

The Ghost of Marcion: What Paul's Letters Really Say

Daniel Botkin

Introduction

If a person has a fair amount of exposure to Mainstream Christianity, and a familiarity with the Bible, he may notice that Mainstream Christianity often de-emphasizes the Old Testament and puts a disproportionate amount of emphasis on Paul's epistles. I would hesitate to say that any part of the Scriptures can be overemphasized. However, if we give uncalled-for weight and emphasis to certain parts of the Bible, and neglect what the rest of the Scriptures teaches about an issue, we will probably develop an imbalanced view of that particular issue.

By volume, Paul's epistles make up approximately 5% of the Bible. Paul's writings are holy Scripture, but neither Paul nor the Holy Spirit expected us to give more weight and authority to these epistles than we do to the Old Testament or to the rest of the New Testament.

By putting a disproportionate amount of emphasis on these letters that Paul sent to various churches, we fail to follow the example of Paul, who told the Ephesians, "I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Ac.20:27). By neglecting certain parts of the Bible, we ignore Paul's declaration that "all Scripture is inspired and is useful" (2 Tim.3:16).

Christianity's strong emphasis on Paul's writings, and lack of emphasis on so much of the rest of the Bible, is puzzling. It is especially puzzling when we consider Peter's warning about Paul's writings:

"His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Pet.3:16).

If it was easy for Paul's contemporaries to misunderstand his epistles, we can be sure that it will be even easier for us to do so, with our limited knowledge of the situations and problems Paul was addressing when he wrote to these various churches. Yet some Christians, perhaps unknowingly, are more intent on following the easy-to-misunderstand teachings contained in Paul's letters than they are on following the plain teachings of the Messiah Jesus contained in the Gospels.

What Caused the Church to Pay so Much Attention to Paul?

How did this shift of focus come about? What caused the Church to begin paying so much attention to Paul and so little attention to the Law and the Prophets and other parts of the Bible? To discover the answer to this question, we must go all the way back to the Second Century. After all the original Apostles had died, other people took on the responsibility of continuing the Church's work. The original Apostles were all Jews, who had been exposed to the teachings of the Law and the Prophets since their childhood. The leaders who replaced them were mostly Gentiles from pagan backgrounds, who had comparatively little understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures. We can read about these people in various documents from the Second Century. One Church historian has this to say about these documents:

“Many stories come in versions so distorted that it is hard to decide whether the principal characters were worthy successors to the apostles, or the devil’s own agents. Perhaps their contemporaries were as uncertain as we are.”[1]

There is one character, however, which was undoubtedly one of the devil's own agents: the heretic Marcion, who lived in the second half of the Second Century. Marcion taught that the entire Old Testament should be rejected because it belonged to an evil, inferior God, and not to the God revealed by Jesus of Nazareth.

Marcion was very anti-Jewish; therefore he also rejected any New Testament writings which appeared to speak favorably of “Jewish practices” (i.e., keeping the laws and commandments of the Old Testament). As one writer notes:

“Marcion started the trend which has had many followers right up to the present — if it doesn’t suit the theory, excise it as spurious or an interpolation.”[2]

By the time Marcion finished editing the Scriptures, his “Bible” consisted of nothing more than Luke's Gospel (minus the “Jewish” elements) and ten of Paul's epistles. Paul, Marcion taught, was the only apostle who could be trusted.

Marcion's anti-Jewish, pro-Paul churches spread throughout the Roman Empire and soon became a major threat to the Messianic faith. According to historians, Marcion's heresy continued to spread until it finally died out sometime around the Fifth Century.

We who claim to believe the Bible must ask ourselves an important question: Did Marcion's anti-Jewish, anti-Old Testament, pro-Paul heresy really die out? Or did

the Church simply succumb to it and accommodate it and incorporate it, in a subdued form, into Mainstream Christianity?

Of course our Bible, unlike Marcion's, includes the Law and the Prophets, but how much do we heed their instruction? When we examine the average Christian's attitude to the Law and the Prophets, it is obvious that the ghost of Marcion is very much alive in the church today.

Although the Church pays lip service to the inspiration and authority of *all* the Scriptures, its de-emphasis of the Law, the Prophets, and anything "Jewish," and its heavy emphasis on Paul, reveals that the Church today is basically Marcionite in practice. For those who doubt this assertion, let us examine some things that Marcion taught, and we will see that the spirit of Marcion still has a very strong influence on the Church today.

