

Spiritual Paradox in the Christian Life

CHRISTIANITY IS A LIFE FILLED WITH PARADOX

A **paradox** is defined as a seemingly absurd or self-contradictory statement that is actually true. It is a statement that contradicts itself.

Wiersbe - A paradox is a statement that attracts attention because it seems to be contradictory. This arouses curiosity and we are puzzled. But as we meditate on the statement, we go deeper into some important facet of life and learn something new. Paradoxes are marvelous instructors.

F B Meyer - A paradox states a truth antithetically. We can know each antithesis. But there is a deeper truth beneath.

In the Bible spiritual paradoxes abound and confound the secular unsaved mind. In fact the wise of this world consider believers to be fools for Christ's sake.

THE GREATEST DIVINE PARADOX - THE CROSS - The foolishness of God and weakness of God was manifest to fallen men in the Cross of Christ, but was the ultimate divine paradox for it reflected God's infinite wisdom and omnipotent power conquering sin and death! We live because Christ died! We can have victory over sin because Christ became sin for us (2 Cor 5:21+)

Paul writes that

For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1Cor 1:18+)

"Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (1 Co 1:25+)

Brethren, we are veritable living spiritual paradoxes in this spiritually dead world, a world paradoxically we are IN but not OF

"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ Who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself." (Php 3:20-21+)

The wise of this world scoff and laugh at God's answers to questions like...

Do you want to live?

You must die!

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me. (Gal 2:20+; cf 2 Co 4: 10, 11+)

You must lose your life!

And He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it." (Mark 8:34-35+)

Do you want to be strong?

You must boast about your weaknesses!

"Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me... for when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Co 12:9, 10+)

Do you want to be rich?

You must become poor in spirit.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Mt 5:3+)

Do you want to be first?

You must be willing to be last.

And sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all." (Mk 9:35+, cp Mt 19:30, 20:8, 16, Mk 10:31+, Lk 13:30+)

You must be willing to be a slave of all.

Whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave (doulos - bondservant) of all. (Mk 10:44+)

Do you want to be exalted?

You must be willing to be brought low!

Humble ([aorist imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time (1 Pe 5:6+). (cf Jas 4:6+, Jas 4:10+ Mt. 23:12)

Do you wish to be great?

You must be willing to become a servant.

"But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant." (Mk 10:43+, cf Mt 23:11)

You must be willing to humble yourself as a little child

"Whoever then humbles himself like this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Mt 18:4NET)

You must be willing to be least.

"Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me; for the one who is LEAST among all of you, this is the one who is GREAT." (Lk 9:48+)

Do you want to rule?

You must be willing to serve.

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. (Mk 10:45+ cp Mk 9:35+)

Do you want to be fruitful?

You must die.

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. (Jn 12:24).

Do you want to be adequate?

Own the truth that you are naturally inadequate for supernatural work of God

to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. **And who is adequate for these things?** (2 Cor 2:16+)

Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, 6 Who also made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2 Cor 3:5-6+)

Summary:

- GREATEST PARADOX = THE CROSS - 1 Co 1:18+
- Life out of death - We live because Christ died! We live because Christ was crucified and we with Him.
- Want to live? The ultimate paradox is..To live is Christ, to die is gain. (Php 1:21+) 2Co 6:9-10+
- Want to be live? - Mark 8:34-35+ , Gal 2:20+
- Want to be strong? - 2 Co 12:9-10+
- Want to be rich? - Mt 5:3+
- Want to be first? - Mk 9:35+

- Want to be exalted? - 1 Pe 5:6
- Want to be great? - Mk 10:43+, Mt 18:4
- Want to be fruitful? - Jn 12:24 cf Jn 15:5
- Want to be adequate? - 2 Co 2:16+, 2 Co 3:5-6+ cf 1Co 15:9,10+
- Want to be rich? We become rich thru Christ's poverty (2 Cor 8:9)
- Want to see the unseen? We see the unseen (2 Co 4:18+, Heb 11:27+)
- Want to conquer sin? We conquer by yielding (Ro 6:16, 17, 18+) (Begs question - What "pet sin" are you holding on to? What "secret sin" are you not willing to let go of?)
- Want to have victory over sin? Victory over sin because Christ became sin for us 2 Cor 5:21+
- Want to find perfect rest? We find rest by taking His yoke (Mt. 11:28, 29, 30+)
- Want to reign? We reign by serving (Mk 10:42, 43, 44+)
- Want to be great? We are made great by becoming little (Lk 9:48+) (Begs question - What is your opinion of yourself? He is not advising degrading ourselves, just having a proper opinion, one that is not pridefully exalted!)
- What to be wise? We become wise by being fools for Christ's sake (1 Co 1:20, 21+)
- Want to find victory? We find victory by glorying in our infirmities (2 Co 12:5+)

A FEW MORE SPIRITUAL PARADOXES

Before we became followers of Christ, we were DEAD IN our trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1+) but after salvation, we are ALIVE with Christ (Eph. 2:5+), and DEAD TO SIN (Ro 6:11+).

We were once slaves to sin but now are free from sin, "For when you were SLAVES OF SIN, you were free in regard to righteousness. But now having been FREED FROM SIN and ENSLAVED to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life." (Ro 6:20, 22-note) True Freedom is not the right to do as we please, but the power to do as we should, a freedom and power paradoxically found only in enslavement to Christ! Indeed, we are most FREE, when we are most BOUND!

We also see this paradox in our daily growth in Christ-likeness (progressive sanctification). In Phil 2:12+ Paul charges us to "WORK OUT our salvation in fear and trembling" and then he explains how this is even possible, writing that "it is God (the indwelling Spirit of Christ continually) WORKING in us, giving us the DESIRE (left to ourselves the desire of our fallen flesh is not to please God) and the (supernatural) POWER to do what pleases God." (Phil 2:13NLT+) Are you learning to depend daily on the Spirit of Jesus Who Alone can enable you to live the supernatural, abundant life (Jn 10:10)? As Tony Evans says you need to come to the place where you say to God, "I can't do this on my own," (Then) you are ready to say, "But through Your provision (the enabling power of the indwelling Spirit) of that which I lack, I can go out and tear down the strongholds that are defeating me. In Your strength, I can fulfill Your expectations for me." You have now invited God to do for you what you can't do for yourself!" (from "The Battle is the Lord's")

We see a similar paradoxical dynamic in Paul's summary of His entire ministry where he says "by the **grace** of God I am what I am, and His **grace** toward me did not prove vain; but I LABORED even more than all of them, yet NOT I, but God Who was WORKING through me by His **grace**." (1 Cor 15:10+ paraphrase)

Kent Hughes explains "Unless there is death, the vast possibilities inside us will not be released. We will shrivel and remain alone. **We must die.** (Ed: compare the similar spiritual principle in Mk 8:34, 35, 36, 37+, Mt 10:38, 39+, Lk 9:23, 24, 25+) Those who are beginning the Christian life or are awakening to their spiritual potential must learn that we live by dying. This has been true in my own life." (John: That You May Believe. Preaching the Word)

The ultimate paradox is...

To live is Christ, to die is gain. (Php 1:21+)

MY LORD JESUS CHRIST....

You are my strength when I am weak
 You are the treasure that I seek
 You are my all in all.

Play Chris Tomlin's version of [All in All](#)

Scriptural paradoxes are seeming, not actual, contradictions.

**Scripture is its own infallible interpreter
and every part of it must be interpreted in the light of the whole of it.**

--R. B. Kuiper

Related Resource:

- A W Tozer's [That Incredible Christian](#), **A.W. Tozer** - Tozer describes some of the many paradoxes one finds in Christianity
- Sermon by C H Spurgeon - [2 Corinthians 12:10 A Paradox](#)

PARADOXES

To conquer we must surrender (Matt. 5:39; 1 Cor. 15:57).

To live, we must die (John 12:23, 25).

To save life, we must lose it (Matt. 10:39; Luke 17:33).

To get, we must give (Prov. 11:23, 25).

To reign, we must serve (Luke 12:42–44).

To be wise, we must become fools (1 Cor. 3:18).

To be exalted, we must become humble (Matt. 18:4; 23:12).

To be first, we must be last (Mark 9:35; Matt. 20:26).

We must be humble in order to be exalted.

We must take up our yoke in order to find peace and rest.

We must work in order to be stronger.

We must surrender in order to win.

We must die in order to live.

We must give in order to receive.

When "down" is "up" and "up" is "down" (figuratively speaking) - James 1:9-10+ But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; 10 and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away.

Mark 8:35 lose his life. The reference is not to physical martyrdom, but to the fact that real life is found only in dying to self and living for Christ. This divine paradox is repeatedly emphasized in the New Testament. See note on Matthew 10:39. - Henry Morris

Matthew 10:39 lose it. This apparently paradoxical principle was emphasized by the Lord Jesus more often than any other (Matthew 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24; 17:33; John 12:25). The same truth is also stressed by Paul (Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15; 6:9-10; Galatians 2:20; Philippians 2:5-11; 2 Timothy 2:11-12). This divine paradox of dying to self and living unto God is the very essence of a truly happy and fulfilling life in this world and eternal life in the world to come..- Henry Morris

2 Corinthians 4:8 yet not distressed. There are at least five divine paradoxes of grace mentioned in 2 Corinthians 4:8-10—troubled but not distressed, perplexed but not despairing, persecuted but not abandoned, cast down but not destroyed, dying in Jesus yet alive in Him. Compare these to the nine similar paradoxes in 2 Corinthians 6:8-10. See note on 2 Corinthians 6:4. - Henry Morris

2 Corinthians 6:4 all things. The "all things" which Paul enumerates in these verses as characteristic of true ministers (that is, "servants") of Christ comprise a remarkable complex of three ninefold descriptors. First (2 Corinthians 6:4-5) are listed nine "negative" experiences which the servant must be willing to endure graciously. Then there are nine "positive" attributes which he should exhibit (2 Corinthians 6:6-7). Finally, there are nine paradoxes that characterize such a minister (2 Corinthians 6:8-10), displaying simultaneously the joys of life in Christ and the exigencies of living in the world as His servant.- Henry Morris

John 6:37 cast out. This remarkable claim both asserts that no one can come to Christ merely of his own volition (though he may think, sincerely, that he is doing so, not being consciously aware of all the influences God has been bringing on him in order to lead him to that decision) and also promises that none so led of the Father to Christ can ever be cast out. This involves the mystery of divine election versus human freedom. Both are true, because both are taught in Scripture, but our human minds are incapable of full comprehension of this divine paradox. .- Henry Morris

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- He was going to be killed.
 - And he was going to conquer.

This is the divine paradox. Yes, he was about to "suffer many things"—even a wicked crucifixion at the hands of the "elders, chief priests, and scribes." His death, however, would not be the end but a glorious beginning, for he would "be raised the third day" (v. 21).

And rising with him—established upon his death sentence and ignited by his resurrection—would be his church. In breaking the curse of sin and death, Jesus would empower this new, messianic community to fulfill his commission: making disciples of all the nations (Matt. 28:19-20).

When Christ speaks in this discourse of a future coming, sometimes He means His spiritual coming at Pentecost (14:18) and sometimes His second advent (14:3). Though physically and visibly He would leave His disciples and go to the Father, yet spiritually and invisibly He would come to them and remain with them (14:23). He leaves and yet remains; He is with us always yet comes again. Divine paradox!

C H Spurgeon - PARADOXES read more miscellaneous quotes What may seem defeat to us may be victory to Him.

The difficulties about free agency and predestination have existed, do exist, and will exist to the world's end, ay, and through eternity too. Both facts are to my mind certain, but where they meet none knows but God himself.

What a strange medley are we of the diabolical and the divine, the sinful and the heavenly, so sadly wedded to the earth, and yet so gloriously born from heaven.

My friends, believe in the unexpected. I was about to utter a paradox, and say expect the unexpected.

O child of God, thou art on one side fair as an angel, and the grace of God gleams upon thee, and makes thee bright as thy transfigured Master: and yet on the other side of thee thou art black as a devil, and if the grace of God were taken from thee thou wouldst as much dishonour the name and cross of Christ as ever did the false apostate who took the thirty pieces of silver.

Mark this: the man who grieves because he does not grieve is often the man who grieves most. He that feels that he does not feel is probably the most feeling man of us all; I suspect that hardness is almost gone when it is mourned over. He who can feel his insensibility is not insensible.

Paradoxes, in spiritual things, are as plentiful as blackberries; in fact, if you cannot believe a paradox, you cannot believe in Christ himself, for he is God and man in one person, and that is a paradoxical mystery.

Do not let us exalt him into only a God-man; for if we do, we shall degrade him into a man-God. He is neither the one nor the other. He is God; diminish not his splendour. He is man,—man such as we are; forget not his tenderness.

Oh, how many things you and I have still to gain by losing! How much we are to be enriched by our losses! How we are to make progress by going backward! How we have yet to mount by sinking! How we have yet to rise by descending!

And you may depend upon this fact, that paradoxes are not strange things in Scripture, but are rather the rule than the exception.

You do not like to remember your sin; but, if you remember it, God will forget it; whereas, if you forget it, God will remember it against you.

The sinner sins in order to be happy, as he thinks; and the newborn man abstains from sin in order to be happy.

Our war is for peace. Every blow that we strike is against blows. If we have to denounce anything, we do most of all denounce denunciation; and if we are bitter at all, most of all we are bitter against bitterness, and envy, and malice, and all uncharitableness.

Permit me to use a paradox, and say that it is not trouble that troubles a man so much as something else that is the secret of the trouble.

Psa 119:143. Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me: yet thy commandments are my delight.

What a curious mixture this verse describes! Here is a man full of trouble and anguish, and yet full of delight at the same time. Little do they understand human nature, and especially gracious human nature, who cannot comprehend this paradox. There are many seeming contradictions in the Christian life, and this is one of them: "Trouble and anguish have taken hold of me:" — as dogs lay hold of their prey, — "yet thy commandments are my delights." The apostle Paul pictured another such a case as this when he wrote, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not

destroyed," and he also described the Christian paradox, "As unknown, and yet well known, as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things." May we all understand these paradoxes in our own experiences!

Paradoxes

What may seem defeat to us may be victory to Him.

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The difficulties about free agency and predestination have existed, do exist, and will exist to the world's end, ay, and through eternity too. Both facts are to my mind certain, but where they meet none knows but God himself.

Clearing The Road To Heaven, Volume 19, Sermon #1131 - Isaiah 62:10

What a strange medley are we of the diabolical and the divine, the sinful and the heavenly, so sadly wedded to the earth, and yet so gloriously born from heaven.

Thinking And Turning, Volume 20, Sermon #1181 - Psalm 119:59

Do not let us exalt him into only a God-man; for if we do, we shall degrade him into a man-God. He is neither the one nor the other. He is God; diminish not his splendor. He is man,—man such as we are; forget not his tenderness.

"All Of One", Volume 41, Sermon #2418 - Hebrews 2:11-13

Oh, how many things you and I have still to gain by losing! How much we are to be enriched by our losses! How we are to make progress by going backward! How we have yet to mount by sinking! How we have yet to rise by descending!

The First And The Second, Volume 46, Sermon #2698 - Hebrews 10:9

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Feeding On The Bread Of Life, Volume 46, Sermon #2706 - John 6:47, 48

You do not like to remember your sin; but, if you remember it, God will forget it; whereas, if you forget it, God will remember it against you.

The Great Miracle Worker, Volume 47, Sermon #2736 - John 11:47

The sinner sins in order to be happy, as he thinks; and the newborn man abstains from sin in order to be happy.

Victorious Faith, Volume 47, Sermon #2757 -1 John 5:4, 5

Our war is for peace. Every blow that we strike is against blows. If we have to denounce anything, we do most of all denounce denunciation; and if we are bitter at all, most of all we are bitter against bitterness, and envy, and malice, and all uncharitableness.

Christ Before Annas, Volume 49, Sermon #2820 - John 18:12, 13, 19-23

Permit me to use a paradox, and say that it is not trouble that troubles a man so much as something else that is the secret of the trouble.

The Cause And Effect Of Heart Trouble, Volume 54, Sermon #3076 - John 14:27

Spurgeon's Sayings of a more Spiritual Sort - a number of paradoxes in this list from [Salt Cellar Quotations](#) (a fascinating collection!)

Half-way to Christ is a dreadful place.

A dreadful place to stop in; for it tempts to presumption, and yet it is no better than being far off.

Have a good memory. Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy.

A minister, one Sunday, was accosted by a man, who said, "Sir, have you seen a family going along here travelling?" "What sort of family were they?" said the good man. "Oh, they had a cart." "Yes," said the minister. "Were they a family with short memories?" "I don't know much about that," said the young man. "What do you mean?" "Why," replied the divine, "I thought they must be, for it is written, 'Remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy,' and they seem to have forgotten it." There are many families with short memories nowadays.

He alone lives who lives to God alone.

The rest is death. Paul saith, "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth." —1 Timothy 5:6.

He gains a loss who shuns the cross. He is no man who needs no mending.

He is safe who is where God puts him, He is right who is what God makes him.

He knows God who imitates him.

Certainly imitation is the truest form of praise. It can only be carried out so far as the great Original is known to us.

He loseth nothing that keepeth God for his friend.

He only is a Christian indeed who is a Christian in deeds.

He pleases God best who trusts him most.

"Without faith it is impossible to please God"; but with much of it we can delight him.

He prizes grace too little who prizes gifts too much.

He shall have hell as a debt who will not have heaven as a gift.

He shall never want mercy that does not wanton with mercy.

And even he that has so wantoned with mercy shall obtain it if he turn and repent; for the Lord is not only merciful, but he is mercy full.

He that believes God for the event must believe him for the means also.

If the harvest is sure you must be sure to make sure the sowing.

He that can repel a temptation to gain, gains by the temptation.

He that contemns a small sin commits a great one.

He that doth not fear God continually has cause for continual fear.

He that doth not hear the Word of God to his renovation, shall hear it to his condemnation.

He that falls into sin is a man; He that boasts of sin is a devil; He that grieves over sin is a Christian; He that forgives sin is God.

He that forsakes the truth of God, forsakes the God of truth.

He that good thinketh good may do, And God will bless him thereunto: For no good work was ever wrought Without beginning in good thought.

Want of thought is a far more pernicious want than it may seem to be. "I thought upon my ways," said the Psalmist, "and turned unto thy statutes."

He that hath Jesus Christ for his daily bread, may (without sin) fare sumptuously every day.

He that is graceless in the day of grace will be speechless in the day of judgment.

He that is rotten within will soon be specked without.

Before long evil principles display themselves in unhallowed actions.

He that is most full of God is most empty of himself; and he that is most full of himself is most empty of God.

He that makes earth his heaven shall have no other heaven.

He that will make God's will his will, will have his will. He that will not be saved needs no sermon.

He that wills to serve God for nought, will find that he does not serve God for nought.

Our motive must be free from selfishness, but in the end the Lord will reward all the faithful. Satan asked, "Doth Job serve God for nought?" "But we might answer, "Dost thou think that God is such a Master that he would let a man serve him for nought?"

He that would find Christ must seek him.

He that would have his sins covered by God must uncover them before God.

He that would never die must die daily. He walks uprightly who leans on God.

None else will long do so. The leaning of faith balances the natural leaning to our own understanding.

He who brings good tidings may knock boldly.

How bold may he be who brings the gospel—"glad tidings of great joy"!

He who can wrestle with God can conquer man.

Or put it in these words, "He that overcomes heaven can overcome earth." We shall have power with men for God in proportion as we have power with God for men.

He who closely clings to God Oft escapes the chastening rod.

The further off the heavier the blow when a man is striking. By running into God's arms we escape the full force of the stroke. Complete submission renders affliction light.

He who covers his sin, discovers himself to be a sinner. He who creates his image in us, will love his image in us.

He who dwells in high heaven never dwells in a haughty heart.

He who gives before we ask will give when we ask.

