

## The Meaning Of "In Christ"

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As we begin, I would like to return to the story of Capt. John “Black Jack” Geary to mine a few more nuggets from author Jack Campbell's science-fiction series *The Lost Fleet* that we talked about in my last sermon.

Recall that Capt. Geary was found floating in space in a damaged life pod one hundred years after he had fought a heroic rearguard action to save the Alliance fleet from certain destruction. Soon after his rescue, as the officer with the most seniority because he had a hundred years on everybody else, he found himself in command of the fleet that had found him and he was tasked with leading them back home safely through enemy space.

Remember that he found this modern fleet and its officers far different than those he had been accustomed to in his fleet a century earlier. Because, after a hundred years of constant conflict, the rules of honorable warfare had fallen by the wayside. Both sides hated each other with a visceral passion. Revenge and retaliation were normal, atrocities were commonplace on both sides, and standards had slipped. Remember I illustrated that he had to institute the military salute back into common use.

Most officers in the corps sought only promotion and glory, and the whole corps itself had become deeply politicized and even battle tactics had degenerated into straight ahead, guns blazing charges with no forethought and no strategy at all. What Capt. Geary sees appalls him. He knew that was not the way to run a fleet, the way to fight a war, or even a way to live.

The young officers of the fleet idolize him because they see him as the heroic “Black Jack” of the war who, with daring and sacrificial courage, had outwitted the enemies of the Alliance and had annihilated them. They did not realize that their perception of John Geary is entirely false. “Black Jack” we

might say, was a propaganda cutout made by the Alliance hierarchy to inspire courage and heroism in this generation of officers. It was not the real John Geary. John Geary and “Black Jack” were two totally different people.

The real Capt. Geary was a fallible human being, he trembled before battle, he constantly second guessed himself, he often missed important details, things that he just did not think about. On the other hand, even though he was a normal fallible human being, he was a man of truth—he did not lie. One of the recurring themes through these books is that each time he tries to be a little bit deceptive, people tell him he is a horrible liar.

He really was a man of truth, honesty, and courage who would overcome his fear and hope for the best. He was a man of honor and integrity. A man who believed in helping the enemy after he had beaten them. He was a man of deep thought and resourcefulness who could cobble together what was left of his crew and fleet and make the best of it, and he would use everything at hand to get the job done.

You could say that he was a normal man with certain skills and values that made him successful and even extraordinary, but he did not *feel* extraordinary. He did not look on himself as extraordinary, he saw himself as John Geary, who just happened to fall into this situation but made the best of it.

So there is this misperception here. Peoples’ thoughts are different from reality about him as a person. So, what does he do about this misperception? Does he tell everyone that he is not the “Black Jack” or hero that everyone believes him to be? No, he did not. Did he write a complete bio or character sketch to set the record straight? No, he did not do that either. Did he get all his officers together and instruct them to hold meetings with their crews to give them the truth about Capt. John Geary? No, he did not do that either.

He did not do anything fleet-wide, or even officer-corps-wide to let everyone know what he is like. What he does do is let those who are closest to him know that he dislikes the nickname “Black Jack” because “Black Jack” is a propaganda nickname and it does not say anything about the real name John Geary. He becomes embarrassed and even sometimes even a little angry when people expect him to live up to that “Black Jack” legend.

So what he does is takes each day at a time and lets his humble example, his wise leadership, his even-handed approach, and his numerous victories do the talking for him. His life, his actions, his decisions, do more to change the culture of the fleet than any amount of talking, writing, or meetings could ever do. He decides that he is going to be Capt. John Geary and let people understand, over the course of this dash back home, through all this enemy space, what he is really like. He showed them what the real "Black Jack" did, way back when, to become a hero.

Now what this tells me is the same thing as the old aphorism says, "I would rather see a sermon than hear one any day." Examples go so much further than words and this tells me that the most important part of a person is what is inside; what is in his heart; what he is really like; what his character is. It is those things that people will observe, what they will be able to hold on to and know to be the real person.

Please turn to Luke 6 and we will see this in a positive sense. Then we will turn to Mark 7 and see it in a negative sense. Both are statements by Jesus where He says very much the same thing.

**Luke 6:45** A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

So we see here that it is what is inside that eventually will become observed on the outside. A good man, if there are good things inside, it will eventually come out one way or another—in good fruit, good actions, good words. But if it is an evil man, those same things, on the negative end, are going to come out as well. You cannot hide what you are and that is what people will see in their experience of you.

