

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE PHRASE "IN CHRIST" IN EPHESIANS

BY

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# CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Background

Paul's letter to the Ephesians has been portrayed as:

“...the grandest of all the Pauline letters. There is a peculiar and sustained loftiness in its teaching which has deeply impressed the greatest minds and has earned for it the title of the ‘Epistle of the Ascension.’ It carries largely among ‘the heavenlies.’... It is characterized by a dignity and a serenity which is entirely in harmony with the elevation of its thoughts.” (Wuest 1997:Eph Preface).

Wiersbe (1997:534-535) describes Ephesians as a balance between doctrine and duty, where Deffinbaugh labels Ephesians as the “Rolls Royce of the epistles” (2008:Introduction). Malick (2008) and O’Brien (1999:58) supports the view that unity in Christ is the central message of Ephesians and the church is encouraged to maintain unity through obedience, love, spiritual welfare and by focusing on God’s provision. Grindheim (2003:536) supports this growth in unity, by identifying believers’ position in Christ and the need for unity in their practice of church.

Paul uses the term “Christ” with various prepositions, but most often with the preposition in (ἐν, en). “...the one phrase en Christos, ‘in Christ’ describes Paul’s testimony and experience as no other expression seems to do. It is his characteristic expression and a testimony of relationship to Christ...” (Nielson 1960:17). Many scholars define the phrase “in Christ” and similar phrases as “union with Christ” (Barclay 1999:17). Although the focus of this study is not on the process of unity, it is important to note that Waaijman (2006:41) sees conformity in Christ as part of a transformation process and distinguishes between two types of union: “the substantial union by which God keeps man in being” and “the union by likeness” (p. 41). Campbell investigates the unity in the church according to Ephesians, with Christ central (2008:15-31). This union is established between divided communities with Christ as the agent of peace, bringing reconciliation and resolution (p. 24).

Many scholars have sought the meaning of “in Christ” in Paul’s letters and singularly define the meaning of Paul’s phrase “in Christ” for a specific Epistle or generalise the

meaning of the phrase in all Paul's Epistles. Some scholars examine the phrase "in Christ" but omit the epistolary contexts in which this phrase occurs. Therefore the context in which Paul uses the phrase "in Christ" vary and may refer to the incorporation into the body of Christ (e.g. Phil 3:9), or to the agency of salvation (1 Cor 1:4) (MacDonald 2000:32). Literature lacks comparative studies regarding the context in which Paul uses the phrase "in Christ".

## **1.2. The Problem**

The problem which this study attempts to address is: What is the theological meaning of the phrase "in Christ" (ἐν Χριστῷ) in Ephesians?

From this main research problem the following sub questions emerge:

- What is the prevailing, scholarly agreement regarding the destination, date, circumstances and message of Ephesians?
- How have major theologians and commentators interpreted the theological and contextual meaning of the phrase "in Christ" in Ephesians?
- What does each occurrence of "in Christ" (and its equivalents) mean in context in Ephesians?
- What is the theological understanding and significance for the modern church and believer of Paul's "in Christ" in Ephesians?

## **1.3. Objectives**

The main objective of this study is to do a comparative in-depth study of Paul's phrase "in Christ" (ἐν Χριστῷ, *en Christos*) in Ephesians. The objectives are the following:

- To reconstruct the destination, date, circumstances and message of writing of Ephesians.
- To explore and evaluate the various scholarly views of the theological and contextual meaning of the phrase "in Christ" in Ephesians.

- To determine the theological meaning of each occurrence of “in Christ” (and its equivalent) in context in Ephesians.
- To formulate a viable theological understanding of “in Christ” in Ephesians, and explore its significance for the modern church and believer.

## 1.4. Design

This study is approached as a qualitative, literary research, employing a literary analysis of the phrase “in Christ” in terms of its contextual meaning and implications using mainly commentaries and dictionaries, therefore resulting in a comparison of the use of the phrase in Ephesians. The broad design is therefore to collect data (p. 57), by using mainly a literary study and then to analyse and compare the collected data.

## 1.5. Methodology

The following methodologies are relevant to this study:

- *Historical criticism*: Briefly explain the history of Paul and the circumstances and date when Ephesians was written.
- *Theological analysis*: Determine the contextual and theological meaning of each occurrence of “in Christ” in Ephesians, by identifying and determining the argument of the passage where the phrase occurs.
- *Comparative*: Combine and compare the contextual and theological meanings of all instances of the phrase “in Christ” in Ephesians. Compare the implications of the phrase for the modern church and believer.
- *Synthetic analysis*: Determine the overall purpose and unifying theme of the phrase “in Christ” in Ephesians.
- *Conversational*: Consider Paul’s dialogue and argument when employing the phrase “in Christ” in Ephesians. Therefore analyse Paul’s use of the phrase in the larger context of the text (Mouton 2001:168).

Chapter 2 will be a historical overview in two areas. Firstly, the analysis of Ephesians in terms of destination, date, circumstances and message and secondly on the scholarly research of the phrase “in Christ”. The rest of this study can be summarised in two stages. The first stage involves the determination of the theological and contextual meaning of each occurrence of “in Christ” (and its equivalent) in Ephesians and the theological understanding and significance for the modern church and believer (Chapter 3). The second stage is the combination of the theological and contextual meaning of “in Christ” found in stage one to determine the overall meaning in Ephesians (Chapter 4). Chapter 5 will be the conclusion.



## CHAPTER 2 HISTORY OF RESEARCH

“The phrase *en Christos* is a formula of such deep significance in Paul’s epistles, that it is perhaps better always to find in it the idea of union, fellowship with Christ” (Nielson 1960:60) .

### 2.1. Background of Ephesians

The destination address of Ephesians “in Ephesus” given in Ephesians 1:1 is omitted in Papyrus 46 of the original text of Codices Vaticanus and Sinaiticus (Reicke 2001:79). This exclusion of “in Ephesus” results in various geographical interpretations. However, many scholars agree that it is written for a wider audience than one specific church (Reicke 2001:79; Best 1997:21; Lincoln and Wedderburn 1993:80; Caird 1976:1). In 1:11 Paul uses “we also” in contrast with the anonymous “we/us” in 1:3-10. It seems that Paul had a specific group, namely the Jewish believers, in mind (Hoehner 1985:Eph 1:11-12). In 1:13 Paul addresses “you also” that refer to the believing Gentiles. Paul also addresses the Gentile believers (2:11-13; 3:1; 4:17), who are part of the universal church. Therefore Paul addresses both the Jewish and Gentile believers in this letter.

Many scholars have questioned and debated the authorship of the Pauline Epistles. Lincoln and Wedderburn (1993:12, 83-84) use the dependence of the letter to the Ephesians on Colossians and other Pauline letters, especially Romans, to deduce that they were not written by Paul. This view is supported by Mitton (1951:55-158) and Collins (1988:132-170). However scholars such as Guthrie (1970:479-508), Barth (1974:36-50), Caird (1976:11-29), van Roon (1974:438-439), Johnson (1986:367-372), O’Brien (1999:45-47) and MacDonald (2000:15-17) etc. support some form of Pauline authorship. It is not the aim of this study to investigate the authorship of the Ephesians, therefore the authorship of Paul will be assumed.

Barnes (1798:§Paul), Conybeare and Howson (1857:665-667) and Wood (1956:xi) agree on the chronological events of Paul’s life with reference to his imprisonment. According to them, after Paul’s third missionary journey, including the stay at Ephesus, he was imprisoned at Jerusalem, followed by his imprisonment at Caesarea, his

voyage to Rome and subsequent shipwreck. The next period marks Paul's imprisonment at Rome and is also of importance for the purposes of this study. Wood (1956:311) estimates the date of Paul's arrival in Rome (Haacker 2003:20) approximately A.D. 59-60, while Wuest (1997:Eph preface) and Wiersbe (1997:Eph 1:1) assign A.D. 64 and A.D. 62, respectively. Both Fausset (1997:Eph 1:1) and Carson (1994:Eph Introduction) agree that Paul was taken as prisoner round about A.D. 61. Thus an approximate period A.D. 60-62 seems viable.

During Paul's imprisonment in Rome he writes the letters to Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians and Philipians (Aubrey 2007). In this study it will be assumed that Paul wrote the letter to the Ephesians during his first imprisonment in Rome.

## **2.2. The preposition “in” (ἐν, *en*)**

The preposition “in” (ἐν, *en*) is the most common and frequently (2698 occurrences) used preposition in the New Testament (Robertson 1934:586). The ancient Greek writers used the primary preposition ἐν originally with either the locative or the accusative (p. 584). The simplest use is in the phrase of place, thus referring to a fixed position. It may appear in expressions of time and may not necessarily refer to time, but rather to a certain period time within (p. 586). Therefore the term ἐν has various meanings, but of significance are the locative (in, inside, within, among, on, at, by, beside, near), associative (in union with, joined closely with), instrumental (with, by), substantial (of, consisting of), activity (with regard to, in the case of, in, about), relation (to), time (during) and agent (by, from) (Merriam-Webster 2003:s.v. in).

The preposition ἐν can be used with singular or plural nouns. With plural nouns or collective singular it may signify “among” (Oepke 1964:539). In the majority of cases the word ἐν occurs when the singular of a person is used (Kawamorita 1927:14). “The resultant notion is ‘in the case of’, which does not differ greatly from the metaphorical use of ἐν with soul, mind, etc” (Robertson 1934:587).

Paul's frequent use of ἐν with Christ or Jesus Christ may be compared with Jesus' own words “in Me” (Robertson 1934:587). In the NT, the gospel of John often refers to Jesus' expression of “in Me”. John 10:38; 14:10, 11, 20 reflect the intimate union

between God and Jesus Christ, such as can exist in no other case. However John 15:2-7 metaphorically mirrors the union formed between believers and Jesus Christ as between the branches and the true vine, characterised by friendship, love and of dependence.

### **2.3. The meaning of the phrase “in Christ”**

Moulton (1908:103) states that Paul adopted Christ’s own idea by using the phrase “in Christ”. Greene (1992:44-58) in his study of the terms “Jesus”, “Christ” and “Lord” in Romans, reports on Paul’s perception of God’s plan of salvation and the role of Christ in it. “For Paul, Christ was a complex and stratified agent of the deity, and it was the deity who was the object of Paul’s thought” (p. 49). Contained in the deity is Christ’s death and resurrection for all sinners, thus including salvation (p. 51). Emphasis is placed on the additional function of deity, which is that of redeemer. In conclusion Greene states that Paul views all the terms “Jesus”, “Jesus Christ”, “Lord Jesus Christ” and “Christ Jesus” as demonstrable types of Christ (p. 58).

Adolf Deissmann, a pioneer in the study of Paul’s phrase “in Christ”, expressed it as “the most intimate possible fellowship of the Christian with the living spiritual Christ” (Kawamorita 1927:18, 23). He compares “in Christ” to air, which a number of interpreters reject (Best 1955:17). Best questions this comparison by stating that the whole Christ lives in a believer but that the corporate whole of believers lives in Christ. This concept can not be transferred to air, since all humans live in air but not all the air is in one human (p. 9).

According to Kim (2006:37) the difficulty of interpreting the phrase “in Christ” is situated in the dative constructive role of ἐν. Early scholars such as Dodd (1932:87), in his study of Romans, considered “in Christ” to be equivalent to the phrase “to be baptised”, referring to the church and in the body of Christ. Oepke (1964:542) focuses on the spatial character of the phrase, by opposing the first Adam and the second Adam, Jesus Christ the Redeemer. Believers are removed from the sphere of the first Adam, which is characterised by sin and death, by baptism into the sphere of the second Adam, which is life and righteousness. Barclay (1999) in his study on “Christ in you” compares the meaning of the phrases “in Christ” and “Christ in you” and also equates

“in Christ” to a believer’s baptism and entrance into faith. However, Barclay claims that the more personal phrase “Christ in you” refers to the entire recreation process of believers being conformed to the image of Christ. Oepke refers to this process as Christ formed in believers through suffering (1964:542).

