

S T U D Y G U I D E



THE WHOLE CHRIST

*Legalism, Antinomianism,
& Gospel Assurance—Why
the Marrow Controversy
Still Matters*

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The Whole Christ

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How a *Marrow* Grew

INTRODUCTION

Controversy erupted in eighteenth-century Scotland over the Auchterarder Creed and a work titled *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*. In this lesson, Dr. Ferguson recounts the history of this debate and its relevance for the Christian life.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. To outline the historical developments that led to the Marrow Controversy
2. To introduce the theological themes involved in the Marrow Controversy

SCRIPTURE READING

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.

—Ephesians 1:3–4

LECTURE OUTLINE

- A. The title of this series, *The Whole Christ*, is meant to emphasize the reality that the whole of the Christian life is lived in union with Christ.
 1. The expression *union with Christ* has been used throughout church history because teachers and theologians understood how often Christians are diverted from Christ.
 2. Christians become diverted from Christ when they lose sight of the fact that everything God gives us is fully realized in the person and work of Christ.
- B. *The Whole Christ* is a historical-theological study of a controversy in early eighteenth-century Scotland.
 1. The beginning of this controversy arose in the Presbytery of Auchterarder on February 12, 1717.

- a. The Presbytery of Auchterarder had earlier licensed William Craig to preach the gospel before ordination, but he wavered on affirming the Auchterarder Creed.
 - b. Craig informed the presbytery, and the presbytery revoked his licensure.
 - c. The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland would eventually overturn the Auchterarder decision.
2. The Auchterarder Creed: “It is not sound and orthodox to teach that we forsake sin in order to our coming to Christ.”
- C. The fire of the controversy ignited by the Auchterarder Creed was further fueled by Edward Fisher’s *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*.
1. During the assembly that overturned the Auchterarder decision, Thomas Boston recommended *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* to John Drummond.
 - a. Boston’s recommendation began a sequence of recommendations, and the work was subsequently reprinted in Scotland.
 - b. The Church of Scotland banned *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, to the protest of twelve pastors and teachers known as the Marrow Men.
 2. The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland believed *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* was out of accord with the Westminster Confession of Faith.
 - a. Three charges were leveled against the *Marrow*: universalism, antinomianism, and an overemphasis on assurance as of the essence of faith.
 - b. These charges were false and did not represent the work or the views of the Marrow Men, who saw the work as truly clarifying the gospel.
- D. The issues highlighted in the Marrow Controversy are continually relevant to Christians and go to the heart of our identity in Christ.
1. The questions raised by churches in eighteenth-century Scotland are still being asked in churches today.
 - a. How do we present Christ if we believe that Christ died for the elect?
 - b. What is the purpose of the law for Christians?
 - c. Why do we struggle as Christians with the full assurance of salvation?
 2. The New Testament characteristically refers to believers as “in Christ.”
 - a. Paul uses the phrase “in Christ” more than one hundred times to underscore the reality that all the blessings in the gospel are received in Jesus Christ.
 - b. The Auchterarder Creed recognizes that there is nothing that qualifies us to come to Christ, for we receive all blessing when we are “in Christ.”

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What charge was leveled against *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* related to how the gospel is to be offered?
 - a. The work teaches a conditional offer based on proven repentance.
 - b. The work teaches a universal offer based on particular redemption.
 - c. The work teaches a universal offer based on universal redemption.
 - d. The work teaches a conditional offer based on unseen repentance.

2. Which theologian noted and expanded on the idea that even Christians can become *incurvatus in se* or “turned in on oneself”?
 - a. John Calvin
 - b. Martin Luther
 - c. Thomas Boston
 - d. Thomas Aquinas

3. Which famous work did Thomas Boston write?
 - a. *Precious Remedies against Satan’s Devices*
 - b. *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State*
 - c. *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*
 - d. *The Reformed Pastor*

4. Paul uses the phrase “in Christ” nearly fifty times in his epistles.
 - a. True
 - b. False

5. Why did the Marrow Men object to the banning of *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* by the General Assembly of Scotland?
 - a. The Marrow Men were indebted friends of Edward Fisher.
 - b. The work formed the foundation of the Auchterarder Creed.
 - c. The Marrow Men were all from the Presbytery of Auchterarder.
 - d. The work freed them from inherited confusion about the gospel.

6. Which character in *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* represents the position of one who understands the truth and applies the wisdom of the faith?
 - a. Nomista
 - b. Neophyte
 - c. Evangelista
 - d. Antinomista

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Thomas Boston, even though he was in full agreement with it, considered the Auchterarder Creed to be poorly written. Why do you think the creed is difficult on a grammatical or conceptual level?
2. What are the main theological issues involved in the Marrow Controversy? How do you think these issues are related to our need for a whole Christ?
3. Why do you think the charge of antinomianism was leveled against *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, and the Marrow Men themselves, as far as it relates to the free offer of the gospel?
4. Have you ever struggled with assurance of salvation? Why or why not? Where have you found comfort in this struggle?