

Through the Bible @ 30,000 Feet

Ephesians | *In Christ Alone*

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INTRO

- There is a show on the History channel called “**Alone**” who are dropped off in the wilderness somehow and are expected to survive alone for as long as possible. They get to pick 10 items to bring with them.
 - I’ve never seen this show, but it sounds like one that I would enjoy.¹
- That can be a **fun game to play** with your family when you’re on a road trip: *if you were dropped on an island, and you could only bring 10 items with you, what would they be?*

Let’s also imagine that you are only allowed to bring one book of the Bible with you.

- What book would you bring?

If I was dropped on an island, and I was only allowed to bring one book of the Bible with me, it would be **Ephesians**. (...and if they’d let me, I would also bring **Romans 8** 😊)

Ephesians:

- Almost everything that I believe about God (*theology*) has been shaped by the book of Ephesians.
 - Why was I created? Why does the church exist?
 - What does the love of Jesus look like?
 - What is salvation?
 - What does it mean to be adopted into the family of God?
 - How do I know that Jesus will hold me fast until the end?
 - What does Christian unity look like?
 - What is God’s design for marriage? For families?
 - What is spiritual warfare, and how do I fight?
 - How does prayer fit into the Christian life?
 - How can I find my deepest happiness in God?
- All of this (and more) is in the book of Ephesians!

CONTEXT:

- Sermon Series: *Through the Bible @ 30,000 Feet* ²
- We’re skipping over Galatians today; we’ll come back to that book next Sun. (Lord willing)

THE LETTER

- Today, we are looking at the first of the “**Prison Epistles**”
 - We have four letters that the apostle Paul appears to have written from prison.
 - *Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*
 - Most likely written at the end of Paul’s life while he was a prisoner in Rome.³

¹ Reminds me of the time I was dropped off in the middle of an unknown forest (alone) for a **Boy Scout merit badge**.

² OT. Gospels. History. Pauline Epistles (letters written by the apostle Paul). Prison Epistles.

³ **Acts 28:16–31**. This would mean that it was written sometime between **AD 60–62**.

THE CITY of Ephesus

- The city of Ephesus was a **capital city** in the Roman empire.⁴
- It was a **commercial, political, and education** center in Asia Minor.
- It was also a **religious center** – famous for the **temple of Diana** (Artemis) which was considered to be one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.⁵
- In other words, the local church in Ephesus knew what it was like to be “*in the world*”.

So, the apostle Paul is writing to remind them what it means to be “*in Christ Jesus*”.

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God,
To the saints who are **in Ephesus**, and faithful **in Christ Jesus**.
~ *Ephesians 1:1*

THE CHURCH in Ephesus

- It is likely that the gospel was first brought to Ephesus by **Priscilla and Aquila**.⁶
- Paul visited the church at the end of his **2nd** missionary journey (**Acts 18:18–21**).
- He remained in Ephesus nearly 3 years during his **3rd** journey (**Acts 18:23–19:41**).
- He met with the **church elders** on his way to Jerusalem (**Acts 20:17–38**).
- When Paul left, he called **Timothy** to serve the church alone with the elders.⁷
- By the time Paul wrote this letter, the church in Ephesus was perhaps the **leading church** in all of Asia.

▪ **But, now, THIS IS WHY IT IS SO IMPORTANT for us to know who we are in Christ.**

- Because, as time went on, false teachers got into the local church in Ephesus, and the hearts of the people began to turn from **love** toward **legalism**.
- Probably within a decade of when this letter was written, Jesus gives the apostle John another letter for the church of Ephesus (**Rev 2:1–7**), and in that letter, Jesus says that the church in Ephesus has left their first love.⁸
 - Within a generation, this vibrant, dynamic church had left their first love.

Which is just a reminder to me how easy it is to turn a **relationship** into a **religion**.

It's so easy to move from an atmosphere of **love** into an atmosphere of **legalism**.

It's so easy to see God's commandments as our **job** instead of as our **joy**.⁹

When we see the local church of Ephesus in Revelation, they are still doing all kinds of good things (**Rev 2:2–3, 6**), but they have left their first love: *Jesus*.

