

The All-Inclusive 'In'

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the all-inclusive nature of the phrase 'in Christ', highlighting our union with Christ and our participation in His life, death, and resurrection.

Scripture: John 14:10, John 20:22, Romans 6:5, Romans 8:17, 1 Corinthians 1:30, 2 Corinthians 5:18, Ephesians 1:10, Ephesians 2:6, Philippians 1:27, Colossians 3:10, 1 Thessalonians 4:17

Topics: "Identity in Christ", "Living the Christian Life"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the profound significance of being 'in Christ,' a phrase that encapsulates the entirety of Christian existence and purpose. He explains that all aspects of life, including creation, redemption, and sanctification, are found within this relationship, highlighting that true Christian living is not achievable by human effort but through Christ living in us. Sparks contrasts the state of being 'in Adam' with the transformative power of being 'in Christ,' underscoring the necessity of a deep, experiential incorporation into Him. He calls for believers to recognize their identity and unity in Christ, which is essential for effective service and prayer, as all actions must stem from divine revelation rather than human initiative. Ultimately, he stresses that the Christian life is a manifestation of Christ's life through believers, making it imperative to abide in Him for true effectiveness.

Transcript

There is no phrase or formula which occurs with greater frequency in the New Testament than this, "in Christ." It sometimes varies in translations when "by" and "through" and "with" are used, and sometimes in the original text it changes in form, e.g. "in Christ Jesus," "in him," etc., but in all the two hundred times of its occurrence the principle is the same. In the whole range of Christian dogma there is nothing more expensive, and yet nothing less understood and appreciated.

In one consummate declaration we are told that God has purposed to sum up all things in Christ (Eph. 1:10) and that outside of Him there is nothing which has any place in the eternal purpose and intention of God. The plan, the method, the resources, the times, the eternities, are Christospheric.

The Creation is IN Christ.

The Life is IN Christ.

The Acceptance is IN Christ.

The Redemption is IN Christ.

The Righteousness is IN Christ.

The Sanctification is IN Christ.

The Hope is IN Christ.

The Spiritual Blessings are IN Christ.

The Consolation is IN Christ.

The Peace is IN Christ.

The Effectual Prayer is only IN Christ.

The Strength and Riches are IN Christ.

The Eternal Purpose is IN Christ.

The New Creation is IN Christ.

The Promises are IN Christ.

The Escape from Condemnation is IN Christ.

The One Body is IN Christ.

The Perseverance is IN Christ.

The Gathering into One is IN Christ.

The Bonds of Suffering Believers are IN Christ.

The "No Separation" is IN Christ.

The Perfect Man is IN Christ.

The Helpers Together are IN Christ.

There are the Churches IN Christ.

There are the Dead IN Christ.

There is the One New Man and the Perfect Man IN Christ.

We are Complete IN Christ.

The context of this formula ranges from eternity, through the ages, to eternity.

In eternity past we were chosen and elected together IN Christ. Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 5:13.

Through time, by the Cross, this eternal heavenly fact is wrought in literal and experimental form expressed by different terms implying specific progressive spiritual truths, but always the same principle.

"Planted together in the likeness of his death. Rom. 6:5.

"Quickened... together with Christ." Eph. 2:6.

"Raised... up together... in Christ." Eph. 2:6.

"Made... to sit together... in Christ." Eph. 2:6.

"All things to be gathered together... in Christ." Eph. 1:10

"Perfect together." 1 Cor. 1:10.

"Fitly framed together" in Christ. Eph. 2:21.

"Knit together," Col. 2:2.

"Build together" in Christ. Eph. 2:20.

"Live together with him." 1 Thess. 5:10.

"Working together with him." 2. Cor. 6:1.

"Striving together." Phil. 1:27.

Then comes a climax, at the end of this time, when all the foregoing is accomplished and we are "together... caught up." 1 Thess. 4:17.

Finally the eternity to come looms into view and we see that we are to be "glorified together" with Him. Rom. 8:17.

Then we call to mind the Pauline couplet - which is strictly not Pauline but of the Divine Spirit of truth - namely "in Adam" and "in Christ." On the one side - our relation to Adam, the old creation, by nature - we see one set of conditions; and on the other - by our incorporation in Christ - we see a new and different set.

"IN ADAM"

"The Lord God... breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." Gen. 2:7.

"The first man Adam became a living soul." 1 Cor. 15:45.

"In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Gen. 2:17.

"As in Adam all die." 1 Cor. 15:22.

"The law of sin and of death." Rom. 8:2.

"He also is flesh." Gen. 6:3.

"The flesh profiteth nothing." John 6:63.

"I" - Failure. Rom. 7.

"The old man that waxeth corrupt." Eph. 4:22.

