

Modern-day Marcionism

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Date: 28 October 2018

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[0 : 0 0] Heavenly Father, I thank you today that we can be here in a country where we are allowed to openly worship you and gather together and learn more about you in comfort and in peace.

I pray for those who meet in secret, for those who are suffering right now for your name's sake. I pray you open our hearts and minds as we seek to deepen our relationship with you, and I especially pray that we do not become complacent in the blessings you have given us, that we do not take for granted the preciousness that we have being able to gather together in your name.

Amen. For those of you who do not know him, Marcion was a very influential second century heretic. Heretic.

He is credited with writing the first Christian canon of scripture, and we know about him mostly from Tertullian, but Irenaeus and Origen wrote about him as well.

They took a great deal of time and detail to write against his ideas. There is currently a fad among liberal theologians to take the figure of Marcion and to make him a hero.

[1 : 1 1] They say we cannot know the true Marcion because none of his writing exists. It is true none of Marcion's writing is extant.

However, what we do know is the character and level of scholarship of those who criticized him. We also know the clarity and the commitment to Orthodox Christianity that these witnesses had.

So I would say we know a fair bit about him, what he taught, what influence he had on those around him. And it is crystal clear from these witnesses that what Marcion taught was not Christianity.

I bring this up today because Marcionism is being preached again from pulpits. Not under that name, not under the understanding Marcion knew himself to be sane, but in a subtle form that warps the church and weakens our ability to be salt and light in modern society.

What it's called today is New Testament only preaching. New Testament only preaching. Other way, other way.

[2 : 2 2] Turn around. There we go. According to Tertullian, Marcion was a shipmaster at Pontus and a zealous student of Stoicism.

He was born around 110 A.D. to a wealthy bishop of Sinope. Marcion is said to have been a member of the church under Bishop Aletharcho until his restless curiosity got him expelled from the church.

Having been excommunicated from the apostolic see of Rome, Marcion proceeded to start his own churches based on his interpretation of theology.

We do not know the exact size of the Marcionite movement, but the early church fathers report that Marcion churches could be found throughout Rome, rather like weeds.

They don't grow on a large scale, but they're rather hard to eradicate. Tertullian also claims that near the end of his life, Marcion is said to have repented, and the bans of excommunication were agreed to be lifted, if he brought all those he had led astray back to the true faith.

[3 : 33] However, death prevented Marcion from performing those actions, so the ban was never lifted. Marcion remains a notable heretic. Marcion was born into a Christian family, was given the best church education money could buy, and he always considered himself a Christian.

Before his excommunication, Marcion attended Mass regularly, and indeed, Tertullian records he gave a sizable donation to the Church of Rome. So he was probably considered an excellent member in very good standing in his early life.

Like many people, he wrestled with the problem of evil. The classic struggle is how could a kind and loving God, who's all-powerful, allow evil if he has the power and the foreknowledge to stop it?

Epicureans denied any kind of divine interest in human affairs, but the Stoics and the Platonists believed in some kind of guiding principle, although a much more abstract philosophical one.

The argument from evil is still used today by atheists to deny the existence of God. Bruce Russell states it as follows. One, if God exists, he would not allow excessive unnecessary suffering.

[4 : 56] Two, but there is excessive unnecessary suffering. Three, so God does not exist. Both philosophically and experientially, the concept of a God who is both loving and all-powerful, permitting evil, is difficult to reconcile.

I do not make any claim to be able to reconcile that today, but I do hope to give you a few insights. Marcion's attempt at resolving the issue while maintaining a commitment to Scripture resulted in diatheism, or more accurately, a deeply dualistic henotheism.

According to Marcion, the God of the Old Testament was the creator of the material universe, and the Old Testament was divinely inspired. However, drawing upon the Stoic and Platonic philosophies of his day, Marcion reduced the God of the Old Testament down to a demiurge, merely a Jewish tribal deity who was jealous and capricious.

He believed the Old Testament God was the creator of the visible world, which he created out of matter, which was preexistent. Marcion adopted the argument of many of the philosophers of his time that matter was evil.

Thus, the world we live in is inherently evil, because it's created out of matter. So, the problem of evil is solved, or at any rate, deferred, as the subject of where matter comes from is never discussed under Marcion's cosmology.