- They had forgotten what it means to **be in Christ** and to **live in Christ**.

⁴ Ephesus was the capital of the Roman province of Asia (Asia Minor, modern Turkey).

⁵ Acts 19:35.

⁶ Acts 18:26. This couple was dropped off by Paul during his second missionary journey (Acts 18:18–19).

⁷ **1 Tim 1:3**.

⁸ This timeline is assuming that Revelation was written before the destruction of the Temple in AD 70.

⁹ Psalm 37:4; 100:2; Matt 11:30; 22:37; 1 John 5:3; 2 Cor 5:14.

Ephesians was written to keep the local church (both then and now) from getting to that point.¹⁰

OUTLINE:

- If I had to boil down the theme of **Eph.** into a single phrase, it would be: “*in Christ*”.¹¹
 - **Chapters 1–3** || Our “*life*” in Christ.¹²
 - **Chapters 4–6** || Our “*lifestyle*” in Christ.¹³
 - What it means to “*be*” a Christian?
 - What does it mean to “*live*” like a Christian?

1. **OUR LIFE IN CHRIST** | OUR IDENTITY AS A CHRISTIAN ¹⁴

We are looking at the letters that were written by the apostle Paul, and he has used this phrase “*in Christ*” in every letter so far. *For example...*

“...if anyone is **in Christ**, he is a new creation...”
~ *2 Cor 5:17*

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are **in Christ Jesus**...”
~ *Romans 8:1*

Then we get to **Ephesians** & we see this phrase all over the place, starting in the very first verse:

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God,
to the saints who are in Ephesus, and faithful **in Christ Jesus**.
~ *Ephesians 1:1*

So, what does it mean to be “*in Christ*”?

- I spent a lot of time this past week thinking about that phrase: *in Christ*.
 - What does it mean to be “*in Christ*?”
 - It’s **NOT** like **putting an object into a box** – because putting an object into a box doesn’t change what the object is. If I put **a hammer into a toolbox**, nothing about the hammer has changed: it’s still a hammer. Its identity hasn’t changed. It’s still the same thing that it always was.
 - But Paul says that if you are **in Christ**, you are a new creation (**2 Cor 5:17**). You’re a new person (**Col 3:10**; John 3:3). You have a new identity (**Gal 2:20**). You’re not the same person...

¹⁰ If we live in letters like this (Ephesians), we won’t receive letters like that (Revelation 2).

¹¹ I count over **30 places** where this phrase (or a very similar phrase) is used. Paul uses this phrase (or a similar phrase) over 160 times in his NT epistles.

¹² In Him also we have obtained an inheritance (**Eph 1:11**). We have been blessed with “every spiritual blessing...in Christ” (**1:3**).

¹³ “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (**2:10**). “...walk worthy of the calling with which you were called” (**4:1**).

¹⁴ **We live in a culture that struggles with identity**: gender, church, marriage, Christian...

- So, I think a better picture of what it means to be “*in Christ*” is like... **a branch that’s in a tree.**
 - It’s this idea of being connected to that which gives you life.¹⁵
 - The branch is *alive* because it’s in the tree.
 - It *bears fruit* because it’s in the tree.
 - It continues to *grow* because it’s in the tree.
 - If you disconnected the branch from the tree, it could not bear fruit; it could not grow; and it could not live.
 - Its very existence is dependent on being in the tree.

That’s a picture of what it means to be “*in Christ*” ...

- It’s **NOT** about what you do...it’s about who your life is connected to.
- It means being **connected** to the One who is the source of life.
- It means being **united** to Him.

**“To this I hold, my hope is only Jesus
For my life is wholly bound to His”¹⁶**

- It means everything I am and everything I have, as a Christian, **comes from Jesus**.

Paul spends the first three chapters helping us to see and to savor what it means to be “in Christ.”

So, what does it mean?

