

The **Bible** Unpacked

Comprehensive Study Series

A compilation of the Bible's teaching
for believers established in the faith

paul mallison

This series of studies is based on the
Comprehensive Edition of The Bible Unpacked.

There are seven editions of *The Bible Unpacked*.
These aim to address the needs of
NON-CHRISTIANS through to MATURE CHRISTIANS,
from TEENAGERS to ADULTS.

For more information and free downloads go to:
www.thebibleunpacked.net

An Appeal on Behalf of Persecuted Christians

Over 200 million Christians in at least 60 countries are denied basic human rights solely because of their faith. (Source: World Evangelical Alliance) Every year many Christians are killed because of their faith.

Through prayer, encouragement and practical assistance we can assist and fellowship with persecuted Christians in their suffering. You can play a vital part in this through contacting one of the organizations listed below. Most produce regular news/prayer letters.

Barnabas Fund – www.barnabasfund.org

It provides material and spiritual support in response to needs identified by local Christian leaders.

Christian Faith and Freedom – www.cffreedom.org

It advocates on behalf of and aids persecuted Christians.

Christian Solidarity International – www.csi-int.org

CSI works to defend religious liberty and help persecuted Christians.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide – www.csw.org.uk

It advocates for freedom of religion and justice for persecuted believers.

Compass Direct – www.compassdirect.org

This is a Christian news service providing news, reports, interviews and analyses of situations facing persecuted Christians.

Open Doors – sb.od.org; www.opendoors.org.au

It provides Bibles and other Christian materials, to prepare believers for persecution and equip them to maintain a witness to the Gospel.

Religious Liberty Commission – www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc/; www.ea.org.au/ea-family/Religious-Liberty.aspx

RLC defends and aids persecuted Christians. See also www.idop.org
Receive weekly updates by sending a blank email to join-rpb@hub.xc.org.

The Bible League – www.bibleleague.org/persecuted; www.bibleleague.com

It supplies Bibles to persecuted Christians and also provides training.

Voice of the Martyrs – www.persecution.com; www.persecution.com.au

VOM provides Bibles, literature, radio broadcasts and other assistance to help persecuted Christians spread the gospel. They also send material aid.

Then the King will answer, 'I tell you the truth, anything you did for even the least of my people here, you also did for me.' Matthew 25:40 NCV

The Bible Unpacked™

Comprehensive Study Series

A compilation of the Bible's teaching for believers established in the faith

16. The Standing of God's People

Composed by Paul Mallison

Scripture quotations are from the *NET Bible*®, unless otherwise indicated.

The Bible Unpacked™ Copyright © 1994–2011 by Paul Mallison. All rights reserved.

This book may be freely reproduced for use for non-profit Christian purposes. Free electronic copies may be downloaded at: www.thebibleunpacked.net. In return, users are asked to increase their support of persecuted Christians (cf. www.thebibleunpacked.net/persecuted_Christians.htm).

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the **NET Bible**® copyright ©1996–2006 by Biblical Studies Press, L.L.C. <http://www.bible.org/> All rights reserved. Scripture quoted by permission.

- Scripture quotations marked “CEV” are from the **Contemporary English Version** Copyright © 1991, 1992, 1995 by American Bible Society. Used by permission.
- Scripture quotations marked “ESV” are taken from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*®, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
- Scripture quotations marked “GNT” are from the **Good News Translation in Today's English Version**- Second Edition Copyright © 1992 by American Bible Society. Used by permission.
- Scripture quotations marked “GW” are taken from **God's Word**® Copyright 1995 God's Word to the Nations. Used by permission of Baker Publishing Group. All rights reserved.
- Scripture quotations marked “ISV” are taken from the *Holy Bible: International Standard Version*®, Release 1.44. Copyright © 1996–2007 by The ISV Foundation of Fullerton, California USA. Used by permission of Davidson Press, LLC. All rights reserved internationally.
- Scripture quotations marked “NCV™” are taken from the **New Century Version**®. Copyright © 2005 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Quotations of short phrases from other Bible translations are on occasions included in comments on the verses. The copyright notices for these translations are given below.


