

Sermon to the saints of God which are at Topeka – Sunday, October 19, 2014

Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked? - Eccles. 7:13.

Last Sunday, we considered the first of three propositions expressed in Thomas Boston's treatise – 'The Crook in the Lot,' namely –

Proposition I: Whatever crook there is in our lot, it is of God's making.

We need to get and keep that down good inside us. We know it in the abstract, but hopefully the scriptural points made will allow us to have a proper personal mindset concerning the crooks in our own lots. Today, we consider the second and third of three propositions, namely:

Prop II: What God sees suitable to mar, we shall not be able to mend in our lot, and

Prop III: Considering the crook in the lot as the work of God is the proper means to bring us to behave rightly under it.

So, Prop II: What God sees suitable to mar, we shall not be able to mend in our lot. What crook God makes in our lot, we shall not be able to even.—Let us consider:

1. God's marring and making a crook in one's lot, as He sees fitting.
2. Man's attempting to mend or even that crook in his lot.
3. In what sense it is to be understood that we shall not be able to mend or even the crook in our lot.
 1. God keeps the choice of every one's crook to Himself; He thereby exerts His sovereignty (Matt. 20:15). It is not left to our option what that crook shall be, or what our peculiar burden; but, as the potter makes of the same clay one vessel for one use, another for another use; so God makes one crook for one, another for another, according to His own will and pleasure. *"Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places (Ps. 135:6)."* He wills that crook in the lot to remain while He sees fitting, for a longer or shorter time, specifically according to the holy ends He designs it for. By that will it is so fixed, that the whole creation cannot alter it, nor straighten it, nor speed the straightening of it.
 2. Men attempt to mend or even that crook in their lot. This lies in their making efforts to bring their lot to their own will, that they may both go one way; so it imports three things.

First, a certain uneasiness under the crook in the lot; it is a yoke which is hard for a man to bear – that is, until his spirit is tamed and subdued. *"Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God (Jer. 31:18)."*

Second, a strong desire to have the crook removed, and to have matters in that part of our lot going according to our inclinations – our desires – our way. This is very natural, the flesh desiring to be freed from everything that is burdensome or cross to it; and if that desire is kept in a due subordination to the will of God, and it is not too pre-emptory, it is not sinful. *"And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt (Mt. 26:39)."*

Third, an earnest use of means for that end. This naturally follows on that desire. The man, being pressed with the cross which is in his crook, labors all he can in the use of means to be rid of it. And if the means used are lawful, and not relied on, but followed with an eye to God in them, the attempt is not sinful, whether he succeeds in the use of them or not.

It is not to be understood as if the case were absolutely hopeless, and that there is no remedy for the crook in our lot. For there is no case so desperate, but God may right it. *"Is anything too hard for the Lord (Gen. 18:14)?"* If the Lord Himself does not take it in hand to remove it, it will stand before us immovable, like a mountain of brass, though perhaps it may be in itself a thing that might easily be removed. It will never do by the mere force of our hand: *"For, by strength shall no man prevail (1Sam. 2:9)."* This also does not mean that, by not removing the crook in our lot, we have not found favor with God – there are those of God's people who have endured lifelong crooks, just as God has appointed them – for both their and our learning and edification. Consider these concepts:

1. The most vigorous endeavors we can use will not even the crook, if God give it not a touch of His hand; so that all endeavors that way, without an eye to God, are vain and fruitless, and will be but ploughing on the rock.

2. The use of all allowable means for it will be utterly without success unless the Lord bless them for that end. *"Who is He that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not (Lam. 3:37)?"*

3. It will never do in our time, but in God's time, which seldom is as early as ours. *"My time is not yet come, but your time is always ready Jn. 7:6)."* Hence that crook remains sometimes immovable, as if it were kept by an invisible hand; and at another time it goes away with a touch, because God's time is come for evening it.

4. His will is irresistible. *"My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure (Isa. 46:10)."* When God wills one thing and the creature the contrary, it is easy to see which 'will' must be done. When the omnipotent arm holds, in vain does the creature attempt any other direction. *"Who hath hardened himself against Him and prospered (Job 9:4)?"* *"Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven (Mt. 6:10)."*

There is a necessity of yielding and submitting to the crook in our lot; for we may as well think to remove the rocks and mountains, which God has settled, as to make that part of our lot straight which He has made crooked.