Now, to see the flipside of this, turn to Mark 7. This is in the sections where the Pharisees were criticizing Jesus and His disciples for not washing their hands because it was against their tradition to eat with unwashed hands. In verse 15, Jesus makes a statement about his conclusions about these things.

**Mark 7:15-16** “There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!”

The disciples did not quite understand, so He had to explain, in verse 18.

**Mark 7:18-23** So He said to them, “Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying [digesting or eliminating] all foods?” And He said, “What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man.”

We see here that what is inside, what is written on the heart, is the real person. What comes into the mind, has been absorbed, and then used through various experiences, is the character of the person. A person, once that character is formed, will act in accordance with that and it takes a great deal of hard work to change those things because they become habitual. We all know that the process of repentance is not easy.

The point is that what is on the inside is going to come out in our behaviors and our speech. What is in the heart, or as Martin Luther King said in his famous speech, “it is the content of one’s character that is going to make all the difference in our conduct and thus in our example toward others.”

This is going to make or break our, that is the sons of God, ability to teach and persuade others of the truth, because teachers of moral truth, teachers of ethical things, teachers of God's way, must exemplify what they teach to the best of their ability or they are guilty of hypocrisy and they will fail in persuading others to the truth.

In the ruined chaos of the early Millennium, this will be a critical factor in changing the culture of the world. The example of the sons of God are

critical. As we saw in the last sermon, teachers will no longer be invisible, they will not be in a corner, they will be out for all to see. They will be the front men, as it were, for the government and Kingdom of God; for God's way of life.

They will be living examples of God's way among the people and the people will see that example of God's way of life at its fullness, after we have completed this lifetime in the flesh and have been given our reward—eternal life. They will be able to see in us the results. That is why we are called firstfruits. They will be able to see what this life produces and in our individual actions we will be able to show specifics by our examples.

I am sure we will be teaching, we do that now. We teach by word of mouth, by article, etc., but the way people learn the most is by the *way we live*, by our *example*, and by the way we interact. They are going to see that what we say, when we do teach, is what we *do*. In other words, we live by what we teach. There will be a one-on-one correspondence between what we teach and how we live. People will see it, they will see living examples in its fullness.

Now at this point I want to take a closer look at the title of my sermon, which is, what it means to be “in Christ.” This is a phrase used predominately by the apostle Paul to explain facets of the Christian’s place, his status, his value, his holiness, his distinctiveness, and his actions, among many other things.

I want to show our being “in Christ” means everything to our salvation now and it will mean everything to the parts that we play in the Millennium, the Kingdom of God, and on into eternity. It is that state of being “in Christ” that is going to make the difference, because without Christ we would be nothing.

Now I want to go through the first half of Ephesians 1. It is a well known passage and actually it was Mr. Armstrong's favorite. It is in wonderful soaring language and I am told that the Greek is exquisite. But more than that it is mind boggling in what it tells us. I will read verse 1, skip down to verse 3 then go all the way to verse 12, but I want you to key in on the fact that Paul uses a particular phrase over and over again here.

**Ephesians 1:1** Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints [that is you and me here] who are in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus:

**Ephesians 1:3-12** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

Now this is, like I said, one of the best known sections of Paul's work, but in terms of the use of such phrases as "in Christ" or "in Him," it is fairly typical. We see it clearly here because they are bunched together.

Such phrases like that are found in about every passage in the 14 books of the apostle Paul. Something is either "in Christ," "in Christ Jesus," "in our Lord," "in our Savior," or something along that line. In fact there are only 90-91 chapters in the epistles of Paul and he uses this phrase, or something like it, around 155 times. So you are likely to find one or two in just about every chapter of his writing. This count does not even consider instances of the phrases "in Jesus" or "in God" or in titles like "our Lord," or in phrases like "in His goodness," "in His presence," or "in the Beloved," as we saw in verse 6.

In Paul's 14 letters, the specific phrase "in Christ" appears 84 times. That is just about 1 per chapter. So obviously it was something that was really on his mind. The phrase "in Him" appears about 20 times. The phrase "by Him" or "by Christ" appears 13 times. "Through Him" or "through Christ" appears 12 times, and the phrase "with Him" or "with Christ" appears 26 times.

So you can see there are all of these phrases, all these parts of Paul's writing, where this idea of being in Christ or doing something by Christ or with Christ is being pushed and shoved at us so that we get the point. The point is that being "in Christ" makes all the difference.

