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In Christ: Union with Him as Savior and Lord in Paul

In books on Pauline theology, it is common to speak of the “in Christ” motif. Usage of this expression is fine when “in Christ” is understood as a general phrase for a comprehensive idea. To be more accurate we should speak of the “in Him” concept, for it is a complex idea with a double reference in Scripture. There is the “in Christ” concept properly so-called which refers to Jesus’ person and work as messianic Savior. Then there is the “in the Lord” motif which often has practical and ethical significance for how Christians live their lives under his lordship. There does exist some synonymy or overlap between the two concepts—and, regardless, there is always the most intimate connection—but generally the first bears soteriological connotations having to do with the “indicative” of God’s grace, and the second has practical or imperative connotations having to do with God’s claim, guidance, or protection.

Occurrences and Significance of the Phrase

The overwhelming preponderance of usage is found in the Pauline corpus—a total of 164 times. This includes the forms “in Christ Jesus,” “in Christ,” “Christ Jesus our Lord,” “in the Lord,” “in the Lord Jesus,” “in the Lord Jesus Christ,” “in him,” “in whom,” (Ephesians and Colossians alone), and one time each “in Jesus” (Eph 4:21, cf Rev 1:9), “in the beloved” (Eph 1:7), and “in the one who strengthens me” (Phil 4:13). Moving from Paul’s

major epistles to his prison epistles and then to the pastoral epistles, and, following an approximate chronological order, we have the following distribution: 1 Thessalonians (7x), 2 Thessalonians (3x), 1 Corinthians (23x), 2 Corinthians (13x), Galatians (9x), Romans (21x), Philippians (21x), Colossians (18x), Ephesians (35x), Philemon (5x), 1 Timothy (2x), 2 Timothy (7x), and Titus (none).

Outside the Pauline writings the phrase is found 32 times: Acts (5x), 1 Peter (3x), the Johannine writings, the Gospel of John and 1 John (22x), and Revelation (2x), (Rev 1:9 “in Jesus,” and Rev 14:3 “in the Lord”).

Some observations which are drawn from or related to the statistics above are the following:

1) With respect to the “in Him” formula Paul utilizes “in Christ” or related phrases (explicitly or implicitly referring to Christ) approximately 114 times and “in the Lord” (or related phrases) about 50 times.

2) In the New Testament the “in Him” idea, which does not occur in the Synoptic Gospels, makes its first and most extensive appearance in Paul. He is the inaugurator of the concept among Christians. The shadow of Paul’s usage probably hangs over later New Testament writings which employ the phrase. For example, it is found in 1 Peter, which is much indebted to Paul’s language as a whole.

3) What is left out of the reckoning of occurrences are those passages in which the related idea of Christ dwelling in the believer occurs. Contrary to some opinion, as will be shown below, these occurrences do not represent a new or different idea but the other half of the coin, so to speak. Also left out of the reckoning, but to be treated below, are the associated ideas of being in the Spirit or the Spirit being in us, and the three expressions “with Christ,” “through Christ,” and “of Christ.”

4) It can be seen from all the data above, both in terms of frequency and variation, and related ideas, that the “in Him” concept is one of immense importance in the New Testament, especially in Paul. It is Paul’s most frequently occurring concept and arguably the center of his religious faith. His concept of the righteousness of God or justification, often presumed to be the heart of Paul’s thought, finds its source and significance in the “in

Him” reality. The “in Him” motif, therefore, requires most serious study.

Dimensions of Meaning

The “in Him” conception defies the easy or simple categorization some have tried to give it. For example, at the turn of the century, Adolf Deissmann attempted to reduce all occurrences of the phrase to the mystical sense of the believer dwelling or being submerged in, or suffused by, the heavenly Christ, conceived of locally or spatially as a pneumatic element similar to the air around us and in us. Understood in this way there was obviously the closest bond between the Christian and Christ. However, the phrase resists so single a conception and such a thoroughgoing mystical understanding. It is a complex phrase embracing various nuances of salvation history and both personal and corporate existence. Some categorization is possible, but not every text is easily categorized. On a general basis, with some textual references, we can say that “in Him “ contains, though is not exhausted by, the following dimensions of meaning.

Salvation History

We “In Christ”

To be “in Christ” means to be incorporated into the salvation-historical events of Christ’s death and resurrection and to become a receptor of the efficacy and redeeming qualities of those events. The word “Christ” refers to the one who died and rose for the salvation of humankind. Thus to be in him is to share in his redemption and the new history inaugurated by, and grounded in, his death and resurrection. It means that henceforth one’s whole life is determined by the cross and resurrection, just as to be an American is to have one’s existence determined by the new history begun in the founding events of the American revolution.

