Marcion's Antitheses: Skeletal Reference

A Note on the Reconstruction of Marcion's *Antitheses*

The *Antitheses* was Marcion's own theological work — the one text we know he wrote himself, as distinct from his editorial work on the Gospel and the Pauline letters. It functioned as a preface to his Bible, laying out in parallel form the contradictions between the God of the Jewish scriptures and the good God revealed by Christ. It is also completely lost. Not a single manuscript survives. What scholars work with instead are fragments embedded in the writings of opponents — primarily Tertullian's *Against Marcion*, written around 207 CE, some fifty years after Marcion's death, with additional traces in Epiphanius and the Adamantius Dialogue. The difficulty is not merely that these sources are incomplete. It is that none of them were quoting Marcion systematically or neutrally. Tertullian was refuting arguments, often paraphrasing rather than reproducing, and had every reason to characterize Marcion's positions in the least favorable light. Epiphanius wrote over two centuries after Marcion. The result is that every modern reconstruction of the *Antitheses* — however carefully done — is a scholarly inference about what Marcion probably argued, assembled from hostile and fragmentary evidence, rather than a translation of a surviving text. The thematic outline that follows represents the core ideas that appear consistently enough across all major sources that virtually all scholars accept them as authentically Marcionite. The wording, the order, and the full extent of the original work remain, and will likely remain, irrecoverable.

Two Gods — The creator of the world and the Father of Jesus are entirely different beings. One made the world and gave the Law; the other was unknown until Christ revealed him. Not a contradiction within one God — a genuine ontological distinction.

Law vs. Gospel — The creator rules by command, obligation, and punishment. The good God operates by grace and free gift alone. These are not two stages of one story but two incompatible systems. New wine cannot go into old wineskins.

Justice vs. Goodness — The creator is just in a retributive sense: eye for eye. The good God transcends justice entirely — loving enemies, forgiving unconditionally, giving without expectation of return. Goodness is higher than justice.

The Creator's Failures — He repents, makes mistakes, asks where Adam is, descends to Sodom to find out what is happening. He sends bears to kill children, hardens Pharaoh's heart then punishes Egypt for it, orders plunder and slaughter. No perfect being behaves this way.

Christ Against the Law — Jesus appeared without birth or childhood, belonging to no Jewish lineage. His entire ministry systematically violated the Law: touching lepers, healing on the Sabbath, forgiving sins outside priestly channels. This was not accidental — it was the point.

Corrupted Apostles — The Jerusalem disciples misread Jesus through Jewish messianic expectations and corrupted his message. Only Paul, who received his gospel by direct revelation rather than from them, understood the truth.

Pure Gratuity — The good God owed humanity nothing. He did not create us, did not own us, had no prior relationship with us. His intervention in Christ was an act of completely free, unmotivated love toward beings who belonged to someone else. This makes salvation more radical, not less.