So whether or not it is phrased "in Christ," or phrased in another way, the idea still keeps getting hammered into us that we owe it all to Christ. And not only do we owe it all to Christ in terms of past tense actions that have been done, we owe Christ because of present tense things that are going on now because He is *in* us, and there are also future tense things that will not happen except by the agency of Christ. So Christ is all in all. Christ is everything.

Now in addition to these particular phrases, the idea of union with Christ is found in metaphors all throughout Paul's writing and also all throughout the Bible, but the ones that we tend to key more specifically on are like in I Corinthians 12, where it talks about that we are in His body and He is the Head of the body. So we are clothed with Christ, we put on Christ and become a new man, a new man created in us. There is the metaphor of being built up as a temple or as a building. There is also a very clear example in Ephesians 5 where we are the Bride of Christ, we are married to Christ, He is our Bridegroom and we become one.

So there are all kinds of ideas of union with Christ. Whether they are in these particular phrases or whether they are in the metaphors, we are constantly being bombarded by that thought throughout the apostle Paul's writings. It is no minor theme in the things that he penned. No other writer in the New Testament or the Old Testament goes into this idea of union with Christ nearly as much as he does.

Something or some occasion made it prominent in Paul's thinking about his Savior, and it covers just about every theological concept he explains to us throughout his 14 books.

We can probably find the answers to its origin in Acts 9. Acts 9 has one of the most significant events in the life of the apostle Paul, his conversion on the road to Damascus. This is the seminal event in Paul's life. He thought of his life as nothing until this point, everything got turned upside down, the past was destroyed and he became a new man, he had a new mission and he took that new life seriously. We are able to enjoy the results of this in his example and his writings throughout the rest of his life. Here is the beginning of that idea of being "in Christ." See if you can pick it out here.

**Acts 9:1-8** Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. Then Saul arose from the ground, and when his eyes were opened he saw no one. But they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus.

I should mention that in verse 8 he was blinded at the time and someone had to lead him by the hand. Now in this seminal event in Paul's life, we can see a fairly clear hint about his thinking of our becoming "in Christ." It began immediately upon Christ's revealing Himself to him.

Jesus Christ asked Paul—who had been hailing the members of the church, both men and women, into prison, finding any excuse to do so—“why are you persecuting Me?” He did not say why are you persecuting My people? Then later in verse 5, He says, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.” Why are you killing yourself doing this? Why are you struggling against Me and what I am trying to do?

Do you get the point here? Paul was literally persecuting the members of God's church—Christians, people who follow the Way. But Jesus said, you are persecuting Me. When you persecute them the only logical conclusion that you can come up with at that point is that Jesus Christ was *in* the people. That is the only way that he could be persecuting Christ, is if He was in them.

That was the key part of being a Christian. There was an even deeper and closer link than just following Christ and that is that He was in them and that they were one. He associated Himself so closely to His people that what was done to them was done to Him, and what happened to them happened to Him.

Christ and His people were not separate, rather they were as one, they were unified, and they were inseparable. This was not the first time that this kind of theology is mentioned in the Bible, this was just the first time that Paul had really understood it. The theology of this was Christ's own theology. He taught this theology to His disciples during His ministry. The substance of it comes out with what Christ preached in the gospels.

We know that Jesus is the Chief Cornerstone on which the apostles and the prophets did their work and we are built on them. So this is not really a Pauline doctrine, you might call it, it is Christ's teaching. Paul merely expands on it because he was so fascinated by it, because this is the way that Christ revealed Himself and made this one particular teaching so clear to Paul. Christ in us and the hope of glory was always on his mind. Now let us see a few places in the gospels where this is found.

**John 6:56** "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him."

So if we sign on and we take Him into us then He is in us and we are in Him, we become inseparable.

**John 15:4** "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me."

Here we are the branches on the vine, we are of one plant.

Now, during His magnificent prayer to the Father before His arrest He says:

**John 17:21** [He is praying about us here] ". . . that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me."

**John 17:23** "I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me."

We are loved by the Father just as much as He loved Jesus Christ! That is how one we are with Christ. With Christ in us we receive the love of God to its fullest and that is something awesome to think about. So we see here that this is something that Jesus Christ introduced. He is the Chief Cornerstone, He is the one where all the teaching comes from.

