and counsel of God in it, which is their first source, and be duly thankful to God for it. And whatever evil of suffering or afflictions befall us, we must look above the instruments of it to God. Affliction does not rise out of the dust, or come to men by chance; but it is the Lord that sends it, and we should recognise and reverence his hand in it. This is what David did in the day of his extreme distress; 2 Sam 16:11 "Let him alone, and let him curse; for so the LORD has ordered him." We should be patient under whatever distress comes upon us, considering that God is on our side, Job 2:10 "Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" This would be a happy means to quiet our complaining at adverse dispensations. Hence David says, "I was mute, I did not open my mouth, because it was you who did it," Psa 39:9

4. See here the evil of murmuring and complaining at our lot in the world. How apt are you to quarrel with God, as if he were in the wrong to you, when his dealings with you are not according to your own desires and wishes? You demand a reason, and call God to an account, Why did this happen to me? Why am I so much afflicted and distressed? Why am I so long afflicted? And why such an affliction rather than another? Why am I so poor and another so rich? Thus your hearts rise up against God. But you should remember, that this is to defame the counsels of infinite wisdom, as if God had not ordered your affairs wisely enough in his eternal counsel. We find the Lord reproving Job for this, chap. 40:2 "Shall the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him?" When you murmur and brood under cross and afflictive dispensations, this is a presuming to instruct God how to deal with you, and to reprove him as if he were in the wrong. Indeed, there is a kind of implicit blasphemy in it, as if you had more

wisdom and justice to arrange your circumstances, and to carve out your own portion in the world. This is what you really mean when you say, "If I been on God's counsel, I would have ordered this matter better; things would not be with me as they are now." Oh presume not to correct the infinite wisdom of God, seeing he has decreed all things most wisely and judiciously.

5. There is no reason for people to excuse their sins and failing, from the doctrine of the divine decrees. Wicked men, when they commit some wicked or atrocious crime, might attempt to excuse themselves, saying, "Who can help it? God would have it so; it was appointed for me before I was born, so that I could not avoid it." This is a horrid abuse of the divine decrees, as if they might constrain men to sin. This is impossible. The decree is an immanent act of God, and so can have no influence, physical or moral, upon the wills of men, but leaves them to the liberty and free choice of their own hearts; and what sinners do, they do most freely and of their own choice. It is a horrid and detestable wickedness to cast the blame of your sin upon God's decree. This is to charge your villainy upon him, as if he were the author of it. It is great folly to cast your sins upon Satan who tempted you, or upon your neighbour who provoked you: but it is a far greater sin, nay, horrid blasphemy, to cast it upon God himself. A greater affront than this cannot be offered to the infinite holiness of God.

6. Let the people of God comfort themselves in all cases by this doctrine of the divine decrees; and, amidst whatever befalls them, rest quietly and submissively in the bosom of God, considering that whatever comes or can come to pass, proceeds from the decree of their gracious friend and reconciled Father, who knows what is best for them, and will make all things work together for their good. O what a sweet and pleasant life would you have under the heaviest pressures of affliction, and what heavenly serenity and tranquillity of mind would you enjoy, would you cheerfully acquiesce in the good will and pleasure of God, and embrace every dispensation, how no matter how sharp it may be, because it is determined and appointed for you by the eternal counsel of his will!

God Alone Created the World

by Thomas Boston

This will be evident from the following considerations:

1. The world could not make itself; for that would imply a horrible contradiction, namely, that the world was before it was; for the cause must always be before its effect. That which is not in being, can have no production; for nothing can act before it exists. As nothing has no existence, so it have no operation. There must therefore be something which has existence in itself, to give a being to those things that are; and every second cause must be an effect of some other before it be a cause. To be and not to be at the same time, is a manifest contradiction, which would infallibly take place if any thing made itself. That which makes is always before that which is made, as is obvious to the most illiterate peasant. If the world were a creator, it must be before itself as a created thing.