The spontaneous bounty of God should be a great incentive to believing prayer.

He who gives thee Christ will not deny thee a crust.

"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

He who grieves for his sin may be glad of his grief.

Indeed, it is such blessed sorrow that one holy man was wont to regret that the tear of repentance would not wet his eye in heaven.

He who has God has all.

Therefore, let him not fret though he should seem to lose all.

He who is angry with sin does not sin in his anger.

He who is good to the saints for God's sake, shall find God good to him for the saints' sake.

He who is heaven-bound must first be heaven-born.

He who is of the religion of the time, will in time have no religion. He who is only half God's is wholly the devil's.

The more surely so because of his half-hearted religion.

He who is the friend of God is the enemy of priests.

For they are the enemies of the one Great High Priest. Their pretensions are in direct opposition to the way of salvation by faith.

He who learns Christ unlearns sin.

He who leaves the saints of God will not cleave to the God of saints.

He who lifts clean hands in prayer, God will have him in his care.

He who lives in God will never be weary of living.

He who lives most in sin, and in most sin, is most dead in sin.

He who loses Christ is lost himself.

He who loves Christ sincerely, loves him superlatively.

A second place in the heart our Lord will never occupy; the very idea is a dishonour to him.

He who made man was made man.

He who made the smallest flower Regulates the tempest's power.

He who makes the world his god, worships the god of this world.

He who serves God serves a good Master.

He who sins for profit, will not profit by his sins.

He who would find Christ must lose self.

For self-confidence and confidence in Christ will no more agree than Dagon and Jehovah.

He who would have a clean life must have a clean heart.

Only from a pure fountain can there flow pure streams, and the heart is to be kept with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

He will never go to heaven who is content to go alone. Hear to believe, and believe to do.

This is the hearing which is saving; faith comes by it, and works meet for repentance come of the faith.

Heaven alone has all roses, and no thorns.

No traveller ever reached that blest abode,

Who found not thorns and briars on the road.

Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people.

Our Lord came to earth to prepare the people, and he is gone to glory to prepare the place.

Heaven is never deaf but when our hearts are dumb.

Heaven must be in thee ere thou canst be in heaven.

At the bottom of a portrait of Sibbes we find this couplet:—Of this blest man let this just praise be given:

Heaven was in him, before he was in heaven.

Heirs of blessing should also bless their heirs.

Holy training should be given to all the sons of the sons of God, that then the grace of God may abide upon the family from generation to generation.

Hell is truth seen too late.

Note this definition. May none of us learn its truth by practical experience!

Hem your blessings with praise, lest they unravel.

A notable piece of advice. Doubtless our enjoyments become a danger unless we humbly trace them to the hand of God, and gratefully praise his name for them.

Here we are to labour for rest; hereafter we shall rest from our labours.

We are to "labour to enter into that rest" (Heb. 4:11) . This is a singular expression, and reminds us of our Saviour's words "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life" (John 6:27) . Here he utters a paradox. He bids us not to labour for that which we cannot get without labour, and commands us to labour for that which we cannot earn by labour. Blessed is he that understandeth!

His heart cannot be pure whose tongue is not clean. His voice is most eloquent whose life is most innocent. Hold forth the truth, and hold fast the truth. Hold on, hold fast, hold out.

Three things which must be attended to by all who would reach the eternal rest.

Hold the truth, because it holds you.

No one else will continue to hold the gospel in times when it is unpopular; but if it has full possession of the soul, there is no fear of its being given up. A cross with the motto ET TENEO, ET TENEOB—I hold, and am held—is a fine coat-of-arms for a Christian.

Holiness is not the way to Christ; but Christ is the way to holiness.

Holiness is the best Sabbath dress. But it is equally suitable for everyday wear.

Holiness is the wholeness of the soul. It is our spiritual health, even as sin is the soul's disease.

Holy hearts make holy tongues.

The Holy Spirit, both in his miraculous and in his common gifts delights to work upon tongues. The tongue is the glory of the man, and when grace purifies it, it sets forth the glory of God.

Honour the Lord with thy substance, and there will be substance in it.

God's blessing makes consecrated possessions to be real goods, whereas, without his blessing, they are a vain show.

Hope is a good anchor, but it needs something to grip. Hope is never ill when faith is well.

That hope flourishes

Which true faith nourishes.

Hope on, hope ever.

How shall the blind see when the seers are blind? When the pastors err, where will the sheep go?

Hunger breaks through stone walls.

Nothing can keep back the man who hungers after Christ: he will force his way to the bread of heaven.

Humble we must be if to heaven we go: High is its roof of light, but yet its gate is low.

Humility is to have a just idea of yourself.

To sham humility by a fictitious depreciation of one's self is sickening hypocrisy. We are not without ability, nor without some measure of moral virtue: and we should not profess that we think we are. It cannot be necessary to modesty that we should deny the truth; still, if any man's opinion of himself is very high, he may depend upon it that he has made a mistake in the adding up.

Hypocrites love the gold of the altar better than the God of the altar

Now, I am about to utter a great paradox—I believe that some of these poor fearing people have got the greatest faith of anybody in the world; I have sometimes thought that great fear, great anxiety, must have great faith with it to keep the soul alive at all. See that man drowning, there—there is another in the water too I see. He in the distance thinks he can swim: a plank is thrown to him; he believes himself to be in no danger of sinking. Well, he clutches the plank very leisurely, and does not seem to grasp it firmly. But this poor creature here, he knows he cannot swim, he feels that he must soon sink. Now put the means of escape near him, how desperately he clutches it; how he seems as if he would drive his fingers through the plank! He clutches it for life or death; that is his all, for he must perish if he is not saved by that. Now, in this case, he that fears the most believes the most; and I do think it is so sometimes with poor desponding spirits. They have the greatest fear of hell, and the greatest fear of themselves, and the greatest dread that they are not right. Oh, what a faith they must have, when they are enabled to throw themselves on Christ, and when they can but whisper to themselves "I think that he is mine"—"Surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him.

1 Peter 1:4 - An inheritance that is imperishable."The substance of everything earthly passes away by degrees. Even solid granite will rot and crumble. It is a paradox that the substance of things seen is devoid of substance. Empires, dynasties, and thrones have tottered by internal corruption. But the inheritance of the saints of God has nothing within it that can make it perish.

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 When I am weak. What does that mean? It means when the believer is consciously weak, when he painfully feels and distinctly recognizes that he is weak, then he is strong. In truth, we are always weak, whether we know it or not, but when we not only believe this to be the fact, but see it to be the fact, then it is that we are strong. When it is forced home upon us that we are less than nothing and vanity, when our very soul echoes and re-echoes that word, 'without me ye can do nothing', then it is that we are strong. When a man is thoroughly weak, not only partially, but altogether weak, then is he strong. When apart from the Lord Jesus he is utter weakness and nothing more, then it is that he is strong. Let me persuade you to make a full confession of weakness to the Lord. Say, 'Lord, I cannot do what I ought to do: I cannot do what I want to do: I cannot do what I used to do: I cannot do what other people do: I cannot do what I mean to do: I cannot do what I am sure I shall do: I cannot do what I feel impelled to do, and over this sinful weakness I mourn.' Then add, 'Lord, I long to serve thee perfectly, yet I cannot do it. Unless thou help me, I can do nothing aright. There will be no good in my actions, my words, my feelings, or my desires, unless thou continue to fill me with thine own holy energy. Lord, help me! Lord, help me!' Brother, you are strong while you plead in that fashion. You 'can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth' you and he will strengthen you, now that you are emptied of self. How true it is, 'when I am weak, then am I strong.'

SONG OF SOLOMON 5:2 Paradoxes abound in Christian experience, and here is one: The spouse was asleep, and yet she was awake. The only one who can read the believer's riddle is he who has lived through this experience. The two points in this evening's text are: a mournful sleepiness and a hopeful wakefulness. "I slept." Through sin that dwells in us we may become lax in holy duties, lazy in religious exercises, dull in spiritual joys, and completely indolent and careless. This is a shameful state for one in whom the quickening Spirit dwells; and it is dangerous in the highest degree. Even wise virgins sometimes slumber, but it is high time for all to shake off the chains of idleness. It is to be feared that many believers lose their strength as Samson lost his hair, while sleeping on the lap of carnal security. With a perishing world around us, to sleep is cruel; with eternity so close at hand, it is madness. Yet none of us are as awake as we should be; a few thunderclaps would do us all good, and it may be, unless we soon stir ourselves, we will have them in the form of war or disease or personal bereavements and loss. May we leave forever the couch of fleshly ease, and go out with flaming torches to meet the coming Bridegroom! "My heart was awake." This is a happy sign. Life is not extinct, though sadly smothered. When our renewed heart struggles against our natural heaviness, we should be grateful to sovereign grace for keeping a little vitality within this body of death. Jesus will hear our hearts, will help our hearts, will visit our hearts; for the voice of the wakeful heart is really the voice of our Beloved, saying, "Open to me." Holy zeal will surely unlock the door.

Oh lovely attitude! He stands
With melting heart and laden hands;
My soul forsakes her every sin;
And lets the heavenly stranger in.

Spurgeon - SUNSHINE WITH RAIN - "An many times the sun shineth when the rain falleth, so there may be in the soul a mixture of spiritual rejoicing and holy mourning; a deep sense of God's love, and yet a mourning because of the relics of corruption."

All spiritual persons understand this. The inexperienced ask how a man can be "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." But this is no puzzle to a Christian. Our life is a paradox. Never in the world elsewhere is there such sunshine of delight as we enjoy, and never such rain as that which damps our joys. It seems at times as if heaven and hell met in our experience. Ours is a joy unspeakable, and yet an agony unutterable. We rise to the heavenlies in Christ, and sink to the abyss in ourselves. Those who have seen fire burning on the sea, trees living and flourishing upon a rock, feathers flying against the wind, and doves vanquishing eagles, have begun to see a list of marvels, all of which are to be found within the believer, and much more of equal or greater singularity.

Lord, when my own experience puzzles me, be comforted by the thought that it does not puzzle thee. What I know not now thou hast promised to make me know hereafter; and there I leave it.

Spurgeon - "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations." — 1 Peter 1:6.

THIS verse to a worldly man looks amazingly like a contradiction; and even to a Christian man, when he understands it best, it will still be a paradox. "Ye greatly rejoice," and yet "ye are in heaviness." Is that possible? Can there be in the same heart great rejoicing, and yet a temporary heaviness? Most assuredly. This paradox has been known and felt by many of the Lord's children, and it is far from being the greatest paradox of the Christian life. Men who live within themselves, and mark their own feelings as Christians, will often stand and wonder at themselves. Of all riddles, the greatest riddle is a Christian man. As to his pedigree, what a riddle he is! He is a child of the first Adam, "an heir of wrath, even as others." He is a child of the second Adam: he was born free; there is therefore now no condemnation unto him. He is a riddle in his own existence. "As dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and not killed." He is a riddle as to the component parts of his own spiritual frame. He finds that which makes him akin to the dean — depravity, corruption, binding him still to the earth, and causing him to cry out, "O wretched man that I am;" and yet he finds that he has within himself that which exalts him, not merely to the rank of an angel, but higher still — a something which raises him up together, and makes him "sit together with Christ Jesus in heavenly places." He finds that he has that within him which must ripen into heaven, and yet that about him which would inevitably ripen into hell, if grace did not forbid. What wonder, then, beloved, if the Christian man be a paradox himself, that his condition should be a paradox too! Why marvel ye, when ye see a creature corrupt and yet purified, mortal and yet immortal, fallen but yet exalted far above principalities and powers — why marvel ye, that ye should find that creature also possessed of mingled experience, greatly rejoicing, and yet at the same time, "in heaviness through manifold temptations." (Sermon - [The Christian's Heaviness and Rejoicing](#))

Spurgeon - "Put me in remembrance: let us plead together: declare thou, that thou mayest he justified."-Isaiah 43:26.

We shall mainly dwell upon the first invitation of the text: "Put me in remembrance." If you will cast your eye upon the Scripture itself you will be struck with its singular position it makes a paradox of the most striking kind if you read it in connection with the preceding clause: "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for

mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins. Put me in remembrance." This looks like a contradiction; but, as a wise teacher will win attention by dark sayings, so doth the word of God abound in expressions by which thought is excited, and the lesson is more deeply impressed upon the mind. Many are the paradoxes of the prophets, and of the Lord and leader of all the prophets. Who can read without attention two such sentences as these in succession- "I will not remember thy sins"; "Put me in remembrance"? The use of such paradoxes in Scripture needs no sort of apology. Man is a living riddle. Does any man understand himself? He may think he does, but by this conceit he betrays his ignorance. The sinner is a paradox, and the saint is a double paradox. I say it is meet and right that the Holy Spirit should thus use paradoxical expressions, because those whom he addresses have paradoxes lying deep in their nature, and so the speech is congruous to the listener. (Sermon [A Loving Entreaty](#))

L E Maxwell - From [Born Crucified](#) - This matter of the Cross once-for-all and the "cross daily" is what Bishop Moule calls an "inexhaustible paradox; on one side, a true and total self-denial, on the other, a daily need of self-crucifixion." We are followers of the Crucified. We must surrender to Him once-for-all. There is also what has been called the "spread-out-surrender, a surrender which covers our whole sphere of action and lasts all our days." The Cross-life is not an attainment, but a lifelong attitude. It is not a goal, but a road. There is no ready-made holiness that we can put on like a suit of clothes. God does not show us everything at once.

Ray Stedman - Authentic Christianity - 2 Corinthians 6:3-13 Exhibit A

Mr. Smith sat in his attorney's office and began to lay out the case. "It all revolves around a verbal agreement between Mr. Johnson and myself," he explained. "We agreed to go into a business deal together, but we never set our agreement down in the form of a written contract. So my question to you is: Are verbal agreements binding?"

"Technically, yes," said the attorney. "According to the law, a verbal agreement is as binding as a written contract. The problem comes in proving that the verbal agreement actually took place. If one side denies that such a conversation ever took place, how does the other side prove it? For example, did either you or Mr. Johnson take any notes during your conversation when this agreement was made?"

"No," said Mr. Smith. "No notes were taken."

"Well, then," said the attorney, "were there any witnesses to the conversation?"

"None," replied Mr. Smith. "Mr. Johnson and I were the only persons present when the agreement was made."

"And, of course, I'm sure no recording was made of your conversation," said the attorney.

"Recording?" said Mr. Smith. "You mean, like this one?" He reached into his pocket and produced an audio cassette.

The attorney snatched it and held it up triumphantly. "You mean the entire conversation between you and Mr. Johnson is recorded on this tape? This is wonderful! This is Exhibit A! You have him right where you want him! We'll take him to court and force him to abide by your verbal agreement!"

Instead of joining in his attorney's enthusiasm, Mr. Smith hung his head in despair. "This is horrible!"

"Mr. Smith," said the attorney, "don't you understand? With this tape as Exhibit A, there's no way you can lose in court!"

"No, you don't understand!" Mr. Smith wailed. "That tape--Exhibit A, as you call it--is going to cost me thousands of dollars! I don't want to enforce the verbal agreement--I want to get out of it! That's a copy of a tape Mr. Johnson made of our conversation, and he's going to use it against me in court. Because of Exhibit A, there's no way I can win!"

When we think of the term "Exhibit A," we think of evidence that can't be denied, evidence that persuades and convicts, evidence that clinches the case. In this final chapter of our examination of authentic Christianity, we turn to Paul's "Exhibit A," his incontrovertible, incontestable, undeniable evidence for the validity of the new covenant, God's ironclad "verbal agreement" with the human race. The evidence Paul presents as Exhibit A is nothing less than the story of his own life.

We began this book with Paul's great declaration of his own experience of the new covenant: "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him" (2 Corinthians 2:14). Now we have come full circle, for the words with which we close are taken from the sixth chapter and are, likewise, the apostle Paul's own description of his experience in Christ. But there is a difference. At the beginning of this account Paul spoke in glowing terms of the great principles he had found in Christ which governed and empowered his life. But here, at the end, he speaks more specifically of deeds and experiences and final results.

How we look to others

This is as it should be, for principle must always work itself out into practice. "Faith without deeds," says James, "is dead" (James 2:26). Thus an understanding of the new covenant that does not drastically alter the way of life is a useless thing. Paul's primary concern in this final section is to address the problem of communication with others who do not yet know this great secret of godlikeness, whether they are new Christians or still unregenerate. The new covenant cannot be lived in isolation but must bring us

into contact with others, both Christians and non-Christians, because authentic Christianity is designed for the world as it is. Therefore, the apostle says: "We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way" (2 Corinthians 6:3,4).

There follows then a most remarkable list of very practical ways by which the new covenant may be commended to others. We shall look at this in some detail in a moment. But first, it may seem a contradiction for Paul to say here: "as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way," after he has said in 5:12, "We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again." The commendation he speaks of in chapter 5 is that of words: boastful self-commendation which seeks to impress others. Here in chapter 6 it is the commendation of deeds and attitudes which speak for themselves.

We shall look now at this impressive list to discover the right way Christians can commend themselves and the teaching of the new covenant to others:

Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors (2 Corinthians 6:4-8).

The translators have obscured, in part, the divisions which the apostle indicates in this paragraph. There are three major groupings of thought:

- In great endurance:
 - in troubles,
 - in hardships,
 - in distresses;
 - in beatings,
 - in imprisonments,
 - in riots;
 - in hard work,
 - in sleepless nights
 - in hunger;

By means of:

- purity,
- knowledge,
- forbearance,
- kindness;
- the Holy Spirit,
- sincere love,
- truthful speech,
- the power of God;
- With the weapons of righteousness:
 - in the right hand and the left,
 - in glory and dishonor,
 - in bad report and good report.

It is obvious that the first group deals with the adverse pressures which a Christian can encounter in life. The second group describes the character that must be displayed in the midst of these pressures. And the third group deals with the results produced, both good and apparently evil. And Paul fully exemplifies all these things! The apostles were pattern Christians, chosen to experience the full range of pressures and possibilities in order that we might have in them (and supremely in the Lord Jesus) an example to follow. It is not likely that we will be called upon to endure all these experiences, but we will surely be asked to endure some of them. Let us remember that the world around is watching us and only the manifestation of what Paul lists here will commend us to those who are watching our lives.

Endurance which endures

The key word to the first group is "endurance." It means far more than simply toughing it out. Even a non-Christian can endure hardness in that sense and some take great pride in their ability to do so. Athletes, marines, commandos, frontiersmen, and others

often glory in their ability to confront hardship with fortitude and endurance. But this is not merely a reference to passive resignation which is content to wait with bowed head till the troubles have run their course.

The Greek word used here, *hupomone*, goes far beyond that. Rather, it is the courageous triumph which takes all the pressure and emerges with a cheer! It not only refuses to be broken by the pressure but is actually grateful for the opportunity to endure, knowing it will bring glory to God. "The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name" (Acts 5:41).

Paul endured triumphantly everything on his list, and often many times over. There were "afflictions" or, literally, "distresses." There were pressures that bore heavily upon his spirit--cares and intense anxieties that seldom let up in his life. There were "hardships"--the inescapable discomforts of life. And there were "calamities," or to be more exact, "strictures," narrow places which seem to close one in on every side, offering no escape. In each of these circumstances the triumphant endurance produced by the new covenant commends Paul to those who are watching his life.

Next, there were troubles that stemmed directly from human opposition. There were "beatings" or "stripes." Further on in this letter Paul says, "Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned" (2 Corinthians 11:24,25). These painful beatings left their scars upon him so that he could write to the Galatians, "Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus" (Galatians 6:17).

Often accompanying the beatings were "imprisonments." Clement of Rome tells us the apostle was put into prison seven times, though only four of these are recorded in the Scriptures. At least two imprisonments were for more than two years, so Paul spent at least five years in prison and perhaps much more.