Notice how all these examples I came to are in John. John is the non-synoptic gospel, meaning that he does not look at things the way the others do. It is a gospel that stresses the divinity of Christ and contains the most advanced theological teaching. The other three books of the gospels do not have as bold of statements on union with Christ as this, but they are there.

In the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats the people said, "When did we see you hungry, thirsty, or naked?" and He answered, "If you have done it to the least of these, you have done it to Me!" It is the same idea here that Paul saw firsthand on the road to Damascus.

It likely took the apostles, who first heard these things, years to plumb the depth of this teaching and they probably never did grasp it fully, but only Paul's writings and thoughts about this topic have come down to us in any great length.

Peter writes of being living stones in the temple of the house that is being built for God, which is a similar idea. He also talks about partaking in the divine nature. John also, in his short letters in the end of the Book, talks about God abiding in us and us abiding in Him. So they obviously understood this concept, but we get Paul's take on it because Paul took these ideas and he expanded on them greatly, so that we could see them from many different points of view. He also made certain parts of it much more precise so that we could understand things clearly and exhaustively, on these particular things.

So what is union with Christ? We probably have a pretty good idea of that because we have been in God's church long enough to know and we have read these scriptures. We understand, as we saw in John, Christ lives in us by His Holy Spirit. So the basic understanding of this idea of union with Christ is there.

It is not a very difficult concept, even though we may have a hard time grasping the mechanics of it. We may wonder, how does God, through His Spirit, come and live with us all the time? Or, how do we make use of this? Our minds just naturally try to figure out how all this works. In actuality it may not be all that important for us to know, but what is important to know is that it is happening. He is there and we can always count on Him being there. He is not a prayer away, He is right there, inside of us.

Paul, as I said, refines this so that we have a lot of different other ideas brought into the mix so that we can get a good grasp of it and use it. Now much of the precision in meaning comes across because of the Greek preposition *en*. It corresponds to our word "in" as in the phrase, "in Christ."

Like our prepositions in English grammar, there is not just one definition of the word *en*, it has several different meanings. The Greek preposition *en* can have many as twelve different ideas that it expresses and I want to give you these here so that you understand the broad application of this one two-letter word and why we can have different ideas come out of this phrase "in Christ."

The most common definition of “in” is location. We are in the room; we are in services; we are in a location or a place. It can also mean a state or condition, for example we are in good health. Now in Greek, the word *en* can also be like our word “into.” So it is something that starts from without and goes *into* a thing. For example if you go into the building, that means that you go from outside and you extend your action inside or into the building.

It can also mean close association within a limit, for example you could say that you are in Nashville but you do not just mean Nashville, you include the metropolitan area and everything that is closely associated with Nashville. So you may use a specific place but you are talking about it in a more general sense. It is in association with something.

Those were some of the easier definitions. It can also have to do with the means of something. Most of the time, in this case it is written with the word “with.” For example: you go with haste or in haste. Another meaning is agency, meaning that something is done with the help of another thing. I am just giving you the meanings of this word to show you the broad scope of it.

Another definition is circumstance, meaning: in view of the fact that we are going to family day today, I need to finish early. Another one is identification. So this would be normally translated as “by” or “in connection with.” An example is that you are identified in Christ. Another definition is reason. In most modern translations they would not translate this as “in” but “because.”

Obviously when you say “in” we can sometimes mean time. For example: in five days we will not be here anymore. Oftentimes it is translated while; during; or when, just to get the idea across that we are talking about the passage of time. It can be talked about in terms of manner, meaning for example: according to Paul, or according to this or that. Finally it can also mean substance of something, or consisting of.

Those meanings are not as important other than to understand that the word *en* in Greek has a very broad application. So this means that Paul's use of the

simple phrase of “in Christ” or “in Him” may not say what you think it says because his idea is elsewhere than what you might think. So we really have to study these things in context to get the full meaning of it.

We are going to look at four overall facets of union with Christ or being “in Christ” which will help us to get a better grasp of Paul's development of the idea. I am going to give you these four right here and then go into detail in turn. They are: 1) instrumentality or agency, 2) participation with, 3) identification with, and 4) incorporation.

So for the first one, instrumentality, we will go to II Corinthians 5. We are breaking into a thought here.

**II Corinthians 5:19** that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

If we study these words in context, these “in Christ” statements, it often becomes clear how Paul is using them and how they are meant to be understood. In this case, the context gives us the answer, so we are going to go back to verse 17. Now here, verse 18 explains verse 19, which has the “in Christ” statement in it.