[6 : 36] According to Tertullian, Marcion took this one step further than his contemporaries, and declared that the demiurge himself was also evil. Marcion looked at the creation story and saw only a God who cursed Adam and Eve after he gave them the gift of free will.

He looked at the story of Abraham, where the God of the Old Testament tells Abraham to sacrifice his son to Yahweh. He read the story of the Exodus, where the God of the Old Testament rescued the Israelites, but sent plagues and curses on the Egyptians, and then left them to wander in the deserts for 40 years.

He read the story of Jericho, where the God of the Old Testament declared the harem upon the entire city, every man, woman, child, animals, even down to the possessions within the city.

According to Judith Liu, Marcion accepted many tenets of second-century Christianity, but, quote, More fundamentally, however, he accepted as they that Scripture speaks of the Creator.

However, the story he reads from these is consistently negative one. A God who has repeatedly demonstrated himself to be weak, unreliable, self-contradictory, and given to irrational acts of anger and wanton cruelty.

[7 : 58] End quote. Marcion believed that this demiurge had declared himself to be the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the words, I am your God, in Exodus 3, 14-16, Genesis 17, 1.

Thus, while the Old Testament was divinely inspired, it was inspired by a God no one would really want anything to do with. This idea that the God of the Old Testament should not be worshipped is the core of Marcionism.

While he is historically credited with writing the first Christian canon, calling his canon Christian is a bit dubious. Marcion rejects the entirety of the Old Testament, from Genesis to Malachi.

As much as the New Testament references the Old, he rejected most of the New Testament as well. The purpose in creating a canon was not to distinguish what was divinely inspired rather than what was merely written by man, but to distinguish between the corrupt deity of the Old Testament and the New Teaching of Jesus Christ, who had come to save humanity from the Demiurge Yahweh.

Marcion's canon was very limited in scope. Marcion rejects almost all the apostles. He accepted only parts of the Gospel of Luke, the Book of Acts, also written by Luke, and the writings of Paul, who he felt was the only writer who actually understood Jesus Christ and what Jesus was trying to teach humanity.

[9 : 45] This point is rather important, as it is this myopic focus on Paul by Marcion that so enamored Harnack and created that particular line of modern theology.

Many pastors today proudly proclaim to be Pauline preachers without realizing where the origins of such a statement come from and what the implications of a myopic focus are.

Marcion rejects the Gospels as being written by Judaizers who are trying to weave the Old Testament God onto the story of Jesus, creating a backstory for Jesus that fits the Jewish religion.

He denies the virgin birth. He denies that Christ was prophesied by the Old Testament prophets. He denies Jesus ever made the claim in Matthew 5, 17, where Jesus says, Do not think I came to abolish the law or the prophets, but to fulfill them.

Marcion simply rejected anything the New Testament that substantiated a causal link to the Old Testament. The epistles of the other apostles were considered so heavily redacted as to be worthless.

[10 : 59] Marcion thought that even the epistle of Paul had been Judaized, so he took his pen and cut portions of that as well. What was left was a few fragments of scripture that Marcion felt told a new story, the story of a new God who had come down to earth to save humanity.

To Marcion, Jesus' story begins at Luke 3. Now in the 15th year under the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor, Jesus suddenly appeared on the scene, fully formed, 33-year-old male, to, as one writer put it, a very surprised Joseph and Mary.

Marcion claims that Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, as baptism was one of the legal requirements the Old Testament God had placed on his people, and Jesus had to fulfill all the requirements of the Old God in order to save the people of earth.

Tertullian writes that Marcion believed that when the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus in the form of the dove in Luke 3.22, the dove is a messenger from a completely new and different God.

Thus, this is my beloved Son is a new revelation from a God who is pure spirit, thus capable of being pure good. Because this new God has nothing to do with this world, Marcion was insistent on the impossibility of any natural knowledge of the transcendent God.

- [12 : 35] Marcion was a docetist and believed that Jesus was also pure spirit and only appeared to look like human flesh. If Jesus had been born of a woman, according to Marcion's theology, he too would have been capable of being only evil.

So Marcion decided to proof text Luke 4.31-32. And he came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and he was teaching them on the Sabbath.

And they were amazed at his teaching, for his message was with authority. The word came down means descended. So again, Marcion taught Jesus fully descended.