- Scripture quotations marked “AMP” are taken from the *Amplified*® Bible, Copyright © 1954, 1958, 1962, 1964, 1965, 1987 by The Lockman Foundation. All rights reserved. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org).
- Scripture quotations marked “NASB” are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.
- Scripture quotations marked “NLT” are taken from the *Holy Bible, New Living Translation*, copyright 1996. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.
- Scripture quotations marked “NKJV” are taken from *The New King James Version* / Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers., Copyright © 1982. Used by permission. All rights reserved.


Scripture quotations marked “NRSV” are from the *New Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, copyright © 1989 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved.


This copy uploaded/printed: 26-Feb-11

Overview of *The Bible Unpacked*


There are seven editions of *The Bible Unpacked*, as shown below. Each edition is an abbreviated version of the next longest edition. As such they have similar structures. Four of the editions have studies based on them, with the same text along with questions. For more details and free downloads of all the material, go to www.thebibleunpacked.net.

 **Two-Minute Edition:** Key Bible teachings for people “on the run”
For giving to non-Christians.


 **Pocket Edition:** Key Bible teachings for seekers of truth
Largely for giving to inquiring non-Christians or young new Christians.

 **Concise Edition:** A look at the Bible's teaching for new and young believers. For either new or young Christians. Suitable to give to non-Christian friends. Has study series based on it.




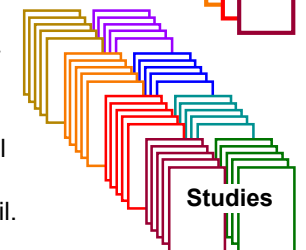
 **Foundations Edition:** A compilation of the Bible's teaching for believers consolidating their faith. For newer Christians. Study series is ideal for studies with newer believers.




 **Intermediate Edition:** A compilation of the Bible's teaching for believers growing in the faith. For developing a sound understanding of the faith. Studies are excellent for Bible study groups.



 **Comprehensive Edition:** A compilation of the Bible's teaching for believers established in the faith. For a comprehensive knowledge of the faith. Useful as a study or a devotional tool - and preparing talks. Studies are ideal for studying topics in detail.



 **In-Depth Edition:** A compilation of the Bible's teaching for teachers and students of the Bible. For Christians keen to gain a deep understanding of their faith. Useful for speakers preparing talks, study groups leaders, Bible students and Bible colleges. It is also in an electronic version, which is a PDF file.

Electronic Version

Section II. What to Do

Part E. Relating to God

21. Being Right with God

- I. Getting Right with God
- II. Staying Right with God

22. Having Faith in God

- I. Faith and Hope
- II. What Not to Do

23. Loving, Fearing and Obeying God

- I. Loving and Fearing God
- II. Obeying God

24. Connecting with God

- I. Being Close to God
- II. Praying to God

25. Exalting God

- I. Instructions
- II. Reasons to Exalt God

Part F. Church Life

26. Being One Body

- I. General
- II. Caring for the Body

27. Worshiping God

- I. General
- II. Offerings

28. Serving God

- I. Preliminary Instructions and Insights
- II. Doing God's Work

29. Significant Practices

- I. Symbolic Rites
- II. Other Significant Practices

30. Church Leadership

- I. General
- II. Teaching in the Church

Part G. Relating to People

31. Love

- I. Loving Qualities
- II. Antitheses of Love

32. Justice

- I. Justice in Action
- II. Being True

33. Wisdom

- I. Being Wise
- II. Antitheses of Wisdom and Knowledge

34. Common Relationships

- I. Family Relationships
- II. Civil Relationships

35. Spreading the Gospel

- I. Instructions
- II. Insights

Part H. Persevering

36. Standing Firm

- I. General
- II. Spiritual Warfare

37. Rejecting Sin

- I. Encountering Sin
- II. Avoiding Sin and Being Holy

38. Major Pitfalls

- I. Pride
- II. Riches and Sex

39. Hard Times

- I. General
- II. Praying in Hard Times

40. Persecution

- I. The Persecution of God's People
- II. What to Do in Persecution

Contents

A Quick Word	iv
Suggestions for Study Groups	v
I. Belonging to God	
a) Prologue: God Draws People to Himself.....	2
b) God's People Belong to God.....	5
c) God's People Are His Family	7
d) God's People Are His Church	9
II. Being 'in' Jesus Christ	
a) God's People Are 'in' Jesus Christ.....	12
b) The Significance of Being 'in' Jesus Christ.....	14
c) God's People Are One Body 'in' Jesus Christ.....	18
d) Epilogue: God's People Relate to God through Jesus Christ....	21
Topics in This Series.....	27
Overview of <i>The Bible Unpacked</i>	29

