These Are a Few of My Favorite... Heresies!
Clarification: I do NOT like heresies! ...But I love the way they forced the Church to bring clarity to key issues.

Less about Heresies and more about how we got the Bible we have and how the church has dealt with the question of how the New Testament relates to the Old.
Heresy or heretic: “Someone who has compromised an essential doctrine and lost sight of who God really is, usually by oversimplification. Literally heresy means ‘choice’ - that is, a choice to deviate from traditional teaching in favor of one’s own insight.”

▪ “A legitimate heresy has threatened to confuse ordinary believers simply because of the speculations of an influential thinker.”

▪ “They weren’t heretics because they asked the questions. It is the answers that they gave that are wrong. They went too far by trying to make the Christian faith more compatible with ideas that they already found appealing, especially those of pagan Greek philosophy.”

▪ *Behold, there is nothing new under the sun!*
Those who forget history are doomed to repeat it.

C. S. Lewis warns, if we remain ignorant of the errors and triumphs of our history, we run the risk of what he calls “chronological snobbery,” the arrogant assumption that the values and beliefs of our own time have surpassed all that came before. ...A man who has lived in many places is not likely to be deceived by the local errors of his native village; the scholar has lived in many times and is therefore in some degree immune from the great cataract of nonsense that pours from the press and the microphone of his own age.”
Review: Heresy #1 – The Judaizers
Acts 15:1-2

Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” 2 This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.
The Driving Question

Does someone have to become a Jew before they become a Christian?
The Questions behind the Question

Does someone have to become a Jew before they become a Christian?

- Are Christians saved by grace or works?
- Is Jesus enough/sufficient?
- Who is allowed into the Christian community?
- What are the requirements to get into God’s covenant family?
Key theological insights (Acts 15):

- God accepted the Gentiles and proved it by giving his Holy Spirit to them, same as to the Jews. (8)
- He made no distinction between Gentiles and Jews, purifying their hearts by faith. (9)
- Not even the Jewish background believers are saved by the Law; it is through the grace of Jesus, just like the Gentiles. (10-11)
- Barnabas and Paul → Testimony of God doing miraculous signs and wonders through them among the Gentiles (12)
Heresy #2: Marcion
Driving Question

- Is the God of the Old Testament the same as the God of the New Testament?
Resonating Questions:

- We have questions and we hear questions -

  - Why does God need to ask questions if he’s all-knowing?
  - Why does the Old Testament attribute to God qualities that we might consider petty—anger and jealousy and being arbitrary?
  - Why is God violent in the Old Testament and kind and gentle in the New Testament?
  - Why does the God in the Old Testament want to destroy the other nations and the God of the New Testament want to save the other nations?

“The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.”
What’s at stake?

- What if...
  - The God of the New Testament is different than the God of the Old?
  - The New Testament were unhitched from the Old Testament?
  - The material world is evil?
  - Jesus wasn’t really human?
  - God is all love with no justice?
Marcion of Sinope

- 85-160 AD
- Son of the bishop of Sinope
- Wealthy ship owner
- Started hanging out with the wrong crowd - Cerdo, a Gnostic teacher
- Embraced Dualism:
  - Flesh/spirit
  - OT/NT
  - Justice/Love
The most significant heretic (and most dangerous!)

Was directly condemned by: Polycarp, Justin, Irenaeus, Clement, Tertullian, Hippolytus, “the Latin writer known as Pseudo-Tertullian,” Bardesanes, Origen etc.

“He was distinguished in his age…” - WHC Frend

Bishop Polycarp met Marcion and was asked if he remembered him. His response: “I do know you, the first-born of Satan.”

After he was driven out of Rome, he established alternative churches around the Mediterranean.

His influence grew until the first Christian emperors suppressed it. (...But it is still around...)
So what did he teach?

- **Antithesis**: he pitted the NT against the OT
- Vengeful Yahweh vs. Gentle Jesus
- Yahweh = “Demiurge”
- Jesus comes on behalf of Abba to save us from Yahweh’s wrath.
- It’s an invasion into Yahweh’s territory.
Marcion became very anti-Jewish and rejected the early church’s struggle to be the “True Israel.”

Tertullian: “Marcion’s special and principal work is the separation of law and the Gospel.”

He wanted to liberate the church from captivity to the Law. “The God who gave the Law could not be the same as the God who gave the Gospel.”