He wasn't born. He descended from an unknown God. And he believed Jesus immediately begins his mission to teach a new way to break free of the old creator God and embrace the worship of the unknown God who had sent Jesus.

And here we reach the fundamental flaw in Marcion's theology. Being the son of this God also made Jesus a God and only appearing to humanity as flesh, but a different substance entirely.

- [13 : 55] Therefore, not being flesh, Christ was also never crucified and consequently never resurrected. Marcionism is, at its core, a modified ransom theory where the penalty of sin is paid not to Satan, but to the Jewish tribal God.

Tertullian speaks at some length that Marcion failed to reconcile how a docetic Jesus could satisfy the law requiring punishment for sin if he merely appeared to be suffering.

But this apparently never bothered Marcion. Marcion's key focus was that the Old Testament God was evil, so the world reflects its evil creator. And Jesus came from a transcendent God who is pure spirit, thus a God of love.

As pure spirit, this is how the new God to whom the human spirits would return after the corruption of the flesh had died, if they accepted the new teaching of Jesus.

Yet Marcion was not a Gnostic, even though he's often included in that rubric due to his use of the term demiurge and embracing a docetic Christ.

- [15 : 03] He did not believe in any secret knowledge. He believed that the Bible was the inspired and actual word of God which anyone could read, just not a God anyone would want to worship.

He taught that the Bible was the written history of an evil creator that Jesus had come to earth to defeat. Thus Marcion taught a faith in a historic God who is genuinely existing, he taught the divine inspiration of scripture, and he taught that the Bible was to be read literally, not allegorically.

Yet these three elements that we hold so fundamental to the Christian faith were warped into heresy because he did not know the true God of the Old Testament. And because he did not know the true God of the Old Testament, Marcion could never know the true God of the New Testament.

While it is true Marcion is credited with establishing the first New Testament canon, a growing number of modern scholars do not think he was very influential in establishing the actual New Testament canon.

There is a strong evidence that the early church had a fairly well established formulation from the beginning. A key characteristic of this line of scholarship is that the heretics never claimed to be part of the apostolic succession.

[16 : 27] The postmodernists like to ramble about many competing Christianities. But this was simply not the case back then. Christ's apostles had their own apostles and the succession of teacher to student was made clear.

Tertullian elucidates this. Quote, For this is the manner in which the apostolic churches transmit their registers as the Church of Smyrna, which records that Polycarp was placed therein by John, and also the Church of Rome, which makes Clement to have been ordained in like manner by Peter.

In exactly the same way, the other churches likewise exhibit their several worthies, whom, as having been appointed by their episcopal places by the apostles, they regard as transmitters of the apostolic seed.

End quote. The early Church theology followed a direct line of succession. This is a chart of the early Church Fathers for the first three centuries.

Over on the left, we start with Jesus Christ and his apostles, round 4 B.C. The red and green lines are periods of persecution and periods of rest.

[17 : 54] So the first red vertical is the persecution that started in 64 A.D. We have four more following in 95 A.D., 107 A.D., a minor persecution in 118 A.D., and 134 A.D.

The first green vertical is a period of rest in 151 A.D., and so on. Christ's apostles are color-coded horizontal trajectories.

On the top, we have the Apostle Thomas in purple. You don't see any more purple into Archelaus, who is known for his disputes with the Manichaeans in 250 A.D.

Yet we know Thomas' work from the second century book The Acts of Thomas, and the churches in India spread as far as Beijing. Below Thomas, we have a solid line of blue from the Apostle John to Ignatius to Polycarp to Irenaeus, along with some others.

Mark's legacy is in green. The very prolific Peter's legacy is yellow, while the orange represents the line of succession from the Latin Roman church. This chart ends in the blue vertical line on the right, which represents the Council of Nicaea in 326 A.D., and the beginning of the Unified Catholic Church.

[19 : 16] So contrary to the popular, many competing Christianities, what we see is five cooperating apostolic sees, perpetuating the faith once and for all delivered to the saints.

They took to heart Paul's letter where he said, Now I mean this, that each of you is saying, I am of Paul, and I am of Apollos, and I am of Cephas, and I am of Christ.

Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, that no man should say you were baptized in my name.

