

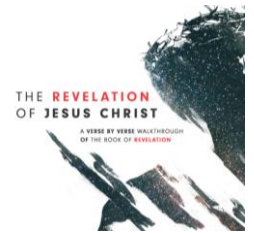
Title: Revelation, Part 23: What do you do with Life's Paradoxes?

Speaker: Charles Stone

Passage: Rev. 15-16

Big Idea: 4 Paradoxes in Revelation 15-16 should Motivate Us to Actively Respond to Life's Uncertainties.

Memory verse of the month: Rev 15:4 Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you for your righteous acts have been revealed.



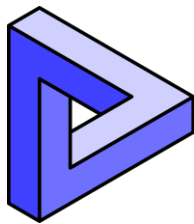
How would you define this word? Paradox Take 30 seconds and share with the person next to you or around you your definition.

Here are some synonyms I came up with. Anomaly, enigma, contradiction, mystery, puzzle, oddity, ambiguity, antinomy

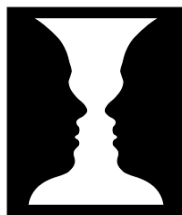


A paradox is something that seems to have no answer or appears contradictory to another idea or truth. A paradox can stretch our minds, can bother us, and can be something we wrestle with.

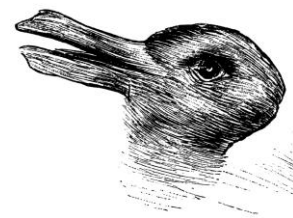
These images capture the idea.



(a triangle)



(2 people)



(duck-rabbit)

Life in general brings our way some paradoxes. We see some paradoxes in the Bible.

I've titled my message today as we continue our study of Revelation this: What do you do with Life's Paradoxes?

**Big idea: 4 Paradoxes in Revelation 15-16 should motivate us to actively respond to life's uncertainties.**

Thus far in our study of Revelation we've learned that it is a book meant to encourage Christians as things get more upside down in the world. The book also previews world events leading up to the final judgment when Jesus returns.

We don't know the dates of Jesus' return, but Revelation gives us an idea of the kinds of things that will increasingly happen more and more toward the end. Yet, we shouldn't be discouraged because God is in control, he sustains us in hard times, and we know how things will come out. Jesus wins.

John, who wrote the book, had been given these visions about what the future holds and he wrote them down as the book of Revelation. He often used his favorite number, 7, which is the number for completeness.

We've seen groups of sevens:

7 cities in what is now W Turkey that the book was originally written to,

7 seals that sealed this scroll that when Jesus broke each seal a portion of the scroll was read which revealed more about world events leading up to the end times.

Then John records visions of 7 angels with trumpets. When an angel sounded a trumpet it revealed more detail about these events. Each of these sevens progressively tell us more about what these visions mean about the future.

These visions with groups of 7 are like looking at something similar from different angles.

Some time back I said that an art museum is another helpful way to describe how the book of Revelation is arranged. Reading and studying Revelation is akin to walking through an art gallery, the Rikes museum in Holland, that Sherryl and I visited a few years ago.

We go to an art gallery to experience something special and from that experience we learn stuff. A museum usually has an overarching theme. The overarching theme of the Rikes museum is the history of Holland. Revelation has an overarching theme, Jesus has won and one day when he returns he will make all things right. In the meantime, Christ followers must be faithful to him as times will get more difficult.

The wings of a museum support that museums' overarching theme. In the Rikes museum the wings are organized by time frame, artists, or some other criteria, with all the art in those wings helping to explain the history of Holland through the visual. Each wing and the art in that wing helps tell the bigger story.

Likewise, various scenes in the book of Revelation explain and illustrate its overarching theme. Each scene further explains the bigger story.

Today we see a final 7, 7 bowls. What makes these stand out so is the finality they convey. These what are called bowl judgments that bring us to the very end of human history.

Chapter 15 is tied closely to chapter 16. Both deal with the seven last plagues of God's wrath. One is preparatory and interpretative, the other descriptive. We're just going to read out loud chapter 15 and I will summarize chapter 16.

It's important to remind yourself that the good stuff is coming at the end of Revelation after all the bad stuff passes.

Let's watch this bible project pre-view than read Rev 15.