There is incredible salvific benefit to being “in Him.” Ephesians 1:3 says that God is praiseworthy because he has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in Christ. The events included in these blessings are election to holiness (1:4), adoption as God’s children (1:5), redemption or the forgiveness of sins through Christ’s blood

(1:7), the revelation of God's will to unify everything in Christ (1:9-10), and the gift of the Spirit which brings God's seal of ownership and pledge of the eternal inheritance (1:13-14). The blessings of God in Christ include eternity past, eternity future, and historical time in between. It is of interest to note that in the first fourteen verses of Ephesians the "in Christ" phrase occurs eleven times.

A summary of soteriological elements found in Christ, as portrayed in a wider range of New Testament writings, includes redemption (Rom 3:24), death to sin (Rom 6:11), eternal life (1 Cor 1:30; Rom 6:23), freedom from condemnation and from the law of sin and death (Rom 8:1-2), the love of God (Rom 8:39), justification and sanctification (1 Cor 1:30; 6:11; Gal 2:17), the grace and kindness of God (1 Cor 1:4; Eph 2:10; 2 Tim 1:9), the blessing of Abraham (Gal 3:14), sonship (Gal 3:26), resurrection and enthronement with Christ (Eph 2:6), being created for good works (Eph 2:10), forgiveness (Eph 4:32), righteousness (Phil 3:9), the peace of God (Phil 4:7), God's glorious riches (Phil 4:19), the promise of life (2 Tim 1:1), salvation (2 Tim 2:10), eternal glory (1 Pet 5:10), etc.

Christ in Us

It has sometimes been urged that being "in Christ" is an objective reality referring to our new legal or forensic standing before God, as in the case of justification, and that "Christ in us" refers to subjective experience, as in sanctification. This does not cohere with the data the New Testament presents. It is clear that Paul far prefers the "in Christ" manner of speech, but in those relatively few statements about "Christ in us," the meaning is basically the same. Both expressions denote relationship; neither is merely legal or objective. According to Galatians 2:20, as a result of my crucifixion with Christ—which must refer to an event which happens for one who is "in Christ"—I am no longer alive, but Christ is alive in me. This does not refer to sanctification, for the entire context is about justification, and it is expressly said following the statement about the indwelling Christ that my present life in the fleshly body is lived by *faith in* Christ Jesus who loves me, as his death *for me* shows. According to 2:21 this death

for me would have been in vain if God's justifying righteousness came through the law. Thus, in this flow of thought the union of the crucified Christ with the believer is what effectuates and demonstrates the presence of justification. Galatians 4:19 moves in the same orbit of thought. Paul declares: "My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you." In terms of the immediate context before and after, which is about redemption from the law (legalism), and by virtue of the general context of Galatians which is about justification through the crucified Christ and not by works, "until Christ be formed in *you*" can only mean "until the crucified, justification-bringing Christ shapes (determines) your existence again." When the Galatians had first been converted, justification by faith in the Crucified was the determining factor. Now, legal observances were taking them back to their former slavery and reducing Paul to fear that he had labored for them in vain (4:9-10). Thus, Paul in 4:19 expresses, amidst his feeling of new birth pangs, the fervent hope that their lives will once more be shaped by Christ's justifying grace.

Paul argues in Romans 8:9 that believers are in the Spirit—which in this verse is otherwise called the Spirit of Christ—if the Spirit dwells in them. Thus, in the Spirit and the Spirit in them are the same reality. Verse 10, building upon this says, "But if Christ be in you." In other words, the Spirit in us, which is the same as our being in the Spirit, is identified with Christ in us. And as verse 10 continues, the Spirit (not "our spirit" as in the RSV, which is corrected "to Spirit" in the NRSV) brings life by reason of (or with a view to) righteousness. Here, by virtue of union with Christ through the Spirit we have life.

According to Ephesians 3:16-17 being strengthened by the Spirit in the inner man is equated with Christ dwelling in our hearts through faith. The result of this is that we, "being rooted and grounded in love" are enabled to comprehend the fullness of the love of Christ (for us) which surpasses knowledge (3:18-19).