We all come from one source. Paul is saying there is one faith, one gospel, one forgiveness of sin. Marcionism is splitting it, saying there are two gods, two faiths, and thus he preaches a false gospel that could not save.

Beware of any theology that sees the Old Covenant as antagonism at the price of continuity. This brings us to the heart of my paper, Modern Day Marcionism.

[20 : 37] There are so-called Pauline preachers today cutting out the Old Testament heart of the New Testament they claim to preach. Like Marcion, they claim to be Christian. In fact, they claim to be more Christian than those who exegete from the Old Testament because of their myopic focus on the New Testament.

But in reality, those who practice modern-day Marcionism are the very wolves in sheep's clothing that Jesus warned us about because they claim to be holier than thou.

But they are, in fact, doing the same brutalization of scripture that Marcion practiced, often in very large and prestigious pulpits and seminaries.

This is why we are looking back at Marcion to see the present more clearly. Tertullian warned the church of this.

Quote, Now what are these sheep's clothing but the external surface of the Christian profession? This is what we think a wolf in sheep's clothing looks like.

[21 : 45] A wolf, but a fuzzy wolf. We think we will know a wolf in sheep's clothing when we see one. But in reality, a wolf in sheep's clothing looks like a sheep.

A con man that looks shifty and unscrupulous is going to have a very short career. It is the con man with the honest faces, the sincere-looking smiles, and the message of trust me who succeed.

So how do we use discernment and root out the wolves? Tertullian gives an excellent definition of a heretic. Heresy is self-will, while faith is submission of our will to the divine authority.

When we see self-will, it should raise a warning flag. We see many pastors preaching a message of their own from their pulpits, trying to be creative and clever rather than faithfully exegeting a biblical passage.

One form of modern-day Marcionism is topical sermons. Mark Deaver summed up the problem of topical sermons quite nicely when he said that it makes the church in the image of the pastor rather than in the image of God.

[23 : 03] God knew what he was doing. Who are we to pick and choose a more palatable message? But more often, the reason people pick topical messages is that they are easier to write.

It's not that they think they're giving their congregations a better message. It just takes less time. You don't even have to know Greek or Hebrew. For proper exegesis, you do.

Rummaging scripture to give your words the illusion of authority is nothing new. We return to Tertullian and find it in his day. Quote, Hoseidus Gaeta has most completely pilfered his tragedy of Medea from Virgil.

On the same principle, these poor poets are commonly called homo or centones, collectors of Homeric odds and ends, who stitch into one piece patchwork fashions the works of their own from the lines of Homer.

Out of many scraps put together from this passage and that, in miscellaneous confusion. Now unquestionably, the divine scriptures are more fruitful resources for all kinds for this sort of facility.

[24 : 11] End quote. We unfortunately find many pastors being collectors of biblical odds and ends, and the result is the church has a patchwork knowledge of the Bible. A survey done in the journal Preaching showed 75% of the sermons preached that year contained only New Testament-centered sermons, while Pulpit Digest came in slightly higher at 77.

J. Timothy Allen writes, These statistics are quite shocking, however, when you think that the Bible is 75% Old Testament.

Most seminaries require pastors in training to study at least a year of Greek, but fewer and fewer are requiring their students to teach Hebrew. Thus, many pastors simply feel more prepared to preach from the New Testament.

Allen goes on to say that another possible reason for the discrepancy is that the Old Testament is an intimidating collection of thousands of years of different cultures, and, okay, while pastors say that they want to base their teachings on the way Christ taught, they practice a startling hypocrisy in that Jesus and the apostles preach from the Old Testament.

While most of these pastors almost never mention it, except a let's add color moment. Thus, the New Testament only preaching is Marcionism reborn.

[25 : 45] The God of the Old Testament is dead. Jesus is only a God of love who wants to give you warm, fuzzy cuddles and save your soul. This may sound like I'm being facetious and exaggerating the problem, but an actual line I heard at Willow Creek and the central message of the sermon was, All Jesus wants is for you to let him love you.

The pastor concluded his sermon with, All Jesus wants is to be your friend. This is high appeal to a postmodern consumerist congregation.

I've created my own anachronyp. New Testament only preaching exegesis. N-O-P-E
Does this sermon contain the full word of God?

Nope. Does this style of teaching reflect the way Jesus and the apostles taught? Nope.
Does this style of teaching give glory to the Father like Jesus did?