EXHORTATION 1: Let us then apply to God for removing any crook in our lot; that in the settled order of things may be removed. Let us consider several motives for such application:

Motive 1. All our attempts for its removal will, without Him, be vain and fruitless. However fair the means we use bid for it, they will be ineffectual if He does not command the blessing.

Motive 2. Such attempts will generally make it worse. Nothing is more ordinary than for a proud spirit, striving with the crook, to make it more crooked (and this not so much the crook itself, but our mind and heart in relation to the crook, and thereby the hurt of our spiritual wellbeing and therefore our outlook toward God). . *"Whoso breaketh a hedge a serpent shall bite him. Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt therewith (Eccl. 10:8-9)."*

Motive 3. There is no crook that cannot be remedied by Him, and made perfectly straight. *"The Lord raiseth them that are bowed down (Ps. 146:8)."* To this point KNOW, that God does make perfectly straight, in the final analysis, the crooks in the lots of his people, and utterly irreparably crooked the crooks in the lots of the reprobate. Heaven and hell, beloved.

Motive 4. He loves to be employed in evening crooks, and calls us to employ Him that way. *"Call upon Me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee (Ps. 50:15)."*

Motive 5. A crook eveninged after earnestly, patiently (in the heart, not just outwardly) calling upon the Lord is a double mercy. There are some crooks eveninged by a touch of the hand of common providence, while people are either not exercised by them, or when they fret for their removal; But how sweet is the evening of the crook by a humble application to and waiting on the Lord! It has the image and superscription of Divine favor on it, which makes it bulky and valuable.

Motive 6. God has signaled His favor to His dearest children, in making and mending notable crooks in their lot. His darling ones ordinarily have the greatest crooks made in their lot. These crooks are on account of, and apply trials of, the faith that God has also blessed them with.

Motive 7. It is the shortest and surest way to go straight to God with the crook in the lot. Our faithless out-of-the-way attempts to even the crook, are but our fool's haste - that is no speed; as in the case of Abraham going in to Hagar. God is the first mover, who sets all the wheels in motion for evening the crook, which without Him will remain immovable. Focusing on secondary causes is the flesh.

So, consider these directions for rightly applying to God for removing the crook in the lot.

1. Pray for it (Eze. 36:37), and pray in faith, believing that, for the sake of Jesus, you shall certainly obtain at length, and in this life too, if it is good for you; but certainly in the life to come, if we be his. Prayer and fasting are both important and can both be expedient here.

2. Humble yourselves under it, as the yoke which the sovereign hand has laid on you. *"I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him (Mic. 7:9)."* Justify God, condemn yourselves, kiss the rod, and go quietly under it; this is the most feasible way to get rid of it, the end being obtained. *"Thou shalt prepare their heart, Thou wilt cause thine ear to hear (Ps. 10:17)."* A heart that knows that the crook is specifically appointed by God, specifically to it, for that man's best and greatest good, is already partially unburdened by its weight.

3. Wait patiently till the hand that made it mend it. Do not give up the matter as hopeless, because you are not so soon relieved as you would wish; *"But let patience have her perfect work, that we may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing (James 1:4)."* Leave the timing of the deliverance to the Lord; His time will at length, to our internal convictions, appear the best, and it will not go beyond it. *"I, the Lord, will hasten it in his time (Isa. 60:22)."* Waiting on Him you will not be disappointed; *"For they shall not be ashamed that wait for Me (Isa. 49:23)."*

EXHORTATION 2: What crook there is, which in the settled order of things cannot be removed or evened in this world, let us apply to God for suitable relief under it. And there are five concepts to perhaps keep in mind here.

1. To take God in Christ for and instead of that thing, the withholding or taking away of which from you makes the crook in your lot. Consider Christ in all the ways, and time, and priority (yea, even higher) than your mind would look upon the straightening of that which is crooked.

2. Look for the stream running as full from Him as ever it did or could run, when the crook of the lot has dried it. This is the work of faith, confidently to depend on God for that which is denied us from the creature. *"When my father and mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up (Ps. 27:10)."*

3. Seek for the spiritual fruits of the crook in the lot. We see the way in the world is, when one trade fails, to fall on and drive another trade; so should we, when there is a crook in the lot, making our earthly comforts low, set ourselves the more for spiritual attainments. If our trade with the world sinks, let us see to drive a trade with heaven more vigorously; we should earnestly see, if by means of the crook, we can obtain more faith, love, heavenly-mindedness, contempt of the world, humility, self-denial, etc. So while we lose at one hand we shall gain another - and that much more valuable.

