

Prayer: The Fruition of Adoption

Prayer is built upon adoption, and adoption bears fruit in prayer. Boston expresses this concept in discourses on the Lord's Prayer from a series of sermons on the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Though Boston views all of Scripture as a guide for prayer, he especially treasures the Lord's Prayer both as an example of prayer and as a directory for the prayers of God's children.⁴³ Boston divides the Lord's Prayer into three sections: the preface, the petitions, and the conclusion.⁴⁴ Each section illustrates the heart of adopted children for their Father.

The Preface: “Our Father which art in heaven”

After establishing that acceptable prayer requires adoption into God's family through faith in Jesus Christ, Boston goes on to say, “We should draw near to God in prayer with child-like dispositions and affections towards him.” This includes the following responses:

- 1) “Though he be very kind and admit us into familiarity with him, yet we

⁴³ *Works*, 2:557–58.

⁴⁴ *Works*, 2:561.

must come with a holy reverence, [Mal. 1:6](#), ‘If then I be a Father, where is mine honor?’ Familiarity must not breed contempt. The character of a Father bears not only kindness, but reverence and fear in it. It is a mixture of love and awful authority; and the ingenuous child will regard both. Slavish fear is to be laid aside, but child-like reverence is necessary [[Heb. 12:28](#)].”⁴⁵

- 2) “Though we have offended God ... we must come with confidence, whatever we want, whatever we need, [Eph. 3:12](#). While he bids us call him *Father*, he requires us confidence in him for the supply of all our wants. For fatherly affection is tender ... [Ps. 103:13](#).”
- 3) “God is ready and willing to help us, and we should come to him in that confidence, [Matt. 7:11](#), ‘If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much

⁴⁵ Note Boston’s allusion to [Rom. 8:15](#). “Slavish fear” was a subject frequently explored by the Puritans in their attempt to distinguish the fear of God commended in Scripture from the terror of rejection and punishment by God.

more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?’ If the mother’s tenderness towards the child be ordinarily greater than that of the father’s, yet the Lord is still more, Isa. 49:15, 16, ‘Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet I will not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me.’ ”⁴⁶

Boston also says “our Father *in heaven*” encourages us “to eye his sovereign power and dominion over all, in our address to him, believing that he is able to help us in our greatest straits, and that nothing is too hard for him but he can do whatsoever he will, Ps. 115:3. This is a noble ground for faith. Our fathers on earth may be unable to help; but our Father in heaven is almighty, and has power to help in every case.”⁴⁷

The fruit of adoption thus flourishes in the prayer life of a child of God. So Boston asks his

⁴⁶ *Works*, 2:562–63.

⁴⁷ *Works*, 2:564.

believing readers to shape their prayers with faith in a reconciled Father who is the sovereign Lord of all.

First Petition: “Hallowed be thy name”

Boston divided the petitions of the Lord’s Prayer into two groups: first, three petitions for God’s glory; and second, three for our good. The first petition concerns the glory of God’s name, and Boston explains, “because of all things it should be nearest our hearts.”⁴⁸ Boston says we do not pray for God to be made holy; rather, we pray for God’s holiness to be manifested, declared, shown, and acknowledged. So this first petition is a prayer for God to be glorified and His beauty to shine.⁴⁹ It is a prayer for providential victories for His church, but also a prayer for powerful grace to “cause the sons of men, ourselves and others, to glorify and hallow His name,” both “internally, by knowing, acknowledging, and highly esteeming him” and “externally, in our words and actions, speaking and living to his praise.”⁵⁰

Again, Boston connects prayer with the heart

⁴⁸ *Works*, 2:565.

⁴⁹ *Works*, 2:566–67.

⁵⁰ *Works*, 2:568–69.

of a child for his divine Father. He writes,

Why truly, if thou belongest to God, it will be a matter of thy hearty consent and prayer, that God may be honoured by others as well as by thyself. Without this concern a man cannot be a Christian; he is not a child of God; for every true believer ardently wishes and prays that God may be glorified; and as far as his power, authority, influence, and example, can reach, he will use his utmost endeavors to induce others to glorify the name of his God....