Nielson (1960) studied the significance of the phrase "in Christ" in Paul’s writings and explains “in Christ” in terms of union and fellowship with Jesus Christ, which can be conceived from both the human and divine aspects as the interpenetration of the human with the Spirit of God. This union refers to a personal, subjective experience with God. Harris supports the meaning of incorporation and union rather than agency (1991:9). He concludes that the phrase “in the fellowship of Christ” portrays both meanings of the phrase “in Christ”.

In contrast Neugebauer (1957-58), in his study of Paul’s “in Christ” identifies this phrase as an objective reality of Christian existence and God’s work in Christ. Oepke also refers to the objective basis of association with God (1964:541), not Christ. Conversely Wedderburn (1985) opposes Neugebauer’s objective view of the expression in his study on Paul’s use of the phrases “in Christ” and “with Christ”.

Schweitzer’s research (1931:388) on Paul’s mysticism views the phrase “in Christ” as falling in between the objective and subjective view. Schweitzer refers to the subjective union here and now with Christ and the objective messianic community in Christ.

According to Best (1955:29), “in Christ” contains two fundamental objectives: firstly believers are in Christ and secondly salvation is in Christ. Both objectives contain the Person Christ as the corporate personality and the preposition, ἐν, takes its complete importance from both. In the occurrence of this phrase, the one or the other objective is prominent. Thus the phrase “in Christ” can express the idea of being in union with Christ or, alternatively, it can convey the notion of Christ as agent or instrument.

In 2 Corinthians 5:19 Paul uses the phrase “God was in Christ, reconciling...” which means that God was not only involved in the reconciliation through Christ’s incarnation and death, but God was also the initiator (Vincent 2002:2 Cor 5:19). Thus the place is Calvary and Christ is the agent of reconciliation between believers and God (Wiersbe 1997:2 Cor 5:18-21). God did not need reconciliation, but He knew sinners did!

Paul uses the phrase “in Christ” to express reconciliation by means or agency of Christ, referred to as instrumental use (Best 1955:7). Moulton and Deissmann defend the instrumental use of the preposition ἐν in the New Testament (Robertson 1934:589-591). Oepke acknowledges both the local and instrumental use of ἐν in “in Christ” (1964:541-542). This instrumental use represents firstly the objective basis of fellowship with God (e.g. when the phrase is used with the “kindness” in Ephesians 2:7) and secondly the gathering of many into one (e.g. when the phrase is used with the phrase “into a holy temple” in Ephesians 2:21). However, the work of Buchsel, Neugebauer and Bouttier states that the context in which it is written determines its significance (Lincoln 1990:21). This results in an alternative meaning of “in Christ” in a local sense, implying that Christ is the “place” in whom believers are and in whom salvation is, thus including the incorporation of believers into Christ (Lincoln 1990:21). Oepke equates the local use to membership of Christ and the Church, an activity or state of the believer and value judgements (1964:541). He concludes that although both the local and instrumental concepts are present, the distinction in Greek is not definite (p. 542).

Therefore the phrase “in Christ” needs to be understood in context and can refer to union with Christ (local) or an instrument or agency (as given in 2 Timothy 1:9), signifying “through God’s activity in Christ” (Lincoln 1990:114).

## **2.4. Paul’s motif**

Paul’s motif for the use of the phrase can be divided into three categories (Dunn 1998:397-398). The motif employs firstly the objective use of the phrase “in Christ”, refers to that which has happened in Christ or what Christ is yet to do. The term “objective” refers to a mystical sense (Wikenhauser 1960:23-25) and includes present and future saving acts. For example Philippians 4:19 (NASB) where Paul refers to Jesus Christ as the one through whom God’s wonderful promise will be fulfilled (future) – “And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” Secondly, the subjective use of the phrases - “in Christ” and “in the Lord” refers to being in Christ or in the Lord. For example Galatians 3:28 “you are all one in Christ Jesus” and Philemon 16 “both in the flesh and in the Lord”. Lastly, when Paul uses the

phrases “in Christ” and “in the Lord” he is referring to his own activity or he is encouraging his readers to adopt a certain attitude or course of action. For example in Philemon 20, Philemon is called on to refresh his heart in Christ. “Paul’s perception of his whole life as a Christian, its source, its identity, and its responsibilities, could be summed up in these phrases” (Dunn 1993:399).

## **2.5. The implication of being in Christ**

On several occasions Paul addresses individuals or groups of believers when using the phrase “in Christ”. According to Barclay (1999:110) the phrase “in Christ” has the implication that believers have a new identity in Christ and a new status, which differ completely from their previous identity and status. This is characterised by a transformed life under the new lordship and ownership of Jesus Christ.

The benefits for believers being “in Christ” (Barclay 1999:109), according to Paul is: being called (1 Cor 7:22), justified (Gal 2:17), sanctified (1Cor 1:2), redeemed (1 Cor 1:30) and consequential freedom “in Christ” (Gal 2:4). Also “in Christ” believers’ needs are met according to the riches in glory “in Jesus Christ” (Phil 4:19) and are made alive “in Christ” (1 Cor 15:22).

## **2.6. Similar phrases**

Paul uses the phrase “in (ἐν) Jesus Christ” only in Galatians 5:6 and Philippians 1:26, when he refers to faith in Jesus Christ. This can include believers who came to believe in Jesus as the Messiah before His crucifixion and resurrection, thus the historical Jesus. However more often Paul refers to faith in Christ when he uses the phrases “in Christ” and “in Christ Jesus” (e.g. Col 1:4; 2:5 and Phlm 1:6). When Paul uses the phrases “in Christ” and “in Christ Jesus” (more frequently than “in Jesus Christ”) then he refers to the resurrected, therefore the glorified or exalted Christ. Other variations of “in Christ” include the following: “In Him” and “in Whom” refer to union (Nielson 1960:50).

However, comparing “in Christ” and “in Christ Jesus” there are two arguments. Best (1955:32) and Nielson (1960:50-51) claim that there is no distinction between the two

phrases. Schmauch argues that “in Christ Jesus” refers to a divine event which happens or happened and always signifies a community of believers, but excludes the fellowship between the believer and Christ (Best 1955:30-31). According to Schmauch “in Christ” implies “new creation” which is referred to in 2 Corinthians 5:17 as a result of what happens “in Christ Jesus”. Schmauch concludes that both phrases exclude fellowship with Christ. Best (1955:31) appropriately asks the question: “If a change in a title in a formula implies a considerable change in its meaning, then the titles in themselves should have different meanings.” Considering the meaning of Jesus and Jesus Christ, the name Jesus signifies Saviour, while the name Christ signifies anointed, equivalent to the Hebrew, Messiah (Smith 2008:s.v. Jesus, Christ). The name of Jesus is the proper name of our Lord, and that of Christ is added to identify Him with the promised Messiah. Considering the fact that both phrases refer to Christ, the Messiah, I agree with Best. Therefore the phrase “in Christ Jesus” refers to the relationship of union with Christ which results from having been incorporated into Him according to Colossians 1:2 (Lincoln 1990:6) and also Ephesians 1:1. According to Fausset, Paul frequently uses the phrase “Christ Jesus” rather than “Christ” in his letters, when the office of the Christ, the Anointed Prophet, Priest and King is significant and “Jesus Christ” when the Person is important (1997:Eph 2:6).

“In Jesus”, “in the Lord”, “in the Lord Jesus” may refer to an ordinary fellowship, with a subsequent loss of meaning, where “in Christ” refers to a higher level of union (Nielson 1960:51). “Into Christ” represents the entrance into this union with Christ and “from Christ” refers to the breaking up of this union (p. 52). “Without Christ” is the opposite of “in Christ”. “For Christ” is used with reference to being ambassadors for Christ and signifies service. “According to Christ” has the same meaning as “in Christ” (p. 53). “Of Christ” could be replaced by “in Christ” but refers mainly to the character traits and possessions belonging to Christ (p. 54). “Christ in you” refers to the basics of Christian life, the beginning of the life of faith (Barcley 1999:50).

## **2.7. Conclusion**

Paul uses the phrase “in Christ” frequently in Ephesians and many scholars have attempted to grasp its meaning. Although he uses this phrase with great confidence, it is challenging to understand his intent. Paul states in Galatians 2:20 that Christ is in

him and is the source of all his life and that which it contains. For Paul it was entirely about Christ. Paul experienced a unique and marvellous union with Christ as he portrays in his letters. May each believer pursue this wonderful, fulfilling union between Christ and him-/ herself so that it can be a truthful reality.



## CHAPTER 3 EXEGESIS OF “IN CHRIST”

“Ephesians is breath-taking in its theological grasp of the scope of God’s purposes in Christ for the church.” (Carson 1994: Eph Introduction)

### 3.1. Introduction

Paul uses the phrases “in Christ Jesus,” “in Christ” or “in Him” to emphasize the importance of believers’ life in Christ and is found nine times in Ephesians 1:1-14 (Hoehner 1985:Eph 1:1). This study will focus on the phrase “in Christ” (ἐν Χριστῷ) found in Ephesians 1:1, 3; 2:6, 7, 10, 13; 3:6, 21 and 4:32. Other variations of “in Christ” include “in Whom” and “in Him” (ἐν αὐτῷ and ἐν ᾧ) and will be included, as found in Ephesians 1:4, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13 (twice); 2:22 and 4:21. All scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Version (1995), unless otherwise indicated.

### 3.2. Paul’s greeting (1:1)

After Paul introduces himself as ambassador of Christ, he addresses the recipients of this letter as saints (1:1), describing them as “faithful in Christ Jesus”. The adjective faithful (πιστός) is derived from the verb πιστεύω (*pisteuo*) which means “to believe”, “to be convicted” or “to trust” (Strong 1996:G4100) and a faithful, trusty person is defined as a person who adheres to his/her faith and is worthy of trust (G4103). Thus the term “faithful” refers to those believers who put their trust in Christ Jesus and therefore exercise their belief. Although the meaning of the word πιστός (*pistos*) can include believers’ measure of trueness and reliability to Him, the contrast found in 2 Corinthians 6:15 between believers and unbelievers excludes this interpretation (Wuest 1997:Eph 1:1; Lincoln 1990:6; O’Brien 1999:59). Henry (1996:Eph 1:1) however includes believers’ loyal observance of His truths and ways. In general this view is true, but this is not the aim of Paul. Considering the context of Ephesians 1 and the entire letter, Paul expands on the term “saint” in 1:4, where holiness is achieved by being elected by God and in 5:26-27 holiness is considered as an outcome of Christ’s death for the church (O’Brien 1999:87). Thus in 1:1 the believers and addressees are saints and called faithful not by their own doing, but through their

relationship to Christ. They represent God's elect, with a believing response (Lincoln 1990:6).

It is significant that "faithful in Christ Jesus" precedes "saints". Although both expressions refer to the same persons, the order is important in that sanctification of God precedes faith (Fausset 1997:Eph 1:1).

The Greek text follows the order Christ Jesus. Christ refers to the Lord as "The Anointed of God" as Prophet Priest and King to fulfil God's purpose as Saviour (Swanson 1997:s.v. Christ; Wuest 1997:Eph 1:1). Jesus refers to the deity, incarnation, humanity and atonement of Jesus Christ for sinners (Wuest 1997:Eph 1:1). The phrase "Christ Jesus" is used in 1:1, since "the *office* of the Christ, the Anointed Prophet, Priest and King, is the prominent thought" (Fausset 1997:Eph 2:6).

This occurrence of "in Christ Jesus" should be considered as a "separate attributive phrase", with Christ not the object of belief (Lincoln 1990:6). In 1:1 the phrase represents the union of believers with Christ, which results in the incorporation of believers into Him. Snodgrass agrees that the phrase is the union of believers with Christ and the believers' identity with Christ (1996:38). The phrase "in Christ Jesus" in 1:1 reflects believers' spiritual position in the office of Christ and includes the incorporation into Him (Hoehner 1985:Eph 1:1; MacDonald 2000:192). This confirms the primary view of "in Christ" as a place or location (Nielson 1960:71).