"The mind of the flesh." Rom. 8:6.

"In my flesh... no good thing." Rom. 7:18.

"Of the flesh... corruption." Gal. 6:8.

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh." John 3:6.

"The end... death." Rom. 6:21.

"IN CHRIST"

"He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Spirit." John 20:22.

"The last Adam... a life-giving spirit." 1 Cor. 15:45.

"Newness of life." Rom. 6:4.

"In Christ shall all be made alive." 1 Cor. 15:22.

"The law of the Spirit of life." Rom. 8:2.

"Spirit" - Victory. Rom. 8.

"The new man... created in righteousness and holiness of truth." Eph. 4:24.

"The new man." Col. 3:10.

"Newness of the spirit." Rom. 7:6.

"In the likeness of his resurrection." Rom. 6:5.

"Have crucified the flesh." Gal. 5:24.

"Our old man was crucified." Rom. 6:6.

All this, which is nothing more than quoting Scripture, will serve to emphasize the Divine inclusiveness and exclusiveness, and will help, we trust, to recognition of the great fact that NO MAN CAN LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE; THERE IS ONLY ONE WHO CAN LIVE THAT LIFE, AND THAT IS CHRIST HIMSELF. We must have such an experimental incorporation into Him that He lives His life through us as members of His one Body, so that "to me to live is Christ" and "it is no longer I... but Christ." As the blacksmith's iron is in the fire and also the fire is in the iron, so first we must realize our position in Christ through the Cross ere Christ can manifest Himself through us.

CHRIST TO BE EXPRESSED THROUGH BELIEVERS

It is very important to recognize a truth upon which Christ laid considerable emphasis, that is, that in a sense, He never intended to be out of this world again during the age, after having once come into it as His rightful heritage. He came to redeem it, to secure the judicial right to sovereignty in it, and to initiate, continue, and complete the restoration of it to His own dominion. This is all to be done by His own

presence in it in one or other of the forms of His manifestation. While He said much about going away, and returning to the Father, He also made His abiding very clear in the words, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the consummation of the age." Paul later said that the central feature or reality of "the mystery... hid from the ages..." is "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

The personal physical presence of Christ in the world was firstly to manifest the nature, method, means, laws, purpose, and power of His abiding presence beyond the days of His flesh; and secondly to make this possible and actual by the work of His Cross. He Who was born out from God shows what is the necessity for and the nature of being "born of the Spirit" if the will of God is to be done on the earth as it is done in the heavens. Then right at the commencement of His ministry He puts the Cross in the figure of baptism. From that time all that He said and did was in the light and power of the Cross. The teaching of Christ can never be effectual, and the works of Christ can never be continued, unless the Cross is the basis. To try to propagate "the teaching of Jesus" or to effect the work of Jesus without having as the basis all that He meant by His Cross, is to labour in vain and without the acceptance of the Father. It will be necessary to return to this connection again at a later stage. So far, however, it leads us to the point where we see that, having in His personal physical presence established the basis and nature of His permanent work, He by the Cross effected that which made possible the bringing of men on to the same plane or into the same realm, and then changed the separate and individual presence for the corporate and universal. Thus "the church, which is His body" was brought into being as the abiding instrument of His world-incarnation. This is the only kind of "church" which He recognizes, made up of those who have been "joined unto the Lord... one spirit." The nature of this joining remains also for later consideration. The word or term "Body" is not mere metaphor. The members of His Body stand in relation to Christ just as our physical bodies stand in relation to our own selves - the means of manifestation, expression, and transaction. This truth is very discriminating, and goes to the root of all matters of life and service. "Working for the Lord," "praying to the Lord," etc., will be seen to have a deeper law which governs their effectiveness.

We cannot take up work for Christ - plan, scheme, devise, organize or enter upon Christian enterprise - and so command the Divine seal and blessing. We cannot pray as we incline, even though it be to the extent of passion and tears, and so secure the Divine response. Failure to recognize this is bringing multitudes of people to despair because of no seal upon their ardent labours, and no answer to their prayers. In the unfolding of the laws of His own effective life the Master put tremendous emphasis upon the fact that the words that He spoke, and the works that He did, were not of (out from) Himself, it was the Father both speaking the words and doing the works. A thorough study of the Gospel by John will convince that this was so. Said Christ, "The Son can do nothing out from himself, but what he seeth the Father doing..." and this knowledge of the transactions of the Father as to what, how, and when - all most important - was, as He made clear, because He abode in the Father. So for all the future of His work He prayed that His disciples might abide in Him. Thus the law of effective and fruitful life, service, prayer, etc., is that there shall be such a oneness that we only do - but surely do - what He is doing. We must know in our spirit just what Christ is doing, how He is doing it, the means which He will use, and His time for it. Moreover, our prayers must be the prayers of the Lord Himself prayed in us and through us by the Holy Spirit. This is surely made very clear as being the realm in which the Church in apostolic times lived. This will demand a considerable sifting of all undertakings in the name of Jesus, and will require that nothing is done until the mind of the Lord has been made known. But this will secure a hundred percent effectiveness, and issues which will never perish. For the practical purposes of God in this age Christ is the One Body holding fast the Head, and the business of every member is to realize more and more fully the meaning of this incorporation and oneness of identity.