But that was not all. There were also "tumults." This is a reference to the riots and mob violence which he sometimes provoked by the sweeping social changes his preaching produced. Perhaps nothing is more frightening than an angry mob, out of control, bent upon venting its rage upon some hapless victim. But Paul was enabled by God to endure all of these encounters and trials with triumphant courage.

The last category of events calling for endurance involved, first, the "labors" he assumed. The word he uses here describes hard, unremitting toil, to the point of exhaustion. Paul doubtless spent many long hours at his tentmaking in order to present his gospel without charge! There were also "watchings"--sleepless nights, spent in prayer and meditation. These were not a matter of mere convenience to Paul but required grace and commitment. Then there was "hunger." The reference is probably to periods of fasting, some deliberately chosen and some enforced upon him by the circumstances in which he found himself. These would take their toll of his physical and emotional strength, but through them all he was enabled to endure triumphantly.

The secret described

What was the secret of such endurance? It was never by a clenching of his fists, a jutting of his jaw, and a determination of his will to show the world how much he could take for Christ. Such an approach would soon have left even Paul broken and defeated, as he actually was in the early days of his Christian life. No, the secret of triumphant endurance was the new covenant--"everything coming from God, nothing coming from me"!

There was a certain kind of character he possessed which saw him through his troubles. It had to be invariable, or nearly so, for he never knew when it would be required. It consisted of four elements. First, there was "purity." This refers to the careful avoidance of all sin which defiles or stains the flesh or spirit. Paul never allowed himself to be found in a compromising relationship with anyone. He carefully guarded not only his behavior, but his thought life, for he knew that is where defilement begins. Whenever he found himself toying with impurity, he immediately brought it to the Lord Jesus and obtained His cleansing and forgiveness.

Next there was "knowledge." His mind was deliberately set upon truth, as he had learned it from the Scriptures and revelations of the Lord. He judged all persons and events, not from a human point of view, but from the divine viewpoint as revealed by the Spirit. The doctrine of Scripture was always his guide.

Third came "forbearance." The Greek word, *makrothumia*, means patience, especially with regard to people. By nature Paul was impatient and hard driving. But he learned by the Spirit to wait for others to catch up, to be understanding about their weaknesses, and to wait quietly for the Lord to do the work of correction that was needed, for "to his own master he stands or falls" (Romans 14:4).

Finally, there was "kindness." The original word has been described as meaning "the sympathetic kindness or sweetness of temper which puts others at their ease and shrinks from giving pain." This attitude was to be shown without respect of persons, whether to a slave or to the emperor himself.

These four marks of Paul's character were what enabled him to endure. Anything other than momentary failure in any of them would

have meant defeat. His pressures would have overwhelmed him, and he would have failed dismally to display that triumphant endurance that would commend him to the watching world.

Deeper yet

But there was something deeper even than these. The four characteristics of purity, knowledge, forbearance, and kindness were visible to other people. They lay in the realm of Paul's soul, his conscious experience in life. Deeper still, in the depths of his spirit, were the forces that undergirded and kept on making possible the display of the four characteristics just listed.

Behind everything else and at the root of it all was "the Holy Spirit." The Third Person of the Godhead is the gift of both the Father and the Son, serving as the guarantee of all else to come, dwelling permanently in Paul's heart, was the uncreated source of all that sustained Paul. It was the Spirit's constant delight to release to Paul at all times "the life of Jesus." Jesus Himself, by the Spirit, lived in Paul and upheld and empowered him, just as He lives in us and upholds us and empowers us through all our trials and tribulations. That "life of Jesus" invariably consists of three elements: love, truth, and power. This "life of Jesus" was continually supplied to Paul through the Spirit, explaining all that He was and did. This was the "sincere love," "truthful speech," and "the power of God" Paul talked about. No wonder he could handle life the way he did!

But Paul isn't through yet. Though the new covenant is designed to make us strong, it is designed so that we might affect others. There is always that watching world before which we must be commended! So Paul's final category speaks of the effect of "the weapons of righteousness." He sees the worth and value he has in God's eyes--worth and value that is based on the righteousness of Christ, not any righteousness of his own--as a kind of sword or spear by which we attack the forces of darkness. With these weapons, we set free those who have been held bondage by Satan. Hence, the term "weapons of righteousness." Righteousness, here, is a summary term gathering up the four distinctives Paul listed in the previous section: purity, knowledge, forbearance, and kindness. These four "weapons of righteousness" have a powerful effect on others in two ways:

First, such righteousness affects both "the right hand and the left." This saying probably goes back to Jesus' statement in the Sermon on the Mount: "Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" (Matthew 6:3). By this He refers to the public and private life. The right hand is the public life, the left hand is the private. Thus, the effect of a righteous life will touch both the public actions of others (their social relationships) and their private lives as well (changing their attitudes). True Christianity does not make superficial changes--it changes people within and without.

Second, the effect of such change is also twofold: "in honor and dishonor." Those freed by Christ will be placed in varying positions before the world. Some will occupy positions of honor, such as Manaen, a member of the court of Herod, the tetrarch, mentioned in Acts 13, and Sergius Paulus, the converted Roman proconsul described in the same chapter. Others will be obscure men and women about whom the world knows or cares nothing. But even these will find a varying acceptance. Some will be of "bad report" and others will be of "good report." Jesus himself had predicted this: "Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also" (John 15:20). But, whether honored by the world, or dishonored; whether held in good or bad esteem, all are equally loved and owned by God, all are equally empowered by the Spirit (if they choose to draw upon Him), and all are expected to live before the world in such a way as to commend the gospel to all people.

A W TOZER CHRISTIAN PARADOXES

In his book [That Incredible Christian](#), A.W. Tozer describes some of the many paradoxes one finds in authentic Christianity--and in authentic Christians:

The current effort of so many religious leaders to harmonize Christianity with science, philosophy and every natural and reasonable thing is, I believe, the result of failure to understand Christianity and, judging from what I have heard and read, failure to understand science and philosophy as well.

At the heart of the Christian system lies the cross of Christ with its divine paradox. The power of Christianity appears in its antipathy toward, never in its agreement with, the ways of fallen men. The truth of the cross is revealed in its contradictions. The witness of the Church is most effective when she declares rather than explains, for the gospel is addressed not to reason but to faith. What can be proved requires no faith to accept. Faith rests upon the character of God, not upon the demonstrations of laboratory or logic.

The cross stands in bold opposition to the natural man. Its philosophy runs contrary to the processes of the unregenerate mind, so that Paul could say bluntly that the preaching of the cross is to them that perish

foolishness. To try to find a common ground between the message of the cross and man's fallen reason is to try the impossible, and if persisted in must result in an impaired reason, a meaningless cross and a powerless Christianity.

But let us bring the whole matter down from the uplands of theory and simply observe the true Christian as he puts into practice the teachings of Christ and His apostles. Note the contradictions:

- The Christian believes that in Christ he has died, yet he is more alive than before and he fully expects to live forever. He walks on earth while seated in heaven and though born on earth he finds that after his conversion he is not at home here. Like the night-hawk, which in the air is the essence of grace and beauty but on the ground is awkward and ugly, so the Christian appears at his best in the heavenly places but does not fit well into the ways of the very society into which he was born.
- The Christian soon learns that if he would be victorious as a son of heaven among men on earth he must not follow the common pattern of mankind, but rather the contrary. That he may be safe he puts himself in jeopardy; he loses his life to save it and is in danger of losing it if he attempts to preserve it. He goes down to get up. If he refuses to go down he is already down, but when he starts down he is on his way up.
- He is strongest when he is weakest and weakest when he is strong. Though poor he has the power to make others rich, but when he becomes rich his ability to enrich others vanishes. He has most after he has given most away and has least when he possesses most.
- He may be and often is highest when he feels lowest and most sinless when he is most conscious of sin. He is wisest when he knows that he knows not and knows least when he has acquired the greatest amount of knowledge. He sometimes does most by doing nothing and goes furthest when standing still. In heaviness he manages to rejoice and keeps his heart glad even in sorrow.
- The paradoxical character of the Christian is revealed constantly. For instance, he believes that he is saved now, nevertheless he expects to be saved later and looks forward joyfully to future salvation. He fears God but is not afraid of Him. In God's presence he feels overwhelmed and undone, yet there is nowhere he would rather be than in that presence. He knows that he has been cleansed from his sin, yet he is painfully conscious that in his flesh dwells no good thing.
- He loves supremely One whom he has never seen, and though himself poor and lowly he talks familiarly with One who is King of all kings and Lord of all lords, and is aware of no incongruity in so doing. He feels that he is in his own right altogether less than nothing, yet he believes without question that he is the apple of God's eye and that for him the Eternal Son became flesh and died on the cross of shame.
- The Christian is a citizen of heaven and to that sacred citizenship he acknowledges first allegiance; yet he may love his earthly country with that intensity of devotion that caused John Knox to pray, "O God, give me Scotland or I die."
- He cheerfully expects before long to enter that bright world above, but he is in no hurry to leave this world and is quite willing to await the summons of his heavenly Father. And he is unable to understand why the critical unbeliever should condemn him for this; it all seems so natural and right in the circumstances that he sees nothing inconsistent about it.
- The cross-carrying Christian, furthermore, is both a confirmed pessimist and an optimist the like of which is to be found nowhere else on earth.
- When he looks at the cross he is a pessimist, for he knows that the same judgment that fell on the Lord of glory condemns in that one act all nature and all the world of men. He rejects every human hope out of Christ because he knows that man's noblest effort is only dust building on dust.
- Yet he is calmly, restfully optimistic. If the cross condemns the world the resurrection of Christ guarantees the ultimate triumph of good throughout the universe. Through Christ all will be well at last and the Christian waits the consummation. Incredible Christian!

A. W. Tozer, [That Incredible Christian](#)

These words of **A. W. Tozer** echo and expand upon the series of magnificent **paradoxes** Paul describes in his depiction of the authentic Christian in 2 Corinthians 6:8-10. He says that he and his fellow authentic Christians are genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

Clearly, authentic Christians present an enigma to the world, because their lives consist of a series of paradoxes. Only the man or woman who stands poised between two worlds can qualify for such a description. The authentic Christian is in a highly vulnerable position, stretched between God and man. We must be content to be called imposters by some, to be thought of as unknown, to be

threatened and punished, to be poor and have nothing--all the while knowing that, before God, the very reverse is true! As God sees us, we are his true children, known to all heaven, living and rejoicing in the spirit when the flesh is perishing, ever imparting the unsearchable riches of Christ to many, and being heirs of all creation when time trembles into eternity.

Is it not fitting, therefore, that the apostle should close this great discourse with an earnest appeal, rising out of the depths of his heart:

We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange--I speak as to my children--open wide your hearts also (2 Corinthians 6:11-13).

Love, truth, and power all require response to be fully operative. Each will grow to infinite expansion if it is met by faith, though it be as small as a grain of mustard seed. The Corinthians were not being held back by Paul. He had opened his heart to them and told them everything he had learned from the Lord. Their present weakness was due to only one thing: a failure to respond to the truth they knew--a reluctance to act on what they had been told. So his appeal comes as a father to his children: "Widen your hearts!"

The present low state of the church in the world is surely due to the same cause. Christians do not really believe what they sing about and profess. They have lost the consciousness of the greatness of God and his ability to act today. Dr. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, noted pastor of Westminster Chapel in London, England, has made an appeal similar to that of Paul's:

I speak especially to those of us who are Evangelicals. We must not continue with our religious life and methods precisely as if nothing were happening round and about us, and as if we were still living in the spacious days of peace. We have loved certain methods. And how delightful they were! What could be more enjoyable than to have and to enjoy our religion in the form with which we have for so long been familiar? How enjoyable just to sit and listen. What an intellectual and perhaps also emotional and artistic treat.

But alas! How entirely unrelated to the world in which we live it has often been! How little has it had to offer to men and women who have never known our background and our kind of life, who are entirely ignorant of our very idiom and even our presuppositions. But in any case how detached and self-contained, how removed from a world that is seething in trouble with the foundations of everything that has been most highly prized rocking and shaking. [D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Plight of Man and the Power of God*, p. 11.]

What possibilities lie before us as Christians if only we are worthy of them! How little the world realizes the treasure that lies in its midst in the church of Jesus Christ. But how little the church realizes it, too. Think of what 300 million "qualified ministers of the new covenant" could accomplish around the world if they began to function as Paul lived. I invite you, as you close this book, to bow your knees before the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in His Name, pray: "Father, make me a qualified minister of the new covenant. Open my eyes to the full meaning of the truth that Jesus lives in me, by the Spirit. Make me hunger and thirst after His righteousness, so that according to your promise I might be filled. Amen."

Warren Wiersbe - Prologue: Contradiction Becomes Illumination (from his book [Truth on its Head: Unusual Wisdom in the Paradoxes of the Bible](#))

A paradox is a statement that attracts attention because it seems to be contradictory. This arouses curiosity and we are puzzled. But as we meditate on the statement, we go deeper into some important facet of life and learn something new. Paradoxes are marvelous instructors.

"Nothing succeeds like success" is a familiar saying, but what about **"There is nothing that fails like success"**? I read that statement in the first chapter of G. K. Chesterton's *Heretics*. Chesterton used a paradox to get my attention and arouse my curiosity. Hillel, the famous first-century rabbi wrote, **"My lowliness is my loftiness; my loftiness is my lowliness."** It sounds a great deal like our Lord's, **"For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted"** (Luke 14:11).

Our heavenly Father wants all of His children to make progress in the Christian life, and every true Christian should want to obey Him and mature. The apostle Peter admonished his readers to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). If we want to glorify our Lord, we must grow. According to the apostle John, God's family is made up of "little children . . . fathers . . . and young men" (1 John 2:12-14). And while all believers are "little children" of God, we must heed the admonition of Hebrews 5:12-14 and grow from childhood into spiritual adulthood. No more baby food! Solid food is the diet for the maturing saints. Jesus wants us to move from "fruit" to "more fruit" to "much fruit" (John 15:1-8). Why? "By this My Father is glorified" (v. 8). We can make progress in the Christian life only if we do the following:

- obey God's precepts,
- believe and claim God's promises,

- understand God's principles, and
- enter into the depths of God's paradoxes.

Precepts are the commands and instructions the Father gives us and which we must obey if we want to please Him and enjoy His blessings. Promises are the encouragements the Father shares with His children to assure them that He will see them through as they trust and obey. Both the precepts and the promises are based on the principles found in the character and purposes of the Lord. Because God is holy, He wants us to be holy (Lev. 19:2; 20:7; 1 Peter 1:15–16); and if we walk in obedience, He will bless us and make us a blessing.

The word “paradox” may not be as familiar to you as “precepts,” “promises,” and “principles,” but it is just as important. Paradoxes share truths that help us go deeper into the truth of God's word. The Scottish preacher George H. Morrison said, “For man does not live by reconciling mysteries; he lives by mysteries he cannot reconcile.”¹ If you will scan the table of contents, you will see what I mean. How do we get strength out of weakness? Honor from humility? And progress out of standing still? All of these are paradoxes — and they work! Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul wrote a string of paradoxes in 2 Corinthians 6:9–10: . . .

- as unknown, and yet well-known;
- as dying, and behold we live;
- as chastened, and yet not killed;
- as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing;
- as poor, yet making many rich;
- as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.

When the believers in Corinth heard these words read to their church gathering, it must have awakened them and aroused their attention. “How can we die and live at the same time, or sorrow and always rejoice?” they would ask. “If I am poor, how can I make others rich? If I have nothing, how can I claim to possess everything?” Paradoxes attract our attention, challenge our faith and provoke us into thinking deeper and asking wiser questions. They lead us into truths that, if we act upon them, will help us to grow out of spiritual childhood and into the blessings of spiritual maturity. The well-known philosopher Alfred North Whitehead wrote, “A clash of doctrines is not a disaster — it is an opportunity.”² For the Christian, a seeming contradiction in a paradox is a challenge to grow. What an opportunity!

In my reading of literature, old and new, I frequently encounter paradoxes. On December 5, 1856, the American naturalist Henry David Thoreau wrote in his journal, “It is the greatest of all advantages to enjoy no advantage at all. I find it invariably true, the poorer I am, the richer I am.” George Orwell put a clever (and quotable) paradox into chapter 10 of his popular novel *Animal Farm*: “All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.” In a newspaper interview, a young Hollywood actress said, “Deep down, I'm pretty superficial.” The American essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, “God hides things by putting them near us.”

Even television makes its contribution. After reporting on the war in Vietnam, the popular news analyst Edward R. Murrow said, “Anyone who isn't confused really doesn't understand the situation.” Finally, a learned theologian said, “We are all free to do as we must.”

In the chapters that follow, I deal with fifteen biblical paradoxes and try to show what they mean and how they can help us mature spiritually in every area of life. The paradoxes are arranged in no special order and you may want to begin with those that interest you the most. But be sure to keep your Bible near at hand so you can look up and read the verses I cite but do not quote. Each citation is important, so please do not ignore them.

The title of this book originated with the British essayist G. K. Chesterton who defined a paradox as “truth standing on its head to gain attention.”

¹ George H. Morrison, *The Weaving of Glory* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1913), 245.

² Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), 266.