It is the disposition of a child of God, to submit his lot and condition in the world to the Lord, to be cut and carved as may serve his glory. Without this one cannot be a child of God.⁵¹

The adopting love of the Father and glorious love-line of God move His adopted children to love Him and long to see Him honored as God. With this emphasis Boston reflects the heart of the Son, who trembled in anticipation of Calvary and yet cried out, “Father, glorify thy name” ([John 12:28](#)).

Second Petition: “Thy kingdom come”

Boston says the coming of the kingdom of our

⁵¹ [Works, 2:570.](#)

Father in heaven “that is the advancement thereof, is desired by all the children of God. And that is the great means of glorifying his name; for then is his name hallowed, when his kingdom comes, is advanced and carried on till it come to perfection.”⁵² Boston distinguishes a fourfold kingdom of God:

- 1) “The kingdom of his power,” the universal reign of God over all His creation by divine providence whether they are willing or unwilling ([Ps. 103:19](#)).
- 2) “The kingdom of his gospel,” the visible church over which Christ reigns by His Word and the officers of the church ([Matt. 21:43](#)).
- 3) “The kingdom of his grace,” a subset of the visible church consisting of those hearts where Christ dwells and reigns in saving, spiritual power ([Luke 17:21; Rom. 14:17](#)).
- 4) “The kingdom of his glory,” the blessed, eternal state that will arrive when [Jesus Christ](#) comes ([1 Cor. 15:50](#)).⁵³

⁵² [Works, 2:571](#).

⁵³ [Works, 2:571–74](#)

Boston says these kingdoms all serve one kingdom purpose: “Here it is to be observed concerning this fourfold kingdom, that they are sweetly linked together, and stand in a line of subordination, the end of which is the kingdom of glory, the kingdom of grace being subordinated to it, the gospel-kingdom to that of grace, and the kingdom of power to the kingdom of the gospel.”⁵⁴ All of these kingdoms are moving or progressing towards the kingdom of glory, of which Boston says, “The ordinances of it are perpetual praises and hallelujahs, never-ceasing songs to God and the Lamb. There is no temple there, for God and the Lamb are the temple thereof. There is no need of preaching or prayer; for perfect knowledge takes place, and every saint is made perfect and full, so as to seek no more. Faith is swallowed up in vision, and hope in fruition.”⁵⁵ Boston views the coming of the kingdom of glory as inevitable. It is impossible that it should not come, because, he says, “The Father’s truth, the Son’s blood, and the Spirit’s seal, are pledges of its erection. The Father has promised it, the Son purchased it, and the Spirit sealed it on

⁵⁴ *Works*, 2:575.

⁵⁵ *Works*, 2:574.

the souls of all the saints.”⁵⁶

God works progressively through other kingdoms to bring about His final end, however. Therefore saints must pray for the destruction of sin and Satan in the hearts and lives of men, the conversion of sinners to God, the perfecting of the saints in grace, the overcoming of obstacles to the gospel, and the propagation of the gospel to all nations.⁵⁷

Boston applies this truth by telling his readers,

Shew yourselves of the family of heaven, by your concern that the Lord’s kingdom may come, even that of glory, grace, the gospel, and power. For this is the language of those who cry unto God, ‘Abba, Father.’ ... It is their Father’s kingdom. How then can the children not be concerned for it? [Matt. 6:9, 10](#). Their Father’s honour must be dear to them, [Mal. 1:6](#).... Their brethren’s interest lies in it too, [Ps. 122:8](#). All the saints are born brethren.... Try by this whether ye be of the family of God or not. Have ye a kindly concern for the coming of his kingdom? Do your hearts say within you, *Thy kingdom come?* If it be not so, God is

⁵⁶ [Works, 2:576](#).

⁵⁷ [Works, 2:578–80](#). Note the heart of the Puritans for worldwide missions.

not your Father; but if so, he is.⁵⁸

So, for Boston, a life of God-centered prayer is the necessary consequence of the adoption of a sinner into God's family.