So he created his own Bible…
- No OT books
- No NT books that referred to Jesus’ Jewishness
- No books that had been “corrupted by Judaizing elements.”
- Big fan of Paul → justified by faith, not the law!
- Kept about 2/3 of Luke and 10 Pauline epistles
- Excluded other Gospels, pastoral epistles, Hebrews, and cut out any Jewish references
- Did not include any references to Jesus’s birth, baptism, or prophecies of Jesus’s coming.

- He wanted to destroy the humanity of Christ (because the flesh is evil in a dulastic worldview)

- He rejected Jesus’ birth narrative and replaced it with...

- Tertullian: “Marcion used the knife, not the pen, massacring scripture to suit his own material.”
How did the Church respond?

Tertullian → 5 volumes called “Against Marcion”

1. Marcion had no connection to the apostolic tradition.
   Irenaeus: “He mutilated the Gospel... he persuaded his disciples that he himself was more trustworthy than the apostles, who handed down the Gospel; though he gave to them not a Gospel but a fragment of a Gospel.”
2. Both the OT and NT testify to the nature and work of God, dualism between Yahweh and Abba must be rejected... there is only one God.

3. Material creation is good, displaying God’s wisdom and glory. “Marcion has ridiculed the insects but he cannot imitate the skills of bee, ant, spider, silkworm, or any other of God’s tiny creatures.”
4. Against Marcion’s dualism between justice/love - “without justice God would have to give commands without intentions to execute them and forbid sins without intentions of punishing them.”

- If there is no retribution for doing what is forbidden, how could God deliver us from sin and death when we were never handed over to sin and death in the first place?

- Justice is the agent of goodness, not the enemy of goodness!
The Quandary of Marcion’s Oversimplification:

- In the OT, Jonah 4:1-3: But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. He prayed to the LORD and said, “O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? …for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing…”

- In the NT, Matthew 10:34-36: “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father… daughter against her mother… daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household…”
5. Christ belongs to the Creator rather than opposing him.

Even with Marcion’s mutilated version of the gospel of Luke, one can see that Christ “has administered (the Creator’s) dispensations, fulfilled his prophecies, promoted his laws, given reality to his promises, revived his mighty power, remolded his determinations, expressed his attributes, his properties.”
“By retaining the Old Testament the church scored two important points. First, it insisted that faith for the Christian would have to reconcile both the wrath and love of God. Marcion’s message was too easy. By eliminating the Old Testament he hoped to make the love of God central for the Christian. But love that never faces the demands of justice is not Christian love. It was not the love Marcion’s hero knew! Paul found in the Cross not only a demonstration of God’s love but a display of his righteousness. Christ’s death, he said, allowed God to be both just and the justifier of all who believe in Jesus (Rom. 3: 25, 26). That is the marvel of the grace of God Marcion missed.” – Bruce Shelley, historian
NT Wright: “From the call of Abraham onwards, what God is committing himself to do is to act to bring about the restoration of the world, but to act through deeply flawed human beings, who constantly need to be reminded that they’re deeply flawed. That then produces all kinds of (to our mind) ambiguities. And I see all of it coming together in the cross. The cross is the moment when I see Israel’s God performing the salvific event, which is simultaneously the worst and most blasphemous act of judicial, theocidal murder than one can ever imagine. And somehow the cross itself says: these things are now reconciled.”
Shaping the Canon

- Marcion’s collection of NT books was the first to be compiled.
- He forced the early church to recognize a core canon: the Gospels and the letters of Paul.
- The OT was reaffirmed as Christian scripture.
- Tertullian argues that the two testaments are not contrary.
- The Church affirmed that the NT books were to be considered as fully authoritative as the OT Hebrew Scriptures.
An Observation: Marcionism is not dead.

- Red Letter Christians
- “I’m with Jesus, not Paul…”
- “Jesus is my homeboy.”
- OT promises are now my promises (nationalism)
An Exhortation: Read the whole thing.

- We focus on the individual stories and events and characters and miss the big pictures.
- We actually encourage Marcionism when we don’t teach the big picture. (See New Tribes chronological Bible teaching)
- CM Kaminski: “Too often the OT is relegated to a few ‘memory verses’ which are usually cited with little understanding of the context... It is my conviction that the God in the OT is not fully understood because we do not know the story...”
Three Ways to Go Deeper

1. Bible in 90 Days
2. Get a Grip on the Bible
3. Basic Training in the Bible