What Did Marcion Teach?

Marcion's most influential writing was a work entitled *Antithesis*, described as "a highly competent work" which consisted of "contrasted statements arranged to prove the incompatibility of the law and the gospel." [3]

Unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately), there are no known copies of *Antithesis* in existence. What we know about Marcion's teachings comes mainly from the writings of those who opposed his heresy.

The one to write the most about Marcion was Tertullian, a church leader who wrote a lengthy work called *Against Marcion*. Tertullian describes *Antithesis* as:

"a work strained into making such a division between the Law and the Gospel as thereby to make two separate gods, opposite to each other, one belonging to one instrument (or, as it is more usual to say, testament), one to the other, and thus lend its patronage to faith in another gospel, that according to Antithesis." [4]

No real Christian today would admit to believing in two gods, of course. Yet many believers make such a division between Old Testament Law and New Testament grace, that they view the Law as something opposed to grace. The Law is seen as something obsolete and of little use to a Christian. Such a warped view of God's Law will carry over into our view of God Himself. If God's Old Testament Law is opposed to God's New Testament grace, we end up with either a schizophrenic God, or Marcion's two gods.

“Marcion sets up unequal gods,” Tertullian writes, “the one a judge, fierce and warlike, the other mild and peaceable, solely kind and supremely good.”[5]

Is this not exactly what many Christians do? They shun the “Old Testament God” because He is too stern and fierce. They focus instead upon the “New Testament God,” who, in their minds, does not expect obedience to His laws. Listen to Tertullian’s description of Marcion’s God, and see if it is not a description of the god presented by the Church today:

Marcion’s god “displays neither hostility nor wrath.” He “neither condemns nor disdains” and “does not punish.” “A better god has been discovered,” Tertullian sarcastically writes, “one who is neither offended nor angry nor inflicts punishment. . . he is merely kind. Of course he forbids you to sin — but only in writing. It lies with you whether you consent to accord him obedience.”[6]

“To what purpose does he lay down commands?” Tertullian asks. “This god is exceptionally dull-witted if he is not offended by the doing of that which he dislikes to see being done.”[7]

We might ask ourselves the same question about the God we worship: To what purpose does He lay down commands? We are certainly not *justified* by keeping the Law. We are justified by faith. But after we are justified, what are we to do with God’s commandments? Are we to put them into practice, or are we to disobey them?

The Scofield Bible: Reviving the Ghost of Marcion

One thing that has helped the ghost of Marcion to thrive so well in the Twentieth Century Church is the popularity of the Scofield Reference Bible. Even Christians who have never seen a Scofield Bible have probably been affected by it indirectly, through preachers and teachers who have been influenced by it.

The Scofield Bible contains many excellent study notes and aids to understanding the Scriptures. Several of Scofield’s notes, however, strongly suggest a Marcionite view of Law and Grace. A reader of Scofield’s notes is left with the impression that Law and Grace are mutually exclusive.

Scofield’s anti-law bias has fed and nurtured and sustained the tares of nomophobia (fear of the Law) that Marcion sowed in the Church nineteen centuries ago. As the end of the age approaches, God is sending forth His

messengers to uproot these tares, so His wheat can mature and bring forth the fruit of obedience to God's laws.

Spirit of Lawlessness

A spirit of lawlessness has been hanging over the Church for most of its history. Some Christians have been influenced by it more than others, of course. Paul saw it beginning in his lifetime. Second Thessalonians speaks about "the secret power of lawlessness" which was "already at work" when Paul wrote to the Thessalonians.

Paul told the Thessalonians that before the Messiah returned, there would be a "falling away" (*apostasy*, "departure from truth"). This departure from the truth would then open the door for something called "the man of lawlessness" to come forth. This "coming of the lawless one" would be accompanied by "all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonder" which would "deceive those who are perishing."

"They perish because they refused to love the truth and be saved," Paul writes. "For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie." In preparation for the Return of the Messiah, God is also sending powerful revelation to graciously expose the ancient lie, so that those who love the truth can depart from error and be freed from the bewitching influence of the spirit of lawlessness.