Third Petition: "Thy will be done"

Boston notes the essential unity of the first three petitions by saying, "As by the coming of his kingdom his name is hallowed, so by doing his will his kingdom comes, or is advanced, and we own him to be King, [Heb 13:21](#). So these three petitions meet to advance the glory of God."⁵⁹ The will of God may be seen as "the will of God's commands," that is, God's commands for faith in His Son ([1 John 3:23](#)) and holiness of life ([1 Thess. 4:3](#)). The will of God may also be seen as "the will of God's providence" in ruling over all things ([Ps. 135:6](#)).⁶⁰

With respect to the will of God's commands, this petition compels us to confess that we have disobeyed God's will and are completely unfit to obey Him. It calls us to profess our grief over the sins of mankind and to trust that God has the

⁵⁸ [Works, 2:581, 583](#).

⁵⁹ [Works, 2:586–87](#).

⁶⁰ [Works, 2:587–89](#).

power to reform our will to match His. The petition leads Christians to pray “that he would by his grace remove from themselves and others all spiritual blindness and cause them to know his will, [Eph. 1:17, 18](#),” and “that God by his grace would remove from themselves and others all weakness, indisposition, and perverseness, and cause them to obey and do his will, as it is done in heaven, [Ps. 119:35](#).” Boston specifies this means praying that we would do God’s will consistently, energetically, universally, humbly, cheerfully, quickly, and constantly.⁶¹

With respect to the will of God’s providence, Boston says this petition directs us to confess that people by nature are apt to complain and quarrel with God over His management of their lives. It summons us to profess our sorrow for not cheerfully submitting to God’s ways and our confidence that God’s grace can subdue our will to His providences. It requires us to pray for God to work in us “a submission to the will of God in afflicting providences ... [Ps. 39:9](#),” “a thankful acceptance of merciful and kind providences, [Luke 1:38](#),” and “a compliance with the design of providences of all sorts” by using our talents, position, and

⁶¹ [Works, 2:592–96](#).

opportunities to serve Him well.⁶²

Though Boston did not mention adoption in his treatment of this petition in the Lord's Prayer, his earlier treatment of adoption emphasizes that a son must submit wholeheartedly to his father's will: "God must command, and ye must obey without disputing your Father's orders.... Your Father's will must be yours.... Ye must give him internal as well as external obedience. Filial [son-like] affections are due to a father; love, reverence, delight in him, and fear to offend him.... Ye and your lot must be at God's disposal, [Ps. 47:4](#). Ye must take what place, and act what part, in the family the Father shall think meet to dispose you to."⁶³

Fourth Petition: "Give us this day our daily bread"

Boston now examines the second triad of petitions, which concern our own good. He deduces from the order of the petitions "that it is the duty of all, and the disposition of God's children, to prefer God's honour to all their personal and private interests." He says, "If the chariot of God's honour cannot drive forward, but it must drive

⁶² [Works, 2:597–98](#).

⁶³ [Works, 1:639](#).

over their table, they bid it welcome to drive on, though it cast down their table, making its way over it, [Luke 14:26](#).⁶⁴ The reason for this is that “God is man’s chief end, and the chief good. All things are from him, and so must be for him, [Prov. 16:4](#); [Rev. 4:11](#). And to alter this order, is for men to make God’s honour the means, and their own welfare the end; which is to lift themselves very proudly above God.”⁶⁵

Boston says that this petition implies, “Men depend wholly and entirely on God’s bounty, for all the means and comforts of life.” God is the creator of all things and is their preserver, owner, and life-giver. He is sovereign over all usefulness and comfort, and holder of veto-power over all our efforts.⁶⁶

Boston says, “Our Lord teaches all his people to come unto God, and say, *Our Father—give us bread.*” This means “we are allowed to lay our temporal concerns and wants before the Lord in prayer, as well as our spiritual concerns.... The praying Christian is a trader with heaven, and he may trade in small things as well as in great things; nay, he ought to do it.” It also means:

⁶⁴ [Works, 2:601](#).