In Colossians 1:27 Christ in us is joined with the making known of the glorious mystery that the Gentiles (not merely the Jews) may have Christ in them as the hope of glory. In other words, Gentiles can come into relationship with Christ and the full range of his salvation. In the thought of Ephesians 2:11-22 those who

were far off are now brought near in the blood of Christ and hence may share the destiny of the people of God.

The “Christ in you” motif occurs in a polemical context in 2 Corinthians 10-13. Paul’s argumentation revolves around opponents who have been challenging his apostolic authority and gospel. In 11:4 he asserts that the Corinthians seem ready to accept a different Jesus and gospel than the one he preached. According to 13:3 they were resisting Paul and wanted proof (*dokime*) that Christ was speaking in him. That is, they wanted to test Paul and find proof of the rightness of his authority and message. In 13:5 Paul turns the tables and says that they should examine and test (*dokimazo*) themselves to see if they are “in the faith” which, in the verse, is parallel to Jesus Christ being in them. If they failed to meet the test of being “in the faith” they would show that Christ really wasn’t in them. The question was not about Paul’s Christianity but about theirs. Were they authentic Christians or not?

Thus, from the above passages it can be seen that the “Christ in us motif” functions in terms of union with Christ, reception of his benefits, and the very reality and truth of the gospel and Christianity. And far from “in Christ” being more in line with objective, legal justification and “Christ in us” being related to subjective sanctification, Galatians 2:20 and 4:19 show that “Christ in us” has to do with justification. Flipping the coin the other way the New Testament evidences that “in Christ” can be connected with sanctification as well as justification. In Romans 6, as a whole, being “in Christ” as a result of being “baptized into Christ” is related to the exchange of lordships from the power of sin to the power of God (Christ) which produces walking in newness of life, living for God, and sanctification. In 1 Corinthians 1:30 it is related not only to righteousness and redemption but to sanctification. In 1 Corinthians 6:11 both sanctification and justification are in the Lord Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 1:5 “in Christ” stands in relation to being holy and without blemish; in 2:10 it is connected with good works and in 1 Corinthians 5:17 with the new creation.

That “Christ in us” and we “in Him” are one indivisible reality can be seen with special force in the gospel and first epistle of John where many times the theme is “abide in me and I in you” (e.g., John 15).

Related Expressions

With Christ

The idea of being “with Christ,” especially in verbal compounds, is another way of expressing the inclusion of the believer into Christ and his salvation-historical destiny.

“With Christ” occurs in the following forms and passages:

Dying with Christ (Rom 6:8, Col 2:20)

Living with Christ (2 Cor 13:4)

Made alive with Christ (Col 2:13)

Compound words beginning with “with” include:

Suffer with (Rom 8:17)

Crucified with (Rom 6:6; Gal 2:19)

Died with (2 Tim 2:11)

Planted (grown with) (Rom 6:5)

Buried in death with (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12)

Raised with (Eph 2:6; Col 2:12; 3:1)

Made alive with (Eph 2:5; Col 2:13)

Live with (Rom 6:8; 2 Tim 2:11)

Seated with (Eph 2:6)

Glorified with (Rom 8:17)

Reign with (2 Tim 2:12)

Heirs with (Rom 8:17)

Conformed with (Phil 3:10, 21; Rom 8:29)

Through Christ

In a number of texts “through Christ” functions in respect to realities which in other places are said to be “in Christ.” The following verses are appropriate here: Romans 1:8; 5:21; 7:25; 16:27; 1 Corinthians 15:21 compared with 15:22; Ephesians 1:5; Philippians 1:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:14; Titus 3:16; 1 Peter 2:5; 4:11.

Of Christ

“Of Christ,” the so-called “mystical genitive” also expresses similar ideas to “in Christ.” Compare, for example, Philemon

1 with Ephesians 4:1 and Ephesians 3:1; Romans 16:16 with 1 Thessalonians 1:1; and Galatians 3:29 with the thought of Romans 6:6. In 1 Corinthians 15:22-23 just after saying that all shall be made alive “in Christ,” Paul describes the order in which coming to life occurs: Christ first, then at his coming those who are “of Christ.” In Romans 8:9 one is not “of Christ” unless Christ is in him (which equals being “in Christ”). All in all there are over sixty nouns in Paul’s epistles where the genitive “of Christ” (or variants) follows, and important ideas similar to what we find in the “in Christ” motif occur.