2. The production of the world could not be by chance. It was indeed the extravagant fancy of some ancient philosophers, that the original of the world was from a fortuitous concourse of atoms, which were in perpetual motion in an immense space, till at last a sufficient number of them met in such a happy conjunction as formed the universe in the beautiful order in which we now behold it. But it is amazingly strange how such a wild opinion, which can never be reconciled with reason, could ever find any entertainment in a human mind. Can any man rationally conceive, that a confused jumble of atoms, of diverse natures and forms, and some so far distant from others, should ever meet in such a fortunate manner, as to form an entire world, so vast in extent, so distinct in the order, so united in the diversities of natures, so regular in the variety of changes, and so beautiful in the whole composure? Such an extravagant fancy as this can only possess the thoughts of a disordered brain.

3. God created all things, the world, and all the creatures that belong to it. He attributes this work to himself, as one of the particular glories of his Deity, exclusive of all the creatures. So we read, Isa 44:24, "I am the LORD, who makes all things, who stretches out the heavens all alone, who spreads abroad the earth by myself." Chapter 45:12, "I have made the earth, And created man on it. I; My hands; stretched out the heavens, And all their host I have commanded." Chapter 40:12,13, "Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, Measured heaven with a span And calculated the dust of the earth in a measure? Weighed the mountains in scales And the hills in a balance? Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, or as his counselor has taught him?" Job 9:8, "He alone spreads out the heavens, and treads on the waves of the sea." These are magnificent descriptions of the creating power of God, and exceed every thing of the kind that has been attempted by the pens of the greatest sages of antiquity. By this operation God is distinguished from all the false gods and fictitious deities which the blinded nations adored, and shows himself to be the true God. Jer 10:11 "Thus you shall say to them: "The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under these heavens. He has made the earth by His power, He has established the world by His wisdom, And has stretched out the heavens at His discretion." Psalm 96:5, "

All the gods of the nations are idols: but the Lord made the heavens." Isa 37:16, "You are God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth." None could make the world but God, because creation is a work of infinite power, and could not be produced by any finite cause: For the distance between being and not being is truly infinite, which could not be removed by any finite agent, or the activity of all finite agents united.

This work of creation is common to all the three persons in the adorable Trinity. The Father is described in Scripture as the Creator, 1 Cor. 7:6, "The Father, of whom are all things." The same claim belongs to the Son, John 1:3, "All things were made by him," [that is to say-] the Word, the Son; John 1:3 "All things were made through Him, and without him was not any thing made that was made." The same honour belongs to the Holy Spirit, as Job 26:13, "By His Spirit He adorned the heavens." Job 33:4 "The Spirit of God has made me," says Elihu, "and the breath of the Almighty gives me life." All the three persons are one God; God is the Creator; and therefore all the external works and acts of the one God must be common to the three persons. Hence, when the work of creation is ascribed to the Father, neither the Son nor the Holy Spirit are excluded; but because as the Father is the fountain of the Deity, so he is the fountain of divine works. The Father created from himself by the Son and the Spirit; the Son from the Father by the Spirit; and the Spirit from the Father and the Son; the manner or order of their working being according to the order of their subsisting. The matter may be considered in this way: All the three persons being one God, possessed of the same infinite perfections; the Father, the first in subsistence, willed the work of creation to be done by his authority: "He spoke, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast."-In respect of immediate operation, it peculiarly belonged to the Son. For, "the Father created all things by Jesus Christ," Eph. 3:9. And we are told, that "all things were made through him," John 1:3. This work in regard of settlement and ornament, particularly belongs to the Holy Ghost. So it is said, Gen 1:2, "and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters," to embellish and adorn the world, after the matter of it was formed. This is why it is also said, Job 26:13 "By His Spirit He adorned the heavens."

Christ's Name Wonderful

by Thomas Boston
Edited by Don Kistler

This is the name of our incarnate Redeemer, and when we hear it named, it must represent to us the Son of God in man's nature.