### **3.3. God's planned spiritual blessings (1:3-14)**

#### **3.3.1. *The condition of spiritual blessings (1:3)***

Blessing and praise is the response of believers to God for the blessings they have received from Him. The word "every" signifies "all", "every kind" or "whole" (Thurston 1995:94). The blessings are spiritual as a consequence of the Holy Spirit, but it also refers to the inner and hidden life of the believer (Thurston 1995:94; Caird 1976:33). Hoehner states that this heavenly realm can only be entered "in Christ" and the time is in eternity past (1985:Eph 1:4-14). The source of the blessings is God, the Father, Who should be blessed (Wiersbe 1997:Eph 1:3). Therefore the phrase "with every

spiritual blessing” pertains entirely to that which believers have received through salvation in Christ (O’Brien 1999:95). As will be shown in Section 3.3.2, these blessings are the design of the Trinity, firstly the Father’s election in 1:4-6, secondly Jesus’ sacrifice in 1:7-12 and finally the assurance of the Holy Spirit in 1:13-14 (Hoehner 1985:Eph 1:4-14). The nature of these blessings is found in the eulogy of 1:4-14: election to holiness (1:4), adoption as sons of God (1:5), redemption and forgiveness (1:7), knowledge of God’s gracious plan to sum up all things in Christ (1:10), the hope of glory (1:12) and the gift of the Spirit (1:13).

The phrase “in heavenly places” as found in 1:20; 2:6; 3:10 and 6:12, represents the unseen realm of the presence of God, His power and sovereignty (Thurston 1995:94). According to O’Brien the phrase “heavenly places” is used metaphorically in a local sense (1999:96-97). It is best understood in view of a Pauline’s doctrine in terms of the Divine saving’s act of Jesus Christ on the cross. Believers are blessed when they are saved and they are connected with the heavenly places.

Believers receive the blessings in heavenly places only in Christ. Thus Christ is the “place” in which believers have been chosen (1:4), and also have their future existence (1:10). The phrase also refers to Christ’s agency, but also to the incorporation of believers into Him, who is Himself in the heavenly places (O’Brien 1999:97; MacDonald 2000:198; Hoehner 1985:Eph 1:3). The use of the phrase “in Christ” in 1:3 is clouded between the locative and instrumental meanings, which is in agreement with Lincoln’s (1990:22) interpretation, but disagrees with the primary view of “in Christ” as a location (Nielson 1960:71).

### **3.3.2. The source of spiritual blessings (1:4-14)**

Paul’s major teaching flows from the phrase “in Christ” in 1:4-14 (Snodgrass 1996:47).

#### **3.3.2.1. God’s election (1:4-6)**

The pronoun in the phrase “in Him” (ἐν αὐτῷ) in 1:4 is the name “Christ” in 1:3. The source of spiritual blessings (1:3) is God’s sovereign election, as also seen in the phrase “He chose us” in Romans 8:30; Ephesians 1:11; 1 Thessalonians 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:13 and Titus 1:1 (Fausset 1997:Eph 1:4). Spiritual blessings are

found in union with Him, the Second Adam, Who is the Restorer and Redeemer of believers, according to the eternal purpose of God carried out in Christ Jesus (3:11; Fausset 1997:Eph 1:4). In 1:10, 22 and Colossians 1:18 Christ is the realm of the Godhead and Representative of the spiritual man (Hoehner 1985:Eph 1:4). Thus believers' positioning in Christ, Who as the Second and Last Adam, bestows righteousness on them, is preceded by God's election of the chosen, in the realm of His salvation and sovereignty (Wuest 1997:Eph 1:3, 4). All things were created in Christ (Col 1:16), confirming that "in Christ" God chose His elected (Lincoln 1990:24). It is significant that this election, before the foundation of the world, presumes Christ existence then. God not only elected believers then, but chose them before they knew Him (p. 23).

This act of choice emphasizes God's grace for people (O'Brien 1999:100; Lincoln 1990:23-24), which is independent of circumstances or people's works or worth. This leads to thanksgiving instead of reprobation. Although election and salvation flow from God's grace and sovereignty, the elected should also believe in the truth (2 Thes 2:13; Fausset 1997:Eph 1:4). Considering Dunn's criteria, 1:4 can be placed under the first category; that which has happened in Christ.

Although Jesus is *the* chosen One (Luke 9:35; 23:35), 1:4 does not refer to Χριστός, but to His people, as proven earlier (O'Brien 1999:99-100). The phrase "in Christ" is used as an objective, and God conditionally chose His people "in Christ" (p. 100). The phrase "in Him" can be classified as a place or location, as they were chosen out "in the sphere of Christ" (Wuest 1997:Eph 1:3, 4).

God's election in the past contrasts the futuristic and eternal holiness and blamelessness of believers (Hoehner 1985:Eph 1:4). This correlates with the holy believers addressed in 1:1. Thus the phrase "in Him" in 1:4 represents the union of the individual believer with Christ, as a consequence of God's election in Christ before the foundation of the world, with the purpose of believers to be holy and blameless in His sight.

### 3.3.2.2. *Redemption in Christ (1:7-12)*

In 1:6 Paul uses the phrase “in the Beloved” to indicate the sphere of the Lord Jesus, His purpose, character and work on Calvary (Wuest 1997:Eph 1:6-7). This phrase is locative of sphere. Here “Beloved” is a perfect participle and Paul uses the perfect tense to reveal the measure of God’s love, as the Father for His Son.

“In the Beloved” (1:7) Paul incorporates the verb “have redemption”, which includes the past, the present and the future (Wuest 1997:Eph 1:6-7). Redemption is found only in Jesus, through His blood and is associated with the forgiveness of sin, based on the grace of God, to Whom should be all the praise (O’Brien 1999:104-105). God’s wonderful grace is complemented by the spiritual gifts of wisdom and understanding (pp. 107-108). Thus Paul focuses on Christ in 1:7, as the agent or instrument in Whom redemption is found (p. 112).

God grants wisdom and understanding to make known the mystery of His will (1:8). This mystery is revealed for God’s good pleasure, which He purposed “in Christ” to bring all things in heaven under His headship (1:9-10). “In Christ” believers were chosen and made an inheritance, according to the purpose of God (1:11), so it might be to the praise of His glory (1:12).

Fausset (1997:Eph 1:9) states that the phrase “in Himself” (ἐν αὐτῷ) in 1:9 refers to God the Father and not Christ, as the phrase “in Christ” which follows in 1:10 cannot refer to His being stated in 1:9. This interpretation is supported by other scholars (e.g. Vincent 2002:Eph 1:9; Wuest 1997:Eph 1:9). However, the ESV English–Greek reverse interlinear New Testament translates ἐν αὐτῷ as the phrase “in Christ” (Libronix Digital Library 2007:Eph 1:9). This contrasting view is supported by other scholars, whose focus is on the mystery (e.g. Carson 1994:Eph 1:3, 9; Wiersbe 1997:Eph 1:8-10). Considering 1:9 and 1:20-23 (Revised English Bible Translation), the mystery refers to God’s action, with the objective of bringing all things in heaven and earth in unity in Christ (Carson 1994:Eph 1:3). This is supported by the central theme of Ephesians; the “cosmic reconciliation in Christ (cf. Eph 1:9–10, 20–23; 2:10–22, and 3:6 with Col 1:19–20)” (Carson 1994:Introduction Eph). The most viable

interpretation of “in Him” proves to be in Christ as the focus of the mystery is in Christ (Carson 1994:Eph 1:3; Wiersbe 1997:Eph 1:8-10).

Lincoln identifies a singular mystery: that which God has done in Christ, but proves that different aspects of this mystery are revealed in Ephesians (1990:31). O'Brien also supports one ultimate mystery with several applications (1999:110). One limiting application of this mystery is Paul's focus on the Gentiles, being equal to the Jews, united in Christ and therefore equal before Christ. The eternal purpose of God regarding this mystery was hidden for ages, although active in the past, it was only unveiled in Christ (Sampley 1978:13). Only believers share in this secret (Wiersbe 1997:Eph 1:7). They are familiar with their place in God's plan and how to live their lives accordingly (Sampley 1978:13). Their place is sealed by the Holy Spirit (1:13).

Thus in 1:9 Paul's focus expands to include God's plan for the entire cosmos. Subsequently, O'Brien interprets “in Christ” as the sphere in which God unifies all things, rather than Christ as the agent/instrument (1999:112). Best agrees that the meaning of “in Christ” in 1:9-10 is local, since it refers to the place of the believers, rather than their relationship to Christ, by focusing on “the relationship of Christ to the work of salvation by his relationship to the work of creation” (1955:6-7). God's plan is to sum up all things in Christ, thus implicating Christ as the agent/instrument (1:10). But the meaning of “in Him” in 1:9 is locative, since the emphasis is on God's plan to unite things in the sphere of Christ.

As discussed earlier, Paul focuses in 1:3-14 on God's ultimate plan of salvation at the end times and therefore some scholars view 1:10 as the key to Ephesians (O'Brien 1999:53). According to Hoehner (1985:Eph 1:8-10) the word “dispensation” means “arrangement or administration”, which refer to the fullness of times, being the conclusion of God's spiritual and material plans and purposes (O'Brien 1999:53).

The main point of 1:10 is reached in the clause “the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth”. Paul uses the phrase “it is summed up” (Rom 13.9) to unify all commands/laws under the central theme of love and now in 1:10 the cosmos is unified under Christ, the Head (Lincoln 1990:33). Christ is connected to the angels by His divine nature; He is connected both to Jews and

Gentiles by His humanity; and He is also connected to the “living and dead” and “animate and inanimate creation” (Fausset 1997:Eph 1:10). God’s purpose is to restore all things from the effect of sin to be in relation of subordination to Him.

The meaning of “in Him” (1:9) and “in Christ” (1:10) are alike and again O’Brien (1999:111-112) and Best (1955:6-7) favour the view of Christ in 1:10 as the sphere, rather than the agent, since Christ is the One in Whom God plans to sum up the cosmos and the One Who restores all things under Him.

In 1:3-4, 5-6 and 9-10 Paul’s focus is on God’s initial action to unify all things under Christ, for which He should be praised. God is therefore the subject of the verb. However in 1:7-8; 11-12 the focus is on believers, what they have obtained in Christ (Carson 1994:Eph 1:3).

Consider the phrase: “In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance” in 1:11. Some scholars prefer the translation of Bengel, Ellicott and others: “In Christ we were made an inheritance” (Wuest 1997:Eph 1:11; Fausset 1997:Eph 1:11). This is based on 1:18, which states that His inheritance is in the saints and in Acts 26:18 that believers’ inheritance is in Him. Lincoln identifies God’s inheritance as His lot or portion, as also found in the OT (e.g. Deut 9:29) and interprets 1:11 as “in Christ we have been chosen as God’s portion” (1990:36). Liefeld (1997:46) justly questions the translation “chosen” and argues for “we were made God’s portion” or “we were claimed as God’s own”, by His own choice. Thus, believers are God’s inheritance, which refers to ownership only in Jesus Christ (Wuest 1997:Eph 1:11). Noteworthy, both inheritance and possession are implied in 1:14.

Snodgrass’ implication of the phrase “in Christ” in terms of Christology, establishes Christ as the cosmic Christ, in Whom God planned His election before the foundation of the world (1996:57). The insight into the mystery of God’s will (1:9) is followed by the uniting of Jewish believers with Christ (1:11) (Hoehner 1985:Eph 1:11-12). In 1:11 Paul uses “we also” in contrast with the anonymous “we/us” in 1:3-10. Apparently Paul had a specific group in mind, namely the Jewish believers. In 1:13 Paul addresses “you also” and refers to the believing Gentiles. Therefore both believing Gentiles and

Jews are united in Christ, but according to Acts 3:26 and Romans 1:16 Jews were called first. Subsequently all believers are incorporated into Christ.