4. Seek and apply Grace to bear us up under the crook. *"For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me (2Cor. 12:8-9)."* Whether a man is faint, and has a light burden, or is refreshed and

strengthened, and have a heavy one, it is all the same – the latter can go as easy under his burden as the former can under his.

5. The keeping in our eye the eternal rest and weight of glory in the other world. *"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal (2Cor. 4:17-18)."* Heaven. Heaven. The only favorable outcome is heaven – and if so, shouldn't that be a constant focus?

EXHORTATION 3: Let us then set ourselves rightly to bear the crook in our lot, while God sees fit to continue it. What we cannot mend, let us bear properly as Christians, and not fight against God, and so kick against the pricks. So let us bear it:

1. Patiently, without fuming and fretting, or murmuring. Though we lose our comforts in the creature through the crook in our lot, let us not lose the possession of ourselves, our minds – the bringing of our thoughts into captivity. *"He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down and without walls (Pr. 25:28)."*

2. With Christian fortitude, without sinking under discouragement, - *"nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him (Heb. 12:5)."* Satan's work is by the crook, either to bend or break people's spirits, and oftentimes by bending to break them.

Keep this important point in mind, beloved. That crook may be lifelong – but what crook do we really have when we only desire one thing? *"One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple (Ps. 27:4)."*

Consider these motives to press this exhortation:

Motive 1. There will be no evening of it while God sees fit to continue it; it will continue immovable, as fixed with bands of iron and brass. *"But He is of one mind, and who can turn Him? And what His soul desireth, even that He doth. For He performeth the thing that is appointed for Me; and many such things are with Him (Job 23:13,15)."* There is a virtue of necessity here. What is not to be cured must be endured, and should be with a Christian resignation.

Motive 2. An awkward carriage under it notably increases the pain of it. What makes the yoke gall our necks, but that we struggle so much against it, and cannot let it sit at ease on us. In such a case, how often are we like men dashing our heads against a rock to remove it!

Motive 3. The crook in your lot is the special trial God has chosen for you – your special testing. It is God's fire, by which He tries what metal men are made of: heaven's touchstone for discovering true and counterfeit Christians.

Motive 4. The trial by the crook here will not last long. Though the work at first seems sore, it is not forever; a few days or years at farthest will put an end to it, and take you off your trials. Do not say, I shall not be eased of it; for, if not eased before, you will be eased of it at death, come after it what will. A serious view of death and eternity might make us set ourselves to behave rightly under our crook while it lasts.

Motive 5. Setting yourselves in a Christian manner to bear the crook, you would find it easier than you imagine. *"Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me, and ye shall find rest to your souls; for My yoke is easy, and My burden is light (Matt. 11:29, 30)."* Satan has no readier way to gain his purpose than to persuade men it is impossible that their minds should be in acceptance with the crook; that it is a burden to them altogether unsupportable. As long as you believe that, be sure you will never be able to bear it. But the Lord makes no crook in the lot of any, except that which may be borne of them acceptably, though not sinlessly and perfectly. For there is strength for that effect secured in the covenant, and being by faith fetched, it will certainly come.

Motive 6. If you behave in a proper Christian manner under your crook here (that is, from the heart – not merely outwardly), you will not lose your labor, but get a full reward of grace in the other world, through Christ.

Motive 7. If you do not behave in a proper Christian manner under I (again, from the heart – not merely outwardly), you will lose your souls in the other world. Those who are at war with God in their lot here, God will have war with them forever. If they will not submit to His yoke here, and go quietly under it, He will wreath His yoke about their neck forever, with everlasting bonds that shall never be loosed. Therefore, set yourselves to behave rightly under the crook in your lot.

Now, Prop III. The considering the crook in the lot as the work of God is a proper means to bring one to behave rightly under it:

1. Perceiving the hand of God in it
2. Representing it to ourselves as a work of God.
 - a. The decree of God purposes that crook for us from eternity.
 - b. The providence of God brings to pass that crook for us in time.
3. Continuing in the thought of it as such. It is not a simple glance of the eye, but a contemplating and leisurely viewing of it as His work, that is the proper mean.
 - a. Habitually impressed with this consideration: as the crook is some lasting grievance, so the consideration of this as the remedy should be habitually kept up.
 - b. We are to be occasionally exercised in it. Whenever we begin to feel the smart of the crook, we should fetch in this remedy – of representing it to ourselves as a work of God

– specifically appointed to us at the express pleasure and will of God – a chastening of a dear son.