Nope. Marcionism remains a notable heresy. Quite simply, the Old Testament is a pragmatic reality that evil exists and an equally pragmatic system of dealing with evil revealed by historical narrative of how divine law works within a flawed human society.

[27 : 20] The Old Testament is a masterpiece of a transcendent God revealing himself to humanity. The Bible has been described as the first hyperlinked document in history.

This is a vizarch by Chris Harrison. It marks visually scriptures that are referenced by other scriptures. Harrison describes his arc as the bar graph that runs along the bottom represents all the chapters in the Bible.

Books alternate in color between white and light gray. The length of the bar denotes the number of verses in the chapter.

Each of the 63,779 cross-references found in the Bible are depicted in a single arc.

The color corresponds to the distance between the two chapters creating a rainbow-like effect. End quote. 63,779 cross-references.

[28 : 35] This is a hubris of the New Testament only teachers today. They have been wildly successful in their field and have ventured into many others. They teach Greek, they teach theologies of various kinds, they have ventured into teaching Gnosticism, and even started teaching history.

But nobody can do it all. One reason we train in a particular field at university is to learn from teachers who have far more experience than us, what we are missing from our pool of knowledge.

Classicists do not know the ancient Near Eastern languages, they do not know religious languages, they do not understand the nuances of the history, but they think they do because they have read a book or googled it.

They think because they are experts in their field, it makes them experts in all fields. The Old Testament is rich in cultural context and historical nuances.

It covers thousands of years of history and several ancient Near Eastern languages. To understand the Old Testament best, you need a theologically trained A&E; expert.

[29 : 43] Only a mind like Ken Kitchen could produce a work like On the Reliability of the Old Testament. Kitchen has spent 60 years of his life absorbed in the ancient Near East, and he is an expert.

He is one of the champions in this century for asserting that the Bible and Judeo-Christian religion as valid historical realities that deserve their place in the study of the academy.

Our seminaries need people like him, and so do our pulpits. Many atheists and pagans are horrified at the plagues that God calls down on the Egyptians as Pharaoh refuses to let the Israelites go.

Most Christians do not have an answer for why a God supposedly just would do such a terrible thing either. An example of how specialist expertise contributes to a nuanced understanding of the Bible and a proper theology of who God is, is the explanation that each plague addresses a specific Egyptian God who is being worshipped in the land and challenges their authority and power.

The gods of Egypt were local deities, having power in one place but not another. You would worship one god in your hometown, but if you traveled to another city, you would offer worship to the god that was there because that is the god who would have power.

[31 : 09] Yahweh takes on the major gods in Egypt and defeats them one by one, proving he is more than just a local tribal god. He is stating he is the creator god, using divine miracles to assert his dominance over both false religious power and nature.

and in the final plague, Yahweh asserts his dominion over life and death itself. Passover is set as an ordinance so that the people of God are told to celebrate for all generations to come to know the God who has delivered us from Egypt.

God is faithful to his people, a God of justice who personally confronts evil, and a God who is the holy creator and thus worthy to be praised.

With ancient Near Eastern gods, they had a good coming and a bad coming. Sekhmet was the goddess of healing, but only because she was an evil goddess who caused death and sickness in the first place.

So by offering her worship, the Egyptians were trying to bribe her from not coming in her bad coming. If she accepted the bribe and left, the person would return to health.

[32 : 30] Magic was a part of ritual worship, but not as a form of praise. Magic was a means of coercion, either binding the gods to the human will or a sufficient bribe to get them to leave you alone.

And if you used magic and coercion, they could remember and come back and get revenge. In stark contrast, the God of the Old Testament reveals a God who never changes.

Contramarcian, Yahweh is a God who reveals himself, who tells his prophets to write down revelations so his people can understand him. The God of the Old Testament is a God of law and order, but these are not bad things.

This is why the Bible references itself so many times, to show stability and security. Instead of an evil God of the Old Testament, as Marcion portrays, Brent A.

Strawn says, absolutely not to be missed here is what God is typically angry about, injustice. He then quotes Abraham J.

[33 : 40] Heschel, the wrath of God is a lamentation. All prophecy is one great exclamation. God is not indifferent to evil.

