

The Mystery of being In Christ

By Ray Ruppert



And [God] raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places *in Christ Jesus* (Eph 2:6).¹

I looked up several definitions of the Greek word “ἐν” translated as “in.” They didn’t vary much and the big takeaway from them is that it means in. In the same way that I would say I am in a room, then the simple rendering of being in Christ Jesus is that I am inside Christ. To us living in a physical world, that is just crazy talk. We cannot literally be inside of Jesus, can we? If that is difficult to imagine, then it is equally difficult to accept the following verse.

To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is *Christ in you*, the hope of glory (Col 1:27).

¹ Scripture is English Standard Version, 2001, unless otherwise noted. Italics have been added for emphasis.

Is it really possible for Christ to be inside of me or is it just some feelgood cliché that Christians use to describe their relationship with Jesus? We often speak about our relationship with Jesus in term of him living in our hearts. “I have Jesus in my heart.” We often challenge people with whom we share the life changing message of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection with the words, “Do you want to invite Jesus to come into your heart and become a Christian?” Yet there are very few verses in the Bible that speak of Christ being in us.

I think that many Christians do not understand the depth of what these verses mean when the Bible says we are in Christ or Christ is in us. I had one Christian tell me that Jesus cannot literally live in me because he has a physical body and that means he cannot be in my heart. If that is true, then why does Paul pray for us, “so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (Eph 3:17)? My friend’s rationale was that Christ’s Spirit is in us but not Christ. Does the same reasoning say that since we have physical bodies, we cannot be in Christ? What does the Bible tell us about being in Christ?

Ephesians 2:6 is only one of eighty-seven verses in the ESV Bible that speak of being in Christ. They do not all refer to the same thing. Some are talking about having faith in Christ (Acts 24:24). Others speak about redemption in Christ (Rom 3:24), eternal life in Christ (Rom 6:23), love of God in Christ (Rom 8:39), workers in Christ (Rom 16:3), approved in Christ (Rom 16:10), sanctified in Christ (1 Cor 1:2), and even infants in Christ (1 Cor 3:1). The list goes on and on. You can also add to the list multiple verses that reference being in Christ when they speak of being “in him.”

These verses express the different promises, privileges, and standing based on our relationship with Christ. These are not as troublesome to understand as Ephesians 2:6 because we all have certain rights when we join some organization. We have rights because we are citizens in the United States. However, they do not express the same concept of being inside of another person. Yet that is the direct implication of Ephesians 2:6.

Of course, someone could say that this is only symbolic. We are not truly in Christ; it is only an expression of unity and perhaps a summation of all those rights and privileges previously mentioned. However, that does not plumb the depths of Ephesians 2:1-10 to discover the foundation of the mystery of being in Christ.

The reason that I titled this the mystery of being in Christ is that Ephesians 2:6 is speaking of something that is mysterious to us. It is declared unapologetically but defies human reasoning. It can only be explained in terms that are outside our physical dimension. It is quite alien to those who do not know Christ. It is not about being in some fraternal organization, rather it has a spiritual dimension that is outside of our physical realm.

If we read all of Ephesians 2, we find that this mystery is not necessarily cleared up but takes on an even greater dimension. We find that being in Christ is also the same as becoming part of a new man (vs. 15) which is made up of both Jews and Gentiles. This new man has one body (vs. 16) and has access to the Father (vs. 18). This new man is then likened to a building and temple for God (vs. 20-22).

In **Colossians 3:3-4**, we have this theme expressed in a different way. **“For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will**

appear with him in glory.” There can be no doubt that this is speaking of something that is far greater and yet hard for us to understand than simply the privileges of being a Christian. There can be no doubt that when we are in Christ, we are not only in Christ, but we are in God.

This should make sense to us because Christ is one of the Trinity. All three members of the Trinity are God and each of the members must exhibit all the attributes of God or they would not be God. Therefore, since we are in Christ, it is logical that we are also in God and by extension, in the Spirit as well. This can only happen if we, physical beings, also are spiritual beings. C. H. Spurgeon described us as “spiritual beings embodied in material forms” (The Biblical Illustrator, s.v. “Christ the Creator”). When we are in Christ, our dead spiritual nature is made alive with Christ (Eph 2:5, 2 Cor 5:17, Titus 3:5). This new spirit that has been regenerated in us is now able to be in Christ in the spiritual realm (heavenly places) as well as having Christ in us.

G. G. Bradley (1881–1902) gives us reason for having difficulty understanding what is to be in Christ. He states, “Though we ourselves are spiritual beings, we can form no conception of any being that is purely spiritual” (The Biblical Illustrator, s.v. “Christ’s human body the temple of God”). If we cannot comprehend God as a purely spiritual being, how can we then comprehend what it is to be in Christ? How can we comprehend that our spirit (the essence of what we are after we are born again and regenerated by the Holy Spirit) is in Christ? We may not comprehend it, but we must acknowledge it because that is what the Bible tell us.

Enough about the fact of our being in Christ. What is the practical, earthly value of being in Christ? I look to **2 Peter 1:4** and find that this is also mind-blowing, **“He has granted to us his**

precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.” If it is hard to imagine being in Christ, it is also hard to imagine partaking in God’s nature.

If we partake of God’s nature, then we have all that we need according to his promises so that we are able to live godly lives. We have the power of God’s nature to continue increasing in the qualities listed in 2 Peter 1:5-7. Without this divine nature, we would have no power to grow in holiness. In fact, this brings us back to the beginning of Ephesians 2 which tells us we were dead in our transgressions. We did not live for God at all and had no reason or desire to advance in holiness because our spirit was dead.

Paul breaks into a doxology at the end of Ephesians 3 which expresses the greatness of the power of God that is available to us, **“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Eph 3:20-21).**

If we think we cannot overcome some sin in our lives, then we must remember that we are in Christ. When we are in Christ, we have more power to resist and chose to live a godly life than we can imagine (NIV). Maybe the problem in living a godly life and increasing in the qualities listed in 2 Peter 1:5-7 is that we do not ask. We do not think we can do it because we have limited our thinking to symbolically being in Christ and not actually being in him because our spirit is in him.

Another benefit of understanding that we are in Christ is that we are already seated with Christ in heaven. This is not describing some future position that will occur after Jesus comes back and we enter eternity. This is talking about the here and now. Since we are already there in our spirits, we can see this as an assurance that we are accepted by God. Even more explicitly, God has not only accepted us, but has done all the work to bring us to himself since he raised us up (Eph 2:6). If he has done this then what in any realm, physical or spiritual, could ever unseat us? **“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:38-39).** Being in Christ gives us the full assurance of our salvation that will never be removed from us.

Being in Christ is a reassurance and encouragement that wherever we are in our journey toward sanctification, we are no less a child of God than the Apostle Paul. We may be a new believer, but we are just as much in Christ as the elderly person who has lived a godly life. C. H. Spurgeon in his Morning and Evening devotional for October 19th expressed it this way, “Are you mourning, believer, because you are so weak in the divine life: because your faith is so little, your love so feeble? Cheer up, for you have cause for gratitude. Remember that in some things you are equal to the greatest and most full-grown Christian. You are as much bought with blood as he is.” When we are in Christ we do not look back at our sins and weakness, but we can rejoice in our place in Christ and know that, “You are as rich as the richest, if not in enjoyment, yet in real possession” (Spurgeon). Rather, knowing we are in Christ, we can press forward in “the upward call of God in Christ” (Phil 3:14).