

Paradoxes in the Christian Life

The Lion and the Lamb

The most dramatic paradox is seen in our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5+) and also the Lamb Who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29+). Christian paradoxes have immense spiritual value as they highlight profound truths about the nature of Christ, His kingdom, and the Christian life. They dramatically describe the counterintuitive nature of the Christian life, even as the wisdom of God is often so counter to the wisdom of the world (cf 1Cor 1:19-24+). Indeed, the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men (1Co 1:25+). Christian paradoxes emphasize the richness and depth of our life in Christ, truths which challenge human logic. Paradoxes reveal how the Christian life challenges conventional thinking, inviting believers into a deeper understanding of Christ's ways and a closer walk with Christ. In short, Christian paradoxes are not meant to confuse but to illuminate.

- See also [Spiritual Paradox in the Christian Life](#)

Paradoxes in the Christian Life

Identity and Humility

1. We are strong when we are weak (2 Corinthians 12:10).
2. We are exalted when we humble ourselves (Matthew 23:12).
3. We find our life by losing it for Christ's sake (Matthew 16:25).
4. We are free when we become slaves to Christ (Romans 6:22).
5. We reign by serving others (Mark 10:43-44).

Blessings in Difficulty

6. We are comforted in mourning (Matthew 5:4).
7. We are rich when we are poor in spirit (Matthew 5:3).
8. We receive through giving (Luke 6:38).
9. We gain strength through suffering (1 Peter 5:10).
10. We experience joy in trials (James 1:2-3).

Spiritual Life and Death

11. Believers are responsible but believers are dependent - see [Paradoxical Principle of 100% Dependent and 100% Responsible](#)
12. We live by dying to ourselves (Galatians 2:20).
13. We are crucified with Christ yet live (Galatians 2:20).
14. Death is gain for those in Christ (Philippians 1:21).
15. We are dead to sin but alive in Christ (Romans 6:11).
16. We die daily yet live abundantly (1 Corinthians 15:31).

Worldly vs. Spiritual Perspectives

16. We are in the world but not of it (John 17:14-16).
17. We are unknown yet known by God (2 Corinthians 6:9).

18. We possess nothing but have everything (2 Corinthians 6:10).
19. We are sorrowful yet always rejoicing (2 Corinthians 6:10).
20. We honor God by becoming fools to the world (1 Corinthians 3:18).

God's Nature and Work

21. God's power is made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).
22. God is one yet three (Trinity) (Matthew 28:19).
23. Jesus is fully God and fully man (John 1:14).
24. Jesus became poor so we could become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9).
25. God is both just and the justifier (Romans 3:26).

Faith and Action

26. We work out our salvation, but it is God who works in us (Philippians 2:12-13).
27. We are saved by faith, but faith without works is dead (James 2:26).
28. God's grace is free but demands everything (Luke 9:23).
29. We fight spiritual battles, but the victory is already won in Christ (1 Corinthians 15:57).
30. We are called to rest while striving for holiness (Hebrews 4:11).

God's Nature and Kingdom

31. God is invisible, yet His attributes are clearly seen (Romans 1:20).
32. God is eternal, yet He entered time through Christ (John 1:14).
33. God is the Creator, yet He became part of His creation (Colossians 1:16; Philippians 2:6-7).
34. Jesus is the Lion and the Lamb (Revelation 5:5-6).
35. The kingdom of God is both now and not yet (Luke 17:21; Matthew 25:34).

Salvation and Redemption

36. We are saved by grace, yet faith without works is dead (Ephesians 2:8-9; James 2:26).
37. We are born again to die to ourselves (John 3:3; Luke 9:23).
38. We are called to take up a cross, yet we find rest in Christ (Matthew 16:24; Matthew 11:28-29).
39. We are God's masterpiece, yet we are still a work in progress (Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 1:6).
40. Our salvation is assured, yet we must persevere (John 10:28; Philippians 2:12, Hebrews 3:6, 14).