Paul's combination of the terms: "purpose", "counsel" and "God's will" in 1:11, accentuates God's sovereign plan and choice of the Jewish believers in the church, with Christ as the Head, and with the purpose of praising God, which corresponds to 1:6 (Hoehner 1985:Eph 1:11-12; O'Brien 1999:115). The phrase "who were the first to hope in Christ" (1:12) confirms Paul's implication of the Jewish believers in 1:11. Fausset interprets this phrase as the Jewish believers who have before (that is before His coming) hoped in the Christ (1997:Eph 1:12). The Greek text for "in Christ" in 1:12 is ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ, which accounts for the translation of "in *the* Christ". In 1:12 these Jewish believers' goal is into the praise of God's glory (cf. 1:6). As in 1 Cor 15:19, hope "in Christ" (ἐν Χριστῷ) refers to Christ as the object of believers' hope, rather than Christ being the place (location) of hope (Lincoln 1990:36-37).

The phrase "in Christ" in 1:11 represents the union of Jewish believers with Christ. Believers are God's inheritance; therefore Christ is the instrument or agent. As 1:11 starts with the phrase "in Christ", it highlights what have already been said regarding Christ in the preceding verses, so to relate believers' incorporation into Christ, according to God's sovereign plan (Liefeld 1997:44-45). Verse 1:12 is a confirmation of the Jewish believers introduced in 1:11 and subsequently the phrase "in (the) Christ" refers to the object of their hope.

The powerful reality of 1:11 is that believers are God's possession or inheritance, by His plan and not believers' incentive or work (Liefeld 1997:47-48). Therefore believers' fear for losing salvation vanishes in His choice of saving them. The truth is that God will keep those He chose. John 10:28 echoes this security that believers' salvation will never be lost. Praise God, as believers' security rest in His ability, and not their own ability.

Summarizing, the meaning of "in Christ" in this passage, 1:7-11 represents the union of the individual believer with Christ, both Gentile and Jew. In 1:7 Christ is the agent of redemption, forgiving their sins. God lavishes them with the gifts of wisdom and understanding. Both occurrences of "in Christ" in 1:9-10 establish Christ as the sphere



(location). Believers are God's inheritance; therefore Christ is the instrument or agent (1:11). This is contrary to Christ being the sphere in which believers have been chosen, receive the blessings in heavenly places and in Whom God plans to sum up the cosmos and restores all things, given in 1:3-4, 9-10 (1:3 also has an instrumental use). Yet, the entire 1:3-11 is theocentric, as it concentrates on what God has already completed in Christ (Snodgrass 1996:164). Finally in 1:12 Christ is the object of believers' hope, rather than the place of hope (local meaning).

### *3.3.2.3. The seal of the Holy Spirit (1:13-14)*

Verse 1:13 provides the process of salvation: sinners hear the Word of Truth, believe in their hearts and trust Christ (now called believers) and receive the seal of the Holy Spirit (Wiersbe 1997: Eph 1:13). The phrase "in Him you also" incorporates the Gentiles into the Jews' sharing in Christ (Fausset 1997:Eph 1:13). Thus "in Him" in 1:13a refers to the incorporation of believers in Christ.

The KJV uses the term "trust" in 1:12-13, in contrast with the other versions using the term "hope". "Trust" is not in the Greek text and should be disregarded. When, and not after, as expressed in the KJV, sinners hear the Word of truth and believe, then at that moment the believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit. Thus the sealing is not an additional step in salvation, but an immediate outcome (Hoehner 1985:Eph 1:13-14a).

Verse 1:13b can be translated as "They were sealed in Him [Christ] with the Holy Spirit of promise", where God is the Person Who seals, signifying His "security (Matt 27:66; Eph 4:30), authentication and approval (John 6:27), certification of genuineness (John 3:33), and identification of ownership (2 Cor 1:22; Rev 7:2; 9:4)" (Hoehner 1985:Eph 1:13-14a). For the believer this seal represents God's salvation through Christ, making God their Owner and Keeper, reassuring them of the fact that no-one is able to break this seal. As in 1:11 Paul reiterates believers' confidence and security found in Christ. Believers have an eternal security, as the seal is a pledge of their inheritance, which will only be fully attained in the final redemption of the world (Carson 1994:Eph 1:13-14).

Therefore in 1:13-14 God is the Person Who seals, the Holy Spirit is the agent/instrument of the seal as a pledge of believers' inheritance (1:14a), and Christ is the sphere in which the seal is made.

Finally, looking collectively at the 1:3-14 the design of the Trinity is evident, firstly the Father's election in 1:4-6, secondly Jesus' sacrifice in 1:7-12 and finally the assurance of the Holy Spirit in 1:13-14 (Hoehner 1985:Eph 1:4-14). In 1:3-7, 11 Christ is the instrument in God's election, believers' incorporation into the heavenly places and their inheritance. In contrast 1:9-10, 12-14 Christ is the sphere in which the mystery is unveiled, all things are unified and where the seal of the Holy Spirit is made.

### **3.4. Believer's new position in Christ (2:1-10)**

Sinners' old condition, being dead to God (2:1-3), is contrasted with believers' new position, being alive in God (2:4-10). Believers are made alive (2:5) in Christ and raised with Christ (2:6a), and now in verse 2:6b God seats them with Christ in the heavenly places (cf. 1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12) in Christ Jesus. The contrast between Christ and believers are seen in the following (Hoehner 1985:Eph 2:6b): Firstly, Christ died physically (1:20); believers were formerly spiritually dead (2:1-3). Secondly, Christ was raised physically (1:20); believers are made alive and raised with Christ spiritually (2:5-6). Thirdly, the resurrected Christ is seated in the heavenly places physically (1:20); believers are seated with Christ in the heavenly places spiritually (2:6). Thus believers are made alive, raised up in Christ and exalted with Christ by the same divine power and now works in them.

Many scholars have connected believers' spiritual death and resurrection with their conversion and baptism (Snodgrass 1996:113; Lincoln 1990:109). In Romans 6:3-5 Paul associates the death of a believer to baptism and refers to the future resurrection of believers' bodies. Believers identify with Christ's death, by dying to their former sinful ways of living, attaining a newness of life (Witmer 1985:Rom 6:3-4). The resurrection of believers gives them a new spiritual life. God's salvation implicates believers' death, burial and resurrection with Christ. In 2:5-6 believers' union with Christ in death is omitted, since Paul's focus is on believers' union with Christ's resurrection and exaltation (Lincoln 1990:117). Now believers share in Christ's triumph

over the cosmic powers, which enslaved and held them captive, revealing once again God's amazing grace. God's love is based on believers' union with the Beloved (1:6) and involves their exaltation to a position of power and authority in Christ, in the heavenly realms (Heil 2007:103).

Thus the present and future ascension and seating occur in believers' spirit only in union with Christ Jesus (2:6; O'Brien 1999:170). However, a variation in time is seen in the Pauline letters. Compare Colossians 2:12 and 3:1 where believers' resurrection has already taken place, to Romans 6:5-8; 2 Corinthians 4:14 and Philippians 3:11, where the resurrection is a hope for the future. A possible rationale is that Paul uses a present resurrection terminology in the earlier Epistles, but associates believers' future resurrection with the newness of their present life (Romans). O'Brien appropriately asks how believers can walk in this newness if they are still dead in Christ. Alternatively, Wuest interprets Paul's intention not to distinguish between the present and future state of believers, but rather to express it as a magnificent gift of life (1997:Eph 2:3-7).

Paul's statement "seated us with Him" is only eligible "in Christ". Thus the resurrection, ascension and the seating of believers with Him only occurs in union with Christ. Comparing 2:6 with 1:20, believers do not share Christ's spiritual ascension in 1:20, but in 2:6 the phrase "heavenly places" are followed by "in Christ Jesus". According to MacDonald the use of the phrase "in Christ" in 2:6 is local, not instrumental, and also represents the incorporation into Christ (2000:198,232).

The phrase "in heavenly places" is only found in Ephesians. In 1:3, 1:20 and 2:6 this phrase refers to "divine transcendence" but in 3:10 and 6:12 it is a place where hostile spiritual forces abide (MacDonald 2000:232).

Paul's thought in 2:4-7 forms a complete cycle: it starts in 2:4 with the divine mercy and love, which is the driving force for God's salvation through Christ. Secondly, in 2:5 the focus is on God's extravagant grace which redeems sinners. Finally, in 2:7 it reaches a climax: God's surpassing riches of His grace in kindness will be revealed towards believers in Christ Jesus (O'Brien 1999:173). In addition to 2:5, 7 God's grace is several times mentioned in Ephesians (1:2, 6, 7; 2:8; 3:2, 7, 8; 4:7, 29 and 6:24).

The eschatology of Ephesians is a present reality for believers in Christ, not completely realized, but having a future aspect (Nielson 1960:54; Lincoln 1990:111). Thus the manifestation of salvation stretches into the future, where the plural use of ages may imply “one age supervening upon another like successive waves of the sea, as far into the future as thought can reach” (O’Brien 1999:173).

In 1:7 the “riches of His grace” is associated with the redemption of believers, which lead to the forgiveness of their sins, and conveyed through God’s kindness to believers in Christ Jesus (2:7), which refers to salvation (2:8; Hoehner 1985:Eph 2:8). Salvation’s origin is grace (2:8), and not works (2:9), through the agency of faith in Jesus Christ (Rom 4:5). Salvation is a gift of God (2:8).

The use of “in Christ” in 2:7 is similar to 1:4. Christ is the “place” in which believers receive God’s grace in kindness, and also have their future grace. Only in Christ believers have access to God’s grace, referring to Christ’s agency, but also to the incorporation of believers into Himself.

The believers’ expectation of heaven is transformed in 2:7. Suddenly material riches, anticipation of what heaven will be like, human experience and the fear of an unknown eternity, faints in God’s incomparable riches of His grace, displaying His kindness (Liefeld 1997:63). God’s extravagant grace is only accomplished in Christ, and is demonstrated in His kindness towards believers, incorporating them into Christ (Lincoln 1990:110).

The term “handiwork” includes the act of God’s creation and is in 2:10 linked to establishment of believers (MacDonald 2000:234). “Christ is the agent through whom God conducts this re-creation of believers” (p. 234).

God chose believers before the foundation of the earth (1:4) and created them in the place of being “in Christ” to walk in good works, which God planned beforehand (2:10; Heil 2007:106). Through God’s grace, salvation is received through faith (2:8) and leads to believers walking in the good works (2:10), which refer to God working in and through believers (cf. Phil 2:13; Hoehner 1985:Eph 2:10).

Similar to 1:4, God created believers “in Christ” for good works (2:10), therefore God conditionally created His people “in Christ” (Wuest 1997:Eph 1:3, 4). The phrase can be classified as a place/location, as they were created “in the sphere of Christ”. Christ is the agent/instrument, since all things were created in Christ (Col 1:16), He is the mediator, and therefore God’s creation originates with Him (Lincoln 1990:114). Therefore, the use of the phrase “in Christ” in 2:10 is both local and instrumental, representing believers union with Him (O’Brien 1999:178-179).

Christ in all three verses (2:6, 7, 10) represents the office of the Christ, as Paul uses the phrase “in Christ Jesus” (Fausset 1997:Eph 2:6). The union of believers with Christ runs like a golden thread throughout Ephesians 1-2. Believers are reassured of God’s love (2:4) as they were chosen in Christ (1:4). They are made alive (2:5) in Christ, raised with Christ (2:6a), and seated with Christ in the heavenly places (2:6b). They receive grace in kindness in Christ Jesus (2:7) and were created for good works in Christ Jesus (2:10). God’s grace encourages and shields believers, allaying all fear. They do not know what the future holds, but they are confident in God’s love for them. Just as He chose them before the foundation of the world, He also had then an amazing plan for them, to work in and through them (Wiersbe 1997:Eph 2:10). God had designed a plan in His sovereign election for all believers, therefore God will accomplish His plans and purposes, only because of His grace and not of man’s intent or the lack thereof (Lincoln 1990:116). The question to believers in the church is:” Will you allow God to work in and through you?” If so do you as believer live a godly life, reflecting your union with Christ Jesus?

