

God's Grace from the Beginning

LOVING THE MESSIAH BY OBSERVING HIS COMMANDMENTS

BY VICTORIA SARVADI, TH.D.

Is the Creator of the universe a loving and merciful God, slow to anger and full of grace? Or, is he a strict and legalistic Judge who reigns from a place of divine distance, meting out rewards and punishment based solely on material law, void of grace and compassion? And perhaps one of the most critical questions would be, did God's grace exist *before* or only *after* he sent the Messiah to do his redemptive work for those who would repent and draw near to him? This is a question that has its roots deep in the Hebrew Scriptures.

The Hebrew Scriptures, the book that Christians call the Old Testament, consists of the Five

Books of Moses (which comprise the written Torah), followed by the eight books of the Prophets and eleven books of other sacred writings. In Hebrew, this collection of 24 books is known as the *Tanakh*. The word *Tanakh* is technically an acrostic of three letters from three Hebrew words—*Torah*, *Nevi'im* (prophets) and *Ketuvim* (writings)—TNK or *Tanakh*.

GOD'S GRACE

The emphasis of God's grace (also translated as loving-kindness and compassion) is demonstrated in many verses throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, such as the ones below.

"For *Adonai Elobim* is a sun and a shield. *Adonai* gives grace and glory. No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly" (Psalm 84:12, Tree of Life Version, TLV).

"Then Moses quickly bowed his head down to the earth and worshipped. He said, "If now I have found grace in Your eyes, my Lord, let my Lord please go within our midst, even though this is a stiff-necked people. Pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for Your own inheritance." (Exodus 34:8-9, TLV).

If Christianity celebrates salvation obtained by God's grace, why are some Christians surprised to find grace even mentioned in the *Tanakh*? Why is the "Old" Testament so often seen as outdated, harsh, holding no grace, and, to some, a depiction of a vengeful and vicious deity? Though God is just, didn't he in his mercy *send* his Son to pay the penalties of the sins of all who would trust in



him? Perhaps one of the most beloved Scriptures that exemplifies God's love and grace comes from John 3:16; "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16, TLV).

Knowing the offenders couldn't pay the penalties for their sins, God provided the means by which they could obtain justification and mercy from their sentence of death even while they were yet sinners. And this he provided from the foundation of the world, before the cross, before Sinai, before creation (Revelation 13:8). With that said, where does all the bias toward the First Testament come from?

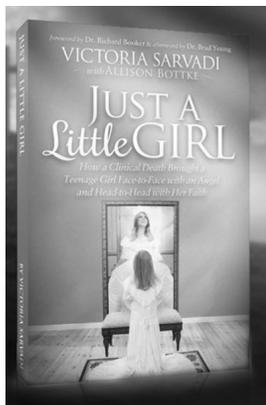
THE GOSPEL OF MARCION—DISTORTED AND DEVALUED

In the early second century, a Gentile teacher of Hellenistic philosophy named Marcion began to preach a different gospel from that of Jesus and Paul, one that, to this day, still has a deep influence in Christianity. Marcion believed that Jesus was the Savior, and Paul was his chief apostle, but he completely rejected the Hebrew Bible and the God of Israel. And so, he decided to give the Bible significant rewrite.

As one of the most infamous heretics in the early church, Marcion's theological errors (and there were many) came from one central root: he refused to believe that the God of the Hebrew Scriptures was in any way connected to the Lord Jesus Christ. He stressed that the God of this antiquated testament was a lesser and vicious god. Because he created the universe and *all material things*, this God was void of the spiritual nature and grace that Jesus embodied. Marcion taught even that Jesus displaced the "demiurge (craftsman) of the Hebrews" and offered the world a new message of love and spirit instead of law and material. Unfortunately, this attitude contributed to the anti-Semitism that still exists in the church.

Marcion also taught that the Old Testament was no longer significant and took for his new Bible a truncated version of Luke's Gospel and selectively edited versions of Paul's epistles. When all the cutting and pasting was finished, Marcion had the Christianity he wanted: a Savior God of goodness, a message of inspiring moral uplift, and a Bible that does away with the uncomfortable bits about God's wrath and laws. This worldview was developed from Gnosticism, and it should never have had a place in Christianity.

To this day there is a subtle indifference or resistance to the ancient Scriptures from which Yeshua and his disciples taught. Most Christians fail to realize that the *Tanakh* is a precious collec-



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tion of pictures, symbols, and rehearsals that depict and prophesy two comings of the Messiah—once as Servant and Redeemer and then ultimately as Judge and King. Even Yeshua declared that the *Tanakh* was written about him:

Jesus said to them, "Remember when I was with you before? I said that everything written about me must happen—everything written in the Law of Moses, the books of the prophets, and in the Psalms (Luke 24:44, Easy to Read Version, ERV). "For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of *me*" (John 5:46, English Standard Version, ESV).