Faith and Grace

41. We are rich in Christ, yet called to be content with little (2 Corinthians 8:9; Philippians 4:12-13).
42. God knows everything, yet we are called to pray (Matthew 6:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:17).
43. We are forgiven, yet we are called to confess our sins (1 John 1:9).
44. We are predestined, yet we have free will (Ephesians 1:5; John 3:16, Ro 10:13).

Spiritual Growth

46. We die daily, yet we are renewed inwardly day by day (1 Corinthians 15:31; 2 Corinthians 4:16).
47. We are strong in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).
48. We are perfect in Christ, yet called to strive for perfection (Hebrews 10:14; Matthew 5:48).
49. We are seated with Christ, yet we are on a journey (Ephesians 2:6; Philippians 3:13-14,20-21).
50. We are free in Christ, yet are bondservants of Christ (Galatians 5:1; Romans 6:18).

Evangelism and Service

51. We are sent to proclaim the gospel, yet God is the One Who saves (Romans 10:14-15; John 6:44)
52. We are to be in the world, but not of it (John 17:15-16).
53. We conquer evil by submitting to God (James 4:7).
54. We lead by serving (Mark 10:43-45).
55. We gain by giving (Luke 6:38).

Life in Christ

56. We live by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7).
57. We are blessed when we are poor in spirit (Matthew 5:3).
58. We are persecuted, yet we are blessed (Matthew 5:10-12).
59. We are strangers in the world, yet ambassadors for Christ (1 Peter 2:11; 2 Corinthians 5:20).
60. We are sorrowful, yet always rejoicing (2 Corinthians 6:10).

Christian Virtues

61. We love our enemies, yet hate evil (Matthew 5:44; Romans 12:9).
62. We are called to be wise as serpents but innocent as doves (Matthew 10:16).
63. We are broken to be made whole (Psalm 34:18; 2 Corinthians 5:17).
64. We fight spiritual battles, yet the victory is already won (Ephesians 6:12; 1 Corinthians 15:57).
65. We are called to be meek, yet bold in faith (Matthew 5:5; Hebrews 4:16).

Eternal Perspective

66. We grieve loss brethren, yet we have hope in Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:13).
67. We store treasure in heaven, yet live simply on earth (Matthew 6:20, Psalm 37:16, Php 4:11-13).
68. We long for Christ's return, yet are content in His timing (Philippians 3:20, Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 3:8-9).
69. We are already victorious, yet still await the final victory (Romans 8:37; Revelation 21:4).
70. We live in the present but are citizens of eternity (Colossians 3:2-3; Philippians 3:20, Hebrews 11:16, 13:14).

1. Reflects the Infinite Nature of God

- **God is beyond human comprehension:** Paradoxes remind us that God's ways are higher than ours (Isaiah 55:8-9). They point to the infinite nature of His wisdom and power, which cannot be fully grasped by finite human understanding.
 - **Encourage awe and worship:** The complexity and depth of paradoxes inspire humility and reverence, drawing us closer to God.
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2. Teaches Spiritual Truths

- **Illustrates Kingdom principles:** Paradoxes highlight the counterintuitive values of God's kingdom, such as humility leading to exaltation or weakness revealing strength. They challenge worldly perspectives and align us with God's truth.
 - **Encourages faith:** They emphasize the need to trust God, even when His ways seem illogical or difficult to understand.
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3. Shapes Christian Character

- **Promotes humility and dependence:** Paradoxes like "strength in weakness" remind believers to rely on God's power rather than their own abilities.
 - **Fosters trust and surrender:** The apparent contradictions teach believers to surrender their understanding and embrace God's wisdom.
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4. Provides Comfort and Hope

- **Encourages perseverance in trials:** Paradoxes such as "joy in suffering" provide a framework for understanding hardships as part of God's redemptive plan.
 - **Points to eternal hope:** Paradoxes remind believers of the ultimate victory in Christ, even in the face of current struggles.
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5. Enhances Discipleship and Evangelism

- **Deepens theological understanding:** Wrestling with paradoxes fosters spiritual growth and a deeper understanding of the Bible.
 - **Strengthens apologetics:** Paradoxes help believers articulate the richness of the faith, offering thoughtful responses to questions or doubts from skeptics.
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7. Highlights God's Grace and Mystery

- **Demonstrates the depth of grace:** Paradoxes like "losing life to find it" emphasize God's generosity and the transformative power of His grace.
 - **Preserves divine mystery:** They protect the sacredness of God's nature, ensuring that His ways remain a source of wonder rather than being reduced to mere human logic.
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QUESTION - What are some examples of paradox in the Bible?