### **3.5. A new corporate position in Christ (2:11-22)**

Paul uses a variety of imageries to convey this new corporate position of believers (Jews and Gentiles) in Christ (Sampley 1978:29). Individuals, who have accepted God’s salvation in Christ, are not isolated, but brought in union with other believers (Hoehner 1985:Eph 2:11-22). Verses 2:1-13 is a statement on the union corporately, the past disunion (2:11-12), and the present union (2:13). This is followed by an explanation (2:14-18) and the consequence of the union (2:19-22).

Paul uses spatial categories in Ephesians to contrast believers' former separation from God and now their new closeness and security in Christ (2:12-13, 17, 19; Sampley 1978:33-34). These spatial categories supplement and may slightly alter the well known statements about what has been completed in Christ.

### **3.5.1. *Union in Christ (2:13)***

Paul addresses the Gentiles in 2:11, who were once far off and now brought near in Christ (2:13; Best 1997:101). The nearness of the Gentiles does not refer to their relation to the Jews, but to the fact that both Jews and Gentiles are brought together in Christ, forming a new community (2:15-16). Paul uses the same language in 2:12 as found in Isaiah 57:19 for Israel, referring to the exiled Jews far off (Sampley 1978:29; Snodgrass 1996:128; MacDonald 2000:243; Campbell 2008:16). Later interpretations included Gentile proselytes, but it is uncertain if this interpretation existed during Paul's time (MacDonald 2000:243). Only in Christ, the Jews (those near) and Gentiles (those far off) have been united, since the dividing walls, separating them, have been broken down (2:14). In 2:15-16 Paul reaffirms this unity by using the phrases "make the two into one new man", establishing peace and "both in one body", bringing reconciliation. Now Jews and Gentiles are equal, they are both "in Christ" and part of His body (O'Brien 1999:191).

The phrase "but now in Christ Jesus" contrasts the temporally (former opposed to now) alienation of believers' position (far opposed to near) before being in Christ, revealing Him as Saviour and Messiah (Vincent 2002:Eph 2:13). Obviously, the interpretation of the phrase as "now you are in Christ" is not relevant (O'Brien 1999:190). The phrase "in Christ Jesus you" should rather be linked to the phrase "have been brought near", meaning that the Gentiles were brought near and consequently they are in Christ and not the other way around (O'Brien 1999:190).

Before the Gentiles were united with the Jews in Christ, they are best described as being "without" (Wiersbe 1997:Eph 2:11). They were without Christ, God, hope and were excluded from Kingdom citizenship and covenants. Although the Gentiles have been included in the OT, they were secondary, but "now" they became primary in Christ (Snodgrass 1996:128). Gentiles "now" have direct access to God, without

fulfilling any Judaist criteria. Jews and Gentiles are incorporated into Christ. The incorporation is through the blood of Christ, since it points to Christ's atoning death and God's salvation in Jesus Christ, found throughout the NT (Col 1:20; 1 John 1:7; Acts 20:28; Liefeld 1997:70).

Paul often uses the phrase "in Christ" in the first two chapters of Ephesians, to refer to the sphere of Christ, His influence and the result (Snodgrass 1996:128). The agent in this process (2:13) can either be Christ or God. The most probable interpretation would be to consider God as part of the process, and Christ as the agent, since the phrase "in Christ" points to Christ's atoning death, while God's action is best portrayed as initiator, considering the verb "have been brought". Although Christ is the agent, Paul's focus in 2:13 is on the sphere of Christ, thus Christ is a place of reconciliation and peace (locative meaning).

Paul reveals the mystery of the church only in Ephesians 3 (Wiersbe 1997:Eph 2:13-17). Up to "now in Christ Jesus" God kept the Jews and the Gentiles separated. The only way a Gentile could come near to God was by becoming a Jew, which is impossible. At the cross of Jesus, God condemned both Jews and Gentiles as sinners, but brought reconciliation through Christ, therefore uniting them.

History reflects the tension between the Jews and Gentiles, as seen in the form of hostility (Liefeld 1997:68). The Gentiles were unpopular among the Jews, within reason, and the Jews enforced their beliefs and laws on the Gentiles, since they saw themselves close to God and the Gentiles far off. Paul describes this alienation in Ephesians in terms a spiritual separation from God. Social loneliness and separation from especially believers can be destructive, since it not only separates you from others but also from God. God in His wonderful grace and wisdom chose to close the cultural and religious gap between Jew and Gentile in Christ (Richards and Richards 1987:Eph 2:11-18). The result is reconciliation with God and peace. Peace is two-sided, as God not only enables, but also demands it, whether political or social, from His followers (Campbell 2008:15).

If barriers were destroyed at Calvary, why do churches still create barriers? Examples of possible barriers may include devaluating and limiting people, taking advantage of

people and inequality (Snodgrass 1996:145). May the Church be characterised by the absence of barriers and motivated to be united in love (Phil 2:2).

The question, to the Church and believers: “How do you maintain unity among one another in Christ?” Do the differences between churches cut them off from being in fellowship with one another? The truth is that in Christ all believers are one and that their lives should convey this unity in love and acceptance (Richards et al. 1987:Eph 3:1-4:6). “As Eph 1-2 indicates, through the power of Christ hostility arising from difference can be turned into a cause of celebration of the blessings of God in Christ.” (Campbell 2008:15).

### **3.5.2. *The effect of the union in Christ (2:19-22)***

In 1:10 Paul launches the concept of unity as God’s purpose and expands it in 2:14-18 to the union of Jews and Gentiles (Snodgrass 1996:129). Paul suggests that believers, whether Jew or Gentile, are now united in Christ in a “third race” (p. 135). In 2:19-22 Paul summarizes and completes his thought process using the metaphor of a building, growing into a holy temple (p. 136). Temple is implied in 2:13-14, 18 but now in 2:21-22 it is specifically mentioned.

Holy temple does not refer to the universal Church as Lincoln states (1990:156), but “this dwelling place of God is a heavenly entity” (O’Brien 1999:219). Verse 2:22 is the climax of 2:11-22, as Paul focuses on Gentile believers’ location in this holy temple in the Lord (p. 220). These Gentiles once without God and without hope (2:11-12), have been brought near, united with the Jews and are built as living stones (cf. 1 Pet 2:5) into this holy temple. The two phrases “holy temple in the Lord” and “dwelling of God in the Spirit” describe both the heavenly temple, where God lives by the Spirit (O’Brien 1999:220-221). Not only does temple refer to God’s heavenly dwelling place as in Ephesians 2, but also refers to the believers in whom His Spirit lives as in 1 Corinthians 3:16 (p. 221).

Already in the OT, believers are called spiritual temples. Isaiah 28:16 mentions a foundation stone, which is the corner stone, implicating the coming Messiah and the end times (Snodgrass 1996:136-137). Jesus Christ is metaphorically *the* cornerstone:



the “unique place in the foundation” of a building, and not a “ceremonial cornerstone” (p. 137). The term “cornerstone” is an appropriate title for Jesus Christ, and also found in 1 Peter 2:2-8.

Although Christ Jesus is the cornerstone, the whole building, referring to believers, also exists in Him, which is validated by the opening phrase “in Him” in both 2:21 and 2:22. (p. 138). Both these phrases refer back to Christ in 2:20 (O’Brien 1999:218; Lincoln 1990:158). The recurrence of this phrase highlights the union between God and believers in Christ. Believers in Christ explicate unity, which is found in God and other believers in Christ, and where God chooses to dwell (Snodgrass 1996:139). The temple is called holy (2:21), therefore the people that dwell in the temple should also be holy. This is a repetition of Paul’s terms for the believers as “saints” in 1:1 and 2:19 and “holy” in 1:4 and 5:27.

In the passage 2:4-22, believers are seated with Christ in the heavenly sphere (2:4-6), through Christ Gentiles have been brought near to God (2:13), uniting Gentiles and Jews (2:14), through Christ they have access to God in heaven (2:18) and calling them fellow citizens with the saints (2:19; O’Brien 1999:220).

Christ acts as central agent in the building, which only functions in relation to Him (O’Brien 1999:218; Lincoln 1990:157). Christ, as cornerstone, not only unites believers (stones) with the other believers (stones), but unifies believers in and with Christ (*the* cornerstone). Christ also acts as mediator, establishing peace in Him and granting access to God through Him, highlighting His role in the unity and growth of the Church (O’Brien 1999:218). Paul’s focus is thus on the agency of Christ in 2:21, while in 2:22 his focus is on the place or location of Gentiles, united with the Jews, in the heavenly temple.

Do believers truly comprehend the greatness of God residing in their hearts and in the Church (Strauss 2008:chap. 2 §2.c)? The true Church of God should mirror the holiness and beauty birthed in believers’ hearts, not yet complete, but more magnificent than anything found in the handmade building of the Church.

The theme of unity is embroidered throughout Ephesians. Believers cannot function in isolation, but as fellow citizens of God’s household they need to grow together, to

become a holy temple in the Lord (2:19; Richards et al. 1987:Eph 2:19-22). The ministry of reconciliation should be on the lips of all believers and be active in their own lives (Wiersbe 1997:Eph 2:19). Believers should be bearers of the Good News.

### **3.6. The mystery of Christ (3:1-13)**

The privileged position which Gentiles have in Christ, as discussed in the preceding section, is a preparation for 3:1-13. In this passage Paul delivers insight into the mystery, which entails the incorporation of the Gentiles into the people of God. Paul and God's apostles and prophets received this revelation of the mystery (3:5) and he defines it in 3:6 (Hughes and Laney 2001:Eph 3:1-7).

It is called a mystery as it was a secret, hidden for past Ages (Hoehner 1985:Eph 3:6). "The mystery was not that Gentiles would receive spiritual blessing (cf. Joel 2:28; Amos 9:12), but that Jew and Gentile would be united on an equal basis in one body, sharing a spiritual inheritance in the promises of God." (Hughes et al. 2001:Eph 3:1-7). The consequences for the Gentiles are threefold: (1) they are fellow heirs of God's riches; (2) they are members of the same body; (3) and they share in the promise in Christ Jesus (3:6; Hoehner 1985:Eph 3:6).

The proper noun Jesus is significant in the phrase "in Christ Jesus", as the Greek texts also include it and refer to God's anointed, Jesus, the Saviour of the world (Wuest 1997:Eph 3:6). If Paul did not incorporate Jesus in the phrase, it would have falsely implied that the Gentiles only share in the Messianic and Jewish promises, although Israel will return to God in the millennium and be sharers in Christ Jesus. Isaiah and other prophets predicted the salvation of the Gentiles, but assumed an inferior position (Richards et al. 1987:Eph 3:1-6). This may be the reason why Paul repeats the union of the Church in Ephesians. The Scofield Bible (2003) has an insightful explanation of Ephesians 3:6:

That the Gentiles were to be saved was no mystery (Rom. 9:24-33; 10:19-21). The mystery 'hid in God' was the divine purpose to make of Jew and Gentile a wholly new thing-'the Church, which is His (Christ's) body,' formed by the baptism with the Holy Spirit (I Cor 12:12, 13) and in which the earthly

distinction of Jew and Gentile disappears (Eph 2:14, 15; Col 3:10, 11). The revelation of this mystery, which was foretold but not explained by Christ (Mt. 16:18), was committed to Paul. In his writings alone we find the doctrine, position, walk, and destiny of the Church.

The mystery in terms of the union is twofold: first the union of Jews and Gentiles with one another and secondly the union of Jews and Gentiles with Christ (O'Brien 1999:236). The union is not instrumentally through Christ, but represents the incorporation of Gentiles into the sphere of Christ (local meaning) (Lincoln 1990:181; O'Brien 1999:236). In the sphere of Christ alone, Gentiles inherit the promises, called sons and daughters of God and share in the body of Christ and receive the Holy Spirit. As the Good News is preached to Gentiles and accepted, they are united with Christ. Thus the Good News is the agent through which God reveals His purposes and plans and incorporates them into Christ. Thus the Church's prerogative should be the proclaiming of the gospel to all, at all times and everywhere, so that people's lives can be changed.