⁶⁵ [Works, 2:602–603](#).

⁶⁶ [Works, 2:604–606](#).

Our bread is God's free gift of mercy, without any merit of ours, [Gen. 32:10](#). The least rag for our clothing, crumb for our food, breathing in God's air, etc. is what we deserve not at the hand of God, [Luke 17:10](#). In Adam we forfeited our right to God's creatures, [Gen. 2:17](#); and by that sin of breaking the first covenant, and many other rebellions against the sovereign God, we have deserved to be stript of our comforts: so that all we get is God's free undeserved gift.⁶⁷

Because of God's grace, the children of God have “a covenant-right to them, through [Jesus Christ](#), by whom the lost right to the creatures is restored to believers, [1 Cor. 3:22](#),” Boston says. “For if one be in Christ, he enjoys his bread by a new tenor, the tenor of the covenant, [Isa. 33:16](#). And that makes dry bread sweet.”⁶⁸ Even prayer for our daily needs is framed within the covenant of grace, for we have communion with the Father, whose love is like honey and butter spread across all our bread.

Fifth Petition: “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors”

⁶⁷ [Works](#), 2:608–609.

⁶⁸ [Works](#), 2:609.

This petition seeks blessings for the soul, for, as Boston says, “the removal of guilt is the opening of the spring of spiritual blessings, to run abundantly; it is the taking the stone off the mouth of the well.” Justification precedes sanctification and spiritual comforts. Sin must be pardoned because sin “is a drowning debt, a debt so great as no mortal is able to pay, [Matt. 18:24, 25.](#)”⁶⁹

Boston says there are three kinds of pardon.

- 1) “Pardon of the guilt of eternal wrath.” This frees sinners from vindictive justice that threatens to send them to the prison of hell. This pardon should be sought by those outside of Christ but is already possessed by the saints of God, for whom there is no condemnation ([Rom. 8:1](#)). Saints fearful of falling under eternal wrath may pray for this pardon, but Christ did not command them to do so, for they are under grace.
- 2) “Pardon of the guilt of temporary strokes and fatherly anger.” God’s covenant promises both fatherly discipline for sin and everlasting

⁶⁹ [Works, 2:613–14.](#)

love which cannot fail (Ps. 89:30–33). Boston writes, “The children of God, who are beyond the reach of eternal wrath, are oftentimes liable to temporary fatherly wrath, which they need a pardon for, as the child needs the father’s pardon. Upon their fresh application to the Lord Jesus Christ they obtain it.”

- 3) “A declarative pardon, which is the pardon manifested to the soul, a sense of pardon.” Believers are forgiven, but they still need to be delivered from doubts and fears by the experiential shining of God’s face upon them.⁷⁰

This petition directs believers to confess the debt of their sins (Dan. 9:5), to plead their inability to pay the debt themselves (Ps. 130:3–4), and to seek God’s forgiveness through the merits of Christ (Dan. 9:17; Rom. 3:24).⁷¹ It also teaches believers to come to God believing He will forgive them just as they have sincerely (though imperfectly) forgiven those who sinned against them.

⁷⁰ *Works*, 2:615–17.

⁷¹ *Works*, 2:616–17.

Boston sees evidence in the addendum to this petition, in which Jesus teaches His disciples to pray for fatherly forgiveness, not release from eternal wrath. He explains,

And this is a demonstrative proof, that the forgiveness the saints here ask for themselves is only the pardon of the guilt of fatherly anger, and the manifestation of pardon, and not the pardon of the guilt of eternal wrath, which concerns their state. For till this last be obtained, one cannot sincerely forgive others, [Matt. 18:32, 33](#).... No man can sincerely forgive his brother, who does not so love him; and none can love his brother, but he who loves God; and none loves God, but he who is forgiven by God, [Luke 7:47](#).⁷²

So Boston interprets the petition for forgiveness according to his covenant theology of atonement by Christ, adoption by God, and assurance by the Holy Spirit.

