

# How to Handle Biblical Paradoxes

by Brent Barnett

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*We should accept and praise God for the paradoxes in Scripture, recognizing the limit of our understanding and not trying to resolve them.*

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 29:29, Isaiah 55:9, Romans 11:33, 1 Timothy 6:4

**Topics:** "Divine Sovereignty", "Biblical Paradoxes"

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## Description

Brent Barnett delves into the mysteries found in Scripture that surpass human understanding, such as the Trinity, predestination, and God's sovereignty, emphasizing the importance of accepting these paradoxes as part of God's divine wisdom. Through passages like Deuteronomy 29:29 and Romans 11:33, he highlights the boundary of our knowledge and the need to humbly acknowledge God's unfathomable ways. Barnett urges believers to imitate the apostle Paul in embracing Biblical paradoxes, avoiding fruitless debates and divisions, and instead praising God for His transcendence over human intellect.

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## Transcript

There most certainly are things in Scripture which defy our comprehension such as eternity, the Trinity, the co-existence of free will and predestination, the omniscience and sovereignty of God, and others. Some of these types of things go over our heads, and it doesn't bother us. In fact, like in the case of eternity, we think it is wonderful and we praise God that we can't wrap our minds around it. Yet others, like the Trinity or predestination and free will, frustrate us because there seems to be a contradiction. Yet the contradiction is a mere paradox. There actually is a resolution of the seemingly contradictory truths, but it requires further knowledge than God has given us. It is tempting to want to say that we have arrived in terms of understanding God fully. Yet the humble and Biblical call is to understand where the limit of our understanding lies.

God has indeed only let us in partially to His reservoir of knowledge. In Deuteronomy 29:29 God says, "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law." In other words, God has given us what we need to know in order to live in obedience to Him. He gives us all that we need to know Him as He desires. Yet there are things He keeps from us; they are His secrets. Since they are His secrets, we do not and cannot know them. This boundary of our lack of knowledge is one which we must acknowledge and accept. As Paul cries out in Romans 11:33, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!" Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit

and a brilliant man who knew the Old Testament Scriptures forwards and backwards. Yet he rightfully acknowledged his limitations of understanding. Interestingly, what Paul was speaking about prior to bursting out in praise of God were issues surrounding predestination, God's sovereignty, and human responsibility. Paul was willing to come to a place of humility and say that God's ways are beyond ours. In an attempt to explain predestination and free will, he gave a few illustrations in the matter, but his conclusion was that God is the Potter and we are the clay. In other words, Paul's conclusion was that God is above us. He was willing to accept his limitations.

There is much to imitate from the apostle Paul, and this is not one of the things that would readily come to mind. But we ought to learn from Paul in the matter of how to handle Biblical paradoxes. In these things that God keeps secret, we ought to accept them and praise God for how He transcends our weak and fallible, created, human intellects. The best way to deal with paradoxes in Scripture is not to debate them for the duration of life. Such can quickly become a waste of time, a means of division, and a vain dispute about words (1 Timothy 6:4). In fact, many divisions in Christian history can be marked by those who tried to stand on one side of a paradox, rather than accepting that both sides were at least partly right. We cannot be dogmatic about what Scripture is not dogmatic about. In what the Scripture is plainly clear and what God does not keep secret, we had better be dogmatic. Rather than try to resolve Biblical paradoxes, we ought to, like Paul, praise God for the fact that He understands it all.

Isaiah 55:9 says, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts." Can we ascend into heaven by our own intellect, sorting out the secret things of God? Obviously we cannot, and neither are we to probe into the areas that God has not revealed to us. When and where do we draw the line between studying the Scripture to ascertain its intended meaning and coming to a place where we must stop because of the limits of our understanding? We do this where the Scripture does it. As I just illustrated, Paul stops short of resolving the paradox of God's sovereignty and man's will. So we should too. In Job's case, God never answered Job as to why He allowed the suffering to take place in Job's life. In the same way, we are not to try to determine why God allows what He allows outside of what He has clearly revealed to us in His Word. There comes a time for humility, and it is when God does not explain Himself. When God tells us to just accept things as they are because He is God, we need to do that and praise Him for being God.

Why would God choose to "keep" things from us? He does this simply because we cannot handle them. Our minds are too simple and finite to grasp His infinite wonder. Do we really want a God that we can't outthink or at least think at the same level with? If we could understand God, then we might as well be God. God has given us minds that can reason and use logic to be able by the work of the Holy Spirit to discern truth and understand His Word. If we do what God has asked in studying His Word, then we will obey Him, praise Him, and honor Him. Yet we must be willing to stop short of God's secrets. Going beyond where God has ordained will only lead to frustration, doubt, and even division among brothers and sisters in Christ. Let us learn from Paul and be adamant about the gospel and the commands of Scripture, but let us not build fortresses of doctrine where the Scripture doesn't build fortresses of doctrine. Some things are meant to be secret until God chooses to reveal them to us. In the meantime, let us learn what God has revealed and obey it.

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