USE 1. O the love of God to poor sinners of mankind! John 3:16, *For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.* The greatest work that ever God did was for their salvation. He made the world for man and gave it to him, Psalm 115:16, and the visible heavens, too, Genesis 1:17. Yes, the highest heavens also He made for them and gives to them in His Son, Matthew 25:34. But a greater work than all these He did for them when He did this miracle of the incarnation of His own Son for them, and gave Him, an incarnate Redeemer, to them. O how can we escape the most fearful doom if we neglect this great salvation! How worthy are they to perish who will not be saved when God has wrought this greatest miracle to save them?

USE 2. What unaccountable stupidity is it in men not to consider, admire, and be swallowed up in contemplation of this miracle; and not to be in deepest love with this miraculous personage given to them? Ah! Have we not all been careless, unmoved spectators of this miracle? How many have never spent a few minutes in the consideration and admiration of Him? Have ye not gazed on and wondered at some trifle more than at this greatest of the works of God? Have ye not been more deeply in love with some person or thing for its shadowy excellencies than with this miraculous person? Cease to wonder at the Jews' obstinacy in not being moved to believe by all His miracles; for a greater than them all is here, to wit, His miraculous self; and yet we are unmoved.

What is the import of Christ as God-man, His being and appearing to be a miraculous, most wonderful one? Considering this as the name of Christ, to commend Him to sinners, it imports:

1. The excellency of His person as God-man. He is an excellent, glorious, and lovely one. Hebrews 1:3, *Being the brightness of His Father's glory, and the express image of His person.* Though the blind world perceives not His excellency, saying as Isaiah 53:2, *He hath no form or comeliness, and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him.* It is not but through their own default, by reason of their blindness; for His glory shines forth, to be perceived by those whose eyes are opened. John 1:14, *We beheld His glory,* etc. But the glory of the sun is not seen by the blind man, nor the glory of Christ by unbelievers.
2. The fulness of excellencies in Him, our incarnate Redeemer. His name is "Miracle," a collective word. There is a confluence of excellencies in Him. Look to Him in every part, and all is excellent in Him. Song of Solomon 5:16, *He is altogether lovely.* Some excel in one thing, some in another, as Moses in

meekness, Samson in strength, Solomon in wisdom; but none but Christ is all. Moses, we would say, was a miracle of meekness; Samson of strength; and Solomon of wisdom. But Christ is a miracle all over: meekness, strength, wisdom, and all other excellencies meet in Him to a miracle. There is no blemish, no lack at all in Him. Colossians 1:9, *For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell.*

3. The uncommonness and singularity of His excellencies. Miracles are but rare, in respect of the common operations of providence. And Christ among the sons of men is as *a standard bearer among ten thousand*, Song of Solomon 5:10. He is a person of singular excellencies. It is observed that what is done by miracle does in its kind excel what is the product of nature in that kind. The water that was made wine was far better than the wine of the vine, John 2:10. So the man Christ is *fairer than the sons of men*, Psalm 45:2. So every excellency in Christ is beyond that excellency in another, so was Christ's meekness beyond Moses' meekness, His strength beyond Samson's, and His wisdom beyond Solomon's, as the sun's light is beyond that of the stars.

4. The absolute matchlessness of His person for excellency and glory. Proverbs 8:11, *Wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it.* Seek through all the creatures in heaven and earth, and there is none comparable to Him. Psalm 73:25, *Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee.* His match is not to be found among all the ranks of created beings.

5. The shining forth of His excellencies, fit to draw all eyes upon Him. A miracle is the center of men's eyes to which all men are ready to look. It is a sight everyone would desire to see, and to see narrowly. There is an attractive beauty and glory in this wonderful one. This is a mystery to the world who are ready to say, as Song of Solomon 5:9, *What is thy beloved more than another beloved that thou cost so charge us?* seeing nothing in Him to fix their eyes upon Him. But,

(1) His Father's eyes are fixed on Him as the object of His good pleasure. Matthew 3:17, *This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.* The eyes of the Holy Spirit are on Him. Zechariah 3:9, *Behold, the stone that I have laid before Joshua; upon one stone shall be seven eyes; behold, I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the Lord of Hosts.* Compared with Revelation 5:6, *In the midst of the throne, and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns, and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.*