In 1989, Ted Turner of CNN declared the Ten Commandments obsolete, and offered his own "Ten Voluntary Initiatives" as an alternative to God's outdated laws. No one should take Turner seriously, of course, but he did make one comment that deserves our attention. "Nobody around likes to be commanded," he said. "Commandments are out." [8]

Christians may scoff at Turner's idea of replacing God's laws with human ideas, yet is this not the very thing the Church has done with some of God's commandments? We have replaced the 24-hour, seventh-day Sabbath with an hour or two of Sunday morning worship; we have replaced the Biblical holy days with holidays of pagan origin; we have replaced God's dietary guidelines with our own ideas about what we should eat.

After a person has been forgiven and justified by faith, where should he look for moral instruction? Should he look to God's commandments to tell him how to live the Christian life, or should he ignore God's commandments and live according to

man's suggestions? Even Scofield, in spite of all his anti-law bias and nomophobia, concedes that the Old Testament commandments "are used in the distinctively Christian Scriptures as an instruction in righteousness." [9]

Forbid what YHVH Commanded and Command what YHVH Forbid

In *Against Marcion*, Tertullian accuses Marcion and his followers of "forbidding what [God] commands and commanding what he forbids." [10] The ghost of Marcion continues to do this in the Church today. Mainstream Christianity has criticized believers for keeping the seventh-day Sabbath, for celebrating the Biblical holy days, for practicing the dietary law, and for refusing to shave their beards — things that God has commanded. And, like Marcion, Mainstream Christianity often commands what God forbids: "Forget the Sabbath. Ignore the holy days and dietary laws. And shave that beard, so you'll look like a Christian!" (Many Bible colleges and seminaries command their students to shave their beard, in spite of God's command in Lev.19:27.)

Marcion, like many church leaders today, misused the words of Jesus and the words of Paul to support this nomophobic, anti-Jewish, pro-Paul gospel. Tertullian rightly points out that Jesus' verbal attacks on the teachers of the Law were not aimed at the Law itself, but at man's perversion and misuse of God's Law. "He is not criticizing the burdens of the law," Tertullian writes. The burdens Jesus criticized were, according to Tertullian, "those which they piled on of their own, teaching for precepts the doctrines of men." [11]

Tertullian shows the importance Jesus attached to keeping the commandments when he writes about the rich young ruler who approached Jesus:

"So when he is asked by that certain man, 'Good Teacher, what shall I do to obtain possession of eternal life?', he inquired whether he knew — which means, was keeping — the Creator's commandments. . . Come now, Marcion, and all you companions in the misery and sharers in the offensiveness of that heretic, what will you be bold enough to say? Did Christ here rescind those former commands. . . ?" [12]

Tertullian opposes Marcion's misuse of Paul's writings by pointing out the "Jewishness" of Paul's faith, and then asking, "What had [Paul] still to do with Jewish custom, if he was the destroyer of Judaism?" [13]

He also refers to Romans 7:7 to combat Marcion's hatred of the Law:

“What shall we say then? That the law is sin? God forbid.’ Shame on you, Marcion. God forbid: the apostle expresses abhorrence of complaint against the law. . . Yet he adds even more: ‘The law is holy, and its commandment is just, and good.’”[14]

As Tertullian points out later:

“you cannot make a promoter of the law into an opponent of it.”[15]

Unfortunately, the Church ignored Paul’s positive statements about the Law and Jesus’ warning about the necessity of continuing to practice and teach the Old Testament commandments. (See Matt.5:17-19.)

Spiritualization of the Law

The Epistle of Barnabas, an influential letter written in the Second Century, indicates the general direction the Church was heading in its attitude to the Old Testament. “The main theme of Barnabas,” writes one church historian, “is a spiritualization of the Mosaic law. The writer holds that the Jews were wrong to take the Old Testament literally.”[16]

Everything in the Old Testament was allegorized to give it a Christian meaning. Even the commandments were taken figuratively, because, according to Barnabas, “the law of Moses had never been meant to be taken literally.”[17] Even the dietary restrictions were said to represent not actual food, but various kinds of sinful habits.

Justin Martyr’s *Dialogue With Trypho* also shows early Christianity’s negative attitude toward the Law. Trypho the Jew expresses bewilderment when he tells Justin:

“[You Christians] spurn the commands. . . and then try to convince us [Torah-observant Jews] that you know God, when you fail to do those things that every God-fearing person would do. If, therefore, you can give a satisfactory reply to these charges and can show us on what you place your hopes, even though you refuse to obey the Law, we will listen to you most willingly, and then we can go on and examine in the same manner our other differences.”[18]

Justin replies by saying that the Law is “obsolete,” “abrogated,” “voided,” and tells Trypho, “You understand all in a carnal way.”[19]

Not all followers of the Messiah were influenced by the nomophobic, anti-Old Testament, pro-Paul gospel of Marcion. There is historical evidence of several groups of believers who practiced the Law as an expression of their faith in Yeshua (Jesus) as the Messiah.