Sixth Petition: “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”

The first petition for soul blessings asks for deliverance from the *guilt* of sin, and the second now

⁷² [Works, 2:618](#).

asks for deliverance from the *power* of sin. Boston notes that, unless he is a hypocrite, the Christian is “equally concerned for justification and sanctification.” The petition first asks for preventing grace (“Lead us not ...”), then asks for assisting grace (“Deliver us from ...”).⁷³

The request for preventing grace recognizes that pardoned sinners are still in danger from temptations from the Devil (Matt. 4:3), from men and women (Acts 26:11; Gen. 39:7), and from the lusts of their own hearts (James 1:14). Therefore the children of God must ask God not to place them in circumstances where their hearts will be tempted to sin. God tempts no one to sin, but He may lead people into situations to test them.⁷⁴ Boston concludes, “It is the duty of all, and the disposition of the people of God, to desire they may be kept from engaging with temptations, as with an enemy too strong for them.”⁷⁵ He interprets the Lord’s Prayer both as a revelation of the *duty* of God’s children and as their *disposition* flowing from the grace they have received as sons of the holy Father.

The request for assisting grace seeks “deliver-

⁷³ *Works*, 2:619–20.

⁷⁴ *Works*, 2:620–35.

⁷⁵ *Works*, 2:635.

ance from evil,” that is, from sin and temptations to sin (Rom. 7:24). This part of the sixth petition therefore teaches believers to pray for these deliverances:

- 1) “Deliverance in temptation, that God would powerfully support and enable them to stand in the hour of temptation, 2 Cor. 12:8; that when they are engaged in the battle with Satan, the world, and the flesh, the Lord himself would come in for their rescue.”
- 2) “Deliverance under temptation, Ps. 51:8. Sometimes believers are trod under foot by their lusts and passions: they are lying in the mire, and cannot get out. But they look again towards the Lord, as Jonah out of the whale’s belly, that he would afford them his helping hand, and so sanctify their lot to them, as all may work for their good.”
- 3) “Deliverance completely from all sin, and temptation to it.... Thus the petitions of this prayer end with a longing cry for perfect freedom from sin in another world.”⁷⁶

At the end of his treatment of the sixth petition, Boston returns to the theme of the nature of the children of God. He writes,

Sinning is more terrible than suffering, in the eyes of the children of God. They pray to be delivered from sin absolutely, at any rate, cost what it will.... It is a black mark of one that belongs not to God, when there is no parting betwixt him and his lusts.... It is not a spot of God's children.... It is in the nature of all God's children, to desire to be home. *Our Father which art in heaven—deliver us from evil.* They know that this will never be completely and fully answered till they be beyond the clouds: but from their hearts they desire it. Let us evidence ourselves to be the children of God, by our ardent desires for this complete deliverance from sins.⁷⁷

Boston views the Lord's Prayer not just as a rule of duty but as the natural expression of the heart of a child of God. In this he closely links prayer with adoption. Prayer is the fruition of adoption.

Conclusion: "For thine is the kingdom, and the

⁷⁶ *Works*, 2:636–37.

⁷⁷ *Works*, 2:638.

power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.”

We say these words, not to persuade God to hear us but rather “to exercise and strengthen our own praying graces,” Boston says. We use such words to remind ourselves that the Father is the sovereign, almighty God whose glory shines forever through His works as king. Boston illustrates the effect of these words:

It is as if a hungry child should apply to his father for bread and the father should say, ‘Child, wherefore should I give you bread?’ and thereupon the child should say, ‘Alas! I am pained with hunger, and who will give it me if you refuse? will it not be a reflection on your name, to say your children faint for lack of bread?’ While the child pleads thus, the tear strikes in his eye, and his earnestness increases: whereupon he is answered. Here is it evident, that the effect of the pleading is not on the father.... The effect of it is plainly on the child himself.⁷⁸

Prayer brings to fruition the effect of divine adoption, but it also ripens the fruit of adoption. In prayer, Boston teaches the child of God to reflect more deeply upon the One he is privileged

⁷⁸ *Works*, 2:640.

to call “our Father” and to seek to know Him more intimately.