A Quick Word

This series of studies aims to present a compilation of the Bible's teachings in a clear and readable order. There are 40 booklets in the series, based on the 40 chapters of the book *The Bible Unpacked - Comprehensive Edition*. Each booklet has two sections, which can be used for two or more studies.

See *Topics in This Series* towards the end of this booklet for a full listing of all the topics. Note that studying booklets alternatively from the two major sections (*What to Know* and *What to Do*) would add variety.

The material contains Bible verses. Before the verses are headings, which reflect what the verses say – in particular the parts of the verses in *italics*. The verses are sometimes followed by a comment.

The verses often have a brief introduction. Usually these state who is speaking and often who they are speaking to. Apart from God and Jesus Christ, the main speakers are:

- Moses – who led the Israelites out of Egypt and taught them God's laws;
- David – Israel's greatest king who wrote many of the psalms, most of which are essentially prayers;
- Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and other prophets – who spoke to the people of Israel on God's behalf; and
- Paul, Peter, John and other leaders of the early church – who spoke to various groups and wrote letters to believers.

Much care has been taken in order to correctly interpret the verses. Nevertheless, if you encounter a verse that is used to teach something that is contrary to or goes beyond your understanding, assess its use by doing such things as: reading the passage it is from; and considering how its teaching fits in with Scripture as a whole (e.g. interpret OT teaching in the light of NT teaching).

For more information on *The Bible Unpacked* and free downloads, go to the website: www.thebibleunpacked.net

Paul Mallison

Topics in This Series

Section I: What to Know

Part A. God and Spiritual Powers

1. God's Being

- I. Basics
- II. God's Pre-Eminence

2. God's Character

- I. Holy Characteristics
- II. Loving Characteristics

3. Jesus Christ

- I. General
- II. Jesus Christ and God

4. The Holy Spirit

- I. General
- II. God, Christ and the Holy Spirit as One

5. Angels, Satan and Demons

- I. Angels
- II. Satan and Demons

Part B. God and the World: Basics

6. God's Creation

- I. General
- II. God's Creation of People

7. God's Sovereignty

- I. God's Supreme Authority
- II. God's Control over the World

8. God's Word

- I. General
- II. Key Old Testament Covenants

9. The Problem of Sin

- I. General
- II. The Law's Provision for Israel's Sin

10. God's Judgment

- I. Basics
- II. The Manifestation of God's Judgment

Part C. God and the World: Jesus Christ

11. God's Promised Messiah

- I. The Messiah's Identity
- II. The Messiah's Purpose and Person

12. Jesus Christ's Mission

- I. God's Enablement of Jesus Christ
- II. Jesus Christ's Ministry, Death and Resurrection

13. Salvation through Jesus Christ

- I. Salvation from Sin
- II. Salvation for the World

14. The New Order

- I. Jesus Christ and the Law's Diminished Role
- II. Key Elements of the New Order

15. 'The Last Things'

- I. Jesus Christ's Return and the Final Judgment
- II. The Afterlife

Part D. God and His Own People

16. The Standing of God's People

- I. Belonging to God
- II. Being 'in' Jesus Christ

17. Keys to God's Interaction with His People

- I. Basics
- II. God's Holy Spirit in His People

18. God's Transformation of His People

- I. General
- II. Spiritual Attributes

19. God's Care of His People

- I. God's Saving of His People
- II. God's Preservation of His People

20. God's Plans for His People

- I. General
- II. God's Plans for Israel

Notes

Suggestions for Study Groups

Preliminary matters:

- Beforehand the leader should: check the context of any verses they are not familiar with; and review the questions. If need be, they should compose questions more applicable to the group.
- Each person should have a Bible, for things such as checking a verse's context. It would also be helpful to have Bible commentaries on hand.
- Pray before beginning the study. Ask God for help in understanding the meaning of the verses and to affect your lives through them. Also pray together at the end.