The main theme of Ephesians is Christ, the Church and God's divine purpose and plan to unite all things in Christ Jesus (Wiersbe 1997:Introductory notes to Ephesians). Unity in Christ is the focal point in Ephesians 2-5 (Snodgrass 1996:167). If God's purpose was to unite the Jews and Gentiles, should not the Church today portray this unity among one another? Creating self-motivated divisions and upholding individualism in the Church, at the cost of unity, is detrimental. Unity is maintained through humility, patience and love for one another (Richards et al. 1987:Eph 3:1-6). "When we are taken into Christ Jesus, we become one body with other Christians, regardless of our differences. We are one with all in him." (Snodgrass 1996:169).

### **3.7. Praise be to God (3:20-21)**

Paul prays for the unification of believers, in 3:14-19, knowing God's love and therefore practicing it towards each other (Hoehner 1985:Eph 3:14-21). Appropriately he closes the prayer and the first three chapters with a praise doxology for God's great victory in Christ (Wiersbe 1996:Eph 4:17-32), describing God's unlimited grace and mercy in answering believers' prayers (Henry 1996:Eph 3:14-21). God's ability to do abundantly

more than believers can ask or think is applauded. God's intention is for believers to experience His power at work in them, strengthening their faith. Glory, is thus given to God, which should manifest in love in the Church and also in Christ, for uniting Jews and Gentiles (Hoehner 1985:Eph 3:20-21). MacDonald (2000:280) equates the phrases "in Christ Jesus" and "in the Church", reasoning that to be in Christ Jesus implicates to be in the Church in the Pauline letters. O'Brien (1999:268) agrees, stating that "in Christ Jesus" can not be separated from "in the Church", because believers are incorporated into the Church and also in Christ. However, Lincoln (1990:217) states that "in the Church" refers to the "body of Christ and the primary sphere of his present activity" and "in Christ Jesus" refers to the "exalted Head of this Church and the one upon whom its activity and indeed its very existence depend". This differentiation is true, but discarded, as it does not include incorporation as indicated in context.

After describing God, Paul subsequently glorifies Him, attributing all excellence to Him (Henry 1996:Eph 3:14-21). The doxology demonstrates God's omnipotence, superiority and prominence (Wiersbe1996: Eph 4:17-32).

Christ is the instrument of both praises and gifts, since all gifts are received from God through Christ and all praises are given to God through Christ (Lincoln 1990:217; Henry 1996:Eph 3:14-21). Although Paul recognises Christ as the instrument, it seems that his focus is on Christ, the Head of the Church, as the sphere in which God is to be glorified. Thus the phrase "in Christ Jesus" has a local meaning (O'Brien 1999:269; Wuest 1997:Eph 3:20). Vincent agrees that Christ is the "spiritual sphere of this praise" and labels the Church as the "outward domain" where God should be praised (2002:Eph 3:20). The bestowing of glory is from generations to come, until eternity and therefore endless.

Not only should the glory be to God in the Church, but also through the Church (Carson 1994:Eph 3:14). The Church should be a channel through which God can reflect His glory and His character. Do Churches glorify themselves or God in building these impressive buildings? Not does it apply to the Church's outward impression, but also to their deeds and works.

The Church revealing His glory and character will also experience God's active power at work in them and through them (Wiersbe 1997:Eph 3:20). The Church open to God's spiritual blessings, found in Christ, will allow the Holy Spirit to transform them, and thus they will be filled to fullness, abundantly and exceedingly. Praise God for the spiritual wealth believers have in Christ.

### **3.8. Presenting the new man in Christ (4:20-32)**

#### ***3.8.1. The new man's position (4:20-24)***

In 4:20-24 Paul compares the former life of the Gentiles with the life after they have received teachings (Carson 1994:Eph 4:17). Ephesians 4:20-21 is the parallel of Colossians 2:6-7. The teachings the Gentiles have received are the truth, contrasting their previous state of darkness, characterised by the absence of truth (4:21-22). This is the third mentioning of the concept "truth" in Ephesians, reflecting the increasing significance of it in the teaching of the gospel, which is also found in the Pastoral Epistles (MacDonald 2000:304). Prior references are found in 1:13 "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation..." and in 4:15 "but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ...".

The phrase "to learn Christ" in 4:20 is unique and nowhere else found in the NT. It can not be equated to learn about Christ, as it does not portray a mere knowledge about Christ, but refers to believers' intimate fellowship with Him (Wuest 1997:Eph 4:19-20; Wiersbe 1997:Eph 4:20). The indicative mood in the phrase "heard Him" (4:21) means the truth that believers heard as it was Him that they heard (Vincent 2002:Eph 4:21).

Carson (1994:Eph 4:17) translates 4:21 in the Greek text as: "you were taught in him, as [the] truth is in Jesus, to put off the old man/humanity corresponding to your former manner of life ... and to put on the new man/humanity". The phrase "in Him" refers to Christ, Who exemplifies truth and the readers should lay aside the old man (self), which refers to the man in Adam, and put on the new man (self), which is in Christ. This new self in 4:24, refers to the likeness of God, which flows from and is a reflection of the truth. "The truth of Christ appears in its beauty and power, when it appears as

in Jesus.” (Henry 1996:Eph 4:17-24). The phrase “in Him” (4:21) refers to the believers’ fellowship with Him, with Christ the subject, viewed in the role of teacher (Snodgrass 1996:232). The phrase thus refers to Christ in the sphere of learning and its meaning is locative.

Christ is used in 4:20-21a, but Jesus in 4:21b, referring to the historical, rather than the official, name of Jesus (Wuest 1997:Eph 4:19-20) and the prophesied Christ (Wiersbe 1997:Eph 4:20). Paul’s choice of Jesus seems to be deliberate as it is the only occurrence in Ephesians (MacDonald 2000:304). Jesus “embodies and encompasses the truth” (Snodgrass 1996:232). O’Brien (1999:326) confirms that Paul does not use the name “Jesus” as in Gnostic teaching, to distinguish between the risen and earthly Christ, but only affirms that the historical Jesus embodies the truth. The truth exists jointly with Jesus. Both Lincoln (1990:282) and MacDonald (2000:304) hold the same view, but question the weight of the name Jesus. They conclude that the use of Jesus may rather be attributed to Paul’s style. Lincoln (1990:282) equates “taught the truth in Jesus” with “taught in Christ”.

Thus 4:20-21 describes believers’ encounter with Jesus, their acceptance of Him as their Saviour, subsequently being united with Christ, in death and rising as given in 4:22, and the truth is revealed in Him. Literature lacks the meaning of the phrase “in Jesus” in 4:21 as instrumental or locative, but considering the above arguments, it would seem appropriate to classify it as instrumental.

Paul’s indicative use of believers’ union with Christ in crucifixion of the old self and resurrection of the new self (cf. Rom 6; 2 Cor 5:17; Col 2:11–12; 3:9–10), require subsequent imperatives that believers should live in the truth they have received (Carson 1994:Eph 4:17). Thus believers’ lives should mirror the new self they have received in Christ by no longer walking in the ways of the old self.

How can believers live united in the Church, representing this new self, which is God-like in righteousness and holiness (Richards et al. 1987:Eph 4:17-5:2)? Based on 4:21-22, believers can express their righteousness in union with others, by speaking the truth, being transparent and rejecting all pretense and dishonesty. This can only be accomplished through their own intimate relationship with Christ.

### **3.8.2. The new man's practice (4:25-32)**

Ephesians 4:25-32 represents the conduct of the new man in the form of a negative command, a positive command, and the reason for the positive command (Hoehner 1985:Eph 4:25-32). The negative command given to believers in 4:31 is that they should put away all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor (brawling/shouting), slander and malice. The positive commands given to believers in 4:32 are kindness, tenderheartedness and forgiveness. The reason is that kindness (2:7), compassion (Mark 1:41) and grace (Rom. 8:32) is found in Christ (Hoehner 1985:Eph 4:25-32).

The negative vices such as bitterness, wrath and anger represent inward resentment and disapproval of others, while clamor is the way to voice them (Henry 1996:Eph 4:17-32). Slander means evil speaking and includes insults and criticism against those in anger. Malice gives rise to evil plans of hurt and destruction. Anger is a negative vice in the NT because it is a self-centered emotion and is described as a plague that costs both the angry person and the community (Snodgrass 1996:257). The first positive vice is kindness to others, which can only flow from a heart filled with love (Henry 1996:Eph 4:17-32). This is confirmed in John 13:35: "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another". Tenderheartedness represents compassion and mercy, which Jesus expressed in Matthew 12:7: "But if you had known what this means, 'I desire compassion, and not a sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent".

Scripture reveals two reasons why believers should forgive others: to receive themselves forgiveness from God (Matt 6:14; Mark 11:25) and because they have received forgiveness from God (Lincoln 1990:308). In 4:32 forgiveness relates to the latter as believers' sins are forgiven by the blood of Jesus Christ. Irrelevant of the reason, it is imperative that believers should forgive (O'Brien 1999:352). God was the initiator of the reconciliation between Him and sinners, by sending His Son as atonement, bestowing righteousness on them, and by forgiving their sins in the sphere of Christ (Wuest 1997:Eph 4:31-32). Thus what God has done in Christ inspires believers to behave according to the new man they are in Christ (Lincoln 1990:310).

O'Brien (1999:352) and Wuest (1997:Eph 4:31-32) assign the meaning of "in Christ" in 4:32 to the sphere of Christ (locative meaning). Assigning the phrase as instrumental overlooks Paul's full intention of including believers' redemption in Christ, but also their reconciliation with God (O'Brien 1999:352). The word order in this case, excludes believers' union with Christ, as "in Christ" is linked to "God" and not "to you".

Similar to anger, unforgiveness is a self-centred act as it assumes a position of judgement (Snodgrass 1996:259). Many believers, just as unbelievers, refuse to forgive, harbouring resentment and bitterness towards others, even in the Church. The unforgiving person not only ruins relationships, but also lessens the value of others and their own. Believers should treasure their relationship with God and others (p. 261). If believers keep their focus on the unity found in Christ and other believers, they will be more selfless. Believers' relationship with others should be characterized by speaking the truth, building people up and not hurting them, caring for them and treating them as God has treated themselves in Christ (p. 265).

The positive virtues are built on a foundation of love. Practically, believers should seek to have relationships with others; because you can only love people you know (Richards et al. 1987:Eph 4:17-5:2). The relationships should demonstrate a mutual trust, openness and caring for one another. Caring should advance into a response. The active ingredients of a Church should be caring, kindness, forgiveness and compassion. This should be taught and demonstrated in the Church.

### **3.9. Conclusion**

The main theme of Ephesians is Christ, the Church and God's divine purpose and plan to unite all things in Christ Jesus (Wiersbe 1997:Introductory notes to Ephesians). Unity in Christ is the focal point in Ephesians 2-5 (Snodgrass 1996:167).

The letter of Ephesians consists of two distinct parts: Chapters 1-3 and 4-6 (O'Brien 1999:66-67). Chapters 1-3 focus on God's divine purpose to sum up all things in Christ, ending with a doxology, where the union of believers with Christ is prominent in Chapters 1-2. Out of these teachings chapter 4 evolves, where believers are admonished to live lives according to what they have received in Christ.



As stated in Chapter 2, Section 2.4 Paul's motif for the use of the phrase "in Christ" can be divided into three categories (Dunn 1998:397-398). Considering Dunn's criteria, all the occurrences of the phrase "in Christ" in Ephesians 1-4, fall under the first category; that which has happened in Christ, for the following reasons:

- The believers in 1:1 are saints and called faithful through their relationship to Christ. They represent God's elect, not by their own doing.
- Christ is the sphere and agent in 1:3 and believers receive blessings in Him, Who is in the heavenly places.
- Redemption's time frame is past, present and future (1:7) and God's election and inheritance is "in Christ" (1:9, 11) and Christ is the objective of believers' hope, future and present (1:12). In 1:4-6 Christ is the instrument in God's election and in 1:7-14 Christ is the sphere in both His life as sacrifice and the assurance of the Holy Spirit.
- The present and future ascension and seating occur in believers' spirit only in union with Christ Jesus (2:6) and believers are seated with Christ in the heavenly sphere (2:4-6).
- Christ is the "place" in which believers receive God's grace, and also have their future grace (2:7). Only in Christ believers have access to God's grace, but also to the incorporation of believers into Himself.
- All things were created in Christ (Col 1:16) and He is both the sphere and instrument in 2:10.
- In 2:13 Christ is the sphere in which both reconciliation and peace take place. Through Christ Gentiles have been brought near to God (2:13), uniting them and Jews (2:14) so that they are called sons and daughters of God and share in the body of Christ and receive the Holy Spirit. Thus through Christ they have access to God (2:18) and called fellow citizens with the saints (2:19).
- Christ is the agent of both praises and gifts, since all gifts are received from God through Christ and all praises are given to God through Christ (3:20).

