

# THE POWER OF PARADOX

**Paradox**: A statement or proposition that seems to justify contradictory conclusions, thus expressing a hidden truth

**Contradiction**: A statement or proposition that asserts the opposite, or denies another statement or proposition

Example of a paradoxical statement: “**The silence was deafening.**”

## Paradoxes of the Christian faith

1) The paradox of both being *able* and *unable* to know the mind of God

**Isa 55:8**

**"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD.**

**1 Cor 2:16**

**For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him? But we have the Mind of Christ.**

God is both inscrutable (we can't figure Him out) and yet knowable (willing to be in relationship with us)

2) The paradox of two realities running at the same time: God's purposes, man's actions

**Matt 12:35-37**

**"But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."**

**Eph 1:11**

**In Him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will**

As Christians we generally, and correctly, tend to think in terms of *contradictions*:

Good and evil  
God and satan  
God and man  
Black and white

We Christians are convinced that there is true **Truth**

This truth is not figured out or discovered by humans, but is *revealed* to us by God  
Through His Word, His Son and His prophets

We answer the mystery of good and evil, and of love and judgment, by  
understanding the significance of Jesus' crucifixion for the sins of the world  
And by the need for a relationship with a trustworthy God

Coming to these conclusions requires embracing ideas that are hard to understand, and even contradictory, and yet express truth (paradox)

Different Christian groups disagree on **the interpretation** of this God-revealed truth

The more humble of us admit our interpretation is subject to error

The more prideful of us believe that we have a corner on the market of truth

**I argue very well. Ask any of my few, remaining friends. I can win an argument on any topic, against any opponent. People know this, and steer clear of me at parties. Often, as a sign of their great respect, they don't even invite me.**

**- Dave Barry**

More of the paradoxical truths we hold include:

- 1) The belief that Jesus is both God and man
- 2) The belief that God is all-powerful but we can resist His will
- 3) The belief that we are accepted by God by His grace alone, but must demonstrate faith to appreciate this grace
- 4) The belief that God is love but is also just--so He loves sinners perfectly but still must judge us for our sins
- 5) The belief that man is fallen and evil, but was made in the image of God and has the potential of being redeemed and acting godly

We think very paradoxically in our theology

But we rarely think paradoxically in our moment-to-moment lives and in our treatment of others

There is a great disconnect between what we believe and the way we live our lives

For example, Jesus said we are to love one another as we love ourselves

Love is a deeper spiritual notion than intellectual knowledge and does not give itself to analysis

I submit that many of us do not love ourselves and do not love others very much

This is true largely because we refuse to think **relationally** (unconditional love) or **paradoxically** (men are sinners but have the image of God in them)

But think **contradictorily** (I am good, I am bad: he is good, he is bad: I like myself, I don't like myself; I like him, I don't like him)

We do not think with the Mind of Christ:

Seeing beyond the fault to the need

Seeing the good and potential in ourselves and others

We think in **the black and white** of contradictions and logic

We do not think in the **color** of love, relationships, and trusting

We don't like paradox because it causes **tension**

In paradox things are always unresolved

Like dissonant chords

But paradox can resolve into inner peace and greater respect and love for others as we are forced to trust God in the uncertainty of life's contradictions and unanswered questions

**The test of intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function.**

**-F. Scott Fitzgerald**

We prefer to be certain on every subject and often enjoy arguing with anyone who disagrees with us

**My opinions may have changed, but not the fact that I am right.**

**- Anonymous**

Paradox in the teachings of Jesus:

**Luke 9:48**

**"For he who is least among you all--he is the greatest."**

**Matt 20:16**

**"So the last will be first, and the first will be last."**

**John 9:39, 41**

**Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind ... If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains. "**

Paradox in nature:

Light is both a particle and a wave  
Electricity has a positive and negative pole  
Masculinity and femininity  
Up and down  
North and South

The paradox of Sunday and Monday Christianity

<u>Sunday</u>	<u>Monday</u>
Giving	Earning and keeping
Dying to self	Surviving /preserving self
Selling all	Possessing
Submitting	Leading
Resting	Keeping busy

Most all things are appropriate when used at the proper time, in the proper circumstance, with the correct attitude

**Eccl 3:1**

**There is a time for everything,  
And a season for every activity under heaven:**

Political Paradoxes: Conservative vs Liberal thinking

The good and bad connotations of **conservative...**  
 The good and bad connotations of **liberal...**

My goal: to hold conservative values and be a liberal, generous person

The positive emphases of conservative and liberals:  
 Conservatives: Encouraging responsibility and enterprise / using resources wisely  
 Liberal: Showing unconditional compassion / being generous

**Holiness without love is harsh  
 Love without holiness is compromise**

**He has the right to criticize who has the heart to help.  
 -Abraham Lincoln**

Paradoxical thinking allows us to embrace the truth and tension of these opposites and come to a deeper understanding of them than can be grasped by only accepting one or the other

The Church is quite divided. Why?