Table of Contents in Wiersbe's book "[Truth on its Head: Unusual Wisdom in the Paradoxes of the Bible](#)"

1. The Joyful Fear of the Lord

- Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with. (Ps. 2:11)
- You who fear the LORD, praise Him! All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, and fear Him, all you offspring of Israel! (Ps. 22:23)
- He will bless those who fear the LORD, both small and great. (Ps. 115:13)
- For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him. . . . As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him. (Ps. 103:11, 13)

- Blessed is the man who fears the LORD. (Ps. 112:1)
- Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in His ways. (Ps. 128:1)
- The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. (Prov. 9:10)
- The fear of the LORD leads to life, and he who has it will abide in satisfaction; he will not be visited with evil. (Prov. 19:23)
- His delight is in the fear of the LORD. (Isa. 11:3)
- His mercy is on those who fear Him. (Luke 1:50)

2. When We Are Weak, We Can Be Strong

- And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing, I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor. 12:7–10)

3. The More We Give, the More We Receive

- I have coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:33–35)

4. When We Choose to Go Down, God Lifts Us Up

- Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. (Prov. 16:18)
- He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)
- But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. (Matt. 23:11–12)
- Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of [the disciples] should be considered greatest. And [Jesus] said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called ‘benefactors.’ But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. . . . I am among you as the One who serves.” (Luke 22:24–27)
- For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. (Rom. 12:3)
- Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. (Phil. 2:3)
- Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. (James 4:10)
- Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time. (1 Peter 5:6)

5. Our Foolishness Leads Us to God’s Wisdom

- Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. (James 4:10)
- For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.” Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness,

but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God and righteousness and sanctification and redemption — that as it is written, He who glories, let him glory in the LORD. (1 Cor. 1:18–31)

6. By Standing Still, We Go Forward

- Even the youths shall faint and be weary and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. (Isa. 40:30–31)
- And He said, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” (Exod. 33:14)
- And I said, “Oh, that I had wings like a dove! For then I would fly away and be at rest.” (Ps. 55:6)
- Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? . . . Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? . . . But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. (Matt. 6:25, 27, 33)
- Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the LORD. (Ps. 27:14)
- My soul, wait silently for God alone, for my expectation is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense: I shall not be moved. (Ps. 62:5–6)
- The work of righteousness will be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever. (Isa. 32:17)

7. We Must Lose Our Life to Save It

- And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He spoke this word openly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But when He had turned around and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, “Get behind Me, Satan! For you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.” When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples, also, He said to them, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his own soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.” (Mark 8:31–38)
- But Jesus answered them, saying, “The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor.” (John 12:23–26)

8. When Light Becomes Darkness

- Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness! No one can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. (Matt. 6:19–24)
- For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. . . . And have no fellowship with the

unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. (Eph. 5:8, 11)

- Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world. (Phil. 2:14–15)

9. Unknown, and Yet Well Known

- . . . as unknown, and yet well known. (2 Cor. 6:9)
- And when Saul [Paul] had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the disciples. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out. (Acts 9:26–28)
- For the ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD, and He ponders all his paths. (Prov. 5:21)
- The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good. (Prov. 15:3)
- Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the Gentile worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there. Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, “What does this babblers want to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods,” because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection. (Acts 17:16–18)
- Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. (1 John 3:1)
- But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man. (John 2:24–25)
- And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. (Heb. 4:13)

10. Sorrowing Yet Always Rejoicing

- Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him. (Ps. 126:5–6)
- How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? (Ps. 13:2)
- The pains of death surrounded me, and the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me; I found trouble and sorrow. (Ps. 116:3)
- Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion, according to the multitude of His mercies. (Lam. 3:32)
- Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength. (Neh. 8:10)
- These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. (John 15:11)
- A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has
- come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you. (John 16:21–22)
- . . . rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer. (Rom. 12:12)
- . . . as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. (2 Cor. 6:10)
- Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! (Phil. 4:4)

11. We Lead Others by Serving Them

- O LORD, I pray, please let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name; and let Your servant prosper this day, I pray, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.” For I was the king’s cupbearer. (Neh. 1:11)
- His lord said to him, “Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.” (Matt. 25:21)
- The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called “benefactors.” But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let

him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves. (Luke 22:25–27)

- If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him will My Father honor. (John 12:26).
- But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. (Rom. 6:22)
- Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. (1 Cor. 4:1)
- For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither will he eat. (2 Thess. 3:10)
- For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of sinful men — as free, yet not losing your liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. (1 Peter 2:15–16)

12. Knowing Love That Passes Knowledge

- For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height — to know the love of Christ that passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generation, forever and ever. Amen. (Eph. 3:14–21)

13. We See the Invisible

- In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. (Gen. 1:1–4)
- And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, “Alas, my master! What shall we do?” So he answered. “Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” And Elisha prayed, and said, “LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.” Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. (2 Kings 6:15–17)
- Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your Law. (Ps. 119:18)
- Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. (Ps. 119:105)
- Jesus answered and said to [Nicodemus], “Most assuredly, I say to you, except one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. . . . And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.” (John 3:3, 19–21)
- By faith [Moses] forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. (Heb. 11:27)
- And the city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it, and the Lamb is its light. (Rev. 21:23)

14. Losing What You Never Had

- For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord’s money. After a long time, the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with

them. So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, "Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them." His lord said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord." He also who had received two talents came and said, "Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them." His lord said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord." Then he who had received the one talent came and said, "Lord, I know you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours." But his lord answered him and said to him, "You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. Therefore you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matt. 25:14–30)

15. We Are Yoked to Be Free

- Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent: "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which had been done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day, But I say to you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you." At that time Jesus answered and said, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Matt. 11:20–30)

Vance Havner - The Divine Paradox Mark 15:31

WHILE Jesus hung upon the cross, the chief priests, mocking, said among themselves with the scribes, "He saved others; himself he cannot save" (Mark 15:31).

In their scorn, they were declaring a truth greater than they knew. While they meant to belittle Him, the real truth of their statement is to His eternal glory. To save others He must give Himself: it is the stupendous heart of the atonement. "Without shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb. 9:22).

In a lesser sense, and one applicable to you and me, it was also a fulfillment of Jesus' own paradox: "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever will lose his life for My sake, the same shall save it" (Luke 9:24). If Jesus had decided in Gethsemane to save His life, He would have lost it as our Savior: but in losing it, He truly saved it as our Redeemer.

Here is the application for us: In saving others, we cannot save ourselves. I speak of saving others in the sense of winning them to Christ and God. If we are to rescue others, we must expect to spend and be spent. So long as life revolves around self—self-advancement, self-promotion, self-satisfaction—we are wretched and miserable. If we are to save others, we must forget ourselves. When the family is sick, mother forgets herself in caring for others—and generally the Lord seems to keep mothers going in such times. In service, we Christians must lose ourselves with the spirit of Paul: "Neither count I my life dear unto myself" (Acts 20:24).

Then there is the other side of the paradox: In losing our lives to save others we most truly save ourselves. I am not here speaking of saving our souls; no good works can save the soul, but faith in Christ only. We can save our lives, our time, our talents as we spend them in saving others. The only time you ever save is the time you spend for others. The only money you ever save is the money you spend for others. It is the only certain investment in this gold-brick age. Paul has it in mind when he bids the Ephesians redeem the time. Jesus has it in mind when He says to lay up treasure in heaven. It is the principle of the parable of the unjust

steward: use your earthly assets to make for yourself friends through service. Bread cast on the waters of service returns even if after many days.

How slow men are to learn that in saving life they lose it, but in losing it for Christ's sake they save it. Mind you, Jesus said, "Whosoever will lose his life for My sake"—not for one's own sake, not to be called a hero, not for consciences sake, but for Christ's sake. Mere idealistic service is not meant here. Often that is a price men offer for salvation.

This is a day of introverted living. We look at everything in the light of self: what it will profit us, where we can gain by this and that move. Christ turns life outward so that selfish Saul, proud of his legal righteousness, becomes a Paul who could wish himself accursed for his brethren's sake. Spend life and you save it; give it and you get it.

We do not save our lives while we save others, but because we save others. We often lose our money, our health, our temporal fortunes. But if we leave all for His sake, we shall be compensated in this world—and in the world to come, receive eternal life.

In saving others you cannot spare yourself. Yet in saving others you do most surely preserve yourself! All that you save is what you spend on others for His sake.

J D Watson - Deep (2) 'āmaq <H6009>

Yesterday we considered four of the deep things of God (Psalm 92:5). While we could mention several others, let us consider just one more.

Fifth, **consider the depth of God's paradoxes**. A paradox is a seeming contradiction that is nonetheless true. One of the hardest things for any Bible student to live with is the paradoxes of Scripture, things we simply cannot comprehend but that are still true. We vainly try to explain them, which sometimes results in a distortion of one or more truths. "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God" (Deut. 29:29).

For example, was Jesus God or man? Yes. He was both 100 percent God from before the beginning (John 1:1) but was also 100 percent man in His incarnation (John 1:14). Can we comprehend this? No, but we believe it anyway.

Another question is, "Do I live my Christian life or does Christ live my Christian life?" Yes. Paul states both principles in Galatians 2:20. He also says in one place that he constantly struggled to discipline His body to keep it in submission (1 Cor. 9:27) but then says in another that "we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10, emphasis added). Which is true? Both. Can we comprehend it? No, but we believe it.

Of course the "really big one" is, "Is God sovereign, or is man free to choose?" Yes. Does Acts 4:27, 28 say that God decreed the suffering and death of our Savior at the hands of these wicked men? Indeed, it does. But does it say that these men were coerced or even forced to do what they did? No. While God knew and decreed the actions of Herod and Pilate, they still did them of their own accord. As theologian A. A. Hodge so ably put it: "We have the fact distinctly revealed that God has decreed the free acts of men, and yet that the actors were none the less responsible, and consequently none the less free in their acts." While man is free to choose, God is sovereign in control.

Perhaps we can think of our understanding of the deep things of God as standing between a set of railroad tracks and looking toward the horizon. Where we are standing, they are separate, but only in eternity do they converge

"Run with patience." Always remembering that it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy ; that he that believeth shall not make haste, that the race is not to the swift ;t but learning the divine paradox, that they who wait on the Lord run, and are not weary.

The kingdom of God is a kingdom of paradox, where through the ugly defeat of a cross, a holy God is utterly glorified. Victory comes through defeat; healing through brokenness; finding self through losing self. CHARLES COLSON

Now we face a paradox: on the one hand nothing in the world is more precious than one single human person; on the other hand nothing in the world is more squandered, more exposed to all kinds of dangers, than the human being—and this condition must be. What is the meaning of this paradox? It is perfectly clear. We have here a sign that man knows very well that death is not an end, but a beginning. . . . Life is changed, life is not taken away. JACQUES MARITAIN (1882–1973)

Barry Horner - Glorification is life-giving, John 12:25.

"Whoever loves his soul/life loses/destroys [apollumi] it, and whoever hates his soul/life in this world will keep/preserve [phulasso] it unto eternal life." Here now is the personal application for any would-be disciple of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:21), though not identically.

Jesus' death is for us redemptively; His disciples' death is for Christ in service. Here now we have two contrasting principles and world views that completely divide human society, a divine paradox!

1) Investment in self is the destruction of self, Jn 12:25a.

Here a person is careful to invest in self, to promote self, to indulge self, to advance self, to defend self. He lives autonomously in a man-centered universe, in which case he has no time for the dominion of God over his life. He declares, "I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry'" (Luke 12:15-19). As a self-made man, who boasts in self-achievement, he scoffs at the weakness of dependent faith; he derides the low self-esteem of a humble, convicted sinner. He little realizes that, like Judas, Ananias and Sapphira, and the rich man, he establishes self-destruction (Luke 12: 20; cf. Ps. 37:35-36).

2) Depreciation of self is the preservation of self, v. 25b.

In stark contrast, this person is quite contrary to the man centeredness of this world. Rather, he confesses a "poverty of spirit," he "mourns" over his human condition, he "hungers and thirsts for righteousness" knowing the poverty of his soul (Matt. 5:3-4, 6); he covets "the meekness and gentleness of Christ" (2Cor. 10:1). Jesus Himself taught that "the gentle . . . shall inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5). In this way he puts self to death, as if by crucifixion after the manner of his Lord (Mark 8:34-38). Yet the end result is that, like the miserable tax collector, he hears the welcome words of life from Christ, "this man went to his house justified [alive], . . . for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:14), as with Joseph, Moses, and Paul. There must be death before resurrection.

J C Philpot - "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked--who can know it?" Jeremiah 17:9

The sin of our fallen nature is a very mysterious thing. We read of the mystery of iniquity as well as of the mystery of godliness; and the former has lengths, depths, and breadths as well as the latter; depths which no human plumb-line ever fathomed, and lengths which no mortal measuring line ever yet measured out. Thus the way in which sin sometimes seems to sleep, and at other times to awake up with renewed strength, its active, irritable, impatient, restless nature, the many shapes and colors it wears, the filthy holes and puddles in which it grovels, the corners into which it creeps, its deceitfulness, hypocrisy, craftiness, persuasiveness, intense selfishness, utter recklessness, desperate madness, and insatiable greediness are secrets, painful secrets, only learned by bitter experience.

In the spiritual knowledge of these two mysteries, the mystery of sin and the mystery of salvation, all true religion consists. In the school of experience we are kept, day after day, learning and forgetting these two lessons, being never able to understand them, and yet not satisfied unless we know them, pursuing after an acquaintance with them, and finding that they still, like a rainbow, recede from us as fast as we pursue. **Thus we find realized in our own souls those heavenly contradictions, those divine paradoxes**, that the wiser we get, the greater fools we become (1 Cor. 3:18); the stronger we grow, the weaker we are (2 Cor. 12:9, 10); the more we possess, the less we have (2 Cor. 6:10); the more completely bankrupt, the more frankly forgiven (Luke 7:42); the more utterly lost, the more perfectly saved; and when most like a little child, the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 18:4).

The greatness of God rouses fear within us, but his goodness encourages us not to be afraid of him. To fear and not be afraid—that is the paradox of faith. A. W. TOZER (1897–1963)

John Blanchard - Complete Gathered Gold - MAN—a Paradox

Man is harder than rock, and more fragile than an egg. Anon.

I have become a puzzle to myself. Augustine

Although modern man zestfully explores outer space, he seems quite content to live in a spiritual kindergarten and to play in a moral wilderness. Carl F. H. Henry

Man is an enigma to himself. Carl Gustav Jung

Man's conquest of nature has been astonishing. His failure to conquer human nature has been tragic. Julius Mark

All the evidence of history suggests that man is indeed a rational animal, but with a nearly infinite capacity for folly... He draws blueprints for Utopia but never quite gets it built. Robert McNamara

What a chimera, then, is man! What a novelty! What a chaos, what a contradiction, what a prodigy! Judge of all things, imbecile worm of the earth; depository of truth; a sink of uncertainty and error; the pride and refuse of the universe. Blaise Pascal

We human beings have both a unique dignity as creatures made in God's image and a unique depravity as sinners under his judgement. John R. W. Stott

Man is a peculiar, puzzling paradox, groping for God and hoping to hide from him at the selfsame time. William A. Ward

The grace of God is undeserved, unsought, and unbought (except that it is made available by the precious blood of the Lamb of God). The infinitely high price of redemption was paid for by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor (His incarnation), that you through His poverty might become rich (spiritual riches that Jesus gives to all who place their trust in Him). (2Cor 8:9)

So the riches of our salvation (calling, election, justification, sanctification) were all made possible by the "impoverishment" of Christ Who became a man, suffered and died a cruel death on the cross so that grace could be manifested in our life. When we realize what it cost God to express grace, it helps us realize the wickedness of our sin and the undeserving state of mankind.

What an amazing divine paradox -- grace was immeasurably costly for God to express and yet is unconditionally free to all men. Grace is God's favor freely offered but expensively expressed!

Don't recklessly waste the infinite riches of God's grace by continuing to yield to temptation to sin. Don't be like the prince of a small, oil-rich Asian nation who was indicted for allegedly squandering \$16 billion of his country's wealth. Over a 10-year period, the prince is believed to have lost huge sums through poor judgment and bad investments. His nation's High Court said that he spent \$2.7 billion just on aircraft, yachts, cars, and jewelry. Beloved, don't squander the riches of God's grace!

Jesus Christ exhibited a divine paradox of the lion and the lamb. He was the Lion in majesty, rebuking the winds and demons. He was the Lamb in meekness, "who when he was reviled, reviled not again." He was the Lion in power, raising the dead. He was the Lamb in patience who was "brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth." He was the Lion in authority, "Ye have heard that it hath been said . . . but I say unto you." He was the Lamb in gentleness, "Suffer the little children to come unto me." OSWALD CHAMBERS (1874–1917)

Michael Catt - The Divine Paradox Mark 15:31

WHILE Jesus hung upon the cross, the chief priests, mocking, said among themselves with the scribes, "He saved others; himself he cannot save" (Mark 15:31).

In their scorn, they were declaring a truth greater than they knew. While they meant to belittle Him, the real truth of their statement is to His eternal glory. To save others He must give Himself: it is the stupendous heart of the atonement. "Without shedding of blood is no remission" (Heb. 9:22).

In a lesser sense, and one applicable to you and me, it was also a fulfillment of Jesus' own paradox: "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever will lose his life for My sake, the same shall save it" (Luke 9:24). If Jesus had decided in Gethsemane to save His life, He would have lost it as our Savior: but in losing it, He truly saved it as our Redeemer.

Here is the application for us: In saving others, we cannot save ourselves. I speak of saving others in the sense of winning them to Christ and God. If we are to rescue others, we must expect to spend and be spent. So long as life revolves around self—self-advancement, self-promotion, self-satisfaction—we are wretched and miserable. If we are to save others, we must forget ourselves. When the family is sick, mother forgets herself in caring for others—and generally the Lord seems to keep mothers going in such times. In service, we Christians must lose ourselves with the spirit of Paul: "Neither count I my life dear unto myself" (Acts 20:24).

Then there is the other side of the paradox: In losing our lives to save others we most truly save ourselves. I am not here speaking of saving our souls; no good works can save the soul, but faith in Christ only. We can save our lives, our time, our talents as we spend them in saving others. The only time you ever save is the time you spend for others. The only money you ever save is the money you spend for others. It is the only certain investment in this gold-brick age. Paul has it in mind when he bids the Ephesians redeem the time. Jesus has it in mind when He says to lay up treasure in heaven. It is the principle of the parable of the unjust steward: use your earthly assets to make for yourself friends through service. Bread cast on the waters of service returns even if after many days.

How slow men are to learn that in saving life they lose it, but in losing it for Christ's sake they save it. Mind you, Jesus said, "Whosoever will lose his life for My sake"—not for one's own sake, not to be called a hero, not for consciences sake, but for Christ's

sake. Mere idealistic service is not meant here. Often that is a price men offer for salvation.

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We do not save our lives while we save others, but because we save others. We often lose our money, our health, our temporal fortunes. But if we leave all for His sake, we shall be compensated in this world—and in the world to come, receive eternal life.

In saving others you cannot spare yourself. Yet in saving others you do most surely preserve yourself! All that you save is what you spend on others for His sake. (Reflections on the Gospels - Devotional Thoughts)

A W Tozer - Cross: foolishness of

At the heart of the Christian system lies the cross of Christ with its divine paradox. The power of Christianity appears in its antipathy toward, never in its agreement with, the ways of fallen men. The truth of the cross is revealed in its contradictions. The witness of the church is most effective when she declares rather than explains, for the gospel is addressed not to reason but to faith. What can be proved requires no faith to accept. Faith rests upon the character of God, not upon the demonstrations of laboratory or logic.

The cross stands in bold opposition to the natural man. Its philosophy runs contrary to the processes of the unregenerate mind, so that Paul could say bluntly that the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness. To try to find a common ground between the message of the cross and man's fallen reason is to try the impossible, and if persisted in must result in an impaired reason, a meaningless cross and a powerless Christianity.

Harold Wilmington - The Very Life and Ministry of Our Blessed Savior Was Itself a Divine Paradox

1. It may be concluded that the very life and ministry of our blessed Savior was itself a divine paradox.
2. He hungered, yet fed multitudes (Mt. 4:2; Jn. 6).
3. He thirsted, yet is the water of life (Jn. 19:28; 4:14).
4. He wearied, yet is our rest (Jn. 4:6; Mt. 11:29, 30).
5. He paid tribute, yet is the King of kings (Mt. 17:27; Rev. 19:16).
6. He prayed, yet hears our prayers (Mk. 14:32-42; Jn. 14:13, 14).
7. He wept, yet dries our tears (Jn. 11:35; Rev. 21:4).
8. He was sold for thirty pieces of silver, yet redeems the world (Mt. 26:15; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19).
9. He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and yet is the Good Shepherd (Isa. 53:7; Jn. 10:11).
10. He was put to death, yet raises the dead (Jn. 19:33).

Paradoxes General

1. Of finding one's life, yet eventually losing it Matt. 10:39; John 12:25
 2. Of losing one's life, yet eventually finding it Matt. 10:39
 3. Of being unknown, yet being well known 2 Cor. 6:9
 4. Of dying, yet possessing life 2 Cor. 6:9
 5. Of dying, yet being able to give life John 12:24
 6. Of being sorrowful, yet always rejoicing 2 Cor. 6:10
 7. Of being poor, yet making many rich 2 Cor. 6:10
 8. Of having nothing, yet possessing all things 2 Cor. 6:10
 9. Of hearing words that cannot be expressed 2 Cor. 12:4
 10. Of being strong when one is weak 2 Cor. 12:10-13
 11. Of knowing the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge Eph. 3:19
 12. Of seeing the unseen 2 Cor. 4:18
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John MacArthur - The divine paradox

God is our strength. He is our resource. We must know that divine energy gives us victory. But Ephesians 6 indicates that we have a part in the battle: "Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (v. 11). That is the divine paradox: The strength is God's, but the commitment must be ours. The same kind of paradox is seen in salvation: We are saved because we are chosen by God, yet we must believe through faith. The paradox is seen in the Christian life: The apostle Paul said, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2:20). This is my life, yet Christ lives in me. This divine paradox is seen in the revelation of God's Word to man: the book of Ephesians is written by Paul, but only through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. You were saved by God's sovereignty and grace alone, yet you committed yourself to Christ. You must

live the Christian life with diligence and commitment, yet that is possible only through God's power. So we see that we are strong in the Lord and the power of His might, yet we must appropriate the resources. Oliver Cromwell displayed great theology when he said, "Trust in God and keep your powder (The Believer's Armor - Ephesians 6:10-24)

Alexander Maclaren - 'The Prince of Life' Acts 3:14-15

THIS early sermon of Peter's, to the people, is marked by a comparative absence of the highest view of Christ's person and work. It is open to us to take one of two explanations of that fact. We may either say that the Apostle was but learning the full significance of the marvellous events that had passed so recently, or we may say that he suited his words to his audience, and did not declare all that he knew.