(2) The eyes of the angels are drawn after Him as a most wonderful sight. The faces of the cherubim were therefore made looking towards the mercy-seat,

Exodus 25:20, to teach us that Christ the Mediator, reconciling God and sinners, is the object of the angel's wonder. I Peter 1:12, *which things the angels desire to look into.*

(3) The eyes of all the saints are drawn after Him as the object of their admiration and affection. No sooner are the eyes of the blind soul opened, but they fix on Him. John 4:10, *If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldst have asked of Him and He would have given thee living water.* Therefore faith is called "looking unto Christ." Isaiah 45:22, *Look unto Me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.* And it is not a looking after a wonder of a few days, but it must remain all along their course through the world. And when they come to glory, they will fix their eyes on Him forever, never weary, but always refreshed with the sight.

And that the eyes of all men are not upon Him is because they know Him not, and are not capable of discerning His glory. Psalm 9:10, *And they that know Thy name will put their trust in Thee.*

Whosoever truly discerns what Christ is cannot choose but to love Him above all persons and things, and choose Him for their portion being offered to them. His matchless excellencies make Him such a lovely one that the discovery of them commands the surrender of the heart to Him and captivates the affections. It sinks the value of all created things in competition with Him and enthrones Him in the heart. Hence, true believers can neither be boasted nor bribed, frightened nor flattered from His love.

Believers' love to Christ must be lasting and everlasting, for

His excellencies are infinite and incomprehensible. When we meet with an object among the creatures that commands our admiration and love, we are taken with it; but some defect comes afterwards to be perceived in it, and then the admiration ceases or turns into contempt. At least the perfections of the object are all seen through and they become familiar, and the admiration dwindles into nothing. And what was at first sight admired as new ceases to be so when it affords nothing more new. But no defect or blemish can ever be spied in Him, who is fairer than the sun; and there being an incomprehensible depth of excellencies in Him, there is ever a place for new discoveries, so the admiration must be kept up forever.

Those whose greatest admiration and supreme love Christ is not the object of are yet certainly in the midnight darkness of their natural state. Whosoever of you admire and love any created person or thing as much or more than Christ, you have never yet seen nor known Him. The predominant love of the world, prizing and esteeming the things thereof above Him, is a concluding evidence

that you are walking in the dark, that the scales are yet on your eyes, and that Christ is a veiled Christ to you.

Christ is God and man in one person. Here is a wonderful person indeed whom we cannot comprehend; true God, yet man; true man, yet God. The uniting of a soul to an earthly body, forming one person called man was a work of wonder; but what is the putting together of two pieces of clay in comparison of the Potter's uniting with His own clay? Should we behold an angel assuming to himself and appearing in a crawling worm as if it were his own body, we would cease to wonder at it, beholding this surpassing wonder, an incarnate God! Here eternity and a being of yesterday meet together in one person, a child, and yet the everlasting Father. Here infinite and finite meet in one; God and His own creature!

He is wonderful in His perfections and qualifications. Psalm 45:2, *Thou art fairer than the children of men.* Grace is poured into Thy lips. All qualities that render one desirable and lovely meet together in Him, and all those are in Him to a miraculous pitch. So His Father is well-pleased in Him, Matthew 3:17, and the Spirit rested upon Him, verse 16. And every soul beholding Him with an eye of faith will take up its eternal rest in Him.

Particularly He is wonderful in His spotless and unchangeable holiness and purity. The fulness of the Spirit of holiness is in Him. The brightest of the saints here below do not lack their spots; at best they are but fair as the moon, but there is no darkness in Him at all.

He is wonderful in the centering of all perfections in Him, each in its perfection. Song of Solomon 5:16, *his mouth is most sweet, yea, he is altogether lovely.*

He is wonderful along in His duration. Some are wonderful in one part of their life, some in another, but He is miracle all over His duration.