- The phrase “in Him” (4:21) views Christ as teacher and as the sphere of learning.

## **CHAPTER 4 THE APPLICATION OF “IN CHRIST”**

### **4.1. Introduction**

Paul greetings (1:1) in Ephesians expand into the most extraordinary view of God, referring to His plan for the fullness of time to sum up all things in Christ (1:10; Sampley 1978:34-38). This is called the “broad vista”; the cosmic unity in Christ and the submission of all things under God’s power (p. 34).

In chapters 1 and 2 of Ephesians, the readers are termed “faithful” and taught God’s eternal gracious plan for them, so that they “will know what is the hope of His calling” (1:18). Paul contrasts their old lives (2:1-2, 11) before they accepted Christ, to their new lives in Christ (2:5-6). They were dead in their trespasses and sins, but now in Christ they are alive (2:5), raised up with Him and seated with Him in heavenly places (2:6). Therefore the faithful ones in Christ find their position in God’s magnificent plan for the universe.

Paul opens with God’s purposes in Christ and then turns his focus to the church and its responsibility. He narrows his focus to the household and then finally on believers’ responsibilities according to God’s purposes. According to Sampley (1978:37), the movement in Ephesians is: God’s cosmic plan to the church to the household and finally to the individual believer.

### **4.2. Central message of Ephesians**

Paul’s doctrine of Christ is life changing, since he truly understood real fellowship with Christ, although he never experienced an earthly relationship with Jesus as His disciples. Irrespective of how scholars view Ephesians, they all acknowledge the significance of the phrase “in Christ”.

The passage 1:3-14 has been named “the key to the whole letter” in its epistolary function, because from it various words and phrases are introduced and elaborated on in the rest of the letter (Lincoln 1990:18-19). By using divisions, Lincoln (p. 19) summarises the flow of eulogy for 1:3-14 in terms of God’s cosmic plan as a mystery

(1:9; cf. 3:3-5; 3:9-10; 6:19), which centres in the phrase “in Christ” (1:9-10). The mystery presented in 1:9-10 releases the glorious riches found in Ephesians, with unity as one of the main themes (O’Brien 1999:58).

In the various attempts to structurally divide 1:3-14, Lincoln opposes Krämer use of the phrase “in Christ” and its equivalent to divide this passage (pp. 15-19). Although he opposes it, he admits that everything centres in Christ (p. 15). Even if “in Christ” is not the point of departure, it is the centre of everything and therefore O’Brien’s flow of eulogy using the phrase “in Christ”, “in Him” and “in Whom”, is the most acceptable (1999:98). It is “in Christ” that believers are chosen (1:4), redeemed and forgiven (1:7), therefore obtaining an inheritance (1:11) and sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit (1:13-14). According to Hayes (1969:393-394) the expression “in Christ” reveals the completeness of the union between Christ and the individual believer. This relation resembles and points to the relation between the universal church and Christ as the head. Christ is portrayed (p. 394), in this magnificent Divine-Human relation with the church, as follow: Saviour (5:23), Cornerstone (2:20), Husband (5:25) and Head (1:22; 4:15; 5:23).

As God has ultimately summed up His plan to unite all things “in Christ” (1:9-10) or under Christ’ headship, the central message of Ephesians would then be the “cosmic reconciliation and unity in Christ” (O’Brien 1999:58). Keathley (2008:2) states that Christ is emphasized as the riches of God to believers and the importance of this letter, as the Gospel message, is the heavenly places.

According to Heil (2007:161) the phrase “in Christ” in “to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever” (3:21) is the climax of Ephesians, because of the following reasons: Paul calls the readers faithful because they are in Christ (1:1), chosen by God in Christ to be holy and blameless (1:4). God’s love is revealed in making believers alive in Christ, raised with Christ and seated in the heavenly realms in Christ (2:6) to show His grace in kindness towards them in Christ (2:7). Believers were created in Christ for good works that they may walk in it (2:10). In Christ, the Gentiles were brought near to God and united with the Jews, making them fellow heirs and fellow members of the body and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ (2:13; 3:6).

Similar to Heil, O'Brien states that "in Christ" functions indispensable in the eulogy, which analyzes God's complete redemptive plan to bless all believers in Christ forever and ever (1999:98).

### **4.3. The meaning of "in Christ"**

Paul's view in Ephesians is on the cosmos-centred Christ and believers united in Christ (Lincoln 1990:lxix). Building on the central message of Ephesians, Christ is thus the sphere or the central point in Whom God will sum up all things, rather than Christ being the instrument or agent. This phenomenon is affirmed in the results reported in Chapter 3 of this thesis. The instrumental and locative meanings of the phrase "in Christ" in Ephesians, are summarized in Flowchart 1, and reflects Paul's use of the phrase mainly as the sphere of Christ. Although both meanings are significant, the contribution of the sphere of Christ surpasses the agency of Christ in Ephesians.

Every interpretation of "in Christ" has three dimensions (Kim 2006:35): contextual, analytical (textual) and theological (hermeneutical). The contextual and analytical dimensions have been covered in Flowchart 1. Kim however focuses on the hermeneutical aspect of "in Christ" in 1 Corinthians, as he eloquently addresses the aspect of dying with Christ as diversity, rather than taking a unilateral position.

Flowchart 1: The instrumental and locative meanings of the phrase "in Christ" in Ephesians.

# God

## in Christ

as agent

as sphere

simultaneously as  
agent and sphere

## believers are

1:7 Redeemed and forgiven.  
1:11 Made God's inheritance.  
1:12 Hopeful in Christ.  
2:21 United in Christ and grow in Him.

1:3 Called faithful.  
1:4 God's elected to be holy and blameless.  
1:6 Receivers of God's grace and love.  
1:9 Receivers of wisdom and insight into the mystery.  
1:10 United with Christ and other believers.  
1:13 Sealed with the Spirit.  
2:5-6 Made alive, raised and seated in heavenly places.  
2:7 Receivers of grace in kindness.  
2:13 Reconciled with God and have peace.  
2:22 As Jews and Gentiles united, and united with Christ.  
3:6 As Gentiles fellow heirs, - members and - partakers in the promise.  
3:21 The church in Christ glorifying God.  
4:21 Taught the truth.  
4:32 Receivers of forgiveness.

1:3 Receivers of spiritual blessings in heavenly places and incorporated into Christ.  
2:10 Created for good works.

A “Christic body” is a non-belonging and living body, referring to Christ’s life, death and resurrection (Kim 2006:49-50). Christic body specifically focuses on believers dying to their selfish desires only possible with Christ (p. 50). Instead of concentrating on believers’ identity, Kim views the phrase “in Christ” through space and time, calling it a “third space” (p. 52). As believers die to their selfish desires through their own difficulties, the phrase “in Christ” is realized, but not perfected. Thus the “third space and time serves as locus for Christ-like life for believers, who locate their experience of ‘dying and living’ in Christ” (p. 52). Furthermore, the “third space” is seen as continuous change in believers’ minds and works, opposing the need for space and time. Lastly, “it is an ending struggle for those who live ‘in Christ’ as a third space and time, with no succumbing to an ideal of unity, or a derision of the powerful who laugh for not being like those downtrodden” (p. 53).

Although Paul does not cover the concept of dying with Christ in Ephesians, he includes the concepts “alive” and “raised” with Christ. The hermeneutical aspect of “in Christ” in 1 Corinthians can be applied to Ephesians, since death with Christ is an element of being made alive in Christ.

#### **4.4. Believers’ response to being “in Christ”**

Paul uses the phrase “in Christ” in his letters, just as if he was geographically referring to a certain region or town (Snodgrass 1996:40). People live in different spheres of influence and power. Not as to depersonalize Christ, believers should also live in the sphere of Christ. How can believers make this truth a reality in their lives?

As will be seen in the following subsections, a life lived in close union with Christ, will be determined by Christ and it will subsequently control their actions, lives and future (p. 42). Not only does in Christ refer to a believer’s salvation, but also to their lives in and outside the believers’ community. This will be also addressed.

#### **4.4.1. God's planned spiritual blessings (1:3-14)**

Believers' growth in their fellowship with Christ should be reflected in their lives (Snodgrass 1996:63). Believers cannot acknowledge Christ in them and at the same time sin. The believers' principles and life are found in Christ (Hayes 1969:393).

The measure of the reality of Christ in a believer, will determine their view and experience of Christ in them (Snodgrass 1996:63). If the believers' view of Christ is "small", then their experience of Christ in them will be insignificant. This can be solved by considering both Christ in the believer and the believer in Christ. Believers should live out of the reality of being in Christ, and subsequently be changed and transformed. This is realized in believers living holy and blameless before God (1:4).

Believers' election in Christ before the foundation of the world should not result in them being spiritual lazy and self-righteous (Morris 1994:17). Believers' lives should portray their commitment to excellence for God alone, bringing glory and praise to Him (3:21). Throughout Ephesians, Paul's doxology is on God's purposes, His planning and bringing people closer to Him in Christ (Snodgrass 1996:58). The believers' focus should not be on the people elected or the reason (result), but on God's work and purpose to ensure that they are holy and blameless before Him (1:4). Believers do not know who God chose before the foundation of the world, therefore they should treat all people as if they are God's elected, even if they live their lives in ignorance of God.

God also predestined believers to adoption as sons and daughters in love (1:4-5). They experience God's love through Christ (Morris 1994:17). Believers' love should not only be to those close to them, but they should have a loving character, shown to all, friend or foe. The more God's love work in the life of the believer, the more God's love will be able to work through them.

The phrase "in Christ" will influence believers' way of evangelizing (Snodgrass 1996:64). Christ is not a ticket to heaven, but believers' salvation should be closely joined in Christ, expanding into their lives, therefore not only changing their lives, but also those in their community.



#### **4.4.2. Believers' new position in Christ (2:1-10)**

God's magnificent purpose and plan in Christ portrayed in 2:1-10 reveals the identity of the believer (Snodgrass 1996:115). If believers know who they are, they will live accordingly (p. 118). The believers' identity is founded in relations, especially with Christ (p. 117). "In essence this passage screams out 'Get a life!'" as believers need "to live out the transition from death to life (2:1-10) by turning from banality to life with Christ" (p. 117). Believers' identity should not be expressed in pride, diversion, avoidance and perfectionism, but rather in worship and gratefulness for God's grace and mercy (p. 118).

Believers' lives often portray paradoxes just as Ephesians: Paul was a prisoner when writing this letter, but saw himself seated in heavenly places (2:6). Believers will endure many difficulties, trials and lack, but they will experience the fullness of God (3:19; Snodgrass 1996:176). To live in Christ is to live in difficulties, but flooded with grace.

Considering "in Christ" in Ephesians, raises the question regarding eternal security: "If one is in Christ, can he move out of Christ" (Snodgrass 1996:119). This question cannot be answered from Ephesians' perspective, as it focuses on believers' privileged position of being united with Christ. However, salvation is past, present and future and is moving towards completion, as given in Philippians 2:12-13: "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (NASB). The question the church must answer is do they preach a cheap salvation or do they convey the seriousness of faith in Christ, being founded in relationship with God and others (Snodgrass 1996:119)?

As stated in 2:8, salvation is a gift of God and cannot be earned. Many churches flourish by laying unnecessary guilt on believers and pressurizing them to do works. Work then becomes the route to self-actualization, giving believers value and self-righteousness. Believers' relationship with God, grant them significance and a right

standing with Him (p. 120). Love for God and faith in Christ should be the fuel of believers' works.