At the same time, we should not overlook the significance of the Christology which it does contain. 'His child Jesus' is really a translation of Isaiah's 'Servant of the Lord.' 'The Holy One and the Just' is a distinct assertion of Jesus' perfect, sinless manhood, and 'the Prince of Life' plainly asserts Jesus to be the Lord and Source of it.

Notice, too, the pathetic 'denied': was Peter thinking of the shameful hour in his own experience? It is a glimpse into the depth of his penitence, and the tenderness with others' sins which it had given him, that he twice uses the word here, as if he had said 'You have done no more than I did myself. It is not for me to heap reproaches on you. We have been alike in sin—and I can preach forgiveness to you sinners, because I have received it for myself.'

Notice, too, the manifold antitheses of the words. Barabbas is set against Christ; the Holy One and the Just against a robber, the Prince of Life against a murderer. 'You killed'—'the Prince of Life.' 'You killed'—'God raised.'

There are here three paradoxes, three strange and contradictory things: the paradoxes of man's perverted and fatal choice, of man's hate bringing death to the Lord of life, and of God's love and power causing life to come by death.

I. The Paradox Of Man's Fatal Choice.

There occurs often in history a kind of irony in which the whole tendency of a time or of a conflict is summed up in a single act, and certainly the fact which is referred to here is one of these. Let us put it as it would have seemed to an onlooker then, leaving out for the moment any loftier meaning which may attach to it.

Peter's words here, thus boldly addressed to the people, are a strong testimony to the impression which the character of Christ had made on His contemporaries. 'The Holy One and the Just' implies moral perfection. The whole narrative of the Crucifixion brings out that impression. Pilate's wife speaks with awe of 'that just person.' 'Which of you convinceth me of sin?' 'If I have done evil, bear witness of the evil.' 'I find no fault in Him.' We may take it for granted that the impression Jesus made among His contemporaries was, at the lowest, that He was a pure and good man.

The nation had to choose one of two. Jesus was the one; who was the other? A man half brigand, half rebel, who had raised some petty revolt against Rome, more as a pretext for robbery and crime than from patriotism, and whose hands reeked with blood. And this was the nation's hero!

The juxtaposition throws a strong light on the people's motive for rejecting Jesus. The rulers may have condemned Him for blasphemy, but the people had a more practical reason, and in it no doubt the rulers shared. It was not because He claimed to be the Messiah that they gave Him up to Pilate, but because He would not meet their notions of what the Messiah should be and do. If He had called them to arms, not a man of them would have betrayed Him to Pilate, but all, or the more daring of them, would have rallied to His standard. Their hate was the measure of their deep disappointment with His course. If instead of showing love and meekness, He had blown up the coals of religious hatred; if instead of going about doing good, He had mustered the men of lawless Galilee for a revolt, would these fawning hypocrites have dragged him to Pilate on the charge of forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, and of claiming to be a King? Why, there was not one of them but would have been glad to murder every tax-gatherer in Palestine, not one of them but bore inextinguishable in his inmost heart the faith in 'one Christ a King.' And if that meek and silent martyr had only lifted His finger, He might have had legions of His accusers at His back, ready to sweep Pilate and his soldiers out of Jerusalem. They saw Christ's goodness and holiness. It did not attract them. They wanted a Messiah who would bring them outward freedom by the use of outward weapons, and so they all shouted 'Not this man but Barabbas!' The whole history of the nation was condensed in that one cry—their untamable obstinacy, their blindness to the light of God, their fierce grasp of the promises which they did not understand, their hard worldliness, their cruel patriotism, their unquenchable hatred of their oppressors, which was only equalled by their unquenchable hatred of those who showed them the only true way for deliverance.

And this strange paradox is not confined to these Jews. It is repeated wherever Christ is presented to men. We are told that all men naturally admire goodness, and so on. Men mostly know it when they see it, but I doubt whether they all either admire or like it. People generally had rather have something more outward and tangible. It is not spiritualising this incident, but only referring it to the

principle of which it is an illustration, to ask you to see in it the fatal choice of multitudes. Christ is set before us all, and His beauty is partially seen but is dimmed by externals. Men's desires are fixed on gross sensuous delights, or on success in business, or on intellectual eminence, or on some of the thousand other visible and temporal objects that outshine, to vulgar eyes, the less dazzling lustre of the things unseen. They appreciate these, and make heroes of the men who have won them. These are their ideals, but of Jesus they have little care.

And is it not true that all such competitors of His, when they lead men to prefer them to Him, are 'murderers,' in a sadder sense than Barabbas was?

Do they not slay the souls of their admirers? Is it not but too ghastly a reality that all who thus choose them draw down ruin on themselves and 'love death'?

This fatal paradox is being repeated every day in the lives of thousands. The crowds who yelled, 'Not this man but Barabbas!' were less guilty and less mad than those who to-day cry, 'Not Jesus but worldly wealth, or fleeting bodily delights, or gratified ambition!'

II. The Paradox Of Death's Seeming Conquest Over The Lord Of Life.

The word rendered 'Prince' means an originator, and hence a leader and hence a lord. Whether Peter had yet reached a conception of the divinity of Jesus or not, he had clearly reached a much higher one of Him than he had attained before His death. In some sense he was beginning to recognise that His relation to 'life' was loftier and more mysterious than that of other men. Was it His death only that thus elevated the disciples' thoughts of Jesus? Strange that if He died and there an end, such a result should have followed. One would have expected His death to have shattered their faith in Him, but somehow it strengthened their faith. Why did they not all continue to lament, as did the two of them on the road to Emmaus: 'We trusted that this had been He who should have redeemed Israel'—but now we trust no more, and our dreams are buried in His grave? Why did they not go back to Galilee and their nets? What raised their spirits, their courage, and increased their understanding of Him, and their faith in Him? How came His death to be the occasion of consolidating, not of shattering, their fellowship? How came Peter to be so sure that a man who had died was the 'Prince of Life'? The answer, the only one psychologically possible, is in what Peter here proclaims to unwilling ears, 'Whom God raised from the dead.'

The fact of the Resurrection sets the fact of the Death in another light. Meditating on these twin facts, the Death and Resurrection of Jesus, we hear Himself speaking as He did to John in Patmos: 'I am the Living One who became dead, and lo, I am alive for evermore!'

If we try to listen with the ears of these first hearers of Peter's words, we shall better appreciate his daring paradox. Think of the tremendous audacity of the claim which they make, that Jesus should be the 'Prince of Life,' and of the strange contradiction to it which the fact that they 'killed' Him seems to give. How could death have power over the Prince of Life? That sounds as if, indeed, the 'sun were turned into darkness,' or as if fire became ice. That brief clause 'ye killed the Prince of Life' must have seemed sheer absurdity to the hearers whose hands were still red with the blood of Jesus.

But there is another paradox here. It was strange that death should be able to invade that Life, but it is no less strange that men should be able to inflict it. But we must not forget that Jesus died, not because men slew Him, but because He willed to die. The whole of the narratives of the Crucifixion in the Gospels avoid using the word 'death.' Such expressions as He 'gave up the ghost,' or the like, are used, implying what is elsewhere distinctly asserted, that His death was His offering of Himself, the result of His own volition, not of exhaustion or of torture. Thus, even in dying, He showed Himself the Lord of Life and the Master of Death. Men indeed fastened Jesus to the Cross, but He died, not because He was so fastened, but because He willed to 'make His soul an offering for sin.' Bound as it were to a rock in the midst of the ocean, He, of His own will, and at His own time, bowed His head, and let the waves of the sea of death roll over it.

III. The Triumphant Divine Paradox Of Life Given And Death Conquered Through A Death.

Jesus is 'Prince' in the sense of being source of life to mankind, just because He died. His death is the death of Death. His apparent defeat is His real victory. By His death He takes away our sins. By His death He abolishes death.

The physical fact remains, but all else which makes the 'sting of death' to men is gone. It is no more a solitude, for He has died, and thereby He becomes a companion in that hour to every lover of His. Its darkness changes into light to those who, by 'following Him,' have, even there, 'the light of life.' This Samson carried away the gates of the prison on His own strong shoulders when He came forth from it. It is His to say, 'O death! I will be thy plague.'

By His death He diffuses life.

'The Spirit was not given' till Jesus was 'glorified,' which glorification is John's profound synonym for His crucifixion. When the alabaster box of His pure body was broken, the whole house of humanity was filled with the odour of the ointment.

So the great paradox becomes a blessed truth, that man's deepest sin works out God's highest act of Love and Pardon.

Miles Stanford - The **divine paradox** is that while you concentrate upon the Lord Jesus, upon the life, the Spirit initially concentrates upon the death as the foundation for that resurrection life. The more the old nature is given over to death, the more the new nature is given over to life, to growth. Understanding the outworking of this principle does not make it any less difficult; however it does give you rest, peace, and joy. Thus you are able to glorify God in the fire as well as in the feast.

"If we have become united with the likeness of his death, we shall be also ... of his resurrection" (Rom. 6:5). Not one thing without the other; not life in union with the Lord Jesus without first the likeness of His death; not death with Him without the certainty of sharing His resurrection life.

Many try to draw upon the life of the living Lord without understanding first the vital union with the likeness of His death. Not the actual nailing on the Cross of the body, but the likeness of that death in its separating power - its vital severance between the old man and the new. There must be the uniting with Him in this likeness of His death, ere there can be room for the blessed work in us of His resurrection life.

Ever paradoxically, our Father uses our negatives to bring forth His positives. Our sin meant death for His Son, that we might have life (John 3:16). He was made to be our sin on the Cross, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21). "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid!" (Rom. 6:1, 2). God's "all things" working together for our good are in His hands, not ours! He is our Sovereign, we are His subjects. We cannot escape from His eternal love—"the Lord corrects and disciplines every one whom He loves" (Heb. 12:6, Amp.).

God works by paradox. Success comes via failure; life springs out of death and so on. The only element in the believer's life that crumbles is that which has to go anyway—the new life can never be harmed or affected. This disintegration is something the believer cannot enter into nor engineer on his own—self will never cast out self. He has to be led into it by the mercy of the Holy Spirit—into failure, abject and total. "For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh" (II Cor. 4:11). So often the means utilized by the Spirit is an unsaved mate, or even a saved one! Or poor health; yes, and good health too! A thousand and one things are used by Him—in fact, everything (Rom. 8:28, 29), to bring out the worst in us, ultimately enabling us to see that the Christian life has to be "not I, but Christ" (Gal. 2:20). People, circumstances, etc. are never the cause of failure. Self's reaction to them is the cause and the one problem to be dealt with.

The Word presents an interesting paradox concerning this rest. "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest" (Heb. 4:9–11). It is certain that there is no rest of faith as long as we struggle to "produce." And the hungry heart will not cease its striving until the truth of the finished work is seen and counted upon. This is the principle of rest, by which we were born in Him, and by which we grow in Him.

The actual "labor" mentioned in verse 11 has to do with believing. It is quite an exercise to reckon that we died unto sin and self, when we are keenly aware of their presence and manifestation in our life. It is also "labor" to believe we are new creations in Christ, when we are so definitely alive to the old man. The earlier reckoning, concerning our assurance of salvation and security in Christ, is preparation for the later reckoning in regard to identification.

Ever The Cross

It is time that we share the answer to your dilemma as to why your faith toward the Son has only seemed to take you farther away from Him. It is because of your Father's ongoing paradox: As you "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14), He takes you there by way of the Cross!

The Way Up Is Down

"But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ" (Phil. 3:7).

"Whosoever will lose his life for My sake, the same shall save it" (Lk. 9:24). Once we learn this great paradox of the Lord, all will be gain, our good, and His glory.

"Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8). 'Unto me, who am less than the least.' In spiritual learning we take degrees downward, not upward, as in ordinary universities. It is a great temptation to those who serve to be arriving at something above the common standard, but God

gives out His best work to 'less than the least.' His service wants depth, not height." -C.A.C.

"The test of genuine revelation is as to whether the one concerned is manifestly well crucified to a desire for power, position, influence. Can that one be resisted, assailed, thwarted, rejected, without in some form seeking to come out even or on top? An element of personal domination or self-vindication will spoil the outreach and discredit the servant. Oh, the peril of getting hold of Divine Truth in order to use it!" -T. A-S.

"We are wounded in order that we may learn from the great Physician how to bind up wounds and give aid. The Father visits us with trials in order to teach us to carry the burdens of others. We ourselves must first go to school before we can be teachers of others."

"Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you" (John 15:16).

The Cross For Self

"I have been crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2:20, ASV).

The Cross is the height of paradox; it is at once God's greatest agony, and His eternal glory. For the growing believer it means daily crucifixion, and at the same time freedom from the penalty and the power of sin and self. "But may it never be mine to boast of anything but the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world!" (Gal. 6:14, Wms.).

"We need to enter deeply into the truth that Christ the Beloved Son of the Father could not return to the glory of Heaven until He had first given Himself over to death. As this great principle opens up to us, it will help us to understand how in our life, and in our fellowship with the Lord Jesus, it is impossible for us to share the fulness of His life until we have first in very deed surrendered ourselves every day as having died to sin and the world."

"Many believers appear to think that when once they have claimed Christ's death in the fellowship of the Cross, and have counted themselves crucified with Him, they may now consider it as past and done with. They do not as yet understand that it is in the crucified Christ, and in the fellowship of His death, that they are to abide daily and unceasingly. The fellowship of the Cross is to be the life of a daily walk—His taking the form of a servant, His humbling Himself and becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross; this mind that was in the Lord Jesus is to be the disposition that marks our daily life."

"Have this mind [attitude] in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5, ASV).

Bill Hull - GAINING YOUR SOUL

Life is full of paradoxes, and I have found that golf is one of them. In football or basketball, anger and adrenaline can improve your game. But it doesn't work that way with golf. The paradox is if you want to hit the ball further, you have to swing easy and smooth. If you want the ball to go left, hit it to the right. If you want it to go right, hit it to the left.

God has created a paradox that is counterintuitive to the human condition. It has to do with gaining our souls or, to put it another way, finding everything we really want.

God's Paradox

If you want to save your life, to put your agenda first and control conditions and results, then you will lose your life. Gaining and losing in this context is about the basic choice of salvation. Notice that Jesus defines salvation not in terms of doctrine but in terms of action. This is because faith is action based on belief. So belief as defined by Jesus is following, self-denial, taking up our cross daily, and obeying him. This does not violate contemporary concepts of grace; it simply defines the nature of faith.

Jesus' statement is clear, "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it" (Luke 9:24). The most natural impulse is to set your goal, develop a plan, and go after it. This, however, will backfire because if we insist on directing our own lives, we will never enter into the joy and fulfillment of God's dream for us. It is clearly stated that God has a dream for us that makes our dreams ho-hum and drab. "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph. 2:10).

The reason for following rather than leading is that Jesus knows where we need to go. Just as he promised to prepare a place in heaven for us (John 14:1-3), he has prepared a life for us right now that is full of meaning and purpose. When we try to control it, we do not have enough wisdom or knowledge to find that ministry "sweet spot."

Hold your life loosely. Forget yourself, follow him, and let him take you where you need to go. Lose yourself in the mission; that is the joyful wonderland of his plan for every follower. If you have plans and strategies that haven't worked and show no sign of God's blessing, then retreat to the surety of his leadership. I often pray, "Lord I am your servant. I will follow you even if it is into apparent failure. I have no rights to success as I define it or as the church defines it or as my culture defines it. I am only interested in pleasing you and being successful as you define it."

You might protest that this seems like abdication of responsibility, but I don't agree. The first responsibility of a servant is to follow and to do his master's will. Jesus tells me to lose my life in the mission, to relinquish control of my life to him. When I do this, and only when I do this, will I find all that I have ever wanted. The true rewards are in finding my life.

Robert Neighbour - III. GIDEON'S CONFESSION OF WEAKNESS (Judg. 6:15, 16)

1. Gideon's confession. We have a second question from Gideon's lips. Once more he shows great emotion. He says, "O my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house."

What a contrast—The angel had called Gideon a mighty man of valor. Gideon calls himself, the least of his father's house. It is quite possible that both were correct, and that we have before us one of **God's paradoxes**. Is it not true that when we are weak, then we are strong?

Moses was a great man, trained in all the wisdom and skill of the Egyptians, and yet Moses said to the Lord, "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the Children of Israel out of Egypt?"

If we err, let it be on the Gideon and Moses side of boasting. We should not think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think.

2. God's promise. In response to Gideon's confession of weakness, the Lord said, "I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man."

"If God be for us, who can be against us?" When God links His omnipotency to our impotency, and His might is joined with our weakness, we have nothing to fear.

Christ was the Lamb of God, and the shepherds were seeking for the Heavenly Lamb. We know that Christ was announced, in after years, by John the Baptist as, "The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." He, then, who was Shepherd, was also Lamb.

This is one of God's paradoxes; the Shepherd of the sheep, went like a lamb to the slaughter; and the Shepherd was like a sheep standing dumb before His shearers.

Thus, the great Bible doctrine of substitution is set forth in striking symbolism. He who was Shepherd, becomes Lamb. He who was the Shepherd seeking the sheep which was lost, becomes the Lamb "lost" for us; bearing our sins; while the "shepherds of the country" came seeking Him.

From Neighbour's "Gems of Gold"

"Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone." (John 12:24.)

When do I live? 'Tis when I die,
The life once lived I mortify,
'Tis then I live;
New life in me, the Lord doth give.
When am I strong? 'Tis when I'm weak,
And God my native power doth break,
'Tis then I'm strong;
'Tis then God's strength becomes my song.
When am I wise? 'Tis when a fool,
Willing to suffer ridicule,
'Tis then I'm wise
With wisdom given from the skies.

GOD'S paradoxes startle at the first, and yet how true they are. It was the Lord who said, "Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone." And yet that very truth is seen everywhere. Life springing out of death is a common sight. We too must die, die to self and to sin, that we may truly live to God.

May we become strong by becoming weak? Paul said, "When I am weak, then am I strong." In our weakness He becomes our strength.

Am I wise when I become a fool? Yes, that is also true. The wisdom of the world is foolishness with God. If we would truly be wise, we must renounce the wisdom which knows not God. So it is along many lines. The way to get up is down, for, when we humble ourselves, He will exalt us. The way to be rich, is to become poor. To some who were rich, Christ said, "Thou knowest not that thou art poor." Then, to some who were poor in this world, He said, "But ye are rich."

When lifted up? 'Tis when abased,

And for Him humbled and disgraced,
Then God lifts up,
Exalts me, till with Him I sup.
When am I rich? 'Tis when I'm poor.
When all earth's riches I abjure,
'Tis then I'm rich;
Earth now my soul can ne'er bewitch.

Robert Neighbour - Another thing—we need to know God's paradoxes though poor, we are rich, etc.

They startle at the first, and yet how true they are! It was the Lord who said, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone." And yet that very truth is seen everywhere. Life out of death, is a common sight. We too must die, to self and to sin, that we may truly live to God.

How can we become strong, by becoming weak? Paul said, "When I am weak, then am I strong." In our weakness He becomes our strength.

And am I wise when I become a fool? Yes, that is also true. The wisdom of the world is foolishness with God: and the Cross is foolishness to the unbeliever. If we would truly be wise, we must renounce that wisdom which knows not God. And, so it is along many lines. The way to get up, is to get down, for, when we humble ourselves He will exalt us. The way to be rich is to become poor. To some who were rich, Christ said, "Thou knowest not that thou art * * * poor." Then, to some who were poor in this world, He said, "But ye are rich."

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With wisdom giv'n from the skies.