He is wonderful in His love. His love will appear wonderful if you consider the subject of it, the party loving us. He is the eternal Son of God, the Prince of the kings of the earth. That the Father's delight should have made the sons of men His delight may cause us to cry out, Psalm 8:4, *Lord, what is man, that Thou takest knowledge of him? Or the son of man that Thou makest account of him?*

Consider the effect, force, and energy of this love. It is absolutely matchless. Never did any love work so powerfully as His, and it does not rest until He has His own with Himself in the highest heavens forever.

The qualities of it are wonderful. It is free love, Hosea 14:4. It is sovereign love. Christ's love had nothing from us to kindle it. It is tender love. It is unchangeable love. It is everlasting love.

And thus Christ appears to be all over wonderful. See then,

1. The greatness of the Father's love in giving to us such a wonderful one for our Prince. The love of God appears here to a wonder. O what honor is put upon man by making such a gift to him, that which heaven could not give a greater! O what happiness appears to be designed for man by this gift!

2. The reasonableness of the believer's superlative love to Christ. Every believing soul loves Christ above all persons and all things. They will love Him more than all the world and all that is therein, and more than their own life, Luke 14:26. And good reason for it, because there is no object so lovely. If we look to confessors parting with their goods, their liberty, and their worldly comforts for Christ, to the martyrs parting with their lives, embracing fires, gibbets, and the most cruel deaths for Christ, we will cease to wonder at their so doing when we consider what a wonderful One He is for whom they undergo the loss of all. Gaining Christ, they are the greatest gainers, whatever they lose, Philippians 3:7-8.

3. The reasonableness of the gospel-demand to all to receive and submit to Christ as their Prince and Governor. His transcendent excellency entitles Him to the principality and government over the sons of men. His merit requires our absolute resignation to Him.

Lastly, see the dreadful sin and danger of slighting this Christ. The more wonderful and excellent He is, the deeper will be the guilt of refusing Him. The deeper the guilt, the more fearful will be the vengeance for rejecting Him. Hebrews 2:3, *How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?*

Be exhorted, then, to give this wonderful One your heart. Proverbs 23:26, *My son, give my thine heart.*

Make Him the choice of your soul. Take Him for your portion as One who is the best of portions. Let your souls solemnly consent to the gospel offer.

Part with all for Him, as the wise merchant who sold all that he had and bought the one pearl of great price, Matthew 13:44-45. Give up your lusts and your idols; renounce the devil, the world, and the flesh, resting on Christ for all for time and eternity.

Dwell in the contemplation of His matchless excellencies. Let it be the substance of your religion to love Him, to admire Him, to be swallowed up in His love. And let love to Him set your souls moving in all holy obedience.

MOTIVE 1. You can never bestow your hearts so well. What is all the world in comparison to Christ but loss and dung? Alas! That shadows should have our hearts while the most substantial good courts it.

MOTIVE 2. Consider that it is for this end Christ is commended to you. We preach Christ that you may fall in love with Him.

MOTIVE 3. Lastly, consider how you will answer for it to Him before the tribunal, that you have preferred others lovely to the lovely One.

The Nature of that Faith and Obedience which the Holy Scriptures Teach

by Thomas Boston

F

irst, as to faith. Divine faith is a believing of what God has revealed,

because God has said it, or revealed it. People may believe scripture truths, but not with a divine faith, unless they believe it on that very ground, the authority of God speaking in his word. And this divine faith is the product of the Spirit of God in the heart of a sinner, implanting the habit or principle of faith there, and exciting it to a hearty reception and firm belief of whatever God reveals in his word. And the faith which the scripture teaches is what a man is to believe concerning God. This may be reduced to four heads: What God is; the persons in the Godhead; the decrees of God relating to every thing that comes to pass; and the execution of them in his works of creation and providence. Now, though the works of creation and providence show that there is a God, yet that fundamental truth, that God is, and the doctrines relating to the Trinity of Persons in the Unity of the Divine Essence, God's acts and purposes, the creation of all things, the

state of man at his creation, his fall, and his recovery by the mediation and satisfaction of Christ, are only to be learned from the holy scriptures. Hence we may infer,

1. That there can be no right knowledge of God acquired in an ordinary way without the scriptures, Matt. 22:29. 'Ye do err,' said Christ to the Sadducees, 'not knowing the scriptures.' As there must be a dark night where the light is gone, so those places of the earth must needs be dark, and without the saving knowledge of God, that lack the scriptures. Thus the Apostle tells the Ephesians, that, before they were visited with the light of the gospel, they were 'without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.' Eph. 2:12.