Church-folk think contradictorily and negatively, not relationally and paradoxically

Unity/harmony in the Church is only achievable through understanding paradox, showing respect to others, and recognizing that God places people with different perspectives than us in the Church **on purpose**

Unity and harmony will never be achieved by getting everyone to think the same

**We don't get harmony when everybody sings the same note.  
 -Doug Floyd**

**If everyone is thinking alike, then somebody isn't thinking.  
 -General George Patton**

The paradox of humans having both a dark side and a good nature:

**Matt 13:25  
 But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. (Elaborate)**

The sin on earth, the sin in our hearts  
 How to deal with it  
 Like an eclipse of the sun  
 We must recognize and confess our sins now  
 Or they will come out later  
 We must be brutally honest with ourselves  
 The unconscious mind is the final frontier (Alan Smith)

We must realize that we are **hybrids**—made in the image of God / filled with the Holy Spirit in our inner man  
 Yet deeply stained with the indelible ink of sin—from Adam, from our ancestors, from our culture, from ourselves  
 We are deserving of condemnation  
 But are also free from condemnation by the paradox of the Cross

**Rom 8:1**

**Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,**

It is really unhealthy to think of ourselves as **sometimes** good, and **sometimes** bad  
 We are allowed to enjoy the good in ourselves and let the grace available to us quickly, and decisively deal with the sin in us  
 We are allowed to conclude that we are **OK**

If we do not embrace this teaching, we will hate ourselves  
 Our dark side, our shadow, our “vibes,” will affect those around us, making them hate themselves as well  
 We will use harsh words, violence, and will abuse and condemn others

We simply need to confess our sins quickly and consistently to God and others and get over them

We need God’s wisdom when to apply different approaches to different situations  
 When to lead, when to follow  
 When to rebuke, when to sympathize  
 When to give, when to withhold  
 When to submit, when to assert

We have all experienced what would be considered **bad** days:  
 Life-altering medical illnesses, accidents  
 Loss of loved ones  
 Abuse: verbal, physical, sexual  
 Torture and abuse victims  
 They have the most difficult recoveries  
 A sense of unbelief that another human could so harm and so betray them  
 Because of the Imago Dei, because of our kinship of suffering that should motivate us to work to help each other out in our common, broken states

Good day or bad day?  
 This depends on your perception and understanding of the power of paradox

**“It is a good day to die.” - Low Dog / Crazy Horse**

If we understand paradox, we can stop seeing days as bad or good  
 They are all good

**Rom 8:28-29**

**And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.**

This verse will ultimately be true for all believers because of our heavenly destination  
 But is only true **now** if we **believe** it to be true and **let** it be true  
 The pain and hardship in life can be viewed as good if we trust in the person **of**  
 God more than our theology **about** God  
**All** days can be opportunities to learn, grow, and overcome

The best and worse day in history

Not last January when Florida beat Ohio State in football in the national championship

The best and worse day in history started with a dream

It ended with storms, earthquakes, and people rising from the dead

**Matt 27:19**

**While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him."**

**Matt 27:50-53**

**And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.**

The characters in the best and worse day in history include: Pilate and Roman guards / the Jewish leaders and people / Peter and the twelve / And, of course Jesus

But one of the small-part players in the drama was a thief crucified next to Jesus

**Luke 23:38-41**

**One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."**

Bear with me as I conclude by developing the story of the repentant thief

"Little did he know..." The third person omniscient narrator  
 Third person objective / The first person

"Little did he know, even as the dawn broke on what threatened to be the worst day of his life, that this day would be his best."

The phrase "little did he know..." is a sermon in itself

Our lives are stories written by God in which we can keep to the script (to our and others benefits--that is, obey and not sin)

Or we can deviate from the script (to our and others' detriment)

We can actually communicate with the Writer and have some input into the outcome of the story, whether it will be a tragedy or a fairy tale

**Luke 23:42-43 Then (the thief) said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."**

The paradox of the thief's crucifixion being the day of his salvation and blessing

The paradox of *our* crucifixion and identification with Christ being the day of our salvation and blessing

**Summary:**

1. **Live with the tension of the intellectual paradoxes of our faith and our lives**
2. **Value relationships with God, family and friends--sometimes against all logic**
3. **Start accepting and loving ourselves despite our sinfulness**
4. **Stop casting our dark shadow on others**
5. **Be kind and help others who are also facing the challenges of this fallen life**
6. **See ourselves in unity with other Christians that think differently that we do, recognizing their value to the Body of Christ**

**So come lose your life for a carpenter's son  
For a madman Who died for a dream  
Then you'll have the faith His first followers had,  
And you'll feel the weight of the beam.**

**So surrender the hunger to say you must know,  
Have the courage to say, "I believe."  
For the power of paradox opens your eyes,  
And blinds those who say they can see.**

**- Michael Card**