Doing the study:

- Ideally, read the material and answer the questions prior to the meeting. Then share answers and discuss any issues arising from the material in the meeting.
- Alternatively, read the material and answer the questions in the meeting – reading either aloud as a group or individually (prior to sharing answers). If reading as a group, **try having one person read the headings, another read the verses and another read the comments.** Additionally, a fourth person could read the Bible references.
- Answers need not be limited to only what is mentioned in the material.
- The group should feel free to diverge from the study if related issues arise.

General or concluding questions:

If time permits, conclude with one or more of the following questions:

- What is something that you either: **did not know** before; gained **greater insight** into; or **needed reminding** of?
- What verse would be helpful to memorize and bear in mind during the next week?
- In taking the verses seriously, is there anything you should change in:
 - (a) how you relate to God or to other people; or
 - (b) any other area of your life (e.g. attitudes, values or behavior)?

If so, are there any specific steps you could take to do this?

a) Prologue: God Draws People to Himself

(⇒ *Salvation by Grace, through Jesus Christ, in 14. The New Order*)

This section contains some teaching which contrasts with teaching elsewhere in the Bible – and has been the subject of much debate. It teaches that God chooses (or elects) some people to be his, and so to be saved. Yet the Bible also teaches that God desires and provides for the salvation of all people (cf. *God invites all people to come to him and be saved, . . . , in 21. Being Right with God; . . . for God wants all people to be saved, in 21. Being Right with God*) and that all people have the choice of whether to respond to him or not.

In coming to terms with this “tension” in Scripture, one should bear in mind that as the Bible teaches both “sides”, the truth lies in both of them, as opposed to a position that is a compromise of both.

God chooses people (to be his people) . . .

MARK 13:20 [JESUS:] If the Lord had not shortened those days, no one would be saved. But for the sake of *the elect whom he has chosen*, he has shortened those days. ^{15v}

LUKE 18:7A Won't God give justice to *his chosen ones*, who cry out to him day and night?

God's people are in view in the above verses as “the elect whom he has chosen” (Mark 13:20) and “his chosen ones” (Luke 18:7a).

. . . As such, God chooses people to receive spiritual blessings

JAMES 2:5 Listen, my dear brothers and sisters! *Did not God choose the poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom* that he promised to those who love him?

ACTS 13:48 When the Gentiles heard this [that God had extended his salvation to Gentiles], they began to rejoice and praise the word of the Lord, and *all who had been appointed for eternal life* believed.

The use of “appointed” speaks of God choosing people for eternal life.

How has Jesus Christ's mission changed the way God's people relate to him?

What do you think relating to God through Jesus Christ involves?

When we give thanks and praise to God, should we be mindful of doing so through Jesus Christ? If so, how should it affect what we think or say in giving thanks and praise to God?

God's people give thanks and praise to God through Jesus Christ

COL 3:17 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] And whatever you do in word or deed, do it all in the name of *the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him*.

HEB 13:15 [THE WRITER, TO BELIEVERS:] *Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, acknowledging his name.*

Jesus Christ's role as high priest is in view here, with him being the one through whom we offer such sacrifices.

God's people ask God for things in Jesus Christ's "name"

JOHN 16:23B, 26 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] I tell you the solemn truth, *whatever you ask the Father in my name he will give you. ...*²⁶*At that time you will ask in my name, and I do not say that I will ask the Father on your behalf.*

Being "in" Jesus Christ and relating to God "through" Christ (as per the previous couple of subsections) are connected to the concept here of relating to God in Jesus Christ's "name". The latter embodies relating to God under or by the authority of Jesus Christ. It is because of a believer's relationship with Jesus Christ – in which believers may relate to God "through" Christ – that a believer can make requests of God in Jesus Christ's "name", on his authority.

God calls them to himself

ACTS 2:39 [PETER, TELLING A CROWD OF THE PROMISE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT:] For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, *everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself*. ESV

This verse supports the assertion that those who are God's people have been called to be by God.