Spiritual Union

There is no question—when Paul speaks of being “in Christ” or “Christ in us” (or similar expressions), the deepest meaning of his words is that the Christian is incorporated not merely into a history—even if that history centers in the death and resurrection of Christ—with all the saving benefits that history brings, but into a person, the person of Christ himself. A vital union of the greatest intimacy is forged so that not only is the life of the Christian determined by the saving events of the cross and resurrection, but it is determined, defined, and indwelt by the crucified, resurrected Christ himself. To be “in Christ” means that a personal union between Christ and the Christian has taken place. Indeed, it is this symbiosis between the living Christ and the Christian that makes possible the believer’s entry into salvation history. There is no possibility of, or meaningfulness to, being “in Christ” without a personal relationship with the *living* Christ. Without that relationship there is no access to salvation history. If Christ be dead, salvation history is a myth, and we are yet in our sins (1 Cor 14:14, 17).

How is the living Christ present to the believer? It is of great significance in answering this question to note two factors. First, what is said to be true “in the Spirit” is what is said to be true “in Christ” (or variations). The same realities or experience are described by the two phrases. Among the nineteen occurrences of “in the Spirit” there are the following parallels:

<u>QUALITIES</u>	<u>“IN THE SPIRIT”</u>	<u>“IN CHRIST”</u>
righteousness	Rom 14:17	2 Cor 5:21
justification	1 Cor 6:11	Gal 2:17
faith	1 Cor 12:9	Gal 3:26
sanctification	1 Cor 6:11	1 Cor 1:2
peace	Rom 14:17	Phil 6:7
joy	Rom 14:17	Phil 3:1; 4:4
love	Col 1:8	Rom 8:39
sealing	Eph 4:30	Eph 1:13
charisma (gift)	1 Cor 12:9	Rom 6:23
standing	Phil 1:27	Phil 4:1
being in	Rom 8:9	1 Cor 1:30
being filled	Eph 5:18	Col 2:10
speaking	1 Cor 12:3	2 Cor 2:17
testifying	Rom 9:1	Eph 4:17
the temple	Eph 2:22	Eph 2:21
one body	1 Cor 12:13	Rom 12:5

There are other kinds of parallels such as: 1) Being led by the Spirit we are adopted children of God (Rom 8:14-15); yet we are adopted through Jesus Christ (Eph 1:5). 2) Our bodies shall be made alive by the indwelling Spirit; yet it is in Christ that we shall be made alive (1 Cor 15:22); 3) We live through the Spirit (Gal 5:25), yet Christ is our life (Col 3:4; Phil 1:21); 4) We have fellowship in the Spirit (Phil 2:1), as we do in Christ (1 Cor 1:9).

The second factor is that while there is not an absolute identification of Christ with the Spirit there is the closest possible association. According to 2 Corinthians 3:17 (also 3:19), “the Lord is the Spirit.” (That this is not identification is shown by the sentence which follows: “And where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom”). In Romans 8 we find the alternating phrases: “in the Spirit,” “Spirit of God in you,” “Spirit of Christ,” and “Christ in you.” Also, in 1 Corinthians 15:45 it declares that “the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.”

What all of this shows is that it is through the Spirit, which comes from Christ, that Christ is present to us. The promises of the Paraclete in John 14-16 supply striking evidence of this. If in John it is said that the Comforter will be in you (14:17), it says

immediately after, “I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you” (14:18). Then in John 15 Jesus several times uses the formula “Abide in me and I in you.”

It is clear that life “in the Spirit” is life “in Christ” because the Spirit is the presence of the resurrected, spiritual Christ. This is the basis for the vital union and personal fellowship which exists between the believer and Christ.

The Body of Christ

As one can be “baptized into Christ” so, according to 1 Corinthians 12:13, one is on that very account “baptized into one body” through the Spirit which is bestowed in baptism. As a result, Jews and Greeks, slaves and free (classes said to be one in Galatians 3:27-28 as a result of being baptized into Christ and putting on Christ) all drink of one Spirit. Thus, being “in Christ” or “in the Spirit” involves one in the fellowship of Christ’s body, the church (1 Cor 12:12). To be in Christ is to share with all those who draw their life from him. Romans 12:15, in a similar vein to 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, declares that “we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.” The idea of being members of one another has a specific application to the Gentiles who, though once far off, have, in Christ Jesus, been brought near in his blood (Eph 2:13) and as a result are “fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus” (Eph 3:6). In view of this what else can be said except “to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen” (Eph 3:21). It is noteworthy how “in the church” and “in Christ Jesus” are coordinated here.

