

Boston distinguishes between regeneration and adoption. Regeneration changes our nature. Boston writes, “Adoption is not a real change of the sinner’s nature; but, as [with] justification, is a relative change of status.” Adoption brings us “out of the state of alienation from God.” He says, “Our names are enrolled among those of the family; and though a new nature accompanies it, yet adoption itself is a new name, not a new nature, [Rev. 2:17](#), though it is not an empty title, but has vast privileges attending it.”¹³ Simply put, true spiritual adoption operates much like legal adoption in today’s world. When a child is legally adopted, he or she is declared the child of new parents. But legal adoption does nothing to change the cellular makeup, genes, or blood of the adopted child. Nevertheless, adoption places a child into a household where he may learn from his father’s love, example, instruction, and discipline to become more like his father. Similarly, when children of Satan are adopted by God, they are no longer children of Satan but are *counted* as children of God, even though remnants of sin remain in them. Yet the privileges of adoption

¹³ [Works, 1:615](#). Boston’s Scripture references have been modernized to use Arabic, not Roman, numerals.

change their lives.

Boston views divine adoption as the work of the Trinity. First, the Adopter is God the Father who, in His great love, eternally predestines sinners to be brought back into His family ([Eph. 1:3, 5](#); [1 John 3:1](#)). Boston writes, “The Adopter can be no higher, for he is the Sovereign King of the world, the adopted no lower, for they are not only the children of base men, but of the devil, the most miserable creature in the universe.” This magnifies the Father’s love but also requires the satisfaction of His law “that forbids the staining of the Adopter’s honor by the meanness of the party adopted.”

Second, divine wisdom requires that these children be adopted in Jesus Christ ([Eph. 1:5–6](#); [Gal. 3:26–27](#)). He is the Son of God who became incarnate as “the Elder Brother in the repaired family of heaven.” Christ is the elder brother to whom supremely belongs the kingdom, priesthood, blessing, and inheritance of sonship. Boston writes, “By his obedience and satisfaction he purchased their adoption, with all other privileges to them, [Gal. 4:4, 5](#). And this natural bond with them gives Him the direct interest to redeem them as their near Kinsman. So law and justice can have nothing to object against the

adoption.”¹⁴

Finally, Christ sends forth His messengers to preach the gospel offer of adoption, and the Father sends His Spirit to open the ears and hearts of people to seek adoption. Boston says, “Whosoever will comply with the gospel call, shall be adopted into God’s family; God will be their Father, and they shall be his sons and daughters.” Though Satan fights to retain his children, “the Spirit of Christ presses forward the elect, and determines them to seek to be received into the family of God.” The elect soul comes to Christ and joins himself to Christ by faith, as in a marriage covenant. Christ then presents the believer to His Father as one with the Son so that the Devil is forced to renounce his former child. God then receives the believer into the family of His children, which is a privilege beyond justification.¹⁵ Their new status as adopted children flows out of their union with Christ. Boston says, “By their union with him, who is the Son of God by nature, they become the sons of God by grace ... sinners, being engrafted into Jesus Christ, whose name is the Branch, his Father is their Father, his God

¹⁴ *Works*, 1:616, 618–19, 622–23.

¹⁵ *Works*, 1:614, 619–21.

their God, [John 20:17](#). And thus they, who are by nature children of the devil, become the children of God.”¹⁶

Adoption offers distinct privileges to the sons of God, which Boston says are as follows:

1) “A new name, [Rev. 2:17](#) and [3:12](#)....

They are called of God sons and daughters, [Heb. 12:5](#).”

2) “The Spirit of adoption, [Rom. 8:15](#).”

We will discuss this privilege later in the chapter.

3) “Access to God and communion with him. They may come farther in than others and come forward with holy boldness, when others must stand back, [Eph. 3:12](#). God as a Father is familiar with his children, allows them a holy confidence with him, as children to pour their complaints into his bosom and tell him all their wants. Never did a father take so much delight in his child’s talking to him, as God, in the prayer of his people poured out, by virtue of the Spirit of adoption, [Prov. 15:8](#). [Song. 2:14](#).”

4) “Special immunities and freedoms

¹⁶ [Works, 8:209](#).

... from the law as a covenant of works ... from the curse ... from the hurt of everything ... Rom. 8:35, 38, 39 [being] bettered by the worse things that befall them, ver. 28.”

