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In Christ

In Ancient Israel, God assigned certain places to be cities of refuge (*Numbers 35:9*), where people who had accidentally killed someone could flee to in order to escape vengeance from their victim's relatives. Church buildings across Europe could be legally designated as sanctuaries from the Seventh to Seventeenth Centuries, and embassies can serve a similar purpose today.

The idea of being "*in Christ*" occurs ten times in *Ephesians 1:3-14*, 30 times in total in *Ephesians*, and over 160 times across the New Testament: it is the most commonly-used description of Jesus' followers. We can see three meanings for it in *Ephesians 1:3-14*...

1. "In Christ" means Jesus is the object of a Christian's faith (verses 12 and 13).

Some people trust in their good deeds to get them through life and into God's favour, some trust in fate to have its way with them, some trust in human progress to make everything better. Christians trust in Jesus. That's the kind of faith Paul is talking about, that God is looking for is all or nothing. What can seem like legitimate desires or concerns to us can actually be rivals to our trust in Jesus alone. Trusting Jesus alone is not only the right choice, it's the best choice: He is far more reliable than anything else, as the next meaning of "in Christ" shows.

2. "In Christ" means what Jesus has done for us (verses 4, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13)

This is the most common meaning of the phrase in the New Testament, and it's about Christ's accomplishments, all the things that He has done for us, that we could never have done for ourselves but are ours through faith in Him.

Chronologically we're told that Jesus...

- Planned with the Father to choose us and rescue us (verse 4).
- Came to Earth as one of us and died for us, so we can be redeemed and forgiven (7).
- Sent the Holy Spirit to us when we believed in Him (13).
- Will bring us into the inheritance He won for us (11).
- Will fulfil God's great plan by uniting everything in Himself (9-10).

Knowing that we're in Christ and that all He did is ours should transform our thinking and our behaviour... When Christians mourn the mistakes we've made and how they affect our relationship with God, and pangs of guilt grab us, what are we to do? Believe that Jesus died for our sins and has credited His perfect life to our account. What about the terrors of this world and the uncertainty of our lives? Jesus has ascended to Heaven in victory, and He will ensure that you do the same. Are we just to be passively waiting for death and an adventure afterwards? No, He has given us His authority, His power, and His mission to fill the world with the glory of God, making us a co-labourer, a partner in the business with Him, a friend with whom He walks and talks and works.

3. "In Christ" means spiritual union with Jesus (verses 3, 6)

When we say Christians are "in" Christ, that's exactly what we mean. It's not a metaphor but a spiritual reality. Theologians often describe this as mystical because it's right on the boundaries of our comprehension. Paul says that Christians have been blessed "in Christ... in the heavenly places" (3) because that's where Jesus is and that's where we currently are (*Ephesians 2:6*)! We are joined with Him, united to Him, part of Him (*Ephesians 1:23, Acts 9:4, John 15:4-5, 17:21*). God lives in by His Spirit, and by the same Spirit we live in Him (*1 John 4:13*).

To be given Christ's rewards is one thing but to be welcomed in to God's presence as His loved one is another level altogether. Verse 6 uses the name or description that the Father has given the Son (*Matthew 3:17, 17:5, Mark 12:6*). It is within this relationship of eternal and divine love that all Christians find themselves: not as spectators, or

guests, or even close friends, but as participants. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: *“God loves the Christian as He loves the Son.”*

Questions:

- Do you have any stories that involve you rushing to catch an important train / bus / flight, or other experiences that make the point about the importance of a place of safety?
 - Look through the text of Ephesians 1:3-14 and highlight the “in Christ” (and variations) passages. What do you think they tell us about what God has done for us in Christ? What is helpful about Luke’s arrangement of them into the three groups listed above; does he miss anything of what Paul might be saying by doing so?
 - God is calling us to put all our trust in Him alone: what do you think makes this so hard for us? What do you think is currently tugging at your attention and trying to rival God for your trust?
 - All people need acceptance, significance, and security: how do Christ’s achievements for us give us these?
 - What might be the implications for our understanding of God and who we are if we think of ourselves as “in Christ” more than we currently do? Are there any likely differences from the popular emphasis that becoming a Christian is about inviting Jesus into our hearts?
 - Martyn Lloyd-Jones said that “God loves the Christian as He loves the Son.” This is just an amazing statement that I want you to think about and praise God for!
 - Spiritual union with Christ is rightly described as mystical: how can we grow in our understanding of what this and its impact on us? Should we use it as part of explaining to non-Christians the good news about Jesus?
 - Paul also connects baptism and communion to being “in Christ” (Romans 6:3-5, 1 Corinthians 10:16, respectively) – how can these actions help us understand what this means?
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Articles for further reading:

“10 Things You Should Know about Union with Christ”

(<https://www.crossway.org/articles/10-things-you-should-know-about-union-with-christ/>)

by Marcus Peter Johnson

“Union with Christ: The Sum of Our Salvation”

(http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/webfm_send/480) by Bill Kynes

“Union With Christ: A Crash Course”

(<https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/justintaylor/2011/02/09/union-with-christ-a-crash-course/>) by Justin Taylor

“What Does It Mean to Abide in Christ?”(<http://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-does-it-mean-to-abide-in-christ>) by John Piper



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