1. It means we were **chosen** to be in God’s family before the foundation of the world (**1:4**)
 - a. The God who spoke galaxies into existence... the God who writes the unique DNA coding for every individual who has ever lived... the God who holds the universe together at every moment... **chose you**. And He chose you before the world began. **17**
2. It means that you are **accepted** in the eyes of God (**1:6**)¹⁸
 - a. Now, we know that God is perfect and holy and just, and we are sinners by nature; so, there is **nothing** that you or I have done (and nothing that we could **ever** do) to earn God’s acceptance. But... do you remember what the Father said about Jesus after He was baptized? “*This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased*” (**Matt 3:17**). God delights in Christ, and you are in Christ.

There’s another song that we sing here at North Center that asks the question,

**“Are you broken and hurting within
Overwhelmed by the weight of your sin...?”¹⁹**

¹⁵ **John 15:4-5.**

¹⁶ [Yet Not I But Through Christ in Me](#), by CityAlight

¹⁷ You don’t write a resume or go through an interview process. You don’t write a convincing letter or give an emotion speech. You don’t earn it, and you don’t choose it (not on your own) – **John 15:16.**

¹⁸ One of the worst feelings in the world is “rejection”: **team tryouts, job application, relationship...**

¹⁹ [Oh, Come to the Altar](#), by Elevation Worship

- b. Maybe you've come here this morning and you are overwhelmed by the weight of your sin. When you look in the mirror of your heart, all you see is sin and shame and guilt and hypocrisy and brokenness and fear and hopelessness... but when God looks at you, all He sees is Christ – and He loves what He sees. In Christ, you are accepted. Right here. Right now. Just as you are.
3. It means that the price for our **redemption** has been **paid**, and we belong to God (**1:7**)
- The wages of our sin is death (**Rom 6:23**), but Jesus paid that price for you on the cross. Our sin separated us from God, but on the cross, Jesus shed His blood to buy you back. So, to be “**in Christ**” means that you belong to God.²⁰
4. It means that we have an **inheritance** (**1:11**).²¹
- God has so much more in store for His children than what He gives us during this short lifetime here on earth. If you're paying attention as you read through Paul's letters, you will see him talk like this all the time:
 - There is *a coming glory* that belongs to us (as an inheritance) in Christ that we cannot even begin to fathom.
 - Paul says...
 - All the *suffering* (in this lifetime) is nothing in comparison...
 - All the *success* (in this lifetime) is nothing in comparison...

“All the money that the world could hold
Mountains made of solid gold
Riches that could buy my dreams
[Jesus] You are better than all these things”²²
5. It means that our relationship with God has been **sealed** by the Holy Spirit (**1:13–14**).²³
- After you heard the truth of the gospel – and believed – the Holy Spirit sealed your salvation. You belong to God, and nothing can ever change that.
- I am persuaded that [nothing] shall be able to separate us from the love of God
which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
~ *Romans 8:37*
6. It means that you have **the power of God** is working for your good (**1:19**).
7. It means that you are **seated in the heavenly places** in Christ Jesus (**2:6**).
8. It means that you have **access** to the Father (**2:18**).
9. It means that you belong to **the body** of Christ called the church (**2:19–22**).

²⁰ Acts 20:28; 1 Cor 6:20.

²¹ Acts 20:32; Eph 1:11, 14, 18; 5:5; See also: Col 1:12; 3:24; Heb. 9:15; 1 Pet 1:3–4.

²² [Better](#). By Pat Barrett

²³ See also Eph 4:30.

Q. WHERE DOES THIS GLORIOUS IDENTITY COME FROM?

A. It comes from the radical love and mercy and grace and kindness of God.

----- *we don't earn ANY of it.*

READ EPH. 2:1-9

To be a Christian (to be in Christ) has nothing to do with anything we have ever done or anything we ever could do. It's about what God has already done for us – and what He has promised to continue doing for us – in Christ.

- God **created** you. God **chose** you. God **redeemed** you. God **breathed life** into your dead soul. God gave you the gift of **grace** and the gift of **faith** to believe in Him. We live on His **promises** and in His **power** and in His **authority**. He brings us into **His body** in the local church. He gives us **access** into presence. He **seals** our salvation.
- **ALL OF IT** – is God.

