

Ἐν τινι εἶναι as the Background to Paul's Discourse on Being "in Christ"

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Abstract

Scholars have investigated Paul's ἐν Χριστῷ phrases for some time, yet no consensus has been reached as to what they mean and how the apostle came to speak of the relationship between believers and Christ in this way. This brief survey shows that the philological background of Paul's "being in Christ" phrases lies in the largely analogous Greek phrase ἐν τινι εἶναι which expresses dependency of something or someone on something or someone else. Various passages from the archaic up to the imperial period that have received no attention so far demonstrate this. In Paul, the concept of dependency in connection with ἐν Χριστῷ phrases particularly comes to play in Rom 1–8.

In his drama *Alcestis*, Euripides's protagonist Admetus exclaims to his wife Alcestis: ἐν σοὶ δ' ἐσμεν καὶ ζῆν καὶ μὴ ("We depend on you for our life or death," 278).² In fact, this remark bears some similarities to Paul's ἐν Χριστῷ phrases:³ in both Euripides and Paul, a group of people is the subject,⁴ both authors use the verb εἶμι, and both use a construction consisting of ἐν and pronouns to express a relationship between a group and an individual. If, therefore, the phrase in Euripides describes the dependence of one group of people on another person, can the same be said of the Pauline expression ἐν Χριστῷ?

While there is certainly no shortage of investigations on ἐν Χριστῷ, the philological search for an analogous phrase in Greek literature has been unsuccessful so far. Adolf Deissmann wrote the first treatise on ἐν Χριστῷ and published it in 1892. Research opinions on the meaning of the phrase now cover a wide range: some advocate a local or spatial interpretation,⁵ others prefer an instrumental inter-

¹For the German version of the present essay, see Barbara Beyer, "Ἐν τινι εἶναι als Hintergrund der paulinischen Rede vom Sein 'in Christus,'" *ZNW* 114.1 (2023) 65–78. Beyer's article itself is part of her fuller treatment of Pauline language about being "in Christ" found in Barbara Beyer, *Determined by Christ: The Pauline Metaphor "Being in Christ"*, NovTSup 191 (Leiden: Brill, 2024).

²Unless otherwise stated, all translations in this article are by the author.

³All variants of this expression (e.g., ἐν κυρίῳ) are also included here.

⁴According to Gustav Adolf Seeck, *Euripides. Alkestis (Griechische Dramen)* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 97, despite the poetic plural form, it can be assumed that the children were included.

⁵See Adolf Deissmann, *Die neutestamentliche Formel "in Christo Jesu"* (Marburg: Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1892), 97; Udo Schnelle, *Gerechtigkeit und Christusgegenwart. Vorpaulinische und paulinische Tauftheologie*, 2nd ed., GTA 24 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986), 110; Andrie du Toit, "In Christ', 'in the Spirit' and Related Prepositional Phrases: Their Relevance for a Discussion on Pauline Mysticism," in *For-*

pretation,⁶ while still others consider a modal aspect to be dominant,⁷ and less often it is interpreted ecclesiologically,⁸ historically,⁹ or eschatologically.¹⁰ Its origin has also been lively debated, with no consensus on whether parallels can be found in Greco-Roman literature,¹¹ the writings of Greek mystery religions,¹² the language of the LXX,¹³ or Jewish wisdom traditions, especially in Philo.¹⁴

Teresa Morgan's more recent study takes a different approach here: she interprets Paul's phrases either instrumentally or with reference to the use of ἐν in Greek, which she calls "encheiristic" and broadly renders as "in the hands of." She lists evidence for this, some of which will be discussed below.¹⁵ Her interpretation is fundamentally correct, but replacing the difficult expression "in Christ"

cusing on Paul. Persuasion and Theological Design in Romans and Galatians, ed. Cilliers Breytenbach and David du Toit, BZNW 151 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007), 129–145, here 132.

⁶See Alexander J. M. Wedderburn, "Some Observations on Paul's Use of the Phrases 'in Christ' and 'with Christ,'" *JSNT* 8.25 (1985): 83–97, here 89.

⁷See Michael Wolter, *Paulus. Ein Grundriss seiner Theologie*, 3rd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2021), 244; Hans-Christoph Meier, *Mystik bei Paulus. Zur Phänomenologie religiöser Erfahrung im Neuen Testament*, TANZ 26 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 38–39.