When lifted up? 'Tis when abased,
And for Him humbled and disgraced,
That God lifts me up,
Exalts me, as with Him I sup.

When am I rich? 'Tis when I'm poor,
When all my riches I abjure,
'Tis then I'm rich,
How rich is He whom God makes rich!

R P Wasnak - We can—by quietly smiling at God's paradox as we prepare for the greatest paradox of all: God coming to us in our own flesh, in the flesh of a tiny baby in the little town of Bethlehem.

Oswald Chambers - (from Conformed to His Image) - Divine Paradox

There is probably no more prominent feature in Bible revelation than that of paradox. In Revelation 5 the apostle John records that in his vision he was told "the Lion of the tribe of Judah . . . hath prevailed to open the book"—and he says, "lo, in the midst of the throne . . . stood a Lamb"! We find a paradox of a similar nature in the Book of Isaiah. The prophet has been looking for some great conquering army of the Lord, and instead he sees a lonely Figure, "travelling in the greatness of his strength." If you take all the manifestations of God in the Old Testament you find them a mass of contradictions: now God is pictured as a Man, now as a Woman, now as a lonely Hero, now as a suffering Servant, and until we come to the revelation in the New Testament these conflicting characteristics but add confusion to our conception of God. But immediately we see Jesus Christ, we find all the apparent contradictions blended in one unique Person.

Drummond in his Natural Law in the Spiritual World, surely makes a fundamental blunder by that very statement, and surely the contention in Butler's Analogy* is right—that as there is a law in the natural world so there is also a law in the spiritual world, but that

they are not the same laws, the one is the complement of the other. Unless this is born in mind by the student of Scripture, and he learns to rely on the Holy Spirit to interpret the spiritual law as he relies on his own spirit to interpret the natural law, he will not only end in confusion, but will be in danger of disparaging the spiritual law in the Bible universe in favour of the natural law in the common-sense universe.

“And I saw in the right hand of Him that sat on the throne a book . . . sealed with seven seals” (Revelation 5:1). I am considering the Book in one aspect only, viz., as containing a knowledge of the future, an understanding of the Providence of God in the present, together with a grasp of the past. The deepest clamour of a man’s nature once he is awake is to know the “whence” and “whither” of life—“Whence came I?” “Why am I here?” “Where am I going?” In all ages men have tried to pry into the secrets of the future, astrologers, necromancers, spiritualists, or whatever name you may call them by, have all tried to open the Book, but without success, because it is a sealed Book. “I wept much,” says John, “because no one was found worthy to open the book, or to look thereon” (rv).

Because of the sealed character of the Book men become indifferent and cease to be exercised over the “whence” and “whither” of human destiny; they take no interest in Bible revelation, and are amused at our earnest solicitation on their behalf—“It is all about something we cannot know, and there is no one who can tell us.” Others say, “There is nothing to know”; not, “We cannot know,” but “There is nothing to know, a man lives his life, then dies, and that is all there is.” The Psalmist refers to such men when he says, “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.” There are others whose sensitive spirit gives them an implicit sense that there is more than this life; there are hidden deeps in their heart that human life and its friendships can never satisfy. The scenes of earth, its sunsets and sunrises, its “huge and thoughtful nights” all awaken an elemental sadness which makes them wonder why they were born, and they feel keenly because the Book is sealed and there is no one able to open it.

But would to God all men knew that there is Someone who is worthy to open the Book!

And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof. (Revelation 5:5)

Who is this Worthy One? If one may say it with reverence, realising the limitation of language, God Himself had to be proved Worthy to open the Book. In the Person of Jesus Christ God became Man, He trod this earth with naked feet, and wrought with human hands the creed of creeds In loveliness and perfect deeds.

By His holy life, by His moral integrity and supreme spiritual greatness, Jesus Christ proved that He was worthy to open the Book. The Book can be opened by only one Hand, the pierced hand of the Worthy One, our Saviour Jesus Christ.

The childish idea that because God is great he can do anything, good or bad, right or wrong, and we must say nothing, is erroneous. The meaning of moral worth is that certain things are impossible to it: it is “impossible for God to lie”; it is impossible for Jesus Christ to contradict His own Holiness or to become other than He is. The profound truth for us is that Jesus Christ is the Worthy One not because He was God Incarnate, but because He was God Incarnate on the human plane. “Being made in the likeness of men” (rv) He accepted our limitations and lived on this earth a life of perfect holiness. Napoleon said of Jesus Christ that He had succeeded in making of every human soul an appendage of His own—why? Because He had the genius of holiness. There have been great military geniuses, intellectual giants, geniuses of statesmen, but these only exercise influence over a limited number of men; Jesus Christ exercises unlimited sway over all men because He is the altogether Worthy One.

And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne . . . stood a Lamb as it had been slain. (Revelation 5:6)

Jesus Christ is the supreme Sacrifice for the sin of the world; He is “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!” How the Death of Jesus looms all through the Bible! It is through His death that we are made partakers of His life and can have gifted to us a pure heart, which He says is the condition for seeing God.

“Having . . . seven eyes.” The Lamb is not only the supreme Sacrifice for man’s sin, He is the Searcher of hearts†††††, searching to the inmost recesses of mind and motive. It is not a curious searching, not an uncanny searching, but the deep wholesome searching the Holy Spirit gives in order to convict men of their sin and need of a Saviour; then when they come to the Cross, and through it accept deliverance from sin, Jesus Christ becomes the Sovereign of their lives, they love Him personally and passionately beyond all other loves of earth.

And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him that sat upon the throne. (Revelation 5:7)

Jesus Christ and He alone is able to satisfy the craving of the human heart to know the “whence” and “whither” of life. He enables men to understand that they have come into this life from a deep purpose in the heart of God; that the one thing they are here for is to get readjusted to God and become His lovers. And whither are we going? We are going to where the Book of Life is opened, and we enter into an effulgence of glory (rv) we can only conceive of now at rare moments.

In the days of His flesh Jesus Christ exhibited this Divine paradox of the Lion and the Lamb. He was the Lion in majesty, rebuking the winds†† and demons††: He was the Lamb in meekness, “who, when He was reviled, reviled not again.” He was the Lion in power, raising the dead†††: He was the Lamb in patience—who was “brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth.” He was the Lion in authority, “Ye have heard that it hath been said, . . . but I say unto you . . .”: He was the Lamb in gentleness, “Suffer the little children to come unto Me. . . . And He took them up in His arms, put His hands upon them, and blessed them.”

In our personal lives Jesus Christ proves Himself to be all this—He is the Lamb to expiate our sins, to lift us out of condemnation and plant within us His own heredity of holiness: He is the Lion to rule over us, so that we gladly say, “the government [of this life] shall be upon His shoulder.” And what is true in individual life is to be true also in the universe at large. The time is coming when the Lion of the Tribe of Judah shall reign, and when “the kingdoms of this world” shall become “the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ.”

One remaining paradox—In Revelation 6:16 “the wrath of the Lamb” is mentioned. We know what the wrath of a lion is like—but the wrath of the Lamb!—it is beyond our conception. All one can say about it is that the wrath of God is the terrible obverse side of the love of God.

Wayne Grudem - Aging Inside-Out -- The Christian paradox is that growing older means getting better

I tried to hide my slight disappointment as I read the Bible verse inscribed on the handwritten birthday card. “Though our outer nature is wasting away . . .,” it began.

That’s true enough, I thought, but a rather tasteless choice of Bible verse for a birthday greeting—and from close friends at that. Perhaps it was an appropriate card for someone older—but for me, at 38?

Then I read the whole verse: “Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day” (2 Cor. 4:16).

Soon I began to think that this verse, far from being tasteless, might be the best birthday greeting in the entire Bible. For this verse gives God’s perspective on aging.

It reminds us that God is pleased to prepare us for glory by gradually unpreparing us for this life. We all age, but not with the despair of the world, not with a denial of the process (even to ourselves), not with a frantic effort to preserve our youth and beauty at any cost. Rather, we will age with the deep peace and joy that comes from knowing that growing old is God’s wise plan for our sanctification.

If in our hearts at each birthday there is renewal of fellowship with God, growth in our Christian life, and spiritual joy and delight, praise and thanksgiving, then we are growing stronger (in the spiritual sense that really counts), even while we grow weaker (in our physical bodies).

In fact, there is a surprising paradox: As we become more and more unprepared for this life, we become better and better prepared to minister effectively in this life. “We have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us” (2 Cor. 4:7). It is not strength that empowers Paul’s mighty ministry, but weakness—“always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies” (2 Cor. 4:10). So physical weakness is not cause for discouragement. Paul even boasts of his weaknesses, “that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Cor. 12:9). In this way, “we do not lose heart” (2 Cor. 4:16).

Another surprising paradox is seen in Paul’s life: Difficulties may become heavier, but they seem lighter. The list of Paul’s afflictions is amazing—beatings, floggings, shipwrecks, dangers of all sorts (2 Cor. 11:24–29)—yet he calls all of it “the momentary lightness of our affliction” (2 Cor. 4:17).

What is the secret to this perspective on greater weakness and hardship? It is seen in verse 18 (where the connection is probably best translated by the NASB). There Paul says that “this slight, momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison while [NASB] we are looking not to things that are seen but to things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal” (2 Cor. 4:17–18).

This is the Christian form of “what you see is what you get.” The renewal of our inner nature, the inner strengthening in spite of outward weakening, comes “while we are looking . . . to the things that are unseen.” We gain this spiritual growth as we fix our minds on the surpassing importance of the unseen spiritual world, the home we have with God “eternal in the heavens” (2 Cor. 5:1). Then we will be confident that “though our outer nature is wasting away” with the passing of each birthday, that does not really matter. What is far more important—at age 38, or 78, or 98—is that “our inner nature is being renewed every day.”

J Hampton Keathley III - Principle: Our liberty in Christ and the abundant grace that is ours in Him must never be used as an

excuse to do as we please and in the process hurt others or ignore our calling and obligations to God and men (cf. Rom. 5-6; Tit. 2:11-14). Freedom in Christ never means freedom from the presence and struggle with the flesh or indwelling sin. It means the provision of the Spirit as God's means of victory (5:16-17). So our salvation and freedom in Christ is never to be considered as freedom from servanthood or from service and loving responsibilities to others (Rom. 14-15).

Here lies a great Christian paradox. It is interesting that Paul, having warned these Christians against becoming slaves again to the Law and the flesh, now urges them to become servants, slaves to one another (5:13) which includes, of course, being bond slaves to God (1 Cor. 6:19; Rom. 12:1). This paradox is tremendously instructive:

- * Slavery to one another and to God is nothing at all like slavery to the flesh or to the Law.
- * Slavery to flesh and the Law result in death, misery, and frustration. It causes us to be consumed, torn apart by one another.
- * On the other hand, slavery to God and one another results in true freedom and maximum blessing.
- * Slavery to sin is involuntary and never neutral. It is degenerative and destructive both to self and to others.
- * Slavery to the Law is voluntary, it is man choosing to save himself. As such it is foolish, burdensome, but also completely helpless to change our lives from the inside where it really counts.
- * Slavery to God and to one another is voluntary. But it is a product of love and the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, it becomes a source of glory to God, and joy, peace, and blessing to self and to others. '(One Another' Commands of Scripture)

John Stott makes the following comments about the living sacrifice:

It is not to be offered in the temple courts or in the church building, but rather in home life and in the marketplace. It is the presentation of our bodies to God. This blunt reference to our bodies was calculated to shock some of Paul's Greek readers. Brought up on Platonic thought, they will have regarded the body as an embarrassing encumbrance.... Still today some Christians feel self-conscious about their bodies. The traditional evangelical invitation is that we give our "hearts" to God, not our "bodies." ... But Paul is clear that the presentation of our bodies is our spiritual act of worship. **It is a significant Christian paradox.** No worship is pleasing to God which is purely inward, abstract and mystical; it must express itself in concrete acts of service performed by our bodies. (Romans [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994], pp. 321–22)

The sentiment itself is one of the many expressions of the great Christian paradox—that the kingdom of God is accessible, not to men of great intellectual power, as such, but to men of childlike hearts. H. ALLON, Penny Pulpit,

Robert Kysar - Paradox as a Theological Method

The relationship among the various christological categories employed by the fourth evangelist implies a theological method or a way of thinking theologically. In this case we are interested in the way the evangelist uses paradox as a means of elucidating doctrine. We will delay discussion of other theological themes in John until we have had a chance to understand how the evangelist uses paradox. Understanding that way of thinking, that manner of posing affirmations about the divine, will assist us in dealing with some of the other theological themes.

John's Christology is paradoxical. Paradox occurs when two or more apparently contradictory truth statements are maintained in spite of their opposition to one another. A classical Christian paradox is that believers are at the same time both sinners and saints.

Paradoxical Theology

The Gospel of John seems to say that truth is found not in one view but in several held together in tension with one another. Christ holds together the divine and the human without compromise (1:14), and claims to be one with God while still subservient to God (for example, 10:30, 38; and 14:28). The multiplicity of Johannine Christologies is indicative of the paradoxical or many-faceted nature of Johannine theology. Out of this paradoxical Christology, the fourth evangelist presents several sides to a number of other theological ideas. Below we will see how paradoxical tension is present in other theological themes, such as eschatology and freedom and determination.

John's paradoxical method of thinking theologically is revealed in general themes, but we also encounter paradox or double-sidedness in John's use of words with multiple meanings. This point anticipates what we should include in the discussion of Johannine language below, but merits consideration here. Sometimes paradoxical theological thought is encapsulated into single words or phrases. If you recognize the possibility that John's so-called double entendre is deliberate, then it illustrates the paradoxical quality we have been discussing. That is to say, if in an instance of multiple meanings in the same word or phrase all the meanings make equal sense in terms of the evangelist's style and thought, then paradox is packed into a single word or phrase.

John 3 contains several specimens of paradox in single words or phrases. The best known is Greek word *anōthen* in verses 3 and 7, which means at least three different things: Born "again," born "from above," and born "from the beginning." The word translated "wind" (*pneuma*—vv. 5, 6, 8) can mean both spirit and breath. "Lifted up" (*hupsoō*—v. 14) refers to both the enthronement of a king

and a crucifixion. In each of these cases, it is easy to argue that both or all the meanings are proper and need to be included in the reading of this passage.

An easy example of this is the use of “lifted up” (*hupsōō*) in 3:14. In chapter 5, we will discuss the idea that for John Christ’s death is also his enthronement as king. Moreover, Pilate’s placard on the cross is ironically true. So, the fourth evangelist invites us to think of the death of God’s beloved child as the means by which Christ takes his role as ruler and sovereign in the world. The revelation of Christ’s kingship is achieved in an entirely unexpected way in which the opposite of what appears to be the case (Jesus is executed as a common criminal) is actually true. This example shows that paradox is closely related to irony. When understood in the context of theological thought, the literary device of irony (see chapter 1) becomes a means of articulating paradoxical truth.

Interpreters are often inclined to seek a resolution to the paradoxical expressions in the fourth Gospel. That is, they will sometimes conclude that one or the other of two truth statements set in paradoxical tension with one another is actually what the evangelist “intended.” Then they will interpret the opposing idea in terms of the one they select as the “true” statement. For instance, in the paradox of the incarnation (1:14), scholars have argued how one ought to deal with the relations between the terms flesh (*sarx*) and glory (*doxa*). Christ cannot be both, so which is the predominant feature of Jesus’ character, divine glory or human flesh? For some the flesh is only a disguise; for others Jesus is genuinely human and is given glory only in the course of his ministry. Perhaps we should not always assume the evangelist actually meant one of the two possible meanings and not the other. Instead we may need to let John be John and think in paradoxical terms. We will find Johannine theology even richer and more complicated than we first thought.

Homiletical Implications of Paradoxical Theology

Preaching the paradoxes of John makes a significant contribution to the life of any congregation. The church today, I believe, needs to take paradox more seriously, because we would profit from understanding that knowledge or truth is complex. Much to our dismay, there may not always be a single, simple answer. In our time, some try to reduce truth to easy singular, uncomplicated statements. Indeed, those churches that hold this view seem to be the ones growing the fastest. People yearn these days for simple truth, since our lives are so complex and absolutely nothing seems simple.

I think John invites us to take a more complicated view. Truth is many-sided, paradoxical, and evasive. While that may not be a popular view today—and certainly not one that solves our desire for certainty—it seems far more realistic. If modernity has taught us anything, it is that truth is never as simple as we would like it to be. Helping our congregations understand paradox and accept the fact that much of truth is paradoxical nurtures their readiness for what the future is likely to hold for North America in a postmodern age.

A Sermon Example

The fourth evangelist presents the many-sidedness of large theological themes in tiny word pictures. What follows is an effort to demonstrate the paradoxical quality of the cross. This is one part of a sermon on John 12:20–33, prepared for the Fifth Sunday of Lent, B. With its attention to verse 32, the goal of this movement of the sermon is to show that we can never fully understand the cross.

This passage is confusing enough already. Greeks come but Jesus doesn’t talk with them. When they appear he claims his “hour has come.” But something else is also puzzling. Jesus declares, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (v. 32). What do you suppose Jesus meant by this statement? What does it mean for him to be “lifted up?”

The meaning of the cross has always puzzled us. We know that something very significant happened in Jesus’ death. We know that his death brought us closer to God. Through his death we see God in an entirely new light. But how is it that his death accomplishes all this? Christian thinkers throughout the history of the church have pondered this question. And without any clear and conclusive answer. So, we are left adrift. Each of us tries as best we can to come to some conclusion about the cross.

The Gospel of John presents us with a very different picture of the meaning of Jesus’ death. At least it is different from other views in the New Testament. We cannot easily impose some of our preconceptions on John. There is little or nothing about the healing power of Jesus’ death. Very little about his death being a sacrifice for our sins. Instead, we have this strange saying about his being “lifted up.” John has used this expression quite deliberately, or so it would seem. On three different occasions in John, Jesus speaks of his death as a “lifting up.”

The Greek word that our text translates “lifted up” is an ambiguous one. It can indeed refer to a crucifixion. Lifting a victim up on a cross to leave him or her there to die. Yet, oddly enough, the word was also used of an enthronement of a king. Lifting one up to the position of king and ruler. We would say that the inauguration of a president is a lifting up. The candidate is installed as our leader.

So, which is it? Does Jesus mean by “lifted up” his crucifixion? Or, does he mean his enthronement as king of the universe? Or, could it be that John wants us to answer yes to both these possibilities? Could it be that Jesus’ crucifixion is his enthronement?

Ah, but that can't be, can it? How can an execution make one a ruler? That would be like saying the death penalty honors a person! As if death could exalt one. John is playing tricks with language here. The phrase "lifted up" tries to get us to imagine the unimaginable. Jesus becomes our King by dying on the cross! In a way we cannot imagine, God makes Christ our Ruler and Leader. What appears to be his death is actually his enthronement. The cross means something quite the opposite of what it seems to mean.

We finally have to say: We simply don't understand how this could be! We have to confess that this idea of the cross goes beyond our logic. Never can we say with absolute clarity exactly what the cross means. We can only say that it rescues us from our meaningless lives.

Sometimes the experiences that do not make sense rescue us. A friend of mine confessed to me that he was trapped in a meaningless life. Nothing made sense to him anymore. A pastor who had served the church for some ten years suddenly found his life empty and void of meaning. We talked, but I couldn't help him. Later, he was on the verge of resigning his position as pastor of a large congregation. Then something happened. The most beloved of the saints of his congregation was diagnosed with cancer. She was only thirty-five years old. The most devout and sincere Christian my pastor friend had ever known. But he joined his life with hers, and together they traveled the road to the woman's eventual death.