After Trypho asks Justin about the possibility of believing in Yeshua as the Messiah and continuing to observe the commandments, Justin writes his reply:

Yes, Trypho, I conceded, 'there are some Christians who. . . desire to observe as many of the Mosaic precepts as possible — precepts which we think were instituted because of your hardness of heart — while at the same time they place their hope in Christ. . . [20]

Justin obviously disagreed with these Law-keeping Messianic believers, but he does acknowledge their existence.

Torah Obedient Nazarenes Following Yeshua

The best-known of these groups who believed in Yeshua and practiced the Torah were the Nazarenes and the Ebionites. There were other groups, more obscure and far less orthodox, such as the Elchasaites and the Pseudoclementines.[21]

Some doctrinal errors in some of these predominately Jewish groups probably contributed to the decision of the Mainstream, Gentile Church to adopt Marcion's anti-law, anti-Jewish attitude. One writer notes that "Jewish Christianity in various forms continued as a disturbing factor until almost the Fifth Century." [22]

It is interesting that this is the same time that Marcion's heresy supposedly "died out." Once Marcion's error (in a modified, subdued form) had been fully assimilated into the Mainstream Church, "Jewish Christianity" was no longer a "disturbing factor" because the Law-keeping Christians were greatly outnumbered by those who had adopted Marcion's attitude toward the Law. The number of those who upheld both the torah and the Messiah (see Rev.12:17 & 14:12) was so insignificant by the Fifth Century that the Mainstream Church no longer considered them a threat. They could now be written off as a fringe group, and conveniently ignored. Though they were few in number compared to the now-Marcionized Mainstream Church, these groups who upheld both the Torah and the Messiah continued to exist until at least as late as the Tenth Century.[23]

While Mainstream Christianity, influenced by Marcion, de-emphasized the law and over-emphasized Paul, groups such as the Ebionites totally rejected Paul, viewing

him as an apostate and enemy of the Law. Both of these extremes are distortions of true, Biblical faith in the Messiah.

The solution is not to reject either Paul or the Law; the solution is to view Paul's writings in a way that will allow them to harmonize with what the rest of the Bible says about the Law.

Seven Guidelines to Understanding Paul's letters

How should a disciple of Yeshua/Jesus view Paul's epistles? For those who desire to be faithful and to live "by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God," seven guidelines are listed below. The Bible student should keep these guidelines in mind when reading Paul's writings.

Guideline 1: Over-All Biblical Context

Paul's epistles, like any other part of Scripture, must be viewed in the light of the entire Bible. This means that when we are dealing with the Law, we must not focus in on a few statements Paul made, and ignore everything else the bible says about God's Law. As pointed out earlier, Paul's writings make up approximately 5% of the Bible. Paul's writings must be understood in a way that will make them compatible with what the other 95% of the Bible says. In other words, let the other 95% of the Bible interpret the 5% that Paul wrote.

It is important to remember that for many years, the Old Testament was the only Bible the Early Church had. The New Testament writings were gradually accepted into the canon of the Scriptures. It was not until about the middle of the Second Century that the term "the Scriptures" referred to the New Testament as well as the Old Testament.[24] Therefore, when New Testament writers mention "the scriptures" or "the commandments," they are referring to the Old Testament.

Guideline 2: Historical Context

The New Jerusalem Bible, in its "Introduction to Paul," makes this statement:

"It is important to remember that Paul's letters were not meant as theological treatises: most of them represent his response to a particular situation in a particular church. . . . Paul's letters do not give any systematic and exhaustive exposition of his teachings; they presuppose the oral teaching which preceded them, and enlarge and comment only upon certain points of that." [25]

Because Paul often wrote to correct particular problems in particular churches, we must have some knowledge of the situation Paul was addressing if we are to understand his writings. Sometimes the problem can be inferred from Paul's remarks, but often we are left with little or no knowledge of the situations Paul was dealing with.