**II Corinthians 5:17** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

Now in verse 17, this “in Christ” statement has to do with being Christians and this would be an identification, but we are not concerned with that, we are concerned with verse 19. Now we will read verse 18 which explains verse 19.

**II Corinthians 5:18-19** Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, [Paul, like a good Hebrew, restates what

he just said] that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

Here we see that God's plan is ultimately to reconcile all of mankind to Himself, because man has rejected God and now needs to be reconciled back to God so that we will all be unified. He started that process by calling us. We are the firstfruits, we are the first go-round in this reconciliation of the world. We are His test case, as it were, and to some, meaning the apostle specifically but the ministry as a whole as well, he has assigned the job of preaching the gospel and getting the word out there to help the process of reconciling of the world.

Now the truly vital fact in this whole operation is that God reconciles the world *in* Christ, and as He explained it in verse 18, it is *through* Christ. So as a general definition of instrumentality, which is what we are trying to explain here, is that our union with Christ involves how Christ accomplishes the will of God towards us and the fact that God the Father uses Jesus Christ to do His will.

Christ is God's supreme agent of working with us, and working with the world. He is reconciling the world *in* Christ. Christ is the agent of reconciliation, or we could say that He is the instrument of God's work for the benefit of the church and more generally for the benefit of all mankind.

We often look at this in terms of His role as Mediator and High Priest, but this actually applies in every way to what Jesus has done. He was God's agent in everything, in creation, in calling, in redemption, in sanctification, and will go all the way through to being God's agent in the resurrection. The Father works through the Son and that is what this idea of "in Christ" is—that He is the instrument or the agent of God in doing work in this world.

The Father rarely touches things down here on earth, it is almost always done through the instrumentality of Christ. Now we will go to II Timothy 1 and see another one of these. Paul writes here:

**II Timothy 1:8-10** Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the

sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

So everything that we have has been given to us “in Christ.” God has made it all work in Christ.

**II Timothy 2:10** Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. [That it comes through Christ Jesus.]

That one is pretty easy to understand. God provides grace and salvation through the instrumentality of Christ. All things are done “in Christ.”

Now let us go on to the second one: participation. Turn to I Corinthians 15. It is always tempting to see all of these “in Christ” statements as either identification or as instrumentally, that God is doing something through Christ or that it was done because we identify with Christ.

**I Corinthians 15:20-22** But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

Now you can easily see that we could look at that and say that through Christ we are going to be resurrected, but we would be not exactly right. It is a truth, however Paul is going in a different direction. He is talking about participation. What he is saying here is that just as we participated in sin and in rebellion against God and deserved the death penalty, just like Adam got, so by participating with Christ, in God's plan of salvation, we will share in the reward or in the resurrection of the dead specifically, as Christ did.

What he is saying is that we did participate in the world's way, Satan's way, just as Adam did. We followed our father Adam, but we have been called out

of the world to participate in a different way, the way of God, the way that Christ lived. And if we continue to participate in the way of Christ then we are going to also do all those things that Christ did, specifically here we are going to participate in the resurrection of the dead just as Christ did. There is a one-on-one correspondence between the life of Christ and the life of Christians, except that one is much greater than the other.

We participate, we share, we have communion with Christ in everything. In the same way, when we are first converted, we participate in His death and burial and we are raised to the newness of life. You can find that in the first few verses of Romans 6. Baptism is a form of death and resurrection and Christ did it first and we follow in His steps. We participate with Him in that.

Paul even made statements that he shared in Christ's suffering just as we also share in Christ's sufferings. We participate in that with Him. So as followers of Christ, we participate in the same things He did in order to produce the character image that He has.

This kind of union with Christ is also written in Paul's writings as doing something *with* Christ. The term "in Christ" in the Greek can also be written as "with Christ." It is an interesting concept there. Now let us look at Romans 8. This is a "with Christ" statement that says pretty much the same thing.

**Romans 8:17** And if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

So if we suffer with Him we will also be glorified with Him and become heirs with Him. We are going to participate with Him in everything that is good for us and that will produce the character image that God wants us to have.

We can also add to this idea from Hebrews 2:10, where Christ is shown to be the Captain of our salvation or the *archegos*; the one who goes before; the trailblazer, and we follow behind in His footsteps doing the exact same things. He cuts the trail and we trudge behind Him.