2. That where the scriptures are not known, there can be no saving faith. For, says the Apostle, Rom. 10:14, 15, 17. 'How shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? and how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet. of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.'

3. That there is nothing we are bound to believe as a part of faith but what the scripture teaches, be who they will that propose it, and whatever they may pretend for their warrant. 'To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them,' Isa. 8:20. No man must be our master in these things: 'For one is our master even Christ,' Matt. 23:10. He is Lord of our faith, and we are bound to believe whatever he has revealed in his word.

Secondly, As to obedience, it is that duty which God requires of man. It is that duty and obedience which man owes to God, to his will and laws, in respect of God's universal supremacy and sovereign authority over man; and which lie should render to him out of love and gratitude. The scriptures are the holy oracle from whence we are to learn our duty, Psal. 19:11. 'By them is thy servant warned,' says David. The Bible is the light we are to take heed to, that we may know how to steer our course, and order the several steps of our life. 'Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light to my path,' says the Psalmist, Psalm 119:105. From whence we may infer,

1. That there can be no sufficient knowledge of the duty which we owe to God without the scriptures. Though the light of nature does in some measure show our duty to God, yet it is too dim to take up the will of God sufficiently in order to salvation.

2. That there can be no right obedience yielded to God without them. Men that walk in the dark must needs stumble; and the works that are wrought in the dark will never abide the light; for there is no working rightly by guess in this matter. All proper obedience to God must be learned from the scriptures.

3. That there is no point of duty that we are called to, but what the scripture teaches, Isa. 8:20, mentioned before. Men must neither make duties to themselves or others, but what God has made duty. The law of God is exceeding broad, and reaches the whole life of man, outward and inward, Psalm 19; and man is bound to conform himself to it alone as the rule of his duty.

Thirdly, As to the connection of these two: faith and obedience are joined together, because there is no true faith but what is followed with obedience, and no true obedience but what flows from faith. Faith is the loadstone of obedience, and obedience the touchstone of faith, as appears from James 2: They that lack faith cannot be holy; and they that have true faith, their faith will work by love. Hence we may see,

1. That faith is the foundation of duty or obedience, and not obedience or duty the foundation of faith, Tit. 3:8. 'This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men;' and that the things to be believed are placed before the things to be practised, in order to distinguish between the order of the things in the covenant of grace, and what they were under the covenant of works. Under the latter, doing, or perfect obedience to the law, was the foundation of the promised privilege of life; but under the former, the promise is to be believed, and the promised life is to be freely received: and thereupon follows the believer's obedience to the law, out of gratitude and love for the mercy received. This appears from the order laid down by God himself in delivering the moral law from mount Sinai. He lays the foundation of faith, first of all, in these words, 'I am the Lord thy God,' &c. which is the sum and substance of the covenant of grace; and then follows the law of the Ten Commandments, which is as it were grafted upon this declaration of sovereign grace and love, Exod. 20:2-18. And let it be remembered, that the Apostle Paul calls gospel-obedience the obedience of faith, as springing from and founded upon faith. And if we examine the order of doctrine laid down in all his epistles, we shall find, that he first propounds the doctrine of faith, or what man is to believe, and upon that foundation inculcates the duties that are to be practised.

2. That all works without faith are dead, and so cannot please God. For whatsoever is not of faith is sin; and without or separate from Christ we can do nothing. Faith is the principle of all holy and acceptable obedience.

3. That those who inculcate moral duties without proclaiming the necessity of regeneration, and union with Christ, as the source of all true obedience, are foolish builders; they lay their foundation on the sand, and the superstructure they raise will soon be overturned; and they pervert the gospel of Christ, Such would do well to consider what the Apostle says, Gal. 1:9, 'If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.'