It made absolutely no sense whatsoever that this woman should suffer and die. Her agony and struggle were utterly meaningless. She died a painful and lingering death. Through her senseless suffering, however, my friend saw something more. He saw the dignity and worth of human life. He saw the way in which her love could not be smashed, even in the worst pains imaginable. He saw her spirit strengthen even as the end approached. As he finally said to me, "Her suffering and death seemed to open a window to truth for me." And in her death, my pastor friend found new life—new meaning and purpose.

"And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." (From "Preaching John")

God's Paradoxes

Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. —Matthew 16:25

Today's Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:7-18

The Bible tells us there is a wisdom that is foolish and a foolishness that is wise (1 Cor. 1:20-25).

There is a gain that is loss and a loss that is gain (Phil. 3:7-9).

And there is an exalted way that leads downward and a humble way that leads to exaltation (Phil. 2:5-11).

Statements like these seem to be contradictions, but they are actually paradoxes. A paradox is a statement that contains two truths, which at first glance seem to be incompatible.

A psychiatrist once unknowingly referred to one of God's paradoxes, remarking,

"The greatest secret of mental health comes down to us in the words, 'Whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will save it.'" He added, "**I forget who said that, but it is a great truth**"

Who said that? Our Lord Jesus Christ! He gave us that principle in Matthew 16:25. And the apostle Paul lived it out as he endured countless hardships for the benefit of others (2 Cor. 4:8-12). Yet Paul knew that even as his physical body was dying, his spirit was being renewed (v.16).

You cannot find your richest personal fulfillment until you sacrifice your time, strength, and resources to God's will.

"Lose your life" for Christ. Start really living!

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Take up thy cross and follow on,
Nor think till death to lay it down,
For only he who bears the cross
May hope to wear the glorious crown.
—Everest

Christ showed His love by dying for us;
we show our love by living for Him.
(by dying to self!)

Paradox

Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. —Luke 18:14

Today's Scripture: Luke 18:9-14

Luke 18 contains a startling paradox. The man who admitted he was wrong was declared right, while the one who claimed to be right was condemned as wrong (vv.9-14).

Jesus told this parable of the tax collector and the Pharisee to teach the true way of salvation to those “who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others” (v.9). He wanted them to see that they had a false righteousness like the Pharisee, who thanked God that he was “not like other men” (v.11).

What they needed was the attitude of the tax collector, who saw himself as a sinner. He realized that he had to rely solely on God's mercy and grace. Jesus said of him, “This man went down to his house justified rather than the other” (v.14).

Perhaps you've never considered this seeming paradox—how you as a sinner can be justified through faith. If you are still trying to save yourself, you stand condemned. But as soon as you admit that you are hopelessly lost and you place your trust in Christ, God will forgive you and declare you righteous (Rom. 10:13). It is through faith alone that anyone can be justified in the sight of God (Rom. 3:28; Eph. 2:8-10).

Think about the parable Jesus told. Are you like the Pharisee or the tax collector? Richard DeHaan [Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#)

Just as I am, without one plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bid'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!
—Elliott

We are saved by God's mercy, not by our merit.

G K Chesterton - The Paradoxes of Christianity

THE REAL TROUBLE with this world of ours is not that it is an unreasonable world, nor even that it is a reasonable one. The commonest kind of trouble is that it is nearly reasonable, but not quite. Life is not an illogicality; yet it is a trap for logicians. It looks just a little more mathematical and regular than it is; its exactitude is obvious, but its inexactitude is hidden; its wildness lies in wait. I give one coarse instance of what I mean. Suppose some mathematical creature from the moon were to reckon up the human body; he would at once see that the essential thing about it was that it was duplicate. A man is two men, he on the right exactly resembling him on the left. Having noted that there was an arm on the right and one on the left, a leg on the right and one on the left, he might go further and still find on each side the same number of fingers, the same number of toes, twin eyes, twin ears, twin nostrils, and even twin lobes of the brain. At last he would take it as a law; and then, where he found a heart on one side, would deduce that there was another heart on the other. And just then, where he most felt he was right, he would be wrong.

It is this silent swerving from accuracy by an inch that is the uncanny element in everything. It seems a sort of secret treason in the universe. An apple or an orange is round enough to get itself called round, and yet is not round after all. The earth itself is shaped like an orange in order to lure some simple astronomer into calling it a globe. A blade of grass is called after the blade of a sword, because it comes to a point; but it doesn't. Everywhere in things there is this element of the quiet and incalculable. It escapes the rationalists, but it never escapes till the last moment. From the grand curve of our earth it could easily be inferred that every inch of it was thus curved. It would seem rational that as a man has a brain on both sides, he should have a heart on both sides. Yet scientific men are still organizing expeditions to find the North Pole, because they are so fond of flat country. Scientific men are also still organizing expeditions to find a man's heart; and when they try to find it, they generally get on the wrong side of him.

Now, actual insight or inspiration is best tested by whether it guesses these hidden malformations or surprises. If our mathematician from the moon saw the two arms and the two ears, he might deduce the two shoulder-blades and the two halves of the brain. But if he guessed that the man's heart was in the right place, then I should call him something more than a mathematician. Now, this is exactly the claim which I have since come to propound for Christianity. Not merely that it deduces logical truths, but that when it suddenly becomes illogical, it has found, so to speak, an illogical truth. It not only goes right about things, but it goes wrong (if one may say so) exactly where the things go wrong. Its plan suits the secret irregularities, and expects the unexpected. It is simple about the simple truth; but it is stubborn about the subtle truth. It will admit that a man has two hands, it will not admit (though all the

Modernists wail to it) the obvious deduction that he has two hearts. It is my only purpose in this chapter to point this out; to show that whenever we feel there is something odd in Christian theology, we shall generally find that there is something odd in the truth.

I have alluded to an unmeaning phrase to the effect that such and such a creed cannot be believed in our age. Of course, anything can be believed in any age. But, oddly enough, there really is a sense in which a creed, if it is believed at all, can be believed more fixedly in a complex society than in a simple one. If a man finds Christianity true in Birmingham, he has actually clearer reasons for faith than if he had found it true in Mercia. For the more complicated seems the coincidence, the less it can be a coincidence. If snowflakes fell in the shape, say, of the heart of Midlothian, it might be an accident. But if snowflakes fell in the exact shape of the maze at Hampton Court, I think one might call it a miracle. It is exactly as of such a miracle that I have since come to feel of the philosophy of Christianity. The complication of our modern world proves the truth of the creed more perfectly than any of the plain problems of the ages of faith. It was in Notting Hill and Battersea that I began to see that Christianity was true. This is why the faith has that elaboration of doctrines and details which so much distresses those who admire Christianity without believing in it. When once one believes in a creed, one is proud of its complexity, as scientists are proud of the complexity of science. It shows how rich it is in discoveries. If it is right at all, it is a compliment to say that it's elaborately right. A stick might fit a hole or a stone a hollow by accident. But a key and a lock are both complex. And if a key fits a lock, you know it is the right key.

But this involved accuracy of the thing makes it very difficult to do what I now have to do, to describe this accumulation of truth. It is very hard for a man to defend anything of which he is entirely convinced. It is comparatively easy when he is only partially convinced. He is partially convinced because he has found this or that proof of the thing, and he can expound it. But a man is not really convinced of a philosophic theory when he finds that something proves it. And the more converging reasons he finds pointing to this conviction, the more bewildered he is if asked suddenly to sum them up. Thus, if one asked an ordinary intelligent man, on the spur of the moment, "Why do you prefer civilization to savagery?" he would look wildly round at object after object, and would only be able to answer vaguely, "Why, there is that bookcase . . . and the coals in the coal-scuttle . . . and pianos . . . and policemen." The whole case for civilization is that the case for it is complex. It has done so many things. But that very multiplicity of proof which ought to make reply overwhelming makes reply impossible.

There is, therefore, about all complete conviction a kind of huge helplessness. The belief is so big that it takes a long time to get it into action. And this hesitation chiefly arises, oddly enough, from an indifference about where one should begin. All roads lead to Rome; which is one reason why many people never get there. In the case of this defence of the Christian conviction I confess that I would as soon begin the argument with one thing as another; I would begin it with a turnip or a taximeter cab. But if I am to be at all careful about making my meaning clear, it will, I think, be wiser to continue the current arguments of the last chapter, which was concerned to urge the first of these mystical coincidences, or rather ratifications. All I had hitherto heard of Christian theology had alienated me from it. I was a pagan at the age of twelve, and a complete agnostic by the age of sixteen; and I cannot understand any one passing the age of seventeen without having asked himself so simple a question. I did, indeed, retain a cloudy reverence for a cosmic deity and a great historical interest in the Founder of Christianity. But I certainly regarded Him as a man; though perhaps I thought that, even in that point, He had an advantage over some of His modern critics. I read the scientific and skeptical literature of my time—all of it, at least, that I could find written in English and lying about; and I read nothing else; I mean I read nothing else on any other note of philosophy. The penny dreadfuls which I also read were indeed in a healthy and heroic tradition of Christianity; but I did not know this at the time. I never read a line of Christian apologetics. I read as little as I can of them now. It was Huxley and Herbert Spencer and Bradlaugh who brought me back to orthodox theology. They sowed in my mind my first wild doubts of doubt. Our grandmothers were quite right when they said that Tom Paine and the freethinkers unsettled the mind. They do. They unsettled mine horribly. The rationalist made me question whether reason was of any use whatever; and when I had finished Herbert Spencer I had got as far as doubting (for the first time) whether evolution had occurred at all. As I laid down the last of Colonel Ingersoll's atheistic lectures the dreadful thought broke across my mind, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." I was in a desperate way.

This odd effect of the great agnostics in arousing doubts deeper than their own might be illustrated in many ways. I take only one. As I read and re-read all the non-Christian or anti-Christian accounts of the faith, from Huxley to Bradlaugh, a slow and awful impression grew gradually but graphically upon my mind—the impression that Christianity must be a most extraordinary thing. For not only (as I understood) had Christianity the most flaming vices, but it had apparently a mystical talent for combining vices which seemed inconsistent with each other. It was attacked on all sides and for all contradictory reasons. No sooner had one rationalist demonstrated that it was too far to the east than another demonstrated with equal clearness that it was much too far to the west. No sooner had my indignation died down at its angular and aggressive squareness than I was called up again to notice and condemn its enervating and sensual roundness. In case any reader has not come across the thing I mean, I will give such instances as I remember at random of this self-contradiction in the skeptical attack. I give four or five of them; there are fifty more.

Thus, for instance, I was much moved by the eloquent attack on Christianity as a thing of inhuman gloom; for I thought (and still think) sincere pessimism the unpardonable sin. Insincere pessimism is a social accomplishment, rather agreeable than otherwise; and fortunately nearly all pessimism is insincere. But if Christianity was, as these people said, a thing purely pessimistic and

opposed to life, then I was quite prepared to blow up St. Paul's Cathedral. But the extraordinary thing is this. They did prove to me in Chapter I. (to my complete satisfaction) that Christianity was too pessimistic; and then, in Chapter II., they began to prove to me that it was a great deal too optimistic. One accusation against Christianity was that it prevented men, by morbid tears and terrors, from seeking joy and liberty in the bosom of Nature. But another accusation was that it comforted men with a fictitious providence, and put them in a pink-and-white nursery. One great agnostic asked why Nature was not beautiful enough, and why it was hard to be free. Another great agnostic objected that Christian optimism, "the garment of make-believe woven by pious hands," hid from us the fact that Nature was ugly, and that it was impossible to be free. One rationalist had hardly done calling Christianity a nightmare before another began to call it a fool's paradise. This puzzled me; the charges seemed inconsistent. Christianity could not at once be the black mask on a white world, and also the white mask on a black world. The state of the Christian could not be at once so comfortable that he was a fool to stand it. If it falsified human vision it must falsify it one way or another; it could not wear both green and rose-coloured spectacles. I rolled on my tongue with a terrible joy, as did all young men of that time, the taunts which Swinburne hurled at the dreariness of the creed—

Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean, the world has grown gray with Thy breath.

But when I read the same poet's accounts of paganism (as in "Atalanta"), I gathered that the world was, if possible, more gray before the Galilean breathed on it than afterwards. The poet maintained, indeed, in the abstract, that life itself was pitch dark. And yet, somehow, Christianity had darkened it. The very man who denounced Christianity for pessimism was himself a pessimist. I thought there must be something wrong. And it did for one wild moment cross my mind that, perhaps, those might not be the very best judges of the relation of religion to happiness who, by their own account, had neither one nor the other.

It must be understood that I did not conclude hastily that the accusations were false or the accusers fools. I simply deduced that Christianity must be something even weirder and wickeder than they made out. A thing might have these two opposite vices; but it must be a rather queer thing if it did. A man might be too fat in one place and too thin in another; but he would be an odd shape. At this point my thoughts were only of the odd shape of the Christian religion; I did not allege any odd shape in the rationalistic mind.

Here is another case of the same kind. I felt that a strong case against Christianity lay in the charge that there is something timid, monkish, and unmanly about all that is called "Christian," especially in its attitude towards resistance and fighting. The great skeptics of the nineteenth century were largely virile. Brad-laugh in an expansive way, Huxley, in a reticent way, were decidedly men. In comparison, it did seem tenable that there was something weak and over patient about Christian counsels. The Gospel paradox about the other cheek, the fact that priests never fought, a hundred things made plausible the accusation that Christianity was an attempt to make a man too like a sheep. I read it and believed it, and if I had read nothing different, I should have gone on believing it. But I read something very different. I turned the next page in my agnostic manual, and my brain turned upside down. Now I found that I was to hate Christianity not for fighting too little, but for fighting too much. Christianity, it seemed, was the mother of wars. Christianity had deluged the world with blood. I had got thoroughly angry with the Christian, because he never was angry. And now I was told to be angry with him because his anger had been the most huge and horrible thing in human history; because his anger had soaked the earth and smoked to the sun. The very people who reproached Christianity with the meekness and non-resistance of the monasteries were the very people who reproached it also with the violence and valour of the Crusades. It was the fault of poor old Christianity (somehow or other) both that Edward the Confessor did not fight and that Richard Cœur de Leon did. The Quakers (we were told) were the only characteristic Christians; and yet the massacres of Cromwell and Alva were characteristic Christian crimes. What could it all mean? What was this Christianity which always forbade war and always produced wars? What could be the nature of the thing which one could abuse first because it would not fight, and second because it was always fighting? In what world of riddles was born this monstrous murder and this monstrous meekness? The shape of Christianity grew a queerer shape every instant.

I take a third case; the strangest of all, because it involves the one real objection to the faith. The one real objection to the Christian religion is simply that it is one religion. The world is a big place, full of very different kinds of people. Christianity (it may reasonably be said) is one thing confined to one kind of people; it began in Palestine, it has practically stopped with Europe. I was duly impressed with this argument in my youth, and I was much drawn towards the doctrine often preached in Ethical Societies—I mean the doctrine that there is one great unconscious church of all humanity founded on the omnipresence of the human conscience. Creeds, it was said, divided men; but at least morals united them. The soul might seek the strangest and most remote lands and ages and still find essential ethical common sense. It might find Confucius under Eastern trees, and he would be writing "Thou shalt not steal." It might decipher the darkest hieroglyphic on the most primeval desert, and the meaning when deciphered would be "Little boys should tell the truth." I believed this doctrine of the brotherhood of all men in the possession of a moral sense, and I believe it still—with other things. And I was thoroughly annoyed with Christianity for suggesting (as I supposed) that whole ages and empires of men had utterly escaped this light of justice and reason. But then I found an astonishing thing. I found that the very people who said that mankind was one church from Plato to Emerson were the very people who said that morality had changed altogether, and that what was right in one age was wrong in another. If I asked, say, for an altar, I was told that we needed none, for men our

brothers gave us clear oracles and one creed in their universal customs and ideals. But if I mildly pointed out that one of men's universal customs was to have an altar, then my agnostic teachers turned clean round and told me that men had always been in darkness and the superstitions of savages. I found it was their daily taunt against Christianity that it was the light of one people and had left all others to die in the dark. But I also found that it was their special boast for themselves that science and progress were the discovery of one people, and that all other peoples had died in the dark. Their chief insult to Christianity was actually their chief compliment to themselves, and there seemed to be a strange unfairness about all their relative insistence on the two things. When considering some pagan or agnostic, we were to remember that all men had one religion; when considering some mystic or spiritualist, we were only to consider what absurd religions some men had. We could trust the ethics of Epictetus, because ethics had never changed. We must not trust the ethics of Bossuet, because ethics had changed. They changed in two hundred years, but not in two thousand.

This began to be alarming. It looked not so much as if Christianity was bad enough to include any vices, but rather as if any stick was good enough to beat Christianity with. What again could this astonishing thing be like which people were so anxious to contradict, that in doing so they did not mind contradicting themselves? I saw the same thing on every side. I can give no further space to this discussion of it in detail; but lest any one supposes that I have unfairly selected three accidental cases I will run briefly through a few others. Thus, certain skeptics wrote that the great crime of Christianity had been its attack on the family; it had dragged women to the loneliness and contemplation of the cloister, away from their homes and their children. But, then, other skeptics (slightly more advanced) said that the great crime of Christianity was forcing the family and marriage upon us; that it doomed women to the drudgery of their homes and children, and forbade them loneliness and contemplation. The charge was actually reversed. Or, again, certain phrases in the Epistles or the marriage service, were said by the anti-Christians to show contempt for woman's intellect. But I found that the anti-Christians themselves had a contempt for woman's intellect; for it was their great sneer at the Church on the Continent that "only women" went to it. Or again, Christianity was reproached with its naked and hungry habits; with its sackcloth and dried peas. But the next minute Christianity was being reproached with its pomp and its ritualism; its shrines of porphyry and its robes of gold. It was abused for being too plain and for being too coloured. Again Christianity had always been accused of restraining sexuality too much, when Bradlaugh the Malthusian discovered that it restrained it too little. It is often accused in the same breath of prim respectability and of religious extravagance. Between the covers of the same atheistic pamphlet I have found the faith rebuked for its disunion, "One thinks one thing, and one another," and rebuked also for its union, "It is difference of opinion that prevents the world from going to the dogs." In the same conversation a freethinker, a friend of mine, blamed Christianity for despising Jews, and then despised it himself for being Jewish.

I wished to be quite fair then, and I wish to be quite fair now; and I did not conclude that the attack on Christianity was all wrong. I only concluded that if Christianity was wrong, it was very wrong indeed. Such hostile horrors might be combined in one thing, but that thing must be very strange and solitary. There are men who are misers, and also spendthrifts; but they are rare. There are men sensual and also ascetic; but they are rare. But if this mass of mad contradictions really existed, quakerish and bloodthirsty, too gorgeous and too thread-bare, austere, yet pandering preposterously to the lust of the eye, the enemy of women and their foolish refuge, a solemn pessimist and a silly optimist, if this evil existed, then there was in this evil something quite supreme and unique. For I found in my rationalist teachers no explanation of such exceptional corruption. Christianity (theoretically speaking) was in their eyes only one of the ordinary myths and errors of mortals. They gave me no key to this twisted and unnatural badness. Such a paradox of evil rose to the stature of the supernatural. It was, indeed, almost as supernatural as the infallibility of the Pope. An historic institution, which never went right, is really quite as much of a miracle as an institution that cannot go wrong. The only explanation which immediately occurred to my mind was that Christianity did not come from heaven, but from hell. Really, if Jesus of Nazareth was not Christ, He must have been Antichrist.