- 5) “God’s fatherly love and pity.... No mother [is] so tender of the fruit of her womb as God is of his children, Isa. 49:15.”
- 6) “Protection, Prov. 14:26.... In all cases they have a Father to run to, both able and willing to protect them, Ps. 90:1.... And at length he will set them beyond all danger, Rev. 21:25.”
- 7) “Provision, 1 Pet. 5:7.... Come what will, God’s children shall be provided for; for he that feeds his birds, the ravens that cry, will not starve his children.”
- 8) “Seasonable and sanctified correction.... It is a special benefit of the covenant of grace, proceeding from God’s fatherly love, Ps. 89:30–32.”
- 9) “Lastly, an inheritance and portion, according to their Father’s quality. They are heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, Rom. 8:17. So all

is theirs, grace and glory.”¹⁷

Adoption privileges have remarkable implications for the prayers of the children of God. It is no wonder that a man with this view of divine adoption would spend much time in communion with God. However, these privileges belong only to those adopted by the Father, in the Son, through the Spirit. Unbelievers may cry out to God for mercy, but access to the Father is a benefit reserved for the children of God. Prayer is the duty of all, but acceptance with God is a privilege. Boston writes, “It is a privilege that God will allow us to come so near him, and to pour out our hearts before him, a privilege bought by the blood of Christ.”¹⁸

Therefore the children of God must enjoy their privileges in prayer in conscious dependence upon Jesus Christ. Believers must pray in Jesus’ name ([John 16:23](#)). Boston understands the meaning of praying in Jesus’ name as far more than “a bare mentioning his name, in prayer, and concluding our prayers therewith.” Rather, praying in Jesus’ name means

- 1) Praying because Jesus commanded

¹⁷ [Works, 1:624–26.](#)

¹⁸ [Works, 11:15.](#)

us to do so and thus authorized us to do so.

- 2) Praying because we have seen the glory of God in Jesus and so we love Him.
- 3) Praying in the strength that Jesus Christ supplies us to do our spiritual duty.
- 4) Praying with reliance upon Jesus as the only basis for God to hear and answer us.¹⁹ This last point Boston elaborates in more detail, saying it means,
 - “Renouncing all merit and worth in ourselves ... Gen. 32:10.”
 - “Believing that however great the mercies are, and however unworthy we are, yet we may obtain them from God through Jesus Christ; Heb. 4:15–16.”
 - “Seeking in prayer the mercies we need of God, for Christ’s sake accordingly.”This means praying with

¹⁹ *Works*, 11:82–90.

both shame and confidence:
“Our holy shame respects
our unworthiness; but
Christ’s merit and interces-
sion are set before us, as a
ground of confidence.”

- “Pleading on his merit and intercession.... Faith found-
ing its plea on Christ’s merit,
urges God’s covenant and
promise made thereupon;
[Ps. 74:20](#).”
- “Lastly, trusting that we shall
obtain a gracious answer for
his sake; [Mark. 11:24](#).”²⁰

Because prayer is a benefit of grace given through Christ, our prayers are to be Christ-centered. Our adoption and all its benefits are in Him. So Boston writes, “Going to God in prayer, we must as it were put off our own persons, as not worth noticing in the sight of God, and put on the Lord Jesus Christ; come and receive the blessing in the elder Brother’s clothes, having all our hope from the Lord’s looking on the face of his Anointed.”²¹ If we attempt to approach God out-

²⁰ [Works, 11:91](#).

Joel R. Beeke and Brian G. Najapfour, eds., *Taking Hold of God: Reformed and Puritan Perspectives on Prayer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011).

side of or apart from Christ and seek God by any other way, “the glory of God [will] fright the sinner away from him, as from a consuming fire. So we must behold God in Christ, and go to him as the object of our love and adoration.”²²

Adoption comes from the Trinity, so prayer depends on the Trinity. Boston writes, “For thus the whole Trinity is glorified by the praying [of] believers, the Father as the Hearer of prayer, the Son as the Advocate and Intercessor presenting their prayers to the Father, and the Spirit as the Author of their prayers; Eph. 2:18, ‘For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.’ ”²³ This leads to how the Holy Spirit helps God’s children pray.

²² *Works*, 11:84.

²³ *Works*, 11:83.