

EXPOSITION

Monthly e-Bulletin from Virginia Beach Theological Seminary



From My Window

Lewis Sperry Chafer, the co-founder and first president of Dallas Theological Seminary, was an influential theologian who loved to teach the theology of grace. One of his students wrote, as an “aging professor who taught from his wheelchair” we were all “awestruck with his insights and enthusiasm” for grace. Near the end of his life he stated, “for over half of my life I have been studying this truth and I am just beginning to discover what the grace of God is all about.” The humility and passion of Chafer for the subject of grace is a worthy example for all of us. The apostle Paul’s words in Titus 2:11–12 marked Chafer, and they speak to us today, “The grace of God has appeared to all men teaching us to say ‘no’ to worldly desires, and to live godly in this present age.”



Ministering at Waller Mill Bible Church

In early fall of 2021, a Waller Mill Bible Church of Williamsburg, Virginia, reached out to VBTS for help in securing a pastor. The church also made an additional request, “Could you supply our pulpit with students and professors from VBTS until we extend a call to a new pastor?” After counsel and prayer, the seminary committed to help this local church on a weekly basis. From Oct. 3, 2021, to July 31, 2022, ten VBTS students, graduates, and professors preached to this congregation. On July 31st, there was a wonderful “handing off” service, including a fellowship meal, to the new pastor of WMBC, Trey Meester. We thank God for the faithfulness of our VBTS preachers, and for the continued outreach of VBTS to local churches!

Thomas Boston's Crook in the Lot

Dr. Eric J. Lehner, Professor of Theology

One of the great pastor-theologians of the 18th century was Thomas Boston of Scotland. Born as the youngest of seven in 1676, he served as a pastor from age 23 until his death at the age of 56. He is known best today for his prolific writing (12 volumes), his courageous commitment to truth, and for his pastoral heart, especially toward those enduring afflictions.

Perhaps one reason Thomas Boston cared for those experiencing trials is that his own life was one of hardship. During his boyhood his father was jailed for his faith, along with many others who refused to conform to the religious requirements of the English crown between 1660-1688. By the time the young Thomas was sixteen years old, both of his parents were dead. Throughout his life he regularly suffered from poor health. His wife Katherine was frequently assaulted by severe depression, and his ministry often faced opposition. In addition to all these things, he and Katherine endured the loss of six of their ten children.

In his memoirs, Boston reflected on these periods of affliction as God's work to establish "more heavenliness in the frame of my heart, more contempt for the world, more carefulness to walk with God, and more resolution for the Lord's work over the belly of difficulties". This personal transformation became evident in his preaching and the consequent conversion of hundreds in his town parish of Ettrick.

In the last months of his life, Boston determined to extend encouraging words to those in affliction by combining seven of his sermons into a short book. This book, published five years after his death, was entitled *The Crook in the Lot: The Sovereignty and Wisdom of God in the Afflictions of Men Displayed*. Boston based his work on Ecclesiastes 7:13, "Consider the work of God: For who can make that straight which he hath made crooked?" Ian Hamilton explains that "by 'lot,' Boston means our 'lot in life,' the shape of our lives as they are styled by God's many providences. By 'crook,' he means those unforeseen troubles ('thorns') that afflict, unsettle, or disturb us in any way" ("Foreword," in *The Crook in the Lot* [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2017], viii).

Boston orders his direct but encouraging words around three principles from Scripture. First, "whatever crook there is in one's lot, it is of God's making." Second, God is sovereign in bringing the "crook." Therefore, the crook will not be straightened apart from God's sovereign will. Finally, it is when we look at the crook as "the work of God" that we receive the grace to respond rightly to it.

Boston's *Crook in the Lot* is packed with Scripture, pastoral insight, straightforward warnings, and words of comfort. Throughout the work he urges every reader to submit to the sovereign hand of God, and to recognize that "God has signalized his favour to his dearest children, in making and mending notable crooks in their lot. His darling ones ordinarily have the greatest crooks in their lot. . . the greatest crooks issue in the greatest mercies to them that are exercised thereby" (p. 45). As we consider this encouraging truth, Boston commends Hebrews 12:6 for our personal meditation: "the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son whom he receives (ESV)."