Theologians often try to reconstruct the historical backgrounds of the epistles, and make educated guesses about the problems Paul was addressing. This can be a noble effort, if it is done in a sincere attempt to come to a clearer understanding of what Paul taught. Unfortunately, many people come to an understanding of Paul that contradicts what the rest of the Bible teaches, either by incorrectly reconstructing the historical background, or by ignoring it altogether.

Guideline 3: Peter's Warning

It is important to bear in mind Peter's warning that Paul's letters are not easy to understand:

"His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction. Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position " (2 Pet.3:16f).

Those with little or no knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures are especially apt to misinterpret Paul's writings to their own ruin. Notice, it is not the Law-keeping disciples of Yeshua who distort Paul's epistles — it is "lawless men" that Peter warns us about.

Guideline 4: Jesus' Warning

Early in His ministry, the Messiah spoke this warning to His followers:

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven " (Matt.5:17-19).

Our Master’s warning seems plain and simple enough to understand, yet many Christians mistakenly believe that by fulfilling the Law, He thereby abolished it. This is exactly what He is warning us not to think! “I have come to fulfill the Law,” He says, “but do not even think that by fulfilling it, I am thereby abolishing it.”

Sometimes it is easier for people outside Mainstream Christianity to see the blindness of Christians in this area. The Jewish Encyclopedia quotes Jesus’ warning of Matt.5:17, and then makes this bold statement: “The rejection of the Law by Christianity, therefore, was a departure from its Christ.”[26]

In an article with the catchy title, “Jesus Was Not a Christian,” the writer points out that “Jesus certainly wouldn’t have been recognized as a Christian throughout his entire life.” He “scrupulously adhered to the law of Moses” and “enjoined his disciples to keep every detail of the Torah.”[27]

A story in the New York Yiddish *Forward* tells of a reporter’s encounter with an old Hasidic Jew in Paris years ago. This Jew had a fervent faith in Jesus as the Messiah. When the reporter asked him about the compatibility of Orthodox Judaism and belief in Jesus, the old man replied, “Who then should believe in him — the gentiles?” The reporter describes the old man’s remarks this way:

“He said that only Jews can truly accept belief in Jesus as the Messiah and regard him as the last prophet, for gentiles can never accept such a lofty faith. It is next to impossible for them to walk in his ways, for first of all, Yeshua, as he called him, commanded to observe all the Jewish laws, the entire Torah, and gentiles do not even know this.”[28]

Of course it is not impossible for Gentiles to accept and practice such a lofty faith. The question is, will they do it? Or will they continue to cling to the lies of Marcion?

Guideline 5: Paul’s Positive Statements About the Law

Many Christians overlook or choose to ignore the positive things Paul said about the Law. He writes, for example, “the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good” (Rom.7:12). Paul says, “For in my inner being I delight in God’s law” and “I myself in my mind am a slave to God’s law” (Rom.7:22,25).

He tells Timothy, “We know that the law is good if one uses it properly” (1 Tim.1:8). To the Corinthians he writes, “Keeping God’s commandments is what

counts” (1 Cor.7:19). Even when explaining the righteousness that comes by faith, Paul is careful to make sure his readers know that their faith does not give them an excuse to ignore God’s Law: “Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law” (Rom.3:31).

Guideline 6: Paul’s Negative Statements About the Law

Paul, in his negative statements about the Law, was not criticizing the Law itself, but man’s misuse of the Law. The Law was meant to be a moral guide for a people already justified by faith, but some people in Paul’s day were depending on their Law-keeping as the means of their justification before God. What Paul criticized was not Law-keeping itself, but making Law-keeping the basis of one’s justification before God.

Between the Babylonian Captivity and the time of the Messiah, Israel developed an erroneous understanding of the Law’s purpose. The Jews who first returned from Babylon knew that their exile had been the result of the breaking of God’s laws; therefore, they put a heavy emphasis on the Law when they returned to their homeland. Unfortunately, this new emphasis eventually developed a theology that caused some people to erroneously view Law-keeping, rather than faith, as the key to their justification. Paul’s negative statements about the Law were simply his attempts to correct this erroneous use of the Law.

One writer puts it this way:

“Paul, in his epistles, affirms the law, yet condemns the wrong emphasis men place upon it. In this sense he is turning believers back to the original intent of the law, it being a rule for godly living for those who are already redeemed. He rejects the later shift towards making it a means of salvation.”[29]

Another author says basically the same thing when he writes, “Paul rejects the law as a *method of salvation* but upholds it as a *standard for Christian conduct*.”[30]

If we ignore this fact, we will twist the writings of Paul to our own loss, as Marcion and other lawless men have done throughout the centuries.

