

## Paradoxes

SEVERAL TIMES THE APOSTLE PAUL cited paradoxes to communicate profound biblical truths. He wrote about seeing unseen things, conquering by yielding, finding rest under a yoke, being free yet a slave, reigning by serving, being made great by becoming small, being exalted by being humble, becoming wise by being fools for Christ, triumphing through defeat, and living by dying. This article focuses on three of these: the weak and the strong (2 Cor. 12:7-10), human wisdom and the foolishness of the gospel (1 Cor. 1:17-25), and slaves and freedmen (Rom. 6:15-23).

Paul's intention was not to present irreconcilable, antithetical positions, but to use a literary device to accentuate theological truths that could best be expressed through paradoxical statements. When two truths, such as a weak person who is weak and a strong person who is strong, are presented as a paradox (“when I am weak then I am strong”), the result is *third* truth that overrides the first and second truths. This third truth is a divine truth that is significant for either doctrine or application or both. However, nonbelievers cannot grasp this third truth. “The unbeliever, being blind to spiritual things because his ways are controlled by Satan (Eph. 2:2), looks on a Scriptural paradox in frustrated or derisive bewilderment.” Yet for believers Paul's paradoxes are life changing principles to be applied by faith.

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