And then in a quiet hour a strange thought struck me like a still thunderbolt. There had suddenly come into my mind another explanation. Suppose we heard an unknown man spoken of by many men. Suppose we were puzzled to hear that some men said he was too tall and some too short; some objected to his fatness, some lamented his leanness; some thought him too dark, and some too fair. One explanation (as has been already admitted) would be that he might be an odd shape. But there is another explanation. He might be the right shape. Outrageously tall men might feel him to be short. Very short men might feel him to be tall. Old bucks who are growing stout might consider him insufficiently filled out; old beaux who were growing thin might feel that he expanded beyond the narrow lines of elegance. Perhaps Swedes (who have pale hair like tow) called him a dark man, while Negroes considered him distinctly blonde. Perhaps (in short) this extraordinary thing is really the ordinary thing; at least the normal thing, the center. Perhaps, after all, it is Christianity that is sane and all its critics that are mad—in various ways. I tested this idea by asking myself whether there was about any of the accusers anything morbid that might explain the accusation. I was startled to find that this key fitted a lock. For instance, it was certainly odd that the modern world charged Christianity at once with bodily austerity and with artistic pomp. But then it was also odd, very odd, that the modern world itself combined extreme bodily luxury with an extreme absence of artistic pomp. The modern man thought Becket's robes too rich and his meals too poor. But then the modern man was really exceptional in history; no man before ever ate such elaborate dinners in such ugly clothes. The modern man found the church too simple exactly where modern life is too complex; he found the church too gorgeous exactly where modern life is too

dingy. The man who disliked the plain fasts and feasts was mad on entrées. The man who disliked vestments wore a pair of preposterous trousers. And surely if there was any insanity involved in the matter at all it was in the trousers, not in the simply falling robe. If there was any insanity at all, it was in the extravagant entrées, not in the bread and wine.

I went over all the cases, and I found the key fitted so far. The fact that Swinburne was irritated at the unhappiness of Christians and yet more irritated at their happiness was easily explained. It was no longer a complication of diseases in Christianity, but a complication of diseases in Swinburne. The restraints of Christians saddened him simply because he was more hedonist than a healthy man should be. The faith of Christians angered him because he was more pessimist than a healthy man should be. In the same way the Malthusians by instinct attacked Christianity; not because there is anything especially anti-Malthusian about Christianity, but because there is something a little anti-human about Malthusianism.

Nevertheless it could not, I felt, be quite true that Christianity was merely sensible and stood in the middle. There was really an element in it of emphasis and even frenzy which had justified the secularists in their superficial criticism. It might be wise, I began more and more to think that it was wise, but it was not merely worldly wise; it was not merely temperate and respectable. Its fierce crusaders and meek saints might balance each other; still, the crusaders were very fierce and the saints were very meek, meek beyond all decency. Now, it was just at this point of the speculation that I remembered my thoughts about the martyr and the suicide. In that matter there had been this combination between two almost insane positions which yet somehow amounted to sanity. This was just such another contradiction; and this I had already found to be true. This was exactly one of the paradoxes in which skeptics found the creed wrong; and in this I had found it right. Madly as Christians might love the martyr or hate the suicide, they never felt these passions more madly than I had felt them long before I dreamed of Christianity. Then the most difficult and interesting part of the mental process opened, and I began to trace this idea darkly through all the enormous thoughts of our theology. The idea was that which I had outlined touching the optimist and the pessimist; that we want not an amalgam or compromise, but both things at the top of their energy; love and wrath both burning. Here I shall only trace it in relation to ethics. But I need not remind the reader that the idea of this combination is indeed central in orthodox theology. For orthodox theology has specially insisted that Christ was not a being apart from God and man, like an elf, nor yet a being half human and half not, like a centaur, but both things at once and both things thoroughly, very man and very God. Now let me trace this notion as I found it.

All sane men can see that sanity is some kind of equilibrium; that one may be mad and eat too much, or mad and eat too little. Some moderns have indeed appeared with vague versions of progress and evolution which seeks to destroy the μέσος or balance of Aristotle. They seem to suggest that we are meant to starve progressively, or to go on eating larger and larger breakfasts every morning for ever. But the great truism of the μέσος remains for all thinking men, and these people have not upset any balance except their own. But granted that we have all to keep a balance, the real interest comes in with the question of how that balance can be kept. That was the problem which Paganism tried to solve: that was the problem which I think Christianity solved and solved in a very strange way.

Paganism declared that virtue was in a balance; Christianity declared it was in a conflict: the collision of two passions apparently opposite. Of course they were not really inconsistent; but they were such that it was hard to hold simultaneously. Let us follow for a moment the clue of the martyr and the suicide; and take the case of courage. No quality has ever so much addled the brains and tangled the definitions of merely rational sages. Courage is almost a contradiction in terms. It means a strong desire to live taking the form of a readiness to die. "He that will lose his life, the same shall save it," is not a piece of mysticism for saints and heroes. It is a piece of everyday advice for sailors or mountaineers. It might be printed in an Alpine guide or a drill book. This paradox is the whole principle of courage; even of quite earthly or quite brutal courage. A man cut off by the sea may save his life if he will risk it on the precipice. He can only get away from death by continually stepping within an inch of it. A soldier surrounded by enemies, if he is to cut his way out, needs to combine a strong desire for living with a strange carelessness about dying. He must not merely cling to life, for then he will be a coward, and will not escape. He must not merely wait for death, for then he will be a suicide, and will not escape. He must seek his life in a spirit of furious indifference to it; he must desire life like water and yet drink death like wine. No philosopher, I fancy, has ever expressed this romantic riddle with adequate lucidity, and I certainly have not done so. But Christianity has done more: it has marked the limits of it in the awful graves of the suicide and the hero, showing the distance between him who dies for the sake of living and him who dies for the sake of dying. And it has held up ever since above the European lances the banner of the mystery of chivalry: the Christian courage, which is a disdain of death; not the Chinese courage, which is a disdain of life.

And now I began to find that this duplex passion was the Christian key to ethics everywhere. Everywhere the creed made a moderation out of the still crash of two impetuous emotions. Take, for instance, the matter of modesty, of the balance between mere pride and mere prostration. The average pagan, like the average agnostic, would merely say that he was content with himself, but so insolently self-satisfied, that there were many better and many worse, that his deserts were limited, but he would see that he got them. In short, he would walk with his head in the air; but not necessarily with his nose in the air. This is a manly and rational position, but it is open to the objection we noted against the compromise between optimism and pessimism—the "resignation" of Matthew Arnold. Being a mixture of two things, it is a dilution of two things; neither is present in its full strength or contributes its full

colour. This proper pride does not lift the heart like the tongue of trumpets; you cannot go clad in crimson and gold for this. On the other hand, this mild rationalist modesty does not cleanse the soul with fire and make it clear like crystal; it does not (like a strict and searching humility) make a man as a little child, who can sit at the feet of the grass. It does not make him look up and see marvels; for Alice must grow small if she is to be Alice in Wonderland. Thus it loses both the poetry of being proud and the poetry of being humble. Christianity sought by this same strange expedient to save both of them.

It separated the two ideas and then exaggerated them both. In one way Man was to be haughtier than he had ever been before; in another way he was to be humbler than he had ever been before. In so far as I am Man I am the chief of creatures. In so far as I am a man I am the chief of sinners. All humility that had meant pessimism, that had meant man taking a vague or mean view of his whole destiny—all that was to go. We were to hear no more the wail of Ecclesiastes that humanity had no preeminence over the brute, or the awful cry of Homer that man was only the saddest of all the beasts of the field. Man was a statue of God walking about the garden. Man had preeminence over all the brutes; man was only sad because he was not a beast, but a broken god. The Greek had spoken of men creeping on the earth, as if clinging to it. Now Man was to tread on the earth as if to subdue it. Christianity thus held a thought of the dignity of man that could only be expressed in crowns rayed like the sun and fans of peacock plumage. Yet at the same time it could hold a thought about the abject smallness of man that could only be expressed in fasting and fantastic submission, in the gray ashes of St. Dominic and the white snows of St. Bernard. When one came to think of one's self, there was vista and void enough for any amount of bleak abnegation and bitter truth. There the realistic gentleman could let himself go—as long as he let himself go at himself. There was an open playground for the happy pessimist. Let him say anything against himself short of blaspheming the original aim of his being; let him call himself a fool and even a damned fool (though that is Calvinistic); but he must not say that fools are not worth saving. He must not say that a man, *quâ man*, can be valueless. Here, again in short, Christianity got over the difficulty of combining furious opposites, by keeping them both, and keeping them both furious. The Church was positive on both points. One can hardly think too little of one's self. One can hardly think too much of one's soul.

Take another case: the complicated question of charity, which some highly uncharitable idealists seem to think quite easy. Charity is a paradox, like modesty and courage. Stated baldly, charity certainly means one of two things—pardoning unpardonable acts, or loving unlovable people. But if we ask ourselves (as we did in the case of pride) what a sensible pagan would feel about such a subject, we shall probably be beginning at the bottom of it. A sensible pagan would say that there were some people one could forgive, and some one couldn't: a slave who stole wine could be laughed at; a slave who betrayed his benefactor could be killed, and cursed even after he was killed. In so far as the act was pardonable, the man was pardonable. That again is rational, and even refreshing; but it is a dilution. It leaves no place for a pure horror of injustice, such as that which is a great beauty in the innocent. And it leaves no place for a mere tenderness for men as men, such as is the whole fascination of the charitable. Christianity came in here as before. It came in startlingly with a sword, and clove one thing from another. It divided the crime from the criminal. The criminal we must forgive unto seventy times seven. The crime we must not forgive at all. It was not enough that slaves who stole wine inspired partly anger and partly kindness. We must be much more angry with theft than before, and yet much kinder to thieves than before. There was room for wrath and love to run wild. And the more I considered Christianity, the more I found that while it had established a rule and order, the chief aim of that order was to give room for good things to run wild.

Mental and emotional liberty are not so simple as they look. Really they require almost as careful a balance of laws and conditions as do social and political liberty. The ordinary aesthetic anarchist who sets out to feel everything freely gets knotted at last in a paradox that prevents him feeling at all. He breaks away from home limits to follow poetry. But in ceasing to feel home limits he has ceased to feel the "odyssey." He is free from national prejudices and outside patriotism. But being outside patriotism he is outside "Henry V." Such a literary man is simply outside all literature: he is more of a prisoner than any bigot. For if there is a wall between you and the world, it makes little difference whether you describe yourself as locked in or as locked out. What we want is not the universality that is outside all normal sentiments; we want the universality that is inside all normal sentiments. It is all the difference between being free from them, as a man is free from a prison, and being free of them as a man is free of a city. I am free from Windsor Castle (that is, I am not forcibly detained there), but I am by no means free of that building. How can man be approximately free of fine emotions, able to swing them in a clear space without breakage or wrong? This was the achievement of this Christian paradox of the parallel passions. Granted the primary dogma of the war between divine and diabolic, the revolt and ruin of the world, their optimism and pessimism, as pure poetry, could be loosened like cataracts.

St. Francis, in praising all good, could be a more shouting optimist than Walt Whitman. St. Jerome, in denouncing all evil, could paint the world blacker than Schopenhauer. Both passions were free because both were kept in their place. The optimist could pour out all the praise he liked on the gay music of the march, the golden trumpets, and the purple banners going into battle. But he must not call the fight needless. The pessimist might draw as darkly as he chose the sickening marches or the sanguine wounds. But he must not call the fight hopeless. So it was with all the other moral problems, with pride, with protest, and with compassion. By defining its main doctrine, the Church not only kept seemingly inconsistent things side by side, but, what was more, allowed them to break out in a sort of artistic violence otherwise possible only to anarchists. Meekness grew more dramatic than madness. Historic Christianity rose into a high and strange coup de théâtre of morality—things that are to virtue what the crimes of Nero are to vice. The spirits of indignation and of charity took terrible and attractive forms, ranging from that monkish fierceness that scourged like a dog the first

and greatest of the Plantagenets, to the sublime pity of St. Catherine, who, in the official shambles, kissed the bloody head of the criminal. Poetry could be acted as well as composed. This heroic and monumental manner in ethics has entirely vanished with supernatural religion. They, being humble, could parade themselves: but we are too proud to be prominent. Our ethical teachers write reasonable for prison reform; but we are not likely to see Mr. Cadbury, or any eminent philanthropist, go into Reading Gaol and embrace the strangled corpse before it is cast into the quicklime. Our ethical teachers write mildly against the power of millionaires; but we are not likely to see Mr. Rockefeller, or any modern tyrant, publicly whipped in Westminster Abbey.

Thus, the double charges of the secularists, though throwing nothing but darkness and confusion on themselves, throw a real light on the faith. It is true that the historic Church has at once emphasized celibacy and emphasized the family; has at once (if one may put it so) been fiercely for having children and fiercely for not having children. It has kept them side by side like two strong colours, red and white, like the red and white upon the shield of St. George. It has always had a healthy hatred of pink. It hates that combination of two colours which is the feeble expedient of the philosophers. It hates that evolution of black into white which is tantamount to a dirty gray. In fact, the whole theory of the Church on virginity might be symbolized in the statement that white is a colour: not merely the absence of colour. All that I am urging here can be expressed by saying that Christianity sought in most of these cases to keep two colours coexistent but pure. It is not a mixture like russet or purple; it is rather like a shot silk, for a shot silk is always at right angles, and is in the pattern of the cross.

So it is also, of course, with the contradictory charges of the anti-Christians about submission and slaughter. It is true that the Church told some men to fight and others not to fight; and it is true that those who fought were like thunderbolts and those who did not fight were like statues. All this simply means that the Church preferred to use its Supermen and to use its Tolstoyans. There must be some good in the life of battle, for so many good men have enjoyed being soldiers. There must be some good in the idea of non-resistance, for so many good men seem to enjoy being Quakers. All that the Church did (so far as that goes) was to prevent either of these good things from ousting the other. They existed side by side. The Tolstoyans, having all the scruples of monks, simply became monks. The Quakers became a club instead of becoming a sect. Monks said all that Tolstoy says; they poured out lucid lamentations about the cruelty of battles and the vanity of revenge. But the Tolstoyans are not quite right enough to run the whole world; and in the ages of faith they were not allowed to run it. The world did not lose the last charge of Sir James Douglas or the banner of Joan the Maid. And sometimes this pure gentleness and this pure fierceness met and justified their juncture; the paradox of all the prophets was fulfilled, and, in the soul of St. Louis, the lion lay down with the lamb. But remember that this text is too lightly interpreted. It is constantly assured, especially in our Tolstoyan tendencies, that when the lion lies down with the lamb the lion becomes lamb-like. But that is brutal annexation and imperialism on the part of the lamb. That is simply the lamb absorbing the lion instead of the lion eating the lamb. The real problem is—Can the lion lie down with the lamb and still retain his royal ferocity? That is the problem the Church attempted; that is the miracle she achieved.

This is what I have called guessing the hidden eccentricities of life. This is knowing that a man's heart is to the left and not in the middle. This is knowing not only that the earth is round, but knowing exactly where it is flat. Christian doctrine detected the oddities of life. It not only discovered the law, but it foresaw the exceptions. Those underrate Christianity who say that it discovered mercy; any one might discover mercy. In fact every one did. But to discover a plan for being merciful and also severe—that was to anticipate a strange need of human nature. For no one wants to be forgiven for a big sin as if it were a little one. Any one might say that we should be neither quite miserable nor quite happy. But to find out how far one may be quite miserable without making it impossible to be quite happy—that was a discovery in psychology. Any one might say, "Neither swagger nor grovel"; and it would have been a limit. But to say, "Here you can swagger and there you can grovel"—that was an emancipation.

This was the big fact about Christian ethics; the discovery of the new balance. Paganism had been like a pillar of marble, upright because proportioned with symmetry. Christianity was like a huge and ragged and romantic rock, which, though it sways on its pedestal at a touch, yet, because its exaggerated excrescences exactly balance each other, is enthroned there for a thousand years. In a Gothic cathedral the columns were all different, but they were all necessary. Every support seemed an accidental and fantastic support; every buttress was a flying buttress. So in Christendom apparent accidents balanced. Becket wore a hair shirt under his gold and crimson, and there is much to be said for the combination; for Becket got the benefit of the hair shirt while the people in the street got the benefit of the crimson and gold. It is at least better than the manner of the modern millionaire, who has the black and the drab outwardly for others, and the gold next his heart. But the balance was not always in one man's body as in Becket's; the balance was often distributed over the whole body of Christendom. Because a man prayed and fasted on the Northern snows, flowers could be flung at his festival in the Southern cities; and because fanatics drank water on the sands of Syria, men could still drink cider in the orchards of England. This is what makes Christendom at once so much more perplexing and so much more interesting than the Pagan empire; just as Amiens Cathedral is not better but more interesting than the Parthenon. If any one wants a modern proof of all this, let him consider the curious fact that, under Christianity, Europe (while remaining a unity) has broken up into individual nations. Patriotism is a perfect example of this deliberate balancing of one emphasis against another emphasis. The instinct of the Pagan empire would have said, "You shall all be Roman citizens, and grow alike; let the German grow less slow and reverent; the Frenchmen less experimental and swift." But the instinct of Christian Europe says, "Let the German

remain slow and reverent, that the Frenchman may the more safely be swift and experimental. We will make an equipoise out of these excesses. The absurdity called German shall correct the insanity called France.”

Last and most important, it is exactly this which explains what is so inexplicable to all the modern critics of the history of Christianity. I mean the monstrous wars about small points of theology, the earthquakes of emotion about a gesture or a word. It was only a matter of an inch; but an inch is everything when you are balancing. The Church could not afford to swerve a hair's breadth on some things if she was to continue her great and daring experiment of the irregular equilibrium. Once let one idea become less powerful and some other idea would become too powerful. It was no flock of sheep the Christian shepherd was leading, but a herd of bulls and tigers, of terrible ideals and devouring doctrines, each one of them strong enough to turn to a false religion and lay waste the world. Remember that the Church went in specifically for dangerous ideas; she was a lion tamer. The idea of birth through a Holy Spirit, of the death of a divine being, of the forgiveness of sins, or the fulfillment of prophecies, are ideas which, any one can see, need but a touch to turn them into something blasphemous or ferocious. The smallest link was let drop by the artificers of the Mediterranean, and the lion of ancestral pessimism burst his chain in the forgotten forests of the north. Of these theological equalizations I have to speak afterwards. Here it is enough to notice that if some small mistake were made in doctrine, huge blunders might be made in human happiness. A sentence phrased wrong about the nature of symbolism would have broken all the best statues in Europe. A slip in the definitions might stop all the dances; might wither all the Christmas trees or break all the Easter eggs. Doctrines had to be defined within strict limits, even in order that man might enjoy general human liberties. The Church had to be careful, if only that the world might be careless.

This is the thrilling romance of Orthodoxy. People have fallen into a foolish habit of speaking of orthodoxy as something heavy, humdrum, and safe. There never was anything so perilous or so exciting as orthodoxy. It was sanity: and to be sane is more dramatic than to be mad. It was the equilibrium of a man behind madly rushing horses, seeming to stoop this way and to sway that, yet in every attitude having the grace of statuary and the accuracy of arithmetic. The Church in its early days went fierce and fast with any war-horse; yet it is utterly unhistoric to say that she merely went mad along one idea, like a vulgar fanaticism. She swerved to left and right, so exactly as to avoid enormous obstacles. She left on one hand the huge bulk of Arianism, buttressed by all the worldly powers to make Christianity too worldly. The next instant she was swerving to avoid an orientalism, which would have made it too unworldly. The orthodox Church never took the tame course or accepted the conventions; the orthodox Church was never respectable. It would have been easier to have accepted the earthly power of the Arians. It would have been easy, in the Calvinistic seventeenth century, to fall into the bottomless pit of predestination. It is easy to be a madman: it is easy to be a heretic. It is always easy to let the age have its head; the difficult thing is to keep one's own. It is always easy to be a modernist; as it is easy to be a snob. To have fallen into any of those open traps of error and exaggeration which fashion after fashion and sect after sect set along the historic path of Christendom—that would indeed have been simple. It is always simple to fall; there are an infinity of angles at which one falls, only one at which one stands. To have fallen into any one of the fads from Gnosticism to Christian Science would indeed have been obvious and tame. But to have avoided them all has been one whirling adventure; and in my vision the heavenly chariot flies thundering through the ages, the dull heresies sprawling and prostrate, the wild truth reeling but erect.