Guideline 7: Paul’s Example

Actions speak louder than words, the well-known proverb says. If we truly want to understand Paul’s attitude towards keeping or not keeping the Law, we must look at his actions as well as his words.

Even in Paul's own lifetime, false rumors were circulating that Paul taught people "to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs" (Acts 21:21). To dispel these false accusations, the elders of Jerusalem had Paul go with four men who had taken a vow (probably a Nazirite vow), telling Paul that in this way "all will know that there is *nothing* to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also work orderly, *keeping the Law*" (Acts 28:17).

To his Jewish accusers from Jerusalem, Paul said, "I have committed *no offense* either against *the Law of the Jews* or against the temple" (Acts 25:8). To the Jews in Rome, he repeated the same testimony: "Brethren, though I had done *nothing* against our people, or *the customs of our fathers*, yet I was delivered prisoner into the hands of the Romans" (Acts 28:17).

It is very clear that Paul continued to keep the Law after he met the Messiah. The only thing that changed was Paul's reason for keeping the Law. Before, he had kept it in an effort to be justified before God. After meeting the Messiah, he found the justification he had sought through his Law-keeping. Paul was justified through faith, and the Law was internalized, "written upon the heart," as Jeremiah prophesied it would be (31:31-34). Now he desired to obey God's commandments because of the inward impulse of his new nature. His obedience was no longer the result of an external compulsion to justify himself before God by Law-keeping. Thus, he was free to obey "in the way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code" (Rom.7:6).

By keeping the Law, in the right way and for the right reasons, Paul left an example for all disciples to follow, whether Jew or non-Jew. Some people seem to think that only Jewish believers were expected to continue practicing Torah. The so-called "Great Commission" rules out this possibility. When Jesus instructed His Jewish disciples to go to "all nations [Gentiles]," He told them to teach the Gentile nations "to obey *everything* I have commanded you [My Jewish disciples]" (Matt.28:18ff). He commanded His Jewish disciples to obey the Torah (Matt.5:17-19 & 23:1-2), and they were to teach the Gentiles to do it.

The key to godly living is not to ignore the Law and elevate Paul, as Marcion did. Nor is the solution to overemphasize the Law and reject Paul, as the Ebionites and others did. The solution is to do what Paul said to do: "Follow my example, as I follow the example of the Messiah" (1 Cor.11:1). If we truly follow Paul's example, as he followed the example of Messiah, we will begin to practice Old Testament commands that the Church has ignored or changed.

A. W. Tozer wrote, “Probably no other portion of the Scriptures can compare with the Pauline epistles when it comes to making artificial saints.”[31] Let us avoid artificial sainthood by keeping in mind the above-mentioned seven guidelines for understanding Paul’s epistles:

1. Over-all Biblical context
2. Historical context
3. Peter’s warning
4. Jesus’s warning
5. Paul’s positive statements about the Law
6. Paul’s negative statements about the Law
7. Paul’s example

As we let the naked truth of Holy Scripture renew our minds and change our thinking, the sunlight of God’s Word will dispel the mist of the ghost of Marcion. We will find ourselves transformed as the fog lifts, and as we see the Law as God always meant it to be seen: as something positive, holy, and good, “if one uses it properly” (1 Tim.1:8).

Let those who wish to whole-heartedly follow the Messiah begin to learn the commandments, practice them, and teach them to others, for “whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt.5:19). As we banish the ghost of Marcion, the “spirit of lawlessness,” from our theology, we will see the commandments not as a yoke of bondage, but as a moral guide by which we can joyfully live a life that is pleasing to the Heavenly Father. Then we will be able to rejoice in God’s commandments as the psalmist did:

“I will praise You with an upright heart as I learn your righteous laws. . . I rejoice in following Your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. . . I have chosen the way of truth; I have set my heart on Your laws. I hold fast to Your statutes, O Lord; do not let me be put to shame. I run in the path of Your commands, for You have set my heart free. . . I will always obey Your law, forever and ever. I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out Your precepts. . . Great peace have they who love Your law, and nothing can make them stumble” (Ps.119:7,14,30-32,44f,165).

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