

## THE COUNTERINTUITIVE TEACHINGS OF JESUS

### #1 – “Lose Your Life to Save It”

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<sup>21</sup>From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. <sup>22</sup>Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!” <sup>23</sup>Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.” <sup>24</sup>Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup>For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. <sup>26</sup>What good will it be for you to gain the whole world, yet forfeit your soul? Or what can you give in exchange for your soul? <sup>27</sup>For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward everyone according to what they have done. *Matthew 16:21-27*

Introduction: We tend to think of truth as something existing within binary constructs: there is one clear right answer and one clear wrong answer. In actuality, the most profound truths are not so simply stated, and binary truth statements are seldom more than simple common sense. We recognize many of the greatest truths in life because they are so counterintuitive, that is to say that they take us by surprise. The most profound truths shake us to our core and cause us to rethink everything we thought we knew.

- I. Many Profound Counterintuitive Truths Exist Within Paradox
  - A. A “paradox” is “a statement that is seemingly contradictory or opposed to common sense and yet is perhaps true” (Webster’s), and its Greek root means “contrary to expectation.”
  - B. Niels Bohr, the renowned Nobel Laureate in physics said: “The opposite of a correct statement is an incorrect statement. The opposite of a profound truth is another profound truth.”
  - C. Consider these truth paradoxes of love and hate:
    1. “What is mature love? It is union under the condition of preserving one’s integrity, one’s individuality. In love the paradox occurs that two beings become one and yet remain two.” *Erich Fromm*
    2. “It is a great mistake to suppose that love unites and unifies men. Love diversifies them, because love is directed towards individuality. The thing that really unites men and makes them like to each other is hatred.” *G. K. Chesterton*

- D. With regard to spiritual truth, G. K. Chesterton said it best: “The sane person always cares more for truth than consistency. If he sees two truths that seem to contradict each other, he accepts both truths and the contradiction along with them. His intellectual sight is stereoscopic, like his physical sight: he sees two different pictures at once and sees all the better for that.”
  - E. Jesus’ most profound teachings are counterintuitive, and he often speaks in paradoxical language.
  - F. Jesus’ greatest paradoxical teaching was simply this, “For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.”
- II. Lose Your Life to Save It
    - A. Jesus’ paradox of “vital mortification” is profoundly true because it juxtaposes two truths against each other.
      1. The person who tries to control their life loses control, because it is impossible to live the “life of the Spirit” in one’s own power.
      2. The person who yields their life to the power of Jesus Christ discovers true freedom, because “we can do all things through Christ.”
    - B. Like Simon Peter, we do not understand how God incarnate could be made to lay down his life as a sacrifice; this is God’s counterintuitive plan for our salvation.
    - C. When we impose our own understanding of life on God’s will, we fall prey to Satan’s trap of human concern and become stumbling blocks to God’s work.
    - D. Life in Christ is a discipline of self-denial made possible only through radical identification with the Cross of Christ.
    - E. If we gain everything, but do not find relationship with God in Jesus Christ, we have nothing at all, since that relationship is all that matters.
    - F. Salvation is not possible through our own effort, since there is nothing that we can give in exchange for our souls.
    - G. Salvation is a gift of God, and the true irony is that we gain it by receiving it freely.

Conclusion: The famous missionary-martyr Jim Elliot said it this way: “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” Jesus taught us that we had to lose our lives in order to save them. Surely this is the most profound paradox in the Bible, entirely contrary to our intuitive sense of things and yet obviously true. As with other teachings of Jesus, we may trust the paradox of vital mortification all the more because we would not have thought of it all by ourselves. It is a spiritual truth revealed by the Spirit of God.