

In Christ

“All IN”

Ephesians 3.1-14

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Intro

[Series title slide 01]

Welcome to sermon number one of our new three-part teaching series called “ALL IN.” This phrase might initially strike you as a little aggressive [...]

The purpose of this series is threefold:

1. To recognize that to be a Christian is to be ALL IN. (Secular-Sacred)
2. To be ALL IN to help meet needs within our church community and those outside our community.
3. To identify the resources available to the follower of Christ that empower us to be ALL IN.

Here is what it is not: IN IT ALL [...]

To meet our purposes, we are breaking down the ALL IN in three ways:

1. All are invited to be IN CHRIST.
2. All those who are in Christ are also IN THE BODY (the Church).
3. All those who are in Christ are also commissioned to go IN(to) THE WORLD.

Those can appear to be daunting and somewhat confusing ideas. What does it mean to be “in Christ?” I know what it means to be in a building, but is that the same thing? I understand what it means to attend a church service, but how can I relate attending church to being “in the body?” I realize that I am in the world – that is, I understand what it is to live as part of this culture on earth. How is that any different than being invited to go “into the world?” We will attempt to unpack all that over the remaining Sundays in September.

[Sermon title slide 02]

Today we are going to spend a few minutes considering the first one: All IN CHRIST.

Some questions come quickly to mind, right? How does someone get to be IN Christ? (And) What does it mean to be IN Christ? (How does it impact my life?)

Let’s start with the latter question: What’s the big deal?

I want to quickly point you at two passages that provide a very good basis for glimpsing the implications of being “in Christ.” The benefit of these two verses is that they share the same numbers; they are both chapter 1, verse 3. Helpful when you want to go back and consider them more deeply.

The first comes from the earlier reading in Ephesians. Ephesians chapter 1, verse 3 states:

[slide start 03] “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” **[slide end]**

So those of us who are “in Christ” are blessed, or granted, “every spiritual blessing (in the heavenly places.” Remember, from our series on the Lord’s Prayer, heaven is the reference to the realm where God’s will is done, and the spreading of the realm, kingdom, or rule of God on earth includes these gifts. As we read together, the next eleven verses – really the entirety of the first three chapters of Ephesian explain the nature of those blessings.

But, 2 Peter provides us with a bit of a step of clarity without bogging us down with too much detail at this point. In 2 Peter chapter 1, verse 3 we read:

[start slide 04] “His divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.” **[end slide]**

[Summary of general parameters.]

Body

[No slide]

Now that we have noted the general description of the implications of being IN CHRIST, we can now take an introductory look at the specifics. This will provide further grounding for answers to the earlier questions of, How do I get to be IN CHRIST and What does it mean to be IN CHRIST?

A great introduction to these details – that is, to the characteristics of being IN CHRIST – is Jesus’ invitation to Peter and Andrew recorded for us in Matthew 4:19.

After confronting the devil in the wilderness, the Gospel of Matthew explains that Jesus began proclaiming the Kingdom of heaven – of God’s rule. As he did that, he also began to specifically invite others to join him in this ministry. In Matthew 4, the text describes an encounter between Jesus and Peter and his brother Andrew by the Sea of Galilee. As the brothers were fishing, Jesus approached them and said:

[start slide 05] “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” **[end slide]**

Jesus invited Peter and Andrew to join him on his mission using language that they would understand. Beneath the fishing reference, there are principles that can help us begin to make sense of what it means to be “in Christ” and how being in Christ implies that to be a follower of Christ is to be ALL IN.

[No slide]

The fishing analogy is helpful because it provides a reference point for Jesus’ invitation. “Just like you are fishing for, well, fish, I can make you fishers of people for the Kingdom of God. This morning I want to look beneath the fishing reference at the principles on which the fishing analogy is based.

The first thing I want you to do is to think of something that is quite common this time of year. It traditionally begins at this point of the year and continues for most of the next ten months: children on their way to school. But more specifically, I want us to picture a group of youngsters on an outing with their teacher. What does that typically look like? We usually see the children in a line (maybe in a single file, or holding hands or holding a rope, maybe other configurations?) being led by their teacher. The whole point of this is to keep the children safe and to help the children have the best experience while they are outside of the classroom. It's not difficult to imagine what it would be like if each of the kids pulled in different directions (I'm sure some of our teachers have had an experience like this). If that happens, the entire experience is reduced to an exercise of futility. Everyone is frustrated.

This picture of following-the-leader is how Jesus begins his invitation.

Jesus instructs these men literally to first, come behind him. Then he explains that the byproduct of following him is that he will make them into people who will be able to fish for other people. I like how Jim Putman of Real Life Ministries organizes this invitation. **[start slide 6]** First, it addresses the head – how am I going to decide? Am I going to go to Jesus? This is a decision. Next, it addresses the heart – who am I going to be? Do I want Jesus to mess around with my life? Am I willing to become the person he wants me to be? Finally, it is a matter of our hands and feet – what do I do? Do I trust Jesus to do what he tells me to do?

So, in this invitation, **[start slide 7]** Jesus directs people to:

1. Come behind him.
2. And as we follow, he will transform us.
3. To become people who do as he does.

To follow Jesus means to be head-heart-(and)hands Christians (“Christ ones”)**[end slide]**.

[...]

Conclusion

[No slide]

The invitation requires a response. Have you responded? If so, you then, have “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Eph1.3), including “everything needed for life and godliness” (2Pet1.3). You have hope for your future, forgiveness for your past and power for the present.

If you have not responded to the invitation to follow Jesus, please take a moment to consider the options: either we submit to our Creator and gain access to all He provides, or we walk away and attempt to make a go of life with our own devices. Let me ask you, how far can you go on your own?

[...]

I fear that sometimes Christians get caught in the same situation. We are meant to follow Jesus. Jesus is meant to lead. We are meant to learn from the life of Jesus, of how he lived. Yet there are times when we pull this way and that against Christ's leadership, against his example. We try to say that we

are Christians and yet still try and do things our own way. As with the children, all that ends up happening is that we frustrate ourselves and we wonder why we struggle to hear God's voice or we wonder why we can't seem to find time to read the Bible or pray, or to join a Community Group or help in a ministry. We wonder why we can never find satisfaction. The problem might be that you we are pulling against Jesus. The proper orientation is Jesus in front, me behind. That is what how Jesus introduces us to the idea of being "in" him. It begins by getting in line with his lead.

His lead is not merely in churchy things, right? It is not that we follow Jesus only on Sunday mornings or when we are part of an activity that the church organizes. No. We follow Jesus into our office, classroom, home; we follow Jesus in what we read, watch, listen to; we follow Jesus in how we spend our time and our finances. That is what it means to be IN CHRIST. It is not just a decision it is a daily following. It is not a one-time prayer but a daily openness to his desire to transform us – to make us his people who live like he did.

[...]

This is a God-led endeavor. Not a Central Pastors-led or any other human agency. We as pastors, staff and board can be useful to God for his purposes in this community as we submit ourselves to him and his lead. That is why it is so important that each of us understand the parameters of Christ's invitation but that we then follow: follow his lead; follow his transformational process, and; follow his example to live our lives as he lived his – proclaiming the kingdom through truth-telling, peace-making and self-giving. This is true for each of us no matter our lot, but it looks different for each of us.

Let me close with this teaser for next week. In addition to all that it means for our relationship with God, as biblical scholar, Kevin Vanhoozer notes:

[slide start 8] “Union with Christ entails union with other Christians.” (Kevin Vanhoozer) **[slide end]**

Come back next week as we explore that part of being ALL IN.