4. A considering it for the end for which it is proposed to us, namely, to bring us to a dutiful carriage under it.

How it is to be understood that considering the crook in the lot as the work of God is the proper means to bring one to behave rightly under the crook.

Not as if it were sufficient of itself, and as it stands alone, to produce that effect. But as it is used in faith, in the faith of the Gospel; a sinner's bare considering the crook in his lot as the work of God, without any saving relation to Him, will never be a way to behave himself rightly under it. But having believed in Jesus Christ, and so taking God for his God, the considering of the crook of the work of God, his God, is the proper means to bring him to that desirable temper and behavior. Note: Many hearers mistake here. When they hear such and such lawful considerations proposed for bringing them to duty, they imagine that by the mere force of them, they may gain the point. This would be mere stoicism, and thereby put the strength, power and remedy in the pitiful hand of man. And many preachers too, who, forgetting Christ and the Gospel, pretend by the force of reason to make men Christians; the eyes of both being held, that they do not see the corruption of men's nature, which is such as sets the true cure above the force of reason; all that they are sensible of being some ill habits, which they think may be shaken off by a vigorous application of their rational faculties. This is a sore and grievous error to make. To clear this matter, consider,—

What it is to behave rightly under the crook in the lot; what humiliation of soul, self-denial, and absolute resignation to the will of God must be in it. What love to God it must proceed from; how regard to His glory must influence it as the chief end of it; and it is impossible for you to reach it without faith. And we can say that we have faith, and then bull right into the rational stoicism that we are warned of. Time and again, beloved. So let us please be careful here. Oh! what kind of hearts do they imagine themselves to have, who think they can for a moment empty them of the creature further than they can fill them with a God as their God in its room and stead? No doubt men may, from the force of moral considerations, work themselves to a behavior under the crook externally right, such as many pagans had; but a Christian disposition of spirit under it will never be reached without that faith in God – and that faith exercised – consider in this light the daisy-chained attributes of 2Peter 1.

That this consideration of the crook in the lot may be brought home for us in even a more truly practical, yet theologically-significant light, let us briefly make a comparison between the lowly and the proud (in some senses deviating slightly from Boston's points).

"Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud (Pr. 16:19)."

The Crook in the Lot, for each one of us, internally, is in a real sense, a microcosm of the moral universe. I would like to make a practical suggestion that may help us in considering both the crooks in our lot and how we may appropriately bear them. The humble and lowly, with a full view of God in mind, will bring their minds down to the lot. The proud and willful, without a proper view of God in mind (regardless of external appearance, or even a veneered pretense to true religion), will even attempt to bring his lot up to his mind – his eyes never being satisfied.

If men could be brought to truly believe that it is better to have their minds bend to the crook in their lot, than to force the crook to their mind, they would be in such a position to faithfully bear the crook, and even begin to see the crook differently. Hear then the Divine decision in that case: *"Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud (Pr. 16:19)."*

If a humble lowly man and a proud man were set before us, it were better to take our lot with those of a low condition, who have their spirits brought as low as their lot, than with those who, being of a proud and high spirit, have their lot brought up to their mind. A humble spirit is better than a heightened condition.

A lowly disposition of soul, and habitual aim and bent of the heart that way, has a very favorable construction put upon it in heaven. Should we look for a generation perfectly purged of pride and risings of heart against their adverse lot at any time, we should find none in this world. But those who are sincerely aiming and endeavoring to reach it, and keep the way of contented submission, though sometimes blown aside and returning to it again, God accounts to be that lowly generation.

A spirit brought down to their lot. Their lot is a low and afflicted one; but their spirit is as low, being, through grace, brought down to it. Consider the following characteristics of such an one:

1. They submit to it as just. *"I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him (Mic. 7:9)."*

2. They go as quietly under it as is tolerable. *"It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD. It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him. He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope (Lam. 3:26-29)."* While the unsubdued spirit rages under the yoke as a bull unaccustomed to it, or constantly whines and murmurs as though there is something either cathartic or righteous about pointing the crook out to others, the spirit brought to the lot goes softly under it.