Q. WHY WOULD GOD SHOW US MERCY & GRACE & KINDNESS LIKE THIS? WHAT'S THE PURPOSE?

A. His glory.

- **1:4-6** | *to the praise of the **glory** of His grace*
- **1:11-12** | *to the praise of His **glory***
- **1:13-14** | *to the praise of His **glory***
- **3:20-21** | *to Him be **glory** in the church...forever and ever*

OUR LIFESTYLE IN CHRIST | What does it mean to live (...to walk) as a Christian?

For we are His workmanship,
created **in Christ** Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand
that we should walk in them.

~ *Ephesians 2:10*

In Christ, we are a new creation...

- And that means that we live differently than the world around us (**4:17**).
- It means that our lifestyle is different than the world around us (**4:22-24**).
- We aren't living for the same things this world is living for.
- God has redeemed our past & rewritten our future & that changes how we live in the present.
- We have a new trajectory. A new purpose. A new family. And the world sees that by the way we live.²⁴

1. Lifestyle of unity (**4:1-32**)

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you
to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called,
with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love,
endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

~ *Ephesians 4:1-3*

²⁴ Princes live differently than paupers.

2. Lifestyle of love (5:1–2)

Therefore, be imitators of God as dear children
And walk in love as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us...
~ *Ephesians 5:2*

3. Lifestyle of light (5:3–14)²⁵

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.
Walk as children of light...
~ *Ephesians 5:8*

4. Lifestyle of wisdom (5:15–17)

See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but *as wise*,
Redeeming the time [*making the most of every opportunity*] because the days are evil.
~ *Ephesians 5:15–16*

5. Lifestyle of Spirit-filled singing (5:19–20)

6. Lifestyle of love and respect in our marriage (5:21–33)

- A Christian husband does not use his wife; he *loves* her – as Christ...
- A Christian wife does not seek to control her husband; she *respects* him.

7. Lifestyle of love and honor in our homes (6:1–4)

- Parents *love* and *lead* their children to Jesus.
- Children *honor* their father & mother.

8. Lifestyle of Christ-centered obedience in our workplace (6:5–9)

CONCLUSION

After Paul has exulted in what it means to “be in Christ” and what it means to “walk in Christ”, he concludes his letter with a word about spiritual warfare (6:10–17).

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.
Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the [schemes] of the devil.
~ *Ephesians 6:10–11*

The life and lifestyle of a Christian **isn't easy**. It's war. And it's war every single day.
We have **an enemy** who hates *who we are*, and he hates *how God has called us to live*.

And so he is making every effort to **steal** our joy, **kill** our faith, and **destroy** our testimony.²⁶

²⁵ Psalm 119:105; John 1:9; 8:12; 1 John 1:7; Matt 5:16.

²⁶ John 10:10.

So many processing Christians live as if we were on vacation here on earth. But we're not! Our vacation is coming. Our holiday is coming. But right now, it's war.

- God is calling the church to stand up against the attacks of the enemy, and He has given us everything we need in order to be able to stand:
 - Truth... Righteousness (6:14)
 - Gospel... (6:15)
 - Faith... (6:16)
 - Salvation... (6:17)
- And then He has given us a weapon: the Word of God (6:17)
- And we wield it in prayer (6:18–20).

How do you fight against shame or self-condemnation?

- You take *Romans 8:1* and you pray.

How do you fight laziness?

- You take *Eph 5:16* and you pray.²⁷

How do you fight discouragement or bitterness or pride or selfishness or temptation or weakness or fear or greed or lust or passivity or unbelief...?

- You take the Word of God, and you pray.

This book is about who we are *in Christ* and how we are called to live *in Christ*...

- It's about knowing who you are.
- It's about knowing how God has called you to live.
- It's about knowing how to stand ... even when the enemy never stops attacking.²⁸

PRAY

²⁷ 1 Cor 10:31 (whatever you do); Heb 9:27 (appointed unto man once to die).

²⁸ Paul begins with prayer (1:16), and he ends with prayer (6:18–19). He begins with grace (1:2), and he ends with grace (6:24). And he begins with Jesus (1:1), and he ends with Jesus (6:24). This theme (our identity/itinerary in Christ) is held together by these three realities: Jesus, grace, and prayer.