We are expressly told in the Word that we are to "put on the new man" and that this "new man" is Christ. This is but another form of expressing the truth of "in Christ," but it carries with it a whole revelation of practical provision.

Christ is our Redemption. He "was made unto us... redemption." 1 Cor. 1:30; Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14.

Christ is our Righteousness. 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 4:24; Phil. 3:9.

Christ is our Sanctification. 1 Cor. 1:2,30.

Christ is our Faith. Mark. 11:22 ("Have the faith of God," lit. trans.); Acts. 26:18; Gal. 2:20 (R.V.); Eph. 1:15; Phil. 3:9; Col. 1:4.

Christ is our Peace. John 14:27; John 16:33; Eph. 2:14.

This line can be followed on numerous characteristics, e.g. Love, Hope, Wisdom, Mind, Power and Might, Authority, Glory. We suggest a comparison of translations in the references, best of all in the original. The point is that, on all these matters, under given conditions the natural outfit will break down and will have to be laid aside, but in Christ we have a new equipment at every point. For instance, our faith will not take the strain of the requirements of a deep experience of trial and adversity, but if we "live by the faith of the Son of God," the issue will be different. All tests will prove whether we are living by His faith which should have become ours, or whether there is a weakness in our union with Him. The same is true on all points. It is blessed to realize that "in Christ" we have a whole new and saving endowment of virtues and graces. Thus it is that we "put away... the old man... and put on the new man, that after God hath been created in righteousness and holiness of truth" (Eph. 2:22-24).

SOME SIGNIFICANT PREPOSITIONS

So far we have been led in our theme by three simple Greek prepositions, namely: ek - out from; en - in; and sun - together.

These three fragments really summarize the truth and nature of corporate union with Christ, and lay down the essential laws and vital principles of all true and effective spiritual life and service. Some further consideration of this may be well before proceeding further. Christ took great care to repudiate any suggestion and to remove any notion that anything which characterized His mission as Son of man was of His own originating.

1. "EK"

(a) As to Himself. He repeatedly affirmed "I came out from God." (John 7:29; 8:42; 17:8, etc.).

(b) As to His apostleship (Heb. 3:1), He describes Himself as "sent" by God (Gr. apostello) (John 3:17,34; 5:36; 6:29,57; 7:29; 8:42; 10:36; 11:42; 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25; 20:21).

(c) As to His vision: "What he seeth the Father doing... these the Son also doeth." (John 5:19).

(d) As to His works: "The works of my Father" (John 5:36; 9:3,4; 10:25,32,37; 14:10).

(e) As to the words: "I speak not of (out from) myself" (John 8:28,38; 12:49; 14:10; 17:8,14).

(f) As to the Kingdom: "My kingdom is not of (out from) this world" (John 18:36).

(g) This can all be gathered up under a statement in which a different preposition is used in the Greek but one conveying a similar thought: "Now they know that all things... are from thee" (John 17:7.).

The main principle which these all-embracing declarations establish is that only that which proceeds out from God is recognized by God, fulfils the Divine purpose, reaches the Divine standard, and returns to God. This implies that there are other sources than God. Over against some of the foregoing statements regarding Divine origins the Master has placed such as:

1. "Ye are of (out from) your father the devil." "Ye do the works of (out from) your father," etc. (John 8:44,41).

2. "Not of (out from) myself" (John 14:10). This was said, of course, in His capacity of representing man as "made in the likeness of sinful flesh," not as Son of God on the side of Deity. It was ever the enemy's endeavour to get Him to act in the flesh, as man would act, so that the enemy might have ground upon which to wreck Him, but He refused to act on the principle of the flesh. Thus it is clear - and all the Scriptures combine to show it - that the flesh is a source of things which have no acceptance with God, even though they operate through religious forms and "Christian" enterprises.

3. Further, "the world" is spoken of constantly as producing much which God refuses and only hands over to judgment. See the occurrences of "of" (out from) as to the world in John 17, and look further in John's Epistles, with a general comparison with the teaching of Peter and Paul.

Thus we are brought to see that a special Divine significance attaches to that which is "of God."

Now what is true of Christ has to have a counterpart in all who are to be either owned of God or used to the fulfilment in any way of His eternal purpose.