He is always concerned. He is personally affected by how man treats man. He is a God of pathos. This is the meaning of the anger of God, the end of indifference.

End quote. With Jericho, we see a God that because the people of Jericho have sinned utterly against God, they are condemned.

By God, miraculously destroying the walls of Jericho. The work of human hands that the people of Jericho thought they could safely hide behind and do as they pleased.

At Jericho, we see theodicy in action as evil men and women find nothing can hide them from the judgment and justice of their creator. Contrary to the upsurge by a few scholars and theologians of Harnack's line to portray Marcion as a heroic figure within the Christian community, Marcionism and its modern-day equivalents is in no way compatible with Christian orthodoxy.

[34 : 57] 2 Timothy 3.16 says, All scripture is profitable. There was almost no New Testament scripture at the time, as 2 Timothy was one of the first epistles to be written, and it was written before the Gospels.

2 Timothy 3.16 is often used to authenticate the New Testament, but what it was actually talking about was the Hebrew canon. The apostles and their disciples always made sure to validate that Jesus was a Christ prophesied in the Hebrew scripture.

The Hebrew canon is in no way invalid or made irrelevant by the coming of Christ. It is critical to validating that Jesus is the Christ, and it is the foundation upon which the Christian religion is built.

Built upon that foundation are the seven basic doctrines of Christian orthodoxy, reflected in the creeds. The Trinity, the fall of man, the person of Jesus Christ, the resurrection, salvation by grace through faith, the second coming, and sola scriptura.

Very few Christians can actually just rattle off a list, yet they are important to help us identify when somebody is being aberrant or worse, heretical.

[36 : 20] It is very easy to see how Marcion's rejection of the Old Testament God would pervert the foundational Christian doctrine, and this should be a warning to modern-day Marcionists.

As these are all intertwined, only a few highlights from the list will be given here. The Trinity, one God, three persons.

Modern-day Marcionists say the Father is now irrelevant because Jesus is all we need. Everything Jesus did was to glorify the Father. If you want to worship Jesus, you need to glorify the Father too.

The Resurrection. While the New Testament-only preachers do spend a lot of time on the resurrection, there is a disturbing shift in the focus of what the resurrection means without its Old Testament underpinnings.

Modern-day Marcionism fails to realize that the Old Testament helps us understand the gravitas of death. That death and separation from God are eternal consequences of sin.

[37 : 28] When people worship a God who is only love, the message inculcates an inherent selfishness. Don't worry about hell. You aren't going. A God of only love theology reduces the resurrection to a mere analogy of a good thing that is to come for everyone, rather than a historic promise by God to those who repent and believe.

Which is the same reason we don't hear much preaching on the Second Coming, the great white throne of judgment. Modern-day Marcionism thinks it solves a very uncomfortable problem by avoiding it, just like Marcion did.

No final judgment? No hell. But the final judgment is key to the true understanding of the problem of evil. The choice to do evil is intrinsically and unavoidably part of the amazing gift of free will.

But the Second Coming assures us that people who commit evil acts will be dealt with. They will be punished. And that punishment is something we should all fear, so we don't do evil acts.

Contemporary philosophy sees fear as inappropriate. However, fear is useful in instilling respect for the law into the masses. Post-modernity rejects that there can be a healthy moral fear, because that implies a level of authority beyond our own individual me.

[38 : 55] Take, for instance, if you were in the army. Drill sergeant comes along and says, You, Smith, drop and give me 30. Well, if you're Smith, you're going to drop and do 30 push-ups, because that sergeant has the authority to tell you what to do.

He has the authority to make life unpleasant if you do not do what he tells you to do. Military prison is particularly unpleasant.

Therefore, that makes doing 30 push-ups seem like a good idea to do. And this is why sola scriptura, rather than post-modern consumerism, should be shaping what is preached from the pulpits and taught in our seminaries.

Modern-day Marcionism reduces our impact on society because it is the Old Testament that teaches us that God has the authority as our creator to tell all of humanity what to do and what not to do.

Without the weight of that authority, Jesus becomes just another suggestion we can pick and choose at our convenience. Modern-day Marcionism, with its rejection of the Old Testament, has been called a matter of urgent practical theology.

[40 : 22] Orthopraxis is just as important as orthodoxy. And this brings us to the crux of the problem of modern-day Marcionism. What kind of society is produced without a God of justice?