Now let us go on to the third one here which is identification. This is probably the easiest one of them all. We will go to Romans 8:1 and see this very clearly here. It shows that our status has changed from the common man and now we are "in Christ."

**Romans 8:1** There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

So we are identified with Him because we are "in Him." We are Christians, that is our identification label, or name plate. Now as members of His Kingdom we are identified primarily by our association with Christ. We were in the world, we were identified with other men or with Satan. As John 8 states, "you are of your father the devil." That is the association and identification the Jews had there because they were not being Christ-like.

But we have been called to be "in Christ." That is now our identification and that is the foundation of what separates us from the world. This marker of identification is often used in salutations, or openings of letters, and sometimes in the valedictions, which is the closings of those same letters. In Philippians we will see this.

**Philippians 1:1** Paul and Timothy, bond servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:

So here he is identifying those particular people. He calls them saints, holy ones, set apart ones, and what really makes them set apart is that they are "in Christ." Now also in Philippians 4:21. This is the valediction where Paul does the same thing. He says:

**Philippians 4:21** Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren who are with me greet you.

He says the exact thing as he is signing off, identifying those particular people, the saints, in Philippi.

On to the fourth one, which is incorporation. I think we understand this pretty well also. We will go to Ephesians 2. Paul is talking about the Gentiles being made one with the rest of the Christians—the Jews.

**Ephesians 2:14-16** For He [Christ] Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.

Now there is not an “in Christ” specifically here but there is an “in Him” or “in His flesh.” So we have here the idea of incorporation. This is the common New Testament idea that newcomers become not just associated with Christ, or identified with Christ, as Christians, but actually *part of Him*. That is what the word incorporate means.

The base definition of incorporate literally means to make, put, or absorb into a body. For example when you incorporate a business you make it into a specific body called a corporation. You all become one in this particular business. In Christ, our corporation is similar but much greater than that—we actually become a part of His spiritual body.

If we go back to I Corinthians 12, we would see that He specifically says, using the metaphor of the body, that we become specific parts of His body, understanding of course that He is the Head and He is the one who controls and guides us. Some call this a mystical union with Christ, but it is not mystical. It is very practical in the church that we are put in various places and given various functions to do in the work of God here on earth in the present.

It is not only in terms of a body, but it is also in the metaphors of God's temple, God's field, and in the metaphor that we are going to be married to Christ and become one. This is the idea of incorporation, becoming one and being unified with Christ.

We will go to Philippians 3. Paul uses this phraseology again. He wants to be totally absorbed into Christ. He says here:

**Philippians 3:8-11** Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Paul desires to be found completely incorporated with Christ and he explains this as a position, a state of being obtained by faith in Christ and God's grace in applying Christ's righteousness to him in justification. We can also see this in Colossians 3, in a slightly different form, where he says:

**Colossians 3:1** If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.

**Colossians 3:3** For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Meaning He was totally enveloped by Christ, in God. His life was totally taken over and absorbed into the life of God.

Now, like I said, these are four very broad categories and if you study these a little further you would find all kind of nuances of them and others, if we look deeply enough. But we need to realize, if nothing else, that being in Christ is the great difference-maker in our lives, not just our lives now, but in our eternal life. Because without Him we can do nothing, we would be nothing, and without Him we have no future. There is no reward without Him.

The existentialist and the nihilists are right, they see what is going on in the world, they see no hope in the future, so they philosophy the reasons to themselves that there is nothing after this, you die, your spirit is dead, and there is no future because they do not have the hope of Christ in them. So without what Christ did and does for us, and our participation, our identification, and our incorporation with Him, there would be no election, no redemption, no new creation, no hope, no salvation, no resurrection, no eternal life, no glorification, no being in the Kingdom of God. Christ, as the old saying goes, is the answer.

Being in Christ allows us to be part of His Family forever and what a wonderful gift that is to be revealed to us and given to us through Him.

Now let us finish in Ephesians 1. What we want to look at here is not just all the “in Him,” “in Christ,” or the “in the Beloved” statements, but rather I want you to see that he lays out the whole plan of God here, showing that by Christ and in Christ we will inherit all things with Him as firstfruits of His spiritual creation.

**Ephesians 1:3-12** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the

purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

So, with Him in us, working with us, we will grow into the character image of Christ and we will, during those first years of the Millennium, have what it takes to live and rule with Him in His Kingdom.