They must be:

(a) Born of (out from) God.

(b) Commissioned of (out from) God.

(c) Have a spiritual revelation and vision of (out from) God.

(d) Speak the words of (out from) God.

(e) Do only the works of (out from) God.

(f) Seek first the Kingdom of (out from) God.

(g) Be sure that in their case "all things are of (out from) God." (2 Cor. 5:18).

This was the apostolic basis. The Holy Spirit had come to make this both possible and actual. This accounts, therefore, for the effectiveness of their testimony and labours. They knew what it meant to be baptized "in one Spirit... into one body," of which Body Christ is Head, so that really the Sovereign Head but carried on His work through the members thus incorporated. They had no independent action, no self-laid plans, no schemes or enterprises or undertakings which were the product of their own thought, reasoning, devising, or enthusiasm, even though it were "for Christ," or "for the Kingdom," or "in His

name." All had to come by revelation of the Spirit from the Head.

Now the second preposition shows how this was so in Christ's case and must be so with us.

2. "EN"

For Christ, en represented a spiritual position in which He abode.

This spiritual position is suggested in passages, such as the following:

"The Son... who is (not was) in heaven." (John 3:13).

"I am in the Father" (John 14:10).

It must, of course, be recognized that this relationship was the work of the Holy Spirit. From the time of the Spirit's lighting upon Him at the Jordan, all the movements were by the Spirit; even the Cross was wrought out "through the eternal Spirit." He abode in God, and on the side of His humanity this was maintained by the Spirit. There were suggestions, temptations, opportunities, possibilities, methods, means, ideas, provocations, emotions, sentiments, and all the activities of intellect, soul, body, but it was His way to hold these in the Divine Spirit and not to act or proceed upon them as such. He would not commit Himself to any of them or to any man save as He had the Spirit's witness that the urge to do so proceeded from God. Thus He was saved the remorse, confusion, disappointment, shame, failure, and chaos, which always follow upon the uprising of the "natural (soulish, Gk.) man" into the spiritual world. Thus, having been anointed by the Spirit, He abode in God and refused to be drawn out. This is everything in the matter of fullness of life and effectiveness of service.

3. "SUN"

We shall not attempt in this brief treatise to deal in any detail with the particular significance of this preposition. It relates in a special way to the corporate character of the Body of Christ. Its importance is immense, but this is not the place for embarking on so large a theme. We merely remark here that its use emphasizes the fact that in the thought of God those who are "born from above" are not merely so many individuals but are related to one another as the members of a body. They are "together" with one another and "together" with Christ as Head of the one Body, and were so regarded by God in every phase of Christ's redemptive work. The words of Ps. 139:15,16 express this mystery. The practical outworking of this truth is dealt with in greater detail elsewhere.

The general ground of "in Christ" has been presented, but we must emphasize this essential counterpart of Christ's life. As the Father is the Head of the Son, so the Son is the Head of the Body; and as He abode in the Father, so He declares that we must abide in Him. We must not be led to act upon anything from within our natural lives, or anything from without as acting upon us, until we have judged it in the spirit. This applies especially to religious matters, for it is in this realm that we may make the greatest mistakes. The response of our natural emotions, or reasoning powers, or will, to the impact of some suggestion may lead to much evil. The danger of much evangelistic work, spiritual teaching, and missionary propaganda is in its tendency to stir the emotions and offer spiritual prizes, instead of bringing the imperative note of Christ and the apostles.

Many a decision has been made under these conditions which has proved incapable of taking the inevitable strain of testing and to be something less than a real work of the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps there never was a time when there was more of what is called "Christian service," when there was as much organization, machinery, advertisement, expenditure of time, energy, and means in "Christian" enterprise, or when there were more people interested; but it is doubtful whether - speaking comparatively - there ever was as little real spiritual effectiveness. The root question is, how much of all this proceeds directly by revelation and initiation from God by the Eternal Spirit? Of how much may it be truly said that it came by revelation of the Holy Spirit, or that "the Holy Ghost said," or that "it seemed good unto the Holy Ghost"? On the other hand, how much of it is the product of human discussion, devising, impulse, enthusiasm, imaginativeness, philanthropy, interest in a good cause, etc.? The measure of the identification of the instrument with Christ in corporate union is the measure of the real work of God accomplished through it. There may be much which looks like success and impresses with a sense of real accomplishment, but when "the fire" has done its work it may be found that the real as against the apparent is very small. In the long run "the flesh profiteth NOTHING," though it may seem to get results. It is not what is done for God, but what is done by God that will last. Ours it is to see that we are utterly in Christ, and living by the Spirit. All the rest will be spontaneous. There can be no abiding until there has been a real incorporation, and this brings us to where we can proceed to show how this union is effected.

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