

Navigating Life's Conflicts

3. Understanding Present-Age Creative Tensions

The notion of 'creative tensions' can be seen in the nature of conversational communication between two persons or functional roles. By 'present-age' we mean this age in which we currently live prior to our resurrection into the next age, and this insight is very helpful in understanding the inherent conflicts within human life being lived in our current broken world, and this insight is very helpful in understanding the inherent conflicts within human life being lived in a broken world.

These tensions are not necessarily opposites, but certainly different. However, these roles should coexist in a creative tension that is mutually beneficial but requires intentional engagement by both parties in order to overcome their inherent differences, and in the process, becoming increasingly inter-dependent and mutually enhancing.

Some good examples to help our understanding of this are:

- The integrative relationship between the 'whole' and the 'part', be that the relationship between a team and an individual team member, or that one piece of a jigsaw puzzle that only finds its meaning in the context of completing the whole picture.
- The marriage relationship between a husband and a wife, where two differing genders, roles, personalities, and preferences find complementary fulfilment in mutual and reciprocal inter-dependence – a creative tension if ever there was one!!!
- The learning relationship between a teacher and a pupil, in which the teacher creates a learning environment and facilitates the discovery of knowledge within the learner through dialogue and directed exploration, allowing questions and answers that provoke engagement – think, the Garden of Eden.
- And finally, the cognitively transformational relationship between action and reflection. The genius of action-reflection is best described as the functioning of a feedback loop, much like how a guided missile operates. This clearly reveals the action-to-reflection-to-corrected-action that creates the creative tensions inherent within the continual dialogue between *words* of faith and *actions* of faith.

The key to understanding these creative relationships is seeing their inherent *both-and* nature. Of course, tensions that do not become 'creative' can quickly become destructive.

Paul's Use of Literary Creative Tensions

Paul's combination of creative tensions is a literary device to explain his understanding of the Christian life being lived in a fallen world as a *both-and* tension, rather than an *either-or* dualism. He used this idea of creative tensions frequently in his thinking – for example:

⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. ⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. (2Cor 4:7-9)

This passage has a 'because of this fact', therefore 'do this,' construction to it, and is classic creative tension language involving necessary *both-and* tensions.

Another example: Paul considers believers 'in Christ' to have already passed into the eschatological new eon – meaning, each is "...a new creation in Christ;" but, problematically, they are also still living in the old eon of the fallen creation.

They are *both* new creations in Christ *and* still living in the old fallen creation. 2Cor 5:17

However, Paul's classic example are the issues surrounding mind renewal and his use of the *indicative-imperative* tension in Romans 11:30-31 & 12:1-2.

By way of explanation, the *indicative* mood refers to a positive statement that indicates something has happened, while the *imperative* mood implies a command for an action of some kind that needs to take place in response to what has happened. This needs to be understood to clearly follow his line of argumentation via the creative character of his thinking.

³⁰ Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, ³¹ so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. ³² For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all. (Rom 11:30-32)

¹Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your reasonable service. ²Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind... (Rom 12:1-2)

The key to understanding exactly what Paul is wanting to communicate in this passage is to see the creative nature of the transformational process that Paul is explaining, and its relation to the renewing of our minds – this specific usage is unique in the New Testament.

The *indicative* he refers to is 'God's mercy' that is already received – Rom 11:30-32 & 12:1

The *imperative* is 'be transformed' by the renewing of your mind – our needed response.

So, let's parse this word 'be transformed':

Be transformed – *metamorphousthe* – 2nd person, plural, passive, present, imperative.

- It is *passive voice* – we cannot do it ourselves – it is an inner work of the Holy Spirit
- It is *present tense* – like our present continuous: 'continually being transformed'.
- It is *imperative mood* – so, we are not without responsibility, it is a command!
Our involved and intentional collaboration is required!

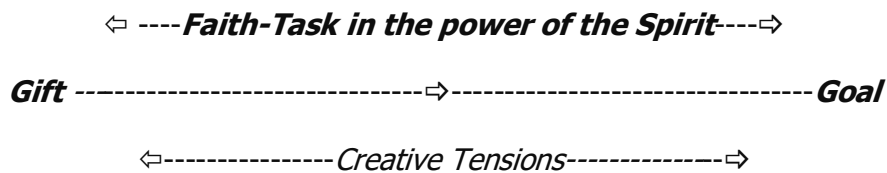
There is an all-encompassing dynamic to Paul's unique approach –

- The *passive voice* – It is a *gift*; received by faith from God.
- The *present tense* – It is a continuous process toward a *goal*; the goal of conformity to the image of Christ to be fully completed in the resurrection.
- The *imperative mood* – It is a *task*; a continuous collaboration of learning obedience.

So Paul's imaginative and unique use of *metamorphousthe* in this context reveals that *spiritual transformation* to be simultaneously – a *gift*, a *goal*, and a *task* – all through faith, that is inspired and empowered by God's Word and Spirit.

A Graphic of the Process within Spiritual Transformation

Renewing the mind (Rom 12:2)



Regeneration
Impregnated Word (Jam 1:18, 21)

Resurrection
Fulfilled Word (Rom 8:19-23)

These same creative tensions were supremely demonstrated in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – The God-Man: *both God and Man*. (Acts 2:36; Heb 5:7-10)

The Word who became flesh in order to reconcile differences and re-establish conversational relationship between God and humanity through his complete identification with us in our embodied existence and his resurrection to God's throne with his Father through the Holy Spirit.

Significantly, this creative tension is also seen to outwork in the Garden of Gethsemane as God the Son wrestles within his own humanity...but in conversation with the Father, voluntarily surrenders his own will to the will of the Father in order to fulfil his Father's greater redemptive will. Matt 26:36-46; Phil 2:5-11

And it will have its glorious fulfilment in our lives in our resurrection into our eternal inheritance as God's children:

²¹ *...the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.* ²² *We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.* ²³ *Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.* ²⁴ *For in this hope we were saved. But*

hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

(Rom 8:21-25)