God enables people to believe and turn to Jesus Christ

JOHN 6:44 [JESUS:] *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.*

ACTS 11:20–23 But among them [believers] were some men from Cyprus and Cyrene who came to Antioch and began talking to the Hellenistic Jews too, proclaiming the Lord Jesus.²¹*The hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number of people believed and turned to the Lord.*²²When the church in Jerusalem heard this news, they sent Barnabas all the way to Antioch.²³When he arrived, *he rejoiced to see what the grace of God had done, and with a hearty determination he continuously encouraged them all to remain faithful to the Lord.* ISV

The people's belief and turning to the Lord (v. 21b) is attributed to neither how the message was presented nor the people's own initiative, but to the "hand of the Lord" (v. 21a) – evidencing "the grace of God" (v. 23).

Note: God's mercy and people's destiny

ROM 9:10–18 [PAUL:] Not only that, but when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our ancestor Isaac — ¹¹*even before they were born or had done anything good or bad (so that God's purpose in election would stand, not by works but by his calling)* — ¹²*it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger,"* ¹³*just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."* ¹⁴What shall we say then? Is there injustice with God? Absolutely not! ¹⁵For he says to Moses: *"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."* ¹⁶*So then, it does not depend on human desire or exertion, but on God who shows mercy.* ¹⁷*For the scripture says to Pharaoh: "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I*

may demonstrate my power in you, and that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.”¹⁸ So then, God has mercy on whom he chooses to have mercy, and he hardens whom he chooses to harden.

The basic thrust of this passage is that God has mercy on who he wants or chooses to – which he has the right to do. Thus God’s purpose for people and their destiny – in this life (vv. 11–12, 17) and the next (cf. vv. 22–23) – depends on God’s mercy. In illustrating this in the case of Jacob and Esau, “hated” (v. 13) is used in a relative sense (cf. AMP, CEV), to emphasize God’s choice of Jacob over Esau.

What role does God play in a person becoming a Christian? What does the person do?

How can the teaching that God chooses people be compatible with God’s justice?

What does the teaching that God chooses people show about God’s grace?

d) Epilogue: God’s People Relate to God through Jesus Christ

Verses which speak of God’s people relating to God (e.g. praying to him) “through” Jesus Christ appear to have in view one or more of the following three concepts: Jesus Christ’s death opening the way into God’s presence; Jesus Christ’s priesthood; and God’s people being “in” Jesus Christ. All three are aspects of Jesus Christ’s mediatory role in a believer’s relationship with God.

Jesus Christ’s death and priesthood have opened the way into God’s presence for God’s people

HEB 10:19–22 So, brothers and sisters, *we are completely free to enter the Most Holy Place without fear because of the blood of Jesus’ death.*²⁰ *We can enter through a new and living way that Jesus opened for us. It leads through the curtain—Christ’s body.*²¹ *And since we have a great priest over God’s house,*²² *let us come near to God with a sincere heart and a sure faith, because we have been made free from a guilty conscience, and our bodies have been washed with pure water.* NCV™

The reference to Jesus Christ’s body as “the curtain” (v. 20) is drawing a parallel between: his death, which opened a way for believers to confidently enter into God’s presence; and the curtain which the high priest went through to enter the Most Holy Place of God’s presence on the Day of Atonement, in the tabernacle and later in the temple.

God’s people have access to God through Jesus Christ – by the Holy Spirit

EPH 2:18 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *It is through Christ that all of us, Jews and Gentiles, are able to come in the one Spirit into the presence of the Father.* GNT

Here “through Christ” may be speaking of how people are to approach God. Alternatively it could be referring to being able to approach God because of what Jesus Christ has done (cf. NLT) – i.e. his reconciliation of people to God by his death (cf. v. 16).

In your own words explain the concept of believers being the body of Christ.

In what sense is Jesus Christ the “cornerstone” of the church?

What sorts of things should we do as working members of the body of Christ?

b) God’s People Belong to God

God’s people belong to him

1PET 2:9A [PETER, TO BELIEVERS:] However, you are chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, *people who belong to God*. GW

For they are God’s people . . .

