

WEEK OF OCTOBER 1



DAY
1

WE ARE "IN CHRIST"

2 Corinthians 5:17; Colossians 1:27

Some of the most beautiful realities of our salvation require some careful theological reflection to appreciate the spiritual benefits of what God has done. Today is one of those themes.

The phrase "in Christ" or a variation is used 151 times in the New Testament. There are many other verses that talk about "with Christ," "through Christ," "by Christ," or a slight variation. It is the Apostle Paul who uses this language most often. Skim through these next verses, noticing how he uses the phrase:

Ephesians 1:3; 2:5, 6, 7, 10, 13; 4:32

Colossians 1:27-28; 2:6, 9, 10, 11, 13, 17; 3:1, 3, 4

Paul also says we are "in the Spirit" (Romans 8:9; 14:17) and twice he says we are "in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1).

We are in Christ and Christ is in us. We dwell in Christ, belong to Christ, our life is in Christ, we are a new creation in Christ, and are included in Christ. What does all this mean?

About one-third of the 151 occurrences describe what God has done for us in Christ. Another one-third are exhortations for us to live in certain ways because we are in Christ. About 20 more describe the experience of our salvation in Christ.

Paul uses this "IN" language to communicate the powerful reality of location, possession, and belonging. We have moved from our previous locations and commitments to other belief systems, other ways of life, other gods, and other allegiances, and have been RELOCATED to the way and life of Jesus.

Above all, it is a statement of the Lordship of the Savior Jesus who has total claim on our lives. In him we live and move and have our being. You are in Christ and Christ is in you. You belong to Christ and he belongs to you. And the Church is in Christ and Christ is in the Church.

DAY
2

PARTICIPATING IN GOD'S NATURE

2 Peter 1:3-11

While Christianity is always rational, there is also a sense of mystery about it. Some things in our faith are simple and other matters are deeper than we can understand. About those things, Paul said we *see through a glass darkly* (KJV) or *in a mirror dimly*, meaning they are just not clearly seen or understood (1 Corinthians 13:12). In 2 Corinthians 12:4 Paul says some things are inexpressible. In 2 Corinthians 2:9 Paul says God has prepared things for us that are beyond our knowing.

That is certainly true of 2 Peter 1:4, which says we "participate in the divine nature" and escape the corruption of the world. What does it mean to participate in the divine nature? Notice it does not say you have a divine nature, just that you participate in it.

God is God and you are not God. Deity and Divinity is essential to God's nature. You are a human being, but a being who

participates in God's nature in striking ways. We are described as holy and godly (God is holy and God is godly). We are in the image of God that is being renewed. We are being transformed from glory to glory (2 Corinthians 3:18). We are sharing in the marvelous glory of our God. To say God is glorious and God has glory is to say God is completely and fully God in all his attributes. God is giving us his own glory!

We have been crucified and resurrected with Christ (Galatians 2:20). In some way we have ascended to the heavenly realms with Jesus (Ephesians 2:6).

Paul tells us that one day we will be transformed; our mortal bodies will become imperishable, glorious, powerful, and immortal (1 Corinthians 15:42-53).

What does all this mean? It is hard to explain, but all of it is true for you. It is part of being blessed with every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3). We do know that one day we will know what it all means and we will experience what it all means. For now, we live with faith, hope, and love ... and worship.

DAY
3

IDENTITY IN CHRIST

John 15:1-17

The vastness and mystery of being "in Christ" that we've explored over the last two days becomes more concrete when we see the change that begins to occur in ourselves and others because of it. At the core of each of us is something that defines who we are, our very identity, which is always being influenced and molded by the world around us.

This is why the phrase "You are what you love" (from a great book of the same name by James K.A. Smith) is so powerful. It demonstrates an undeniable truth about how we all find our true identities when we see what the desires of our hearts point to. If your heart yearns to be successful above all else, then your identity will probably be in your work. If your deepest desire is to be married, then your identity will probably be based on doing everything possible to find the right relationship.