The Manner of Discovering the True Sense of Holy Scripture.

by Thomas Boston

1

The sense of the scripture is but one, and not many. There may be several parts of that one sense subordinate one to another; as some prophecies have a respect to the deliverance from Babylon, the spiritual by Christ, and the eternal in heaven; and some passages have one thing that is typical of another: yet these are but one full sense, only that may be of two sorts; one is simple, and another compound.

Some scriptures have only a simple sense, containing a declaration of one thing only; and that is either proper or figurative. A proper sense is that which arises from the words taken properly, and the figurative from the words taken figuratively. Some have a simple proper sense, as, 'God is a Spirit,' 'God created the heavens and the earth;' which are to be understood according to the propriety of the words. Some have a simple figurative sense, as, 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away,' &c. These have but one simple sense; but then it is the figurative, and is not to be understood according to the literal meaning of the words, as if Christ were a tree, &c. Thus you see what the simple sense is. The compound or mixed sense is found wherein one thing is held forth as a type of the other; and so it consists of two parts, the one respecting the type, the other the antitype; which are not two senses, but two parts of that one and entire

sense intended by the Holy Ghost: e.g. Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, that those who were stung by the fiery serpents might look to it and be healed. The full sense of which is, 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, that, &c. even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.' Here is a literal and mystical sense, which make up one full sense betwixt them. Those scriptures that have this compound sense, are sometimes fulfilled properly (or literally, as it is taken in opposition to figuratively) in the type and antitype both; as Hos. 11:1. 'I have called my Son out of Egypt,' which was literally true both of Israel and Christ. Sometimes figuratively in the type, and properly in the antitype, as Psal. 69:21. 'They gave me vinegar to drink.' Sometimes properly in the type, and figuratively in the antitype, as Psal. 2:9. 'Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron.' Compare 2 Sam. 12:31. Sometimes figuratively in both, as Psal. 41:9, 'Yea, mine own familiar friend hath lifted up his heel against me; which is meant of Ahithophel and Judas. Now the sense of the scripture must be but one, and not manifold, that is, quite different and nowise subordinate one to another, because of the unity of truth, and because of the perspicuity of the scripture.

2. Where there is a question about the true sense of scripture, it must be found out what it is by searching other places that speak more clearly, the scripture itself being the infallible rule of interpreting of scripture. Now that it is so, appears from the following arguments.

(1.) The Holy Spirit gives this as a rule, 2 Pet. 1:20, 21. After the apostle had called the Christians to take heed to the scripture, he gives them this rule for understanding it, 'Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation of our own exposition. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.' As it came, so is it to be expounded: but it came not by the will of man; therefore we are not to rest on men for the sense of it, but holy men speaking as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and so never erring; therefore we are to look to the dictates of the same Spirit in other places.

(2.) There are several approved examples of this, comparing one scripture with another, to find out the meaning of the Holy Ghost, as Acts 15:15. And to this agree the words of the prophet, &c. The Bereans are commended for this, Acts 17:11. Yea, Christ himself makes use of this to show the true sense of the scripture against the devil, Matt. 4:6. 'Cast thyself down,' said that wicked spirit; for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee,' &c. ver. 7. 'It is written again,' says Christ, 'Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.' And thus our Lord makes out the true sense of that scripture, that it is to be understood only with respect to them who do not cast themselves on a tempting of God.**

**The infallible rule of interpretation of scripture is the scripture itself; and, therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any scripture which is not manifold but one, it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly. 2 Pet. 1:20, 21; Acts 15:16

Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter I.9.

Reason not the Supreme Judge of Controversies in Religion

by Thomas Boston

1

Reason in an unregenerate man is blind in the matters of God, 1 Cor.

