

The Whole Christ

By Sinclair Ferguson

Lesson 1: Understanding the Issue (Chapter 1)

God often uses theological _____ in the church as a way to sharpen the saints. The pages of church history are filled with examples of this truth. Puritan William Strong (d. 1654) once wrote, “*Times of reformation have always been times of division.*”

“I believe that it is not sound and orthodox to teach that we forsake sin in order to our coming to Christ, and instating us in covenant with God.”

Historical background-It all starts with a young Scottish man, William Craig, seeking to be _____ for ministry by his local presbytery in Auchterarder in the year 1717. The controversy began with the above-mentioned statement that the young man was asked to comment on.

The young man at first affirmed this statement and was granted a license to be a preacher of the gospel. However, Craig began to have second thoughts about this and asked the council if he could reconsider his answer. After he changed his view on this question the council changed their decision to license him as a preacher of the gospel. Craig then _____ this decision and the matter then went to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland to be decided.

At the General Assembly meeting Reverend John Drummond (one of the ministers from the local presbytery where Craig was denied his license) was seated next to Thomas Boston. The two men sat and listened as the General Assembly _____ the above statement, reversing the decision of the local presbytery. Boston commenting to Drummond said this,

“The ‘Auchterarder Creed,’ was all at once at that diet judged and condemned...although I believed the proposition to be truth...conversing with Mr. John Drummond...I happened to give him my sense of the gospel offer (Isaiah 50:1, Matthew 11:28), with the reason thereof; and withal to tell him of the Marrow of Modern Divinity.”

Drummond then proceeded to get a copy of this book and agreeing with it began recommending it to everyone. And so, this book that was written in 1645 by Edward Fisher, that for the most part had achieved little popularity now became immensely popular and the center of a debate known as the _____.

Boston’s love of this book started about 20 years before when he was at one of his church members’ houses for a pastoral visit and noticed this book as one of two books that were sitting on a shelf. He asked to borrow the book and found that he could not put it down. The book began to illuminate and help clarify for Boston several things in terms of the gospel and how to _____ the gospel to others. He liked the book so much he went back to its owner and asked if he could purchase it from him so that he could keep it. Commenting on the book he wrote,

“The Marrow, I relished greatly; and purchased it, at length from the owner...and it is still found among my books. I found it to come close to the points that I was in quest of and to show the consistency of these, which I could not reconcile before; so that I rejoiced in it, as a light which the Lord had seasonably struck up to me in my darkness.”

However, not everyone thought highly of this book. This book was seen by some as containing errors that were damaging to the church. Therefore, in the year 1720 the General Assembly “prohibited ministers from recommending the book either in preaching or writing and from saying anything in its favor. In addition, if they discovered any of their members reading it, they were to warn them of its dangers and urge them neither to use it nor to read it.”

Despite this ban, Boston decided to have a new edition published with his own notes (under the name of _____) in the year 1726.

What was the issue?

Those who opposed the Marrow (and the above Creed) thought that it promoted a form of _____. Whereas, those who thought highly of the book thought that those who opposed it were guilty of a subtle form of _____.

The real battle was not over a book though. The book, and creed, brought into the light a bigger issue. How are we to understand the gospel? And how is this gospel to be proclaimed?

“At the root of the matter lay the nature of the grace of God in the gospel and how it should be preached.”

The Marrow of Modern Divinity

By Edward Fisher (notes by Thomas Boston)

Preface

“The gospel method of sanctification, as well as of justification, lies so far out of the ken of natural reason, that if all the rationalists in the world, philosophers and divines, had consulted together to lay down a plan for repairing the lost image of God in man, they had never hit upon that which the divine wisdom has pitched upon, viz: that sinners should be sanctified in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 1:2), by faith in Him, (Acts 26:18), nay, being laid before them, they would have rejected it with disdain, as foolishness (1 Cor. 1:23).”

“In all views which fallen man has towards the means of his own recovery, the natural bent is to the way of the covenant of works...All agree in this one principle, that it is by doing men must live, though they hugely differ as to the things to be done for life.”

Chapter 1-The Law of Works (the Covenant of Works)

This book is written as a conversation between four people. Nomista (_____ Christian) brings his friends, Neophytus (_____ Christian) and Antinomista (_____ - _____ Christian) to talk with Evangelista (a pastor and a proclaimer of the gospel).

The book begins as Nomista says that these three friends are having a dispute about the _____. To which Evangelista asks *“What law do you mean?”*. This question confuses the three and so he explains that in the Scripture there are three different “laws”-The law of _____, the law of _____, and the law of _____. This book is divided up into three chapters-one dealing with each of these and then a fourth concluding chapter.

Evan. “You see the law of works is as much to say, the covenant of works; the which covenant the Lord made with all mankind in Adam before the fall; the sum whereof was, ‘Do this, and thou shalt live.’”

Evangelista explains that this covenant of works was the _____ with a positive law added that was an application of the moral law to the specific context of Adam and Eve in the Garden. He says, *“Adam heard as much of the law in the garden, as Israel did at Sinai; but only in fewer words, and without thunder.”*

Nom. “But, sir, methinks it is a strange thing that so small an offence, as eating of the forbidden fruit seems to be, should plunge the whole of mankind into such a gulf of misery.”

Evan. “Though at first glance it seems to be a small offence, yet if we look more earnestly upon the matter it will appear to be an exceeding great offence...First, His dominion and authority in His holy command was violated. Secondly, His justice, truth, and power, in His most righteous threatenings were despised. Thirdly, His most pure and perfect image, wherein man was created in righteousness and true holiness was utterly defaced. Fourthly, His glory, which by an active service, the creature should have brought to Him, was lost and despoiled.”