For Christians, Jesus Christ should be the center of our identity--but that is often easier said than done. Paul's exhortation to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 13:14) implies the need to continually choose to make Christ the center of ourselves.

Take a minute and read John 15:1-17.

This passage gives so much important wisdom for making Christ the core of our identity. We need to remain connected to Jesus (15:3), we are made to bear fruit and cannot do it unless we remain connected to Jesus the true vine (15:5,8). Love is at the core of all of this, "As the Father has loved me, I have also loved you. Remain in my love" (15:9). We are to "love one another as I have loved you" (15:12).

When we choose to put on Christ and live a life "in Christ," as John 15 describes, something fundamental changes in each of us. When our identity is in Christ, we are no longer called servants but are considered friends of God (15:15).

DAY
4

IMITATION OF JESUS

Ephesians 4:32-5:2

Have you ever watched a baby trying to copy what their parents are doing? Babies learn by imitating their parents. It's usually clumsy and hilarious, but it is a natural part of their learning process. (If you need a smile today, search babies copy parents on YouTube!)

Scripture tells us that there is a very similar pattern when it comes to growing in our faith and becoming a disciple: "Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children, and walk in love, as Christ also loved us and gave himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God" (Ephesians 5:1-2).

There are two important takeaways for us as we close this week thinking about what it means to be "in Christ." First, being an imitator requires enough knowledge and context for us to do a good imitation. In other words, being an imitator of God requires us to know God well enough to begin to imitate him. You can do this on your own by spending time in the word and in prayer, but you can also see God through the lives of others. Paul exhorts us to imitate him as he imitates Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1). Finding other Christians who have some more experience imitating is always a helpful part of this process.

The second takeaway is that you don't have to have a perfect imitation. It takes work and practice to imitate something well, but notice that the encouragement in Ephesians 5 tells us to walk in love but does not tell us specifically how to do that. We have all experienced the love of Christ differently and are wired and gifted differently, which is why your imitation may look very different from mine.

The important part of this process is that the more each of us uniquely imitates our Savior, the more we will be formed into a people who love how he loved, being "kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God forgave you in Christ" (Ephesians 4:32).

PERSONAL REFLECTION & LIFEGROUP DISCUSSION

You can always pick any idea from the sermon or the daily readings and biblical passages and talk about those ideas. A good format is to have each LifeGroup member share one idea that was most powerful for them.

Read through Ephesians 13-14 and make a list of "every spiritual blessing" (v. 3) that Paul lists in the following verses.

Who are you? Fill in the blank 10-15 times (or more). I am _____. As you look at the list you just created, are there any "I am" statements that are more powerful and formative for you? Why do they stand out?

Identity is shaped by belonging. When you belong to a group, you identify with that group and what it stands for. Make a list of the groups to which you belong. If you can, prioritize your list. What are the three most important groups to which you belong? In what ways do those groups shape how you view yourself?

The Bible has many images and metaphors it uses to define the "group experience" of Christianity. You can skim through Ephesians 2:11-22 and 1 Peter 2:4-11 to see some of those group descriptions. Note that some of the ways the "group of Christian followers" is described may be surprising. Which images, ideas, and metaphors are most powerful for your own identity as a follower of Jesus?

A Christian is literally "a little Christ." As a little Christ we are to imitate (or follow) Jesus Christ. Our lives are to reflect his life. Christ's life is the model or pattern for our own life. What are the 5-7 MOST important identifying marks of Jesus that Christians must imitate? Which ones are you doing reasonably well on and which ones need more attention?

As those who are "in Christ Jesus," who belong to Jesus, who are being formed into the image of Jesus as we pattern our lives after him, we are then his representatives. We are his ambassadors who are authorized to do his will and work and speak his words to the surrounding world. You are a representative of Jesus. How are you doing and what are you doing to represent Jesus? Living Word as a community is a representative of Jesus. How are we doing and how are you sharing in the ministry of representation (mission)?