COL 3:12 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] God loves you and has chosen you as *his own special people*. So be gentle, kind, humble, meek, and patient. CEV

ISA 63:8A *He [God] said, “Certainly they will be my people, children who are not disloyal.”*

. . . and God is their God

2CHR 13:10A [ABIJAH, KING OF JUDAH:] *But as for us, the LORD is our God and we have not rejected him.*

God’s people are called by God’s name

DEUT 28:10 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] Then *all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD*, and they shall be afraid of you. NKJV

Being called by God’s name identifies God’s people as his, showing their unique relationship with him and is reflective of them being part of his family (as per the following section, *God’s People Are His Family*). Note that references to being called (i.e. named or identified) by God’s name may simply be speaking of being called “God’s” (or “the LORD’s”; cf. Isa 44:5) or “God’s people”.

God’s people likewise belong to Jesus Christ . . .

ROM 14:8 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] If we live, it is for the Lord that we live, and if we die, it is for the Lord that we die. So *whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord*. GNT

. . . God gives his people to Jesus Christ

JOHN 10:29 [JESUS, REFERRING TO HIS FOLLOWERS:] *My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one can snatch them from my Father's hand.*

Why do God's people belong to him?

What are some implications of God being our God?

What is one significant way that belonging to God affects - or should affect - what we do?

The church body is built "in" Jesus Christ . . .

EPH 2:21–22 [PAUL, TO THE EPHESIAN BELIEVERS:] *In him the whole building is joined together and rises into a holy sanctuary in the Lord. ²²You, too, are being built in him along with the others into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.* ISV

The "building" is composed of "members of God's household" (v. 19 ↓).

. . . and Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of the church

EPH 2:20 [PAUL, TO NON-JEWISH BELIEVERS:] You are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. *Christ Jesus himself is the cornerstone.* GW

Jesus Christ is the head of the church body . . .

COL 1:18 *He is the head of the body, the church,* as well as the beginning, the firstborn from among the dead, so that he himself may become first in all things.

. . . and Jesus Christ is portrayed as the husband of the church

2COR 11:2 [PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH:] For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy, because *I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.*

The portrayal of Jesus Christ as the husband of the church points to both his headship of it and his oneness with it (cf. Gen 2:24 et al.).

c) God's People Are One Body 'in' Jesus Christ

(⇒ *The Church as One Body*, in 26. *Being One Body*)

All believers – including Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free – are one body “in” Jesus Christ . . .

GAL 3:28 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female – for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*

Oneness in Jesus Christ takes primacy over all distinctions. In him “there is no difference” (GNT, NCV) between contrasting groups such as Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free people, and males and females. For no group is spiritually superior to another, and all are equal before God (cf. Eph 6:8–9). Note that the use of “Greek”, as opposed to “Jew”, appears to denote all Gentiles.

. . . The church is in fact the body of Christ

EPH 1:23 Now *the church is his body, the fullness of him* who fills all in all.

The description of the church as the “body” of Christ figuratively depicts the spiritual union of Jesus Christ with his people, and points to the oneness that his people have together in their relationship to Christ. Note that the phrase “the fullness of him” (v. 23) has a few possible meanings. It may mean that: the church is filled by Christ's presence and/or by the blessings he gives it; the fullness of Christ is manifested in the church; or the church is the complement of Christ, in a sense the completion of what he represents.

God's people are many different parts making up one body “in” Jesus Christ

ROM 12:4–5 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *Each one of us has a body with many parts, and these parts all have different uses. ⁵In the same way, we are many, but in Christ we are all one body. Each one is a part of that body, and each part belongs to all the other parts.* NCV™

c) God's People Are His Family

Each believer belongs to the household of God

EPH 2:19 [PAUL, TO NON-JEWISH BELIEVERS:] So then you are no longer foreigners and noncitizens, but *you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household*, . . .

As members of God's household, God's people are in effect his family (cf. CEV, GNT, NCV, NLT) – as the following subsections reflect.

God is their Father

ROM 1:7 To all those loved by God in Rome, called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from *God our Father* and the Lord Jesus Christ!

They are God's children . . .

JOHN 1:12–13 But to all who have received him [Jesus Christ] – those who believe in his name – *he has given the right to become God's children* ¹³– *children not born by human parents or by human desire or a husband's decision, but by God.*

Those who accept Jesus and believe in him (v. 12a) are enabled to become God's children (v. 12b) – born of God (v. 13) into spiritual life.