Though Marcion was eventually labeled a heretic and excommunicated from the Church, his teachings still prevail. Sadly, many heresies from the early Christian centuries have survived the ages and made their way into the lexicon of faith. Marcion's heresy is a prime example of such a grandiose lie masquerading through the ages as truth. Many still hang on to this erroneous belief in some form and have somehow determined that God was intolerant before he sent his Son to pay the wages for sin. However, the very reason God sent his Son was that he *deeply loved* the people in this fallen world.

LOVING OBEDIENCE

Those who trusted God *before* the atonement of Yeshua believed in this magnificent and loving plan of redemption that was so eloquently spoken of through the prophets. They believed God's plan *before* Yeshua was manifested, and they trusted *in the promises* that pointed to the Perfect. It was through this trust *in what God prom-*

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ised to do that the faithful were counted as righteous. God counted Abraham as righteous because he left from his country and idols and chose to trust Him. Enoch trusted God and was rewarded by being taken up by God, never seeing death. And it was a merciful and forgiving God that recognized King David's heart for him when he acknowledged his sin in godly sorrow and called upon God's grace to restore him.

LOVING HIM IS OBEYING HIS WORD

Christians need to hear—really hear—this Word from Yeshua. “If you love me, you will obey My commandments.” Obey, not *to be* saved, but *because you are* saved! How can one of any faith say about their god (be it Buddha or Vishnu or Yeshua) “This is my god, I believe in him” and then not follow any of his precepts? Followers **follow** and reflect the teachings of their god. And for Christians, it's following the teachings of Yeshua, the merciful Word of God made flesh.

Therefore, if you are a disciple of Yeshua, you are saved because he loved you first. While you were still a sinner, not asking for salvation, he had already provided the way (just in case you *might* trust in him). He pursued you, drawing you toward him. You had absolutely nothing to do with your salvation except for submitting to this indescribable love. Saying “yes” as a response to his goodness is an act of self-sacrifice of your will. He gave his life, and you are to give him your heart—that is, your obedience.

As parents, we expect nothing less of our children that they honor their parents by obeying the rules of the house. The Bible tells us in Romans 2:13, “For it is not merely the hearers of Torah whom God considers righteous; rather, it is the doers of what Torah says who will be made righteous in God's sight” (CJB). Doing (or obeying) God's instructions is not an evil thing that suggests you are under some dreadful law, it simply means you seek God for his instructions on how to live your life and depend on him to help you actually do it by his Spirit. The Word calls it the “Law of the Spirit in Christ Jesus.” He is divinely “writing his Laws

on your heart.”

Sadly, by removing this fundamental truth of the *Torah written in you*, Marcion poisoned the message of covenantal promises based on obedience and cut out the heart of Christianity.

GOD'S LOVE—THE SAME YESTERDAY, TODAY, AND FOREVER!

Yeshua is *the* walking, talking, living Torah. When we receive him *in* our hearts, the Torah is then alive and written *in us*. It becomes apart of our new nature so that we also become walking, talking, living “material” Torahs, guided by his Spirit. We become a brand new creation!

God, Creator of all things, has always been and will always be a God who shows loving grace to those who love and obey him—proving this by the covenant he offers us, a covenant that includes paying penalties for our sinful nature, pouring his divine Spirit in us to change us, and guiding and teaching us in his ways (laws) by over-riding our sin nature with a new Godly nature. Thus, we are changed, evidenced by the fruit of the Spirit now being displayed by our new character.

A phenomenon is occurring today as biblical Christians realize the need for understanding the Spirit of Torah to demonstrate outwardly the inner workings of grace that has changed their hearts. Something similar is happening to those who practice biblical Judaism who believe in the *Tikkun Olam* (the restoration of the world, or all things). Messiah has promised to change their hearts from stone to flesh, so the Torah they love may be implemented perfectly in grace (Zechariah 12; Ezekiel 36)—Torah and grace working in perfect synchronized spiritual balance; the First (old) and Second (new) Testaments working together in perfect harmony; the First a foundation and a prophetic book of God's redemption plan concerning humanity and the Second a testimony and absolute validation of the First.

One day this will be realized when the coming King establishes his kingdom on earth, restores all creation that groans for repair and heals his broken family in unity, truth, and above all in love. 

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One day the final redemption will be realized when the coming King establishes his kingdom on earth, restores all creation that groans for repair and heals his broken family in unity, truth, and above all in love.