#### **4.4.3. A new corporate position in Christ (2:11-22)**

In 2:1-10 Paul focuses on the individual believer and now in 2:11-22 he views the change that occurs in believers corporatively (Snodgrass 1996:146-147). For God to unite believers with Christ and with other believers, reconciliation had to take place in two reverse ways (p. 134): God in Christ abolished all things related to the flesh listed in 2:11-12 (destruction) and created a new man given in 2:14-18 (resurrection). Waaijman (2006:46-53) also recognises these reverse processes in believers, but uses the terms "conformation" and "unformation". Conformation is used for believers' transformation in "behaviour, thinking and willing, remembering, feeling and focus" in Christ (p. 47) and unformation as the surrendering of those faculties under conformation, to God (p. 48). Both unformation and conformation are continuous and simultaneous processes in believers, purposed and determined by God (p. 51).

God has removed the barriers separating Him and believers (Snodgrass 1996:150), as indicated in the terms "brought near" (2:13), "peace" (2:14), "reconcile" (2:16) and "access" (2:18). If God destroyed the barriers of separation, then why do churches and believers institute barriers between "races, nations, religions, genders, social and economic classes, denominations, schools, communities, teams, and families" (p. 150)? Believers are all united to one another, whether they find it acceptable or not. The believers in the church should mirror the absence of barriers. Referring to Northern Ireland as example, Campbell shows that just as in Ephesians 1-2, God in Christ can turn the opposition that springs from barriers, into a celebration (Campbell 2008:25).

In 2:19-22 Paul extends the recreation of the preceding verses into a building and temple metaphor. When Paul originally addressed the church in his letters, he had the local assembly or gathering of believers or churches in certain houses in mind (O'Brien 1999:25). However throughout Ephesians he deals with the universal church, the community of believers in entirety in terms of oneness (4:4); holiness (1:4; 5:27), Christ as head (1:22) and Christ as foundation of the universal church (2:20). The universal

church exists because of what God has done through Christ (2:14-16; MacDonald 2000:22). Thus the nature of the universal church is outlined in Ephesians (Erickson 2006:1044): Christ is the body and the head over all things to the church (1:22-23; 5:23), the manifold wisdom of God is made known through the church (3:10), the church will glorify God forever and ever (3:21). The church is subject to Christ (5:24) and because He loved her, He gave His life up for her (5:25). He cleanses and sanctifies the church, so that she may be presented to Him holy and blameless (5:26-27). Finally the church and Christ is a mystery (5:32).

The relation between the believer and Christ will to the same extent find expression in the relation between the universal church and Christ (Hayes 1969:393). The church is His building growing into a holy temple in the Lord (2:21). Believers' lives should reflect the holiness and blamelessness they have received from God (1:4), in union with other believers.

Finally, believers' lives should reflect their union with Christ; then the church and their activities should also be centred and determined by Christ (Snodgrass 1996:155). The church should be a place that reflects the unity that God has purposed, by personifying it (p. 174).

#### **4.4.4. *The mystery of Christ (3:1-13)***

The central message of 3:1-7 is that all believers, whether Jew or Gentile, are united and that no group is superior, as Paul explicitly conveyed in the terms "fellow heirs", "fellow members" and "fellow partakers" in 3:6. How does the unity between Jews and Gentiles influence the modern church (Snodgrass 1996:168)? Surely unity also applies to all believers in Christ. Should the church not in conjunction with the preaching of the Gospel, also include unity as part of the message? If so, it will have a significant effect on the church and how believers view one another. The church will then be characterized by love, mercy, grace and acceptance and the absence of judgement and inferiority.

Unity should not be the goal of the church, but one of the consequences (Snodgrass 1996:173). The leaders of the church play a vital role in this regard, as they shape and

guide the believers' society, the hiring and training of staff and their management style (p. 174). If leaders abuse the church as a platform for their own power struggles, division and discord will evolve, instead of unity.

Paul experienced many difficulties, just as all believers; his Ephesians' letter is supportive and encouraging, giving them confidence in God's future victory (3:13; Snodgrass 1996:175). Paul, in his other letters, recognises God's support (Rom 8:35-39) and ownership (1 Cor 3:22-23) in times of tribulations. The believers in the church should also be compassionate and supportive in encouraging their fellow believers as given in 1 Thessalonians 5:11: "Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing" (NASB).

#### **4.4.5. Praise be to God (3:20-21)**

Unfortunately, many believers view the church as a place of being served, and hence their worship exposes it (Snodgrass 1996:173). Worship should be an expression of unity in the church. "To worship is to remember Who owns the house" (p. 61).

Believers' main concern should be worship (Snodgrass 1996:187), since Exodus 34:14 commands: "for you shall not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God..." and Deuteronomy 6:13 "You shall fear only the LORD your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name" (NASB).

Churches have created divisions in worship, as some believers prefer traditional, older forms of worship and some prefer new contemporary worship. Worship should acknowledge God's worth and truth (Snodgrass 1996:61). "Worship is always cultural in that it uses culture for expression, but worship is also always countercultural, for it refuses to accept the pseudo-reality of its time." (p. 61). God must become a reality in the life of the believer finding expression in worship. The focus of the church should be on teaching believers to be involved in the worship with their heart, mind and soul, and not spectators (pp. 187-188). "Ephesians provides both the theological resources and the models to begin the task" (p. 188).

In 3:21 Paul indicates that the church is the place where God should be given the glory (p. 191). Churches, conscious of their power, run the risk of taking God's glory for

themselves. God forbids it in Isaiah 42:8: "I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images" (NASB).

#### **4.4.6. *The new man in Christ (4:20-32)***

Paul gives practical advice to the believers on how to order their lives in this passage. The only response that applies to believers is obedience: "Samuel said, 'Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice...'" (1 Sam 15:22; NASB).

In 4:32 forgiveness for others, rests in the fact that God has forgiven believers in Christ (Snodgrass 1996:264). Therefore the lives of believers should be free from bitterness flowing from unforgiveness, malice and revenge. Believers' lives should reflect mercy, love and grace towards others. Hence, the church should teach the process of forgiveness, as a choice of response, and not as a means of justice. The Golden Rule is to treat others as you wish to be treated. The church should model God's unconditional love, grace and acceptance of all people.

May 1 Peter 4:11 be seen in the church and the lives of all believers: "Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" (NASB).

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

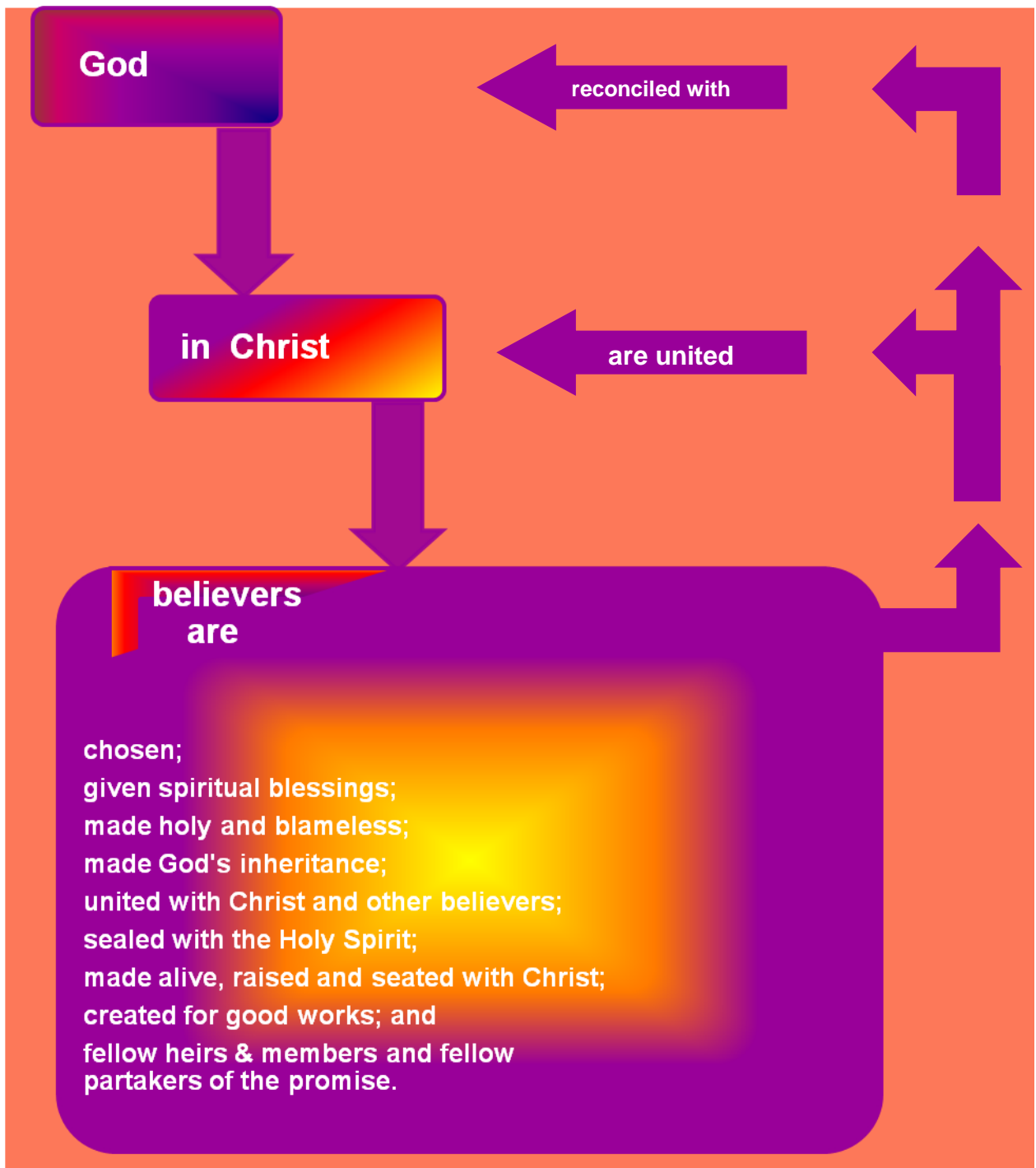
The aim of this thesis was to come to a theological understanding of “in Christ” in Ephesians. The value of this phrase can not be minimised to simply Paul’s trade mark, but reflects the transfer of ownership of believers, denying their independence, and partaking in the truth found in Christ and brought by Christ (Dunn 1998:399-400).

In this study the context, in which each “in Christ” phrase and its equivalent is utilized, is used to determine the precise force of it in Ephesians. Scholars often refer only to the instrumental use of this phrase and subsequently claim non-Pauline authorship, but fail to recognize the local sense of the phrase.

In this thesis both the local and the instrumental use of the phrase “in Christ” are argued. Paul’s use of the phrase relates to both God’s work through the agency of Christ as well as the sphere of Christ and the subsequent effect on believers’ behaviour in the world. “Christ represents God working in the universe” (Greene 1992:58). Christ is central in Ephesians, as Paul focuses on God’s election and the whole redemption, which takes place in Christ. God’s work, accomplished in and through Christ, brings glory to God (3:21). “There is no more majestic theme, no more noble pursuit than the glory of God” (Deffinbaugh 2008: § (10)). May God grant believers not only the breadth and height and depth of God’s love for them, but also of His glory, as seen in Christ and in His church. Believers’ response should be to grow in unity and love for one another. Believers are united with Christ (positionally) and therefore the church should uphold unity in practice (Wallace 2008:§§E, F).

The conceptual framework of Dickoff, James and Wiedenbach’s (1968:423) in terms of the agent, recipient, context, procedure and the envisioned outcome can be adapted to the study of “in Christ”. This is summarised in Flowchart 2.

Flowchart 2: The classification of God as initiator, Christ as the agent and sphere and the effect on the believer in the study of the phrase “in Christ”.



Ephesians is indeed a letter for today: it conveys believers' identity and their appropriate response and Who God is and how He worked in and through Christ (Snodgrass 1996:20).

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