ANSWER - A paradox is a seeming contradiction that, when properly understood, may prove true. The Bible uses paradox at times to explore the full scope and nuance of truth. One of the most famous paradoxes in the Bible is the teaching that [God is triune](#): there is one God who eternally exists in three Persons.

Some examples of paradox in the Bible occur within the same verse. These statements seem, at first blush, to be self-contradictory:

- 2 Corinthians 6:8–10 – "We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything" (ESV).

- Matthew 10:39 – "Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it" (see also Matthew 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 17:33; John 12:25).

- Philippians 3:7 – "But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ" (ESV).

- Matthew 23:11 – “The greatest among you will be your servant.”

- 2 Corinthians 12:10 – “When I am weak, then I am strong.”

Each of these paradoxes is meant to contrast an earthly view with a heavenly view. There is a difference between our material situation and our spiritual reality, although we experience both at the same time.

The book of Proverbs contains paradox among its wise sayings. One example is Proverbs 11:24, which says, “There is one who scatters, yet increases more” (NKJV). John Bunyan picked up on this truth, putting this paradoxical couplet in the mouth of old Honest in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*: “A man there was, though some did count him mad, / The more he cast away, the more he had.” How can a person get rid of stuff, yet have more? Wisdom has the answer.

Another example of paradox in Proverbs is found in sequential verses: “Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself” (Proverbs 26:4, ESV) seems to be contradicted in the next verse: “Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes” (Proverbs 26:5, ESV). It’s up to the reader to discern the meaning of these instructions and solve the paradox.

Paul uses a quote from the poet Epimenides, “One of Crete’s own prophets has said it: ‘Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons’” (Titus 1:12), which presents a paradox. Epimenides was himself a Cretan, and so his statement that [Cretans](#) are “always liars” seems self-contradictory. Is Epimenides telling the truth about his own lying? How can there be a truth-telling liar? Or is it possible that his paradoxical description of his countrymen is both true and false, in certain respects?

Other examples of paradox in the Bible are found in separate passages that seem to teach opposing ideas:

- “For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law” (Romans 3:28, ESV) vs. “You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone” (James 2:24, ESV).
- “I did not come to judge the world” (John 12:47) vs. “For judgment I have come into this world” (John 9:39).
- “The way is hard that leads to life” (Matthew 7:14, ESV) vs. “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:30).
- “Judge not, that you be not judged” (Matthew 7:1, ESV) vs. “Judge with right judgment” (John 7:24, ESV).

One of the most perplexing paradoxes in the Bible concerns the interplay of [God’s sovereignty](#) and [human responsibility](#). (ED: SEE MY ARTICLE ["Paradoxical Principle of 100% Dependent and 100% Responsible"](#)) We see this in the matter of salvation: John 1:12 says, “To those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God”; but then John 1:13 describes those children as “born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.” So, which is it? One verse says that we must believe to be saved, and the next verse says it’s not our decision, but God’s. It’s a paradox, but both verses are true.

We see a similar paradox in Matthew 18:7: “Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come!” This statement has us pondering some riddles: if offenses “must” come, does that mean they are ordained of God and out of our hands? And if there is woe pronounced against the person through whom the offenses come, does that mean he acted freely and is responsible?

In the Bible we are confronted with paradoxes such as a [virgin birth](#), justified sinners, rich poor men, and happy mourners. The use of paradox in the Bible is startling at times, but it reveals a deep spiritual richness and beauty. Paradox causes us to take time to reflect on the meaning of certain passages and investigate the truth, which is sometimes complex.

Every time we sing “Amazing Grace” by [John Newton](#), we vocalize the paradox of grace:

*’Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved.*