As far as Paul was concerned, the church as a whole and the local churches in various locations were all in Christ. This is seen in the greetings he gives to the churches he has founded. For example, Colossians is sent “to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ” (Col 1:2). Paul greets his Thessalonian converts as the “Church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess 1:1, 2 Thess 1:1). (These texts are of special interest because being in the Lord Jesus Christ is equated with being in God the Father. This shows not only a high Christology and a rooted-in-Him ecclesiology but that “in Christ” is not basically a forensic concept,

but a relational one.) Paul can speak of the churches of Judea “in Christ” (Gal 1:22) and of the Philippians as saints “in Christ Jesus” (1:1 and 4:21). In fact the Philippian Christians are “brethren in the Lord” (Phil 1:4), and Epaphroditus is to be received by them “in the Lord” (2:29). Like the latter point the Thessalonians are to respect those who are over them “in the Lord” (5:12). If there is quarreling in the church the disputants are to agree with one another “in the Lord” (Phil 4:2).

In Romans 16 the phrases “in the Lord” or “in Christ” occur eleven times, and the sense is that of those who have a relationship to each other because they have a relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, they are identified as Christians. When the church is asked to receive Phoebe in the Lord (16:2), the import is that she is to be welcomed as a Christian. If Priscilla and Aquila are said to be Paul’s fellow workers in Christ (16:3), the meaning implicit is that they, like Paul, are engaged in Christian service. Romans 16:7 is especially instructive. Paul speaks of Andronicus and Junia as being in Christ before himself. What else can this mean except that they believed and were baptized as Christians before Paul? And as Paul continues his greetings in 16:8-13 most everything he says can be understood in terms of Christian relationships or activities. Of course, to be a Christian is not a superficial designation, but means to be united simultaneously with Christ and his people. When the greetings of Romans 16 close, Paul, who has frequently used the “in Him” concept in the chapter, brings greetings to the Roman church as a whole from all those congregations who are “of Christ,” i.e., who belong to Christ. This shows once more how the genitive “of Christ” may be synonymous with “in Christ.”

Attributes of Existence

In many texts, various aspects of the personal existence of Paul as an apostle and of his converts are said to be totally related to, or defined by, Christ.

As for Paul he claims to have had exalted spiritual experiences as a “man in Christ” (2 Cor 12:2) for whom living itself is Christ (Phil 1:21). This living includes his ways, “in Christ,” his boldness “in Christ” (Phlm 8), his speaking “in Christ” (2 Cor 2:17, 12:19),

his affirmation of the truth “in Christ” (Rom 9:1), his begetting converts “in Christ” (1 Cor 4:15; 9:1) and loving them “in Christ” (1 Cor 16:24). Further, it refers to his pastoral visitations “in Christ,” whether through associates (Phil 2:19) or personally (Phil 2:24), and his pride over laboring “in Christ” (Rom 15:19). When he is thrown in prison, it is not a secular event, for his bonds are “in Christ” (Phil 1:13; Eph 4:1, with which cf Eph 3:1: a prisoner “of Christ”).

As for his converts, they may be infants “in Him” (1 Cor 3:1), but they are also established “in Him” (*eis* for *en* here, 2 Cor 1:21). As such they are new creatures “in Him” (Col 2:6), wise “in Him” (1 Cor 4:10) faithful “in Him” (Col 1:2; Eph 1:1), and live a godly life “in Him” (2 Tim 3:12). They experience liberty “in Him” (Gal 2:4), are consoled “in Him” (Phil 2:1) and, at the end of life’s race, will hear the high calling of God to receive the victory wreath “in Him” (Phil 3:14). Indeed, they experience all the good “in Him” (Phlm 6).

Ethics and Discipleship

Romans 6 points out that by being “baptized into Christ,” by which we come to be “in Christ,” we are set on the pathway of “newness of life” which results in yielding our lives and members to God as weapons of righteousness and becoming sanctified. This is the basis for new ethical actions. The ethical impingement of Christ upon his own can be seen in particular in the “in the Lord” statements. Reference may be made to the listing earlier in the paper to all those texts in which the “in the Lord” motif occurs. Some of these are synonymous with “in Christ” but others contain an ethical challenge of some kind. For example, Paul exhorts the Thessalonians “in the Lord” that as they learned from him how to walk in such a way as pleased God they should do so more and more (1 Thess 4:1; cf 4:2 which refers to the instructions which Paul had given them “through the Lord Jesus”). This accords with Colossians 2:6 which exhorts: “As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him.” This finds a parallel in Galatians 5:25 (“Spirit” replaces “Lord” here): “If we live by (in) the Spirit, let us also walk by (in) the Spirit.” It should not be forgotten that this is a conclusion drawn from Galatians 5:24 which affirms that “those

who belong to Christ (are “of Christ”) have crucified the flesh with its passions.