How do we know God has not already limited evil? Western societies abound in human flourishing. This is because our legal system and many of our other public systems, like health care and education, are based on our historic Judeo-Christian principles.

God limits evil by making us moral agents in his image and thus culpable for instituting a godly love through pragmatic law.

Right before he is crucified, Jesus tells his disciples, If you love me, keep my commandments. John 14, 15, which goes back to Exodus 20, verse 6.

John 15, 10 says, If you keep my commandments, you abide in my love. Exodus 20 contains the Ten Commandments, and these are part of the commandments Jesus is telling us to keep.

[41 : 34] The Ten Commandments are good stuff. We really don't ruminate on them enough. They provide a stable basis for a just society so that good can flourish.

The Old Testament reveals a response to evil that is based on a response to evidential harm, rather than mere theoretical logic on the nature of evil and why it exists.

This is part of the power of the Old Testament, to make sense of the world we actually live in, rather than presenting a utopia of how we would like things to be. Straughan again says, The problem with Marcion's simply good deity is that he is, in the final analysis, entirely devoid of justice.

Marcion's god is weak and decidedly un-godlike. He may dislike evil, but he does nothing to stop it. This is in agreement with Tertullian's analysis centuries ago, that the simply good God, who is neither offended nor angry nor inflicts punishment, excuses evil.

Separating the Judeo-Christian Bible into a God of law and a God of only love, modern-day marcionists encourage evil to flourish. If we do not preach a God of justice and teach the law of God, we leave the world to flounder and to try and combat evil with flawed and frequently evil means, such as social justice, neuroscience brain enhancements, or Orwellian relabeling of evil.

[43 : 13] These are poor counterfeits for the goodness of God. Straughan also calls New Testament-only preaching baby talk, and he states that those who teach it infantize those who are depending on you to teach the full language.

He claims, The Bible provides us with a language or script to resist what needs to be resisted, the dominant culture around us. Language like the Ten Commandments.

Do not covet your neighbor's goods or wife. Honor your father and mother. Do not bear false witness. Coveting, rebellion, and gossip abound. Our society no longer knows the basic rule of ensuring that good flourishes because we have removed these key concepts from the church.

The Bible translation, God's Word for the Nation, removed the word repent because they said that modern readers did not understand the word. If we do not teach people who are in the church to understand what repentance means, how in the world do we expect to be able to have a meaningful dialogue with those who are outside the church on matters of morality and salvation?

What we need is a rejection of modern day Marcionism and a return to the richness of the Old Testament with its thousands of years of history, culture, and profoundly deep practical theology.

[44 : 43] If this talk has inspired you to go dig a little deeper, I recommend a brand new book, Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament.

It's absolutely brilliant. It covers the cultural, social, and historical context of the Old Testament. It's been written by 67 of some of the best Old Testament scholars around the world.

Yet they gave those writers the mandate to make it readable to a layman. This happens to be a contributor copy. This will be out November 5th.

Also, book you've heard me quote frequently in the paper, The Old Testament is Dying by Bruce A. Straughan.

He uses the analogy in this book of the Old Testament as a dying patient and the Old Testament as a dying language. He gives us the hope that while Hebrew was a dying language, Hebrew has in fact been revived to become a first tongue language.

[46 : 00] It's a living language. And he offers us the hope that the Old Testament can become a living language again. He recommends seminaries return to training people to be fluent in the Old Testament.

The Old Testament fluency is needed for the ortho practice of keeping the key verbs in Deuteronomy. Keep, observe, do.

In conclusion, we know that the existence of evil is in tension with a gift of free will God has bestowed upon humanity.

And somehow being made in the image of God involves us being culpable moral agents. We know, but do not want to accept, that God does not prevent all evil because it is our obligation as moral agents to emulate God's divine law into practice through godly living and to institute systems that distribute justice.

Therefore, it is our moral obligation to reject modern day modern day marcionism in all its form and teach and preach that our God is indeed one God, a God who is holy, who acts in human history to teach us that genuine godly love, and thus the love we show our fellow man, includes both grace and justice.

[47 : 26] Psalm 40 verse 9 says, To do your will is my delight. My God, your law is in my heart. May it be in our pulpits and seminaries as well. Thank you.