. . . As God's children, they are also heirs of God

ROM 8:17 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *And if children, then heirs (namely, heirs of God and also fellow heirs with Christ)* – if indeed we suffer with him so we may also be glorified with him.

God's people are Jesus Christ's brothers and sisters

MATT 12:49–50 And pointing toward his disciples *he* [Jesus] *said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ⁵⁰For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”*

God’s people are also brothers and sisters of each other

MATT 23:8 [JESUS, TO HIS FOLLOWERS:] But you must not be called ‘Teacher,’ because you have only one Teacher, and *you are all brothers and sisters together.* NCV™

What are some implications of God being our Father for the way we relate to him?

What do heirs of God inherit?

What else could you do to better relate to or treat other believers as your brothers and sisters?

Why is being “in” Jesus Christ important for our salvation?

Explain the concept of believers being identified with Jesus Christ in his death.

How does being “in” Jesus Christ affect our everyday relationship with God (e.g. in how God views us and how we relate to God)?

“In” Jesus Christ God’s people have eternal life . . .

1JN 5:11B–12 [JOHN, TO BELIEVERS:] *God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.* ¹²*The one who has the Son has this eternal life; the one who does not have the Son of God does not have this eternal life.*

Verse 11 may be speaking of eternal life having its source in Jesus Christ (cf. GNT), rather than being realized through one being “in” him. However v. 12 certainly has the believer’s union with Christ in view.

. . . and “in” Jesus Christ they will have glory

1PET 5:10B He [God] called you *to share in his glory in Christ*, a glory that will continue forever. NCV™

d) God’s People Are His Church

The term “church” denotes an assembly or body of believers that belong to God. Additionally it can be used more generally of God’s people as a whole – the worldwide church.

God’s people form God’s church

ACTS 20:28 [PAUL, TO THE EPHESIAN CHURCH LEADERS:] Watch out for yourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to *shepherd the church of God* that he obtained with the blood of his own Son.

Jesus Christ is the church’s Lord and ruler

JOHN 13:13–14 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] *You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and do so correctly, for that is what I am.* ¹⁴*If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you too ought to wash one another’s feet.*

HEB 3:6A *But Christ is faithful as a son over God’s house.*

This speaks of Jesus Christ being “in charge” (CEV, GNT, NLT) of God’s house or church – i.e. its ruler.

The church is God’s temple, in which God dwells by his Holy Spirit . . .

1COR 3:16 [PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH:] Do you not know that *you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?*

EPH 2:21–22 He [Jesus Christ] is the one who holds the whole building together and *makes it grow into a sacred temple dedicated to the Lord.* ²²*In union with him you too are being built together with all the others into a place where God lives through his Spirit.* GNT

In v. 21 the universal church appears to be in view. This may also be the case in v. 22, although there Paul may be turning the focus to the Ephesian church in particular. Bear in mind that the assertion in the above subheading is applicable to the universal church and also to individual churches, with each church’s members together forming a spiritual building.

. . . As such, God’s people meet together in his presence

ACTS 10:33 [CORNELIUS, TO PETER:] Therefore I sent for you at once, and you were kind enough to come. So *now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to say to us.*

What is the “church”?

How should Jesus Christ being the church’s Lord and ruler affect the running of a local church? In what way could your church better reflect this?

Explain the assertion that the church is God’s temple.

“In” Jesus Christ they are identified with him in his death, resurrection and life

COL 2:11–13 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *In him you also were circumcised – not, however, with a circumcision performed by human hands, but by the removal of the fleshly body, that is, through the circumcision done by Christ.* ¹²*Having been buried with him in baptism, you also have been raised with him through your faith in the power of God who raised him from the dead.* ¹³*And even though you were dead in your transgressions and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, he [God] nevertheless made you alive with him [Christ], having forgiven all your transgressions.*

Verses 11–12 speak of one’s sinful nature being cut off through one being buried and raised with Christ. Following on from this, Paul speaks of believers being given life with Christ (v. 13).