⁸See Ernst Käsemann, *Leib und Leib Christi. Eine Untersuchung zur paulinischen Begrifflichkeit*, BHTh 9 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1933), 183–186.

⁹See Fritz Neugebauer, *In Christus EN ΧΡΙΣΤΩ. Eine Untersuchung zum Paulinischen Glaubensverständnis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961), 36–39, 148–149. He advocated an instrumental and historical understanding.

¹⁰See Albert Schweitzer, *Die Mystik des Apostels Paulus* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1930), 116–126; Rudolf Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, 8th ed., UTB 630 (Tübingen: UTB, 1980), 311, 328. Both advocated an ecclesiologically-eschatological understanding.

¹¹See Deissmann, *Formel*, 70: Paul is "the creator of the formula, not in the sense that he was the first to combine ἐν with the personal singular, but in the sense that he *created a completely new terminus technicus by using an existing linguistic phrase*" (italics original).

¹²See Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos. Geschichte des Christusglaubens von den Anfängen des Christentums bis Irenaeus*, 2nd ed., FRLANT 21 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1921), 104–120; Richard Reitzenstein, *Die hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen. Nach ihren Grundgedanken und Wirkungen*, 3rd ed. (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1927), 91, 334; Käsemann, *Leib*, 168, 171.

¹³Johannes Weiß, "Paulinische Probleme II. Die Formel ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ (Zugleich Besprechung der Schrift von A. Deissmann, Die neutestamentliche Formel 'in Christo Jesu')," *ThStKr* 69 (1896): 7–33, here 10; Wedderburn, "Observations," 89; N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (London: T&T Clark International, 1991), 45–49. Deissmann himself changed his opinion in the second edition of his work *Paulus. Eine kultur- und religionsgeschichtliche Skizze*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1925), 116–117. A broader explanation of its origin within early Judaism has been offered by Klaus Berger, "Zum traditionsgeschichtlichen Hintergrund christologischer Hoheitstitel," *NTS* 17.4 (1971): 391–425, here 403–408; J. Thomas Hewitt, *Messiah and Scripture: Paul's "In Christ" Idiom in Its Ancient Jewish Context*, WUNT 2/522 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 242–243.

¹⁴While Egon Brandenburger, *Fleisch und Geist. Paulus und die dualistische Weisheit*, WMANT 29 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1968), 26–28, 42–57, 225–228; Schnelle, *Gerechtigkeit*, 106–120, refer generally to Jewish wisdom traditions, Gerhard Sellin, "Die religionsgeschichtlichen Hintergründe der paulinischen 'Christusmystik,'" *ThQ* 176.1 (1996): 7–27, here 26–27, argues more specifically for Philo.

¹⁵See Teresa Morgan, *Being "in Christ" in the Letters of Paul: Saved through Christ and in His Hands*, WUNT 449 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), esp. 11–22, for references and a basic interpretation. The lexicons render these ἐν phrases differently. See ΘΗΣΑΥΡΟΣ ΤΗΣ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗΣ ΓΛΩΣΣΗΣ. *Thesaurus Graecae Linguae, ab Henrico Stephano constructus*, ed. Karl B. Hase, Wilhelm Dindorf, Ludwig Dindorf, 3rd ed., vol. 3 (Paris: Excudebat H. Stephanus, 1835), s.v. ἐν 962 B: "Ἐν ἐμοὶ ἐστὶ, In me est, pro In potestate mea est" as well as "Abs te pendemus"; Franz Passow, *Handwörterbuch der griechischen Sprache*, newly revised and updated by Val. Chr. Fr. Rost, Friedrich Palm, Otto Kreussler, 5th ed., vol. 1.2 (Darmstadt: WBG, 1847 [reprinted 1993], s.v. ἐν 2b): "This analogy explains the saying: εἶναι or γίγνεσθαι ἐν τινι, to be in someone's hands or power, to depend on someone," or, for ἐστὶν ἐν τινι, "it depends on someone for something to happen." Subsequent lexicons adopted much of Stephanus's and Passow's work.

with “in the hands of Christ” represents a rather problematic metaphorical shift. For this reason, the terms “dependent on,” “determined by,” and “ruled by Christ” are preferred in what follows.¹⁶ Furthermore, texts from Greek literature that have received little attention to date will be presented and their usefulness for the interpretation of the Pauline ἐν Χριστῷ will be examined.

Since Paul used his ἐν Χριστῷ phrases extremely flexibly, it is essential to consider the entire syntagma. This allows us to weed out some of the ninety-eight examples