A powerful passage challenging the members of the Christian community to be to each other what Christ has been to them is Philippians 2:1-13. The challenge finds its keynote in 2:5: “Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” On the basis of the gifts of encouragement, comfort, and mercy which the community finds “in Christ,” as well as because of the community’s participation in the Spirit (2:1), believers are exhorted to three qualities of life: 1) unity (*sympsychoi* – “together souls,” i.e., “soul brothers/sisters”) in the mind of love (2:2); 2) humility instead of strife and conceit (2:3); and 3) service to others (2:4). Then in 2:6-8 the mind of Christ, which is to characterize the Christian community in its corporate life, is traced. Christ, in contrast to Adam (the story of the fall lurks behind Paul’s words), who grasped for an equality with God which was not his, emptied himself of the glory which was his—the divine form—and, taking on human form and that of a servant or slave, humbled himself and was obedient even to the point of death upon the cross. Here is the realized story of love, humility and service, characteristics to which Paul called the Philippians. The climax of that story is the exaltation of Christ, in which he is given a name which is above every other name and to which every knee is to bow—the name “Lord” (2:9-11). As Lord he directs the lives of all who are “in Him.” His way is to be their way. And it is possible to follow this way and work out (bring to fruition) Christ’s salvation in the life of the church because God dwells in the church and its members both to will and to perform his good pleasure (12-13). It is clear that the crucified, exalted Christ never leaves those “in Him” where he first found them. It is also clear that the church “in Christ” and God in the church stand in fundamental relationship.

We may also recall Paul’s teaching in 2 Corinthians 4:8-11 which, while not expressly using the “in Christ” words; represents what the call to service “in Christ” is like. As death and life characterized Christ, so it characterizes the ministry of those in union with him. We may schematize Paul’s teaching thus:

Death of Christ

4:8 We are afflicted in every way, perplexed
4:9 persecuted, struck down,
4:10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus

Risen Life of Christ

but not crushed
but not driven to despair
but not forsaken
but not destroyed.

so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

Death of Christ

4:11 We are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake,

4:12 so death is at work in us,

Risen Life of Christ

For while we live

so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh.
but life in you

Other texts which show that “in Him” leads to new ethics and other challenges are: 1 Corinthians 7:22, 7:39; 15:58; Galatians 5:10; Ephesians 4:17; 5:8; 6:1, 10; Philippians 4:1, 2, 4; Colossians 3:18; 4:7; 1 Thessalonians 3:8; 5:12; 2 Thessalonians 3:4,12; Philemon 16.

Eschatology

As in the story of Jesus in Philippians 2, those “in Christ,” who walk in the Lord’s way, will find that their lives will be crowned by exaltation. As with Christ, so also with the Christian is Paul’s teaching. “In Christ,” at the farther edge of its working, finds ultimate fulfillment in eschatological glory. So we see that “the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thess 4:16) and that, as I/all die in Adam, so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor 15:22). “Those who belong to Christ” will follow in the way of Christ the first fruits (15:23). ‘If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Jesus Christ from the dead

will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you” (Rom 8:11). And if we are children of God, then we are “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him” (Rom 8:17). The goal of the one “in Christ” is “that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that...I may attain the resurrection of the dead” (Phil 3:10-11) when Christ will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body (3:21). For, “just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven” (1 Cor 15:49).

Conclusions

With the various dimensions of the meaning of “in Him” in view it must be said that 1) no uniform concept can do the phrase justice and 2) that an overriding forensic significance is not justified. At the core “in Christ” refers to the most intimate union possible between the risen Christ and the believer. Because the believer is united with the living Lord through the indwelling of his Spirit, he/ she is incorporated, on the one hand, into those events—the death and resurrection of Christ—which inaugurate the new era of salvation, and on the other hand, into the body of Christ, the Church. As a result, the believer is the recipient of all the blessings of salvation which flow from Christ and exist in the fellowship of believers. The presence of so great a salvation transforms the ethical walk of the believer and finally, when Christ who is our life returns, translates the existence of the believer into the realm of God’s eschatological glory. Being like Christ and with Christ is the final destination of the person “in Him.”





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