“In” Jesus Christ God’s people are given God’s grace

1COR 1:4–5 [PAUL, TO THE CORINTHIAN BELIEVERS:] I always thank my God for you because of *the grace of God that was given to you in Christ Jesus.* ⁵*For you were made rich in every way in him, in all your speech and in every kind of knowledge – . . .*

“In” Jesus Christ God’s people have spiritual “fruits”

JOHN 16:33 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] I have told you these things so that *in me you may have peace.* In the world you have trouble and suffering, but take courage – I have conquered the world.

1TIM 1:14 [PAUL:] But the grace of our Lord was fully given to me, and with that grace came *the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.*

NCV™

This appears to be speaking of the faith and love “that are [to be realized] in Christ Jesus” (AMP), “in union with Christ Jesus” (GNT). However it has also been interpreted as referring to this faith and love as coming from or being of Jesus Christ (cf. NIV, NLT).

b) The Significance of Being ‘in’ Jesus Christ

Generally speaking at least, the spiritual standing and blessings that believers have are based on them being “in” Jesus Christ, by which they are associated and even identified with him. As referred to earlier, this means that they are granted by God the standing and blessings that Jesus Christ has attained on behalf of those so associated with him.

“In” Jesus Christ God’s people are saved, . . .

2TIM 2:10 [PAUL:] So I endure all things for the sake of those chosen by God, that *they too may obtain salvation in Christ Jesus* and its eternal glory.

This may be meaning that salvation comes to those who are “in” or “belong to” (CEV) Jesus Christ – hence its use here. However it could simply be referring to salvation coming through Christ (cf. GNT).

. . . for “in” Jesus Christ they are redeemed and have righteousness

COL 1:13–14 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of *the Son he loves*, ¹⁴*in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins*.

2COR 5:21 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] God made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, *so that in him we would become the righteousness of God*.

“In” Jesus Christ believers share in the righteousness of God (cf. GNT).

“In” Jesus Christ God’s people are sanctified

1COR 1:2 [PAUL:] To the church of God that is in Corinth, *to those sanctified in Christ Jesus*, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: . . . ESV

II. Being ‘in’ Jesus Christ

Arguably the most fundamental change in the standing of God’s people in relationship to him that followed what Jesus Christ accomplished, is that they are now “in” Jesus Christ. Being “in” Jesus Christ involves the association or correlation of believers with Jesus Christ, by which God views them in association with his Son.

Due to this connection with Jesus Christ, they participate with him in such things as: his victory over sin and death; his life; and other blessings he has secured. As such it has great significance in the relationship of believers to God.

Note that expressions like “in Jesus Christ” sometimes have other meanings, such as “through Jesus Christ”. While the verses in this section have been interpreted here as using such expressions to speak of believers being “in” Jesus Christ, in some instances the meaning is debatable.

a) God's People Are 'in' Jesus Christ

God's people are "in" Jesus Christ

EPH 1:1 From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints [in Ephesus], *the faithful in Christ Jesus.*

They are "in" Jesus Christ because of what God has done

1COR 1:30 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] And *because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ...* ESV

God's people are "in" Jesus Christ because of what God has accomplished through Christ for his people, such as securing for them "righteousness and sanctification and redemption".

Jesus Christ identifies himself with God's people

MATT 25:40 Then the King will answer, 'I tell you the truth, *anything you did for even the least of my people here, you also did for me.*'

NCV™

The King in this parable represents Jesus Christ himself. Commentators generally interpret "my people" to be referring to Christians.

God's people live with Jesus Christ . . .

2COR 13:4 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] For indeed he was crucified by reason of weakness, but he lives because of God's power. For we also are weak in him, but *we will live together with him,* because of God's power toward you.

. . . and Jesus Christ is in them

JOHN 14:20 [JESUS, TO HIS DISCIPLES:] You will know at that time that I am in my Father and you are in me and *I am in you.*

EPH 3:16–17A [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] I pray that according to the wealth of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power

through his Spirit in the inner person, ¹⁷*that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, ...*

List a couple of points that you would mention in explaining the concept of believers being "in" Jesus Christ.

In what way are believers united with Christ?

In our everyday lives, how conscious should we be of being "in" Jesus Christ and how should it affect our thinking?