3. They are satisfied in it, as drawing their comfort from another quarter than their outward condition, even as the house stands fast when the prop is taken away that it did not lean on. We have no business, not being of this world, of drawing big chunks of comfort and satisfaction from this world in the first place – *"He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful (Mt.*

13:22).” And *“Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him (Ja. 2:5)?”*

4. They have a complacency in it, as that which is fit and good for them. Men have a sort of complacency in the working of medicine, though it gripes them; they rationally think within themselves that it is good and best for them. So these lowly souls consider their afflicted lot as a spiritual medicine, necessary, fit, and good for them; yea, best for them for the time, since it is ministered by their heavenly Father – not necessarily that which is just to be cured by medicine. So they reach a holy complacency in their low afflicted lot. The lowly spirit extracts this sweet out of the bitterness of his lot, considering how the Lord, by means of that afflicting lot, stops the provision for unruly lusts, that they may be starved; how He cuts off the worldly by-channels, that the whole stream of the soul's love may run towards Himself; how He pulls off and holds off the man's burden and clog of earthly comforts, that he may run the more expeditiously in the way to heaven.

5. They rest in it, as what they desire not to come out of, till the God that brought them into it see it fit to bring them out with His good will. Though an unsubdued spirit's time for deliverance is always ready, a humble soul will be afraid of being taken out of its afflicted lot too soon. It will not be for moving for a change, till the heaven's moving brings it about. So this does not hinder prayer and the use of appointed means, with dependence on the Lord, but requires faith, hope, patience, and resignation.

Beloved, sin has turned the world from a paradise into a thicket, there is no getting through without being scratched - but a proud heart is particularly exposed to crosses. A proud heart will make a cross to itself, where a lowly soul would find none. It will make a real cross ten times the weight it would be to the humble.

1. The proud at heart over-value themselves; and so will not stoop to the yoke; it is below them. What a swelling vanity is in that, *“Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice (Ex. 5:2)?”*

2. The proud at heart have an unmortified, self-will, arising from that overvaluation of themselves, and they will not stoop. The question between heaven and us is, whether God's will or our own must prevail? Our will is corrupt, God's will is holy; they cannot agree in one. God says in His providence, our will must yield to His; but that it will not do till the iron sinew in it is broken.

3. The proud at heart, unable to submit to the cross, or to bear to be controlled, rises up against it, and fights for the mastery, with its whole force of unmortified passions. The design is to remove the crook, and bring the thing, that part of their lot, to their own mind. This is the cause of this unholy war, in which, There is one black band of hellish passions that marches upward, and makes an attack; on heaven itself, namely, discontent, impatience, murmuring, frettings, and the like. *“The foolishness of man perverteth his way; and his heart fretteth against the Lord (Pr. 19:3).”* These notions fire the

beast, disfigure the countenance, let off sometimes a volley of indecent and passionate complaints, and sometimes of blasphemies.

Humility is so far preferable to pride, that in no circumstances whatever its preference can fail. Let all the afflictions in the world attend the man of a humble spirit, and all the prosperity in the world attend the proud man, and he of humility will still have the better. Gold in a dunghill is more valuable than the same weight of so much lead inside a fancy cabinet.

Humility is a part of the image of God. Pride is the masterpiece of the image of the devil. Let us view Him who was the express image of the Father's person, and we shall behold Him meek and lowly in heart. None more afflicted, yet His spirit perfectly brought down to His lot. *"He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet opened not His mouth (Isa. 53:7)."* *"For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest you be wearied, and faint in your minds (Heb. 12:3)."*

Pride, on the other hand, is the very image of the devil. Shall we value ourselves on the height of our spirits? Satan will vie with the highest of us in that point. Though he is the most miserable, yet he is the proudest in the whole creation. There is the greatest distance between his spirit and his lot; the former is as high as the throne of God, the latter as low as hell. It is impossible that ever his lot should be brought up to his spirit; it is also impossible that his spirit will never come down to his lot. Therefore he will be eternally in a state of war with his lot. Thus, even at this time, he has no rest, but goes about, seeking rest, but finds none – and will never find it.

Humility and lowliness of spirit qualify us for friendly communion and intercourse with God in Christ. Pride makes God our enemy (1Pet. 5:5). Our happiness here and hereafter depends on our friendly intercourse with heaven. If we have not that, nothing can make up our loss. And if we have that nothing can make us miserable. *"What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us (Rom. 8:31)?"*

I love you all. Amen.