

## Early Church Heresies – 2. Marcionites

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A mum told me “God has children, he doesn’t have grandchildren.” Her child had turned away from Christianity, and refused to live in the faith he grew up in.

Each person has the opportunity to accept or reject the faith of their parents. This has been seen thru history. It is also portrayed vividly in the Bible eg Eli, the faithful Old Testament High Priest, had unfaithful sons. Faithful king Jotham’s son Ahaz rejected God and burnt his own son in sacrifice to other gods. The Prodigal son portrays a rebellious child.

A painful time in the church’s history occurred about 140AD, when the bishop of Sinope’s son moved to Rome. There, the Gnostic preacher Cerdo taught him. The bishop’s son became a wealthy ship-owner & donated much money to his church. But at the end of July 140AD, the bishop’s son was asked to declare his teachings to a meeting of his church elders. They declared him to be a heretic. He’d changed the faith of his father, to a totally diff belief, which he still called Christianity.

The church refunded all his donations and rejected him. His name was Marcion.

Marcion had good organizing skills and began a new church to defy the Christian one.

Marcionite churches grew in popularity and within 60 yrs had become a serious threat to mainstream Christianity.

Marcion had enough teaching of Jesus to reject the Gnostic hierarchy of spiritual beings, with the unknowable supreme God at the top; but not totally. Instead of having many gods, Marcion only had 2. The greater one was the Supreme unknowable Father. & the 2<sup>nd</sup> was the Old Testament god.

Like other more Xn types of Gnostics, Marcion believed that the Old Testament god was inferior & created the world with all its inherent problems.

This god was the god of justice, the god of Law, the god of the Jews. He was only concerned with the Jews, & hated all other people. The Messiah would come from this god, & would bring Jewish resurgence again.

However, the supreme God was the God of goodness. He sent Jesus into the world. Marcion claimed Jesus wasn’t the expected Christ of the Old Testament, but a messenger from the supreme God.

Since, Marcion claimed (in line with Plato’s philosophy), that spirit is good, matter is evil, then the body (created by the Old Testament god) is evil

and must be denied & discarded, since the soul & spirit alone are redeemed.

So also Jesus could not have been born of the Virgin Mary. Instead, he simply appeared at 29, in a synagogue in Capernaum. Marcion claimed Jesus only seemed to be real. He only appeared to suffer & die. Salvation wasn’t about forgiveness of sins & avoiding God’s wrath. For him, salvation meant rejecting the Old Testament, & living for the supreme God. He claimed Jesus judged no-one, so there is no 2<sup>nd</sup> coming either. Bodily resurrection was unthinkable.

But Marcion did one more bold step, flowing from his view of God. Since he claimed that the Old Testament god was so evil, then the Old Testament itself shouldn’t be kept. He threw it away. So what was left of the Bible?

The New Testament had been written by or through the apostles before 100AD. The gospels & letters had circulated around the churches, as had other letters written by Christian leaders. Most churches accepted what we now have as the New Testament as being Scripture from God. But some major churches weren’t sure about a few (since they hadn’t been sent to those churches from the very start) & wanted a few other letters included.

Marcion, based in Rome, sifted through the books & letters he had, & literally rejected much of the New Testament. He claimed the early Christians had doctored it, to make it more Jewish.

He ended up with a set of Scriptures that was very small. His Bible consisted of Luke, Galatians, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Romans, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, Eph (which he called Laodiceans), Colossians, Philemon & Philippians. Yet any part of them that disagreed with his view of God was cut out as well.

Instead of reading the Bible & seeing the God presented in it, Marcion had formed his own idea of God & trimmed the Bible to fit his image. Unfortunately there are too many people who do a similar thing these days, except they don’t use scissors, but they castrate the meaning in a similar way.

Once Marcion had formed his Bible, he followed it with zeal & consistency. The Marcionites were very moral people who read their Scriptures & lived by them. However, they zealously followed a false god.

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The true Christians responded to Marcion in a few ways. He was not welcome in their churches. But they had to deal with his views.

Since he'd pruned the Bible & his churches emphasized their scriptures, the true Christians had to grapple with what really belonged to the Bible. The Christians collected the New Testament into its current order & content. It wasn't closed completely, for if another genuine letter from Paul appeared, such as his 3<sup>rd</sup> letter to Corinth (which he mentions in 2 Cor), it could have been added. It wasn't finally sealed until the 15<sup>th</sup> century as Protestants & Catholics firmed up their views.

Another response to Marcion & other heresies at the time, was for Christian leaders to put together a creed, based on the apostle's teaching in the Bible. This was accepted in a Council of church leaders, & became the standard by which Xns knew they had a good understanding of God as presented in the Bible. It was called the Apostle's Creed.

As I read it now, see how it contradicts Marcion's teachings.

*I believe in God, the Father Almighty, **maker** of heaven & earth, & in Jesus Christ, his only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, **born** of the virgin Mary, **suffered** under Pontius Pilate, **was crucified**, dead, and buried. He descended into hell. The 3<sup>rd</sup> day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven, & is seated at the right hand of God the F almighty, from there he **shall come** to **judge** the living & the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the **forgiveness of sins**, the **resurrection of the body**, & the life everlasting. Amen.*

There's more in the creed than simply against Marcion & Gnostics, however it is good to know what we believe & to rehearse it frequently so that when someone tells us something different, we'll automatically know it is wrong.

The Old Testament leads into the New Testament. Our God is god of both the Old & the New. Jesus fulfilled the promises of the Old Testament.

Marcion got it wrong, because he refused to accept the Bible's teaching on God, & adapted the Bible to fit his view of God. Don't fall for his folly.