2:14. 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned;' Eph. 4:17, 18; Eph. 5:8. *Except.* This only respects reason not illustrated by divine revelation. *Ans.* By that illustration of reason by divine revelation, they understand either subjective or objective illustration. If they understand it of subjective illustration, they quit that article of their religion, wherein they believe that the mind of man is capable of itself, without the illumination of the Spirit, to attain sufficient knowledge of the mind of God revealed in the scripture. If of Objective illustration, by the mere revelation of these truths, then it is false that they assert: For the apostle opposes here the natural man to the spiritual man; and therefore by the natural man is understood every unregenerate man, even that has these truths revealed to him; for, says the apostle, 'they are foolishness unto him.' Now, how can he judge them foolishness if they be not revealed?

2. Reason is not infallible, and therefore cannot be admitted judge in matters concerning our souls. Reason may be deceived, Rom. 3:4, and is not this to shake the foundations of religion, and to pave a way to scepticism and atheism? *Except.* That is not to be feared where sound reason is admitted judge. But what talk they of sound reason? The adversaries themselves will yield, that reason is unsound in the Most part of men. We say, that it is not fully sound in the world; for even the best know but in part; darkness remains in some measure on the minds of all men.

3. Reason must be subject to the scripture, and submit itself to be judged by God speaking there, 2 Cor. 10:4, 5. 'The weapons of our warfare are....mighty....to the pulling down of strong holds, casting down imaginations....and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.' Matters of faith are above the sphere of reason; and therefore as sense is not admitted judge in those things that are above it, so neither reason in those things that are above it, 1 Tim. 3:16. 'And without controversy, great is the mystery of Godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.'

4. If reason were the supreme judge of controversies, then our faith should be built on ourselves, and the great reason why we believe any principle of religion would be, because it appears so and so to us, which is most absurd. The scripture teaches otherwise, 1 Thess. 2:13. 'Ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the word of God.' Most plainly does our Lord teach this, John 5:34. 'receive not testimony from men;' chap. 5:39. 'Search the scriptures.'

The orthodox assert the supreme judge of controversies in religion to be the Holy Spirit speaking in the scriptures. This is proved by the following arguments.

1. In the Old and New Testament, the Lord still sends us to this judge. So that we may neither turn to the right hand nor left from what he there speaks, Deut. 5:32. and 17:11. 'According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee;' Isa. 8:20. 'To the law and to the testimony,' &c.; Luke 16:29. 'They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them;' John 5:39. 'Search the scriptures.' Some hereto refer that passage, Matt. 19:28. 'Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me in the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.' In this sense it must be meant of the doctrine they taught, as dictated to them by the Holy Ghost.

2. It was the practice of Christ and his apostles to appeal to the Spirit speaking in the scriptures, Matt. 4:where Christ still answers Satan with that, 'It is written.' And so while discoursing with the Sadducees about the resurrection, Matt. 22:31, 32. So also in John, chap. 5 and 10 and Luke 24:44. And so did others, Acts 17:11, and 26:22, 23.; 2 Pet. 1:19.; Acts 15:15, 16. A careful examination of which passages I recommend to you for your establishment in the truth.

3. To the Spirit of God speaking in the scriptures, and to him only, agree those things that are requisite to constitute, one the supreme judge. (1.) We

may certainly know that the sentence which he pronounces is true, for he is infallible, being God. (2.) We cannot appeal from him, for he is one above whom there is none. (3.) He is no respecter of persons, nor can be biased in favour of one in preference to another.

To Search and Study the Scriptures is the Duty of All Classes of Men

by Thomas Boston

I

f ye ask, by whom this is to be done? It is by all into whose hands, by the mercy of God, it comes. Some never had it, and so they will not be condemned for slighting of it, Rom. 2:12. Magistrates are called to look to it, and be much conversant in it, Josh. 1:8. 'This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein.' Deut. 17:18, 19. 'And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book, out of that which is before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life; that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law, and these statutes, to do them.'

Ministers are in a special manner called to the study of it. 1 Tim. 4:13. 'Give attendance to reading.' 2 Tim. 3:16, 17. 'All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.' But not they only are so commanded, but all others within the church, John 5:39. 'Search the scriptures.' Deut. 6:6, 7. 'These words which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart, And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.'

