

“In Christ”: Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians

By
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Thank you for your flexibility as we all learn to live in the new abnormal. While I was looking forward to our time together last spring, it was a wise decision to cancel. But who would have predicted even a couple of months ago that additional changes would need to be considered in August 2021? Truly the future is unknown to us, and we must use the wisdom we have to live in the present. With that said, although we won’t have multiple days together, I am looking forward to being with you next week! The church I work with likewise had to adapt our meeting plans this year, and I appreciate your balance of spiritual nourishment and the wellbeing of each member.

So next Sunday we will be in the book of Ephesians for all three sermons. If I had to recommend one book of the Bible to a non-Christian to learn the gospel, it would be Ephesians. If I had to recommend one book of the Bible to a young Christian to mature in the faith, it would be Ephesians. If I had to recommend one book of the Bible to a seasoned Christian looking for encouragement and revival, it would be Ephesians. I have seen the power of Ephesians in my own life and the lives of my family in Christ. Yet to be candid, Hebrews is and hopefully always will be my favorite book of the Bible. But that is a discussion for another time!

So why is Ephesians applicable to so many different situations? In short, Ephesians is the most generic of Paul’s epistles. All of the rest of Paul’s epistles are dealing with specific situations, but Ephesians has no specific context necessary to interpret the book. Paul is not dealing with problems at Ephesians, nor is he thanking them for an act of grace. Rather, he is laying out the gospel of Christ in its most universal form. Although some would say that Romans is the book in which Paul accomplishes this universal unfolding of the gospel, Romans is actually far more contextual than Ephesians. As such a generic epistle, it has application for every church and every Christian.

So what is Ephesians about? For most of my life, I heard that Colossians was about Christ while Ephesians was about the church. Yet through my study of these epistles, I have actually come to the opposite conclusion! Ephesians is all about “in Christ.” For a short note about Colossians, Paul is dealing with a specific situation at the church and is seeking to urge them toward maturity (see especially Col. 2:19-22).

Ephesians, on the other hand, is all about being “in Christ.” Ephesians 1-3 explain the

blessings and promises that God has realized in Christ. Paul begins his writing with a powerful explanation of the spiritual nature of Christ's work and the unimaginable impact that His work has had on us believers. Chapters 2-3 continue to unfold this thought, all focusing on WHAT it means to be in Christ.

Ephesians 4-6, on the other hand, unfold the SO WHAT of being "in Christ." Paul applies the significance of being in Christ to church relations, individual growth, family relationships, etc. Every facet of life has been affected by Christ's work, and Paul goes to great but concise length to demonstrate the implications of being "in Christ." Put together, this book gives us the meaning and power of what it means to be in Christ (Eph. 1-3) while also laying out the life of one who is in Christ (Eph. 4-6). So I am excited to share this heavenly book with you next week!

How can you prepare for our sermons next Sunday? Here are recommendations:

1. Read through Ephesians at least once a day to (re)familiarize yourself with the book.
2. Pay special attention to every time Paul talks about "in Christ." Again, I see this as the major theme of the book, so it carries much weight.
3. Make a chart comparing the WHAT of the gospel in Ephesians 1-3 with the SO WHAT of the gospel in Ephesians 4-6.