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/revelation-12-22/>

**Rev. 15:1** I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last, because with them God's wrath is completed. <sup>2</sup> And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God <sup>3</sup> and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb:

“Great and marvelous are your deeds,  
Lord God Almighty.  
Just and true are your ways,  
King of the ages.  
<sup>4</sup> Who will not fear you, O Lord,  
and bring glory to your name?  
For you alone are holy.  
All nations will come  
and worship before you,  
for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

<sup>5</sup> After this I looked and in heaven the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the Testimony, was opened. <sup>6</sup> Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests. <sup>7</sup> Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever. <sup>8</sup> And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

**Rev. 15:1 I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last, because with them God’s wrath is completed.**

This sign are these angels that are about to re-enact somewhat the plagues on Egypt in Exodus in the OT. And they are last not because they end the series in the visions but because they are the last judgments of history.<sup>1</sup>

The Exodus plagues were signs of God’s power in judgment to the Egyptians and of God’s mercy and deliverance to the Israelites. They function in the same way here, with an added emphasis that they provide a final opportunity to repent.<sup>2</sup>

So, we are coming down the final, final days. I’m going to talk more about the wrath of God in a bit, but fundamentally God’s wrath is God’s response to the injustice, sin, and rebellion against him in the world.

**<sup>2</sup> And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name.**

The sea of glass mixed with fire refers to God’s transparent righteousness and perfect justice revealed in these final judgments. He shows in holiness in the midst of persecution.

When John writes about the sea, he could be referring back to how God rescued God’s people through the Red Sea and that he will again rescue his people.

Those who had gathered around the sea are those who had died for their faith, martyrs.

**They ... sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb:**

There’s a lot of singing on in heaven as we’ve seen in Revelation.

This again reflects the victory through God’s deliverance from the Egyptians when they walked through the Red Sea with Moses leading them. Their worship of God for his deliverance foreshadowed God’s deliverance from judgment of those who have followed Christ, the Lamb.

In the ancient synagogue they would sing in the afternoon service each Sabbath to celebrate God’s sovereign rule over the universe, of which the redemption from Egypt reminded the Jew.

*Exodus 15:1 Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD: “I will sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea.*

The early Christians may have sung a similar song as they celebrated the final victory by Jesus, the lamb.

*When Moses and the Israelites sang the Song of Moses they were looking back to the blood of a lamb put over the lintels of the doorposts to keep them safe when the Angel of Death passed through the land of Egypt. Here the martyrs are praising God and honoring him for the divine power that has delivered them from the wrath of the Antichrist, based on the blood of redemption shed by the Lamb of God (Ray Stedman).*

John gives us the parts of this song that is based almost entirely on OT quotations

I want you to see two things: the many names of God and his attributes and notice the pronouns he used. Read it to yourself and look for those names/attributes and pronouns.

*“Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty.*

*Just and true are your ways, King of the ages.*

*<sup>4</sup> Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.”*

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<sup>1</sup> Osborne, G. R. (2016). *Revelation: Verse by Verse* (p. 254). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

<sup>2</sup> Osborne, G. R. (2016). *Revelation: Verse by Verse* (p. 254). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

Let's highlight his names and works

**"Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty.**

God's power is incomparable.

**Just and true are your ways,**

God is perfectly just.

**King of the ages.**

God is sovereign.

**<sup>4</sup> Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name?**

Fear is awe and reverence. Glory is an outward manifestation of something of tremendous significance.

The name stands for the whole person.

**For you alone are holy.**

Holy means purity and worth, perfect purity.

**All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."**

Did you see the pronouns? How many me's or my's or I's? NONE. They are all **you, your, yours** pointing to the fact that this is all God's work. He is supremely in charge. There is nothing we add to his works. We simply believe and trust in him.

John then is allowed visual access to the portion of the temple deemed most holy, the dwelling place of God, and sees these 7 angels coming out of the temple.

**<sup>7</sup> Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God...**

Early in this series we say that John had a vision of what is called the throne room, a place in heaven filled with angels and God's throne, his place of ruling authority. He mentions four living creatures that are angels of the highest order.

One of these high order angels gives each of these other angels a bowl. Bowls were used to hold incense and offerings. This act as their commissioning for these tasks in the final days and that they have divine sanction by God to participate in this final judgment.

**<sup>8</sup> And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.**

The "smoke" that filled the temple refers to what is called the shekinah glory or cloud first associated with the tabernacle, the portable temple the Hebrews used to worship God when in the wilderness and then it was associated with the permanent temple. It symbolizes God's special presence and that he is the source of these judgments.

So, in the vision the temple is immediately filled with smoke and no one could enter the temple means that toward the very end, people will reach a point of no return where they will no longer have the chance to trust Christ.

Then in chapter 16, John's vision of the seven bowls gives more detail about these final events that will occur in the end times.

Those include these.

- Incurable disease.
- Sea disasters that will affect the water and food supply and the environment.
- Disaster related to the sun.
- Armies will gather for a final cataclysmic battle called Armageddon.
- A final worldwide earthquake will destroy the earth as we know it.

And in this chapter, we see the levity, and seriousness, and gravity of the finality of it all, with no more chance for people to turn to God. He writes in 16.17...

**16.17 The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, "It is done!"**

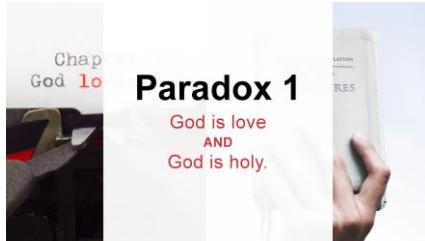
So, let's go back to our big idea.

**BIG IDEA: 4 Paradoxes in Revelation 15-16 should motivate us to actively respond to life's uncertainties.**

Following Christ requires that we often must live with tensions or antinomies or paradoxes. Life is not a nice, neatly packed world.

The first one is perhaps the most important one that comes from these two chapters.

**Paradox 1: God is love AND God is holy.**



These are twin biblical truths, and this relates to God's wrath. This is a paradox. The majority of OT passages about God's wrath have to do with his righteous and rightful anger toward the sins of the Hebrew people, especially aimed toward their idolatry.

Pagan gods in the Roman world were portrayed as angry and vengeful, unpredictable and hard to appease. God's wrath or anger, however, is vastly different from the pagan gods and different from how we usually use the word wrath. God's anger toward injustice and sin is not capricious (given to sudden and unaccountable changes in mode, unexpectedly flying off the handle) nor unforeseeable (well we didn't see that coming).

God is not like how we characterize some men with the phrase, "he's an angry man."

The wrath of God must be balanced with the grace of God. God's judgment against sin and evil in the world that we see in Revelation is right and holy and perfect.

But God is not a monolithic all wrath or all love God. He is not the Force with a good side and a dark side. He is both holy and love, perfectly so. He is not like an old grandfather sitting in a rocking chair in heaven winking at our sin. Nor is he an out of control raging human father looking for everything he can find wrong with his kids.

So, although the final judgement events we see in Revelation speaks more about God's justice and wrath against sin, we must remember the other side of this paradox. God is longsuffering, full of love and grace, and is patient. In fact, we see that behind these terrible final events in world history, not only God showing his wrath against sin, but also showing grace in that these events are meant to bring people to their sense, to repent, to place their faith in Jesus, to give the more chances to accept his love and mercy shown through Christ.

**Psalm 103:8** The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. <sup>9</sup> He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever;

**Jeremiah 3:12** ... I am merciful,' declares the LORD, 'I will not be angry forever.'

**Jonah 4:2** ... I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.

**Micah 7:18** ...You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy.

In exercising these final judgments, he is giving people more chances. 1 Tm 2.4 says that God, *wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.*

**2 Peter 3** He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

God is so full of mercy and graciousness and long-suffering that he waits until the concluding days of the judgment before this massive justice is fully executed.

So, in Revelation the justice and the love of God are intertwined, and one cannot exist apart from the other. A holy God must judge sin and sinners, and this includes the vindication of the saints for all they have suffered.<sup>3</sup>

### Paradox 2: God freely offers new life AND many people reject this new life.



As a Christian and understanding what God does through salvation, it's hard for me to understand why some reject it.

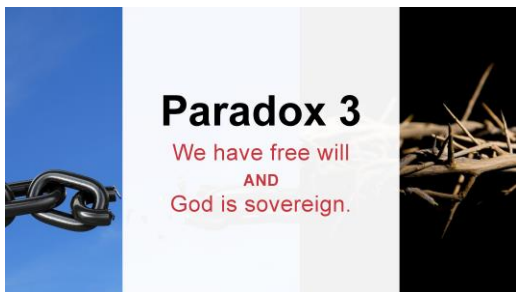
As these final events give people another chance to place their faith in Christ, this will be the response of many in the last days.

***They refused to repent (vss 8, 10).*** In fact, some will go even further with this response, ***they cursed God (vss 9, 11, 21)***

This is a paradox. Fundamentally rebellion against God often has little to do with the evidence. In this case, the inhabitants of the earth are precisely aware of the reason for these judgments, and yet their fury against God only increases.<sup>4</sup>

This next paradox relates to Paradox 2.

### Paradox 3: We have free will AND God is sovereign.



All these events are to give unbelievers further chances to believe. I dealt with this free will and election extensively when we went through Romans. God respects human choice. God gave us a free will. He won't send someone to heaven against their will.

We chose Him because we have a free will yet at the same time God is sovereign and he chooses us. These two ideas seem to be contradictory. But they are twin biblical truths.

In all these end times judgments, we see echoes of this.

### Paradox 4: Death is bad AND death means victory.



In 15. 2 he wrote:

***And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name.***

These were the martyrs, those who died for their faith. He said they were victorious. The world, however, would see them as losers. After all they died. Is that the kind of faith I want?

Though they died, they were victorious in three ways, over the beast [government and religious systems that opposed Christ], his image, and his name. In other words they were victors over temptation, the pressures of the world, and satan's attacks. They didn't give in, they didn't deny their faith, they didn't compromise. They weren't losers. They were victors even through their death.

<sup>3</sup> Osborne, G. R. (2016). *Revelation: Verse by Verse* (p. 260). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

<sup>4</sup> Patterson, P. (2012). *Revelation*. (E. R. Clendenen, Ed.) (Vol. 39, p. 309). Nashville, TN: B&H.

In the early church the day of a person's martyrdom was often called the day of his victory. Barclay comments, 'The real victory is not to live in safety, to evade trouble, cautiously and prudently to preserve life; the real victory is to face the worst that evil can do, and if need be, to be faithful unto death.'<sup>5</sup>

Big idea: 4 Paradoxes in Revelation 15-16 should motivate us to actively respond to life's uncertainties.

## 4 Paradox's

What do we do in light of life's paradoxes?

- 1 God is love **AND** God is holy.
- 2 God freely offers new life **AND** many people reject this new life.
- 3 We have free will **AND** God is sovereign.
- 4 Death is bad **AND** death means victory.

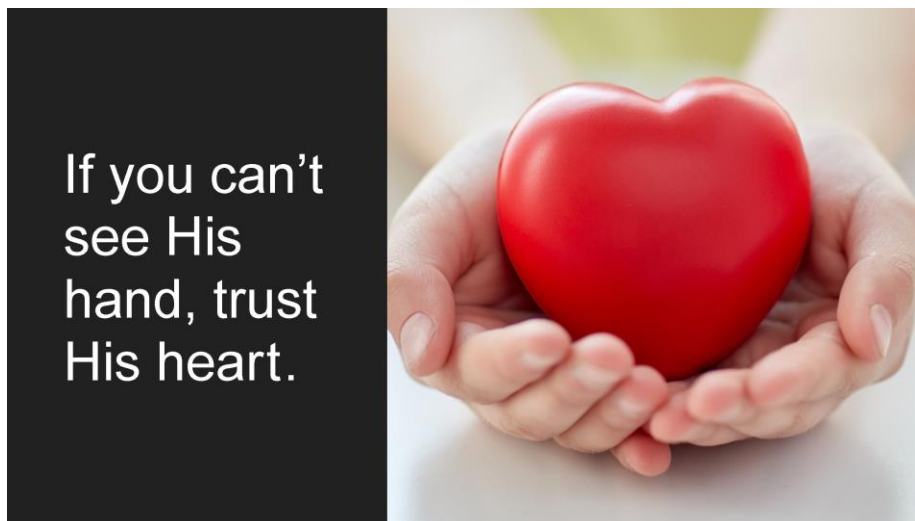
Remind yourself that it's ok to acknowledge these tensions exist.

You are being honest about some of these perplexing things in life. We don't have all the answers. We don't give up on God because we don't have all the answers. In fact, we probably aren't capable this side of heaven to understand the answers even if we got them.

Learn to live in and with these tensions.

These paradoxes and others will make us feel uncomfortable but recognize this is normal to have some of these uncomfortable feelings at times with the uncertainty these tensions cause. The brain craves certainty. It wants answers and wants to know what is next. When we face uncertainty, like these paradoxes, unanswered question, the brain engages our fear centers which causes fear and anxiety. But, we don't to let these uncertainties keep us miserable in our negative emotions.

Jesus Himself is our rock and place of refuge, our hiding place, our healer, our comforter, our strength. You can live with these and other unanswered questions, paradoxes, and tensions without being buried by them, controlled by them, fearful of them, or getting angry at God for not answering these or other questions you have no answers to.



How might you trust His heart more consistently this week in your uncertainties.?

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<sup>5</sup> Morris, L. (1987). [\*Revelation: an introduction and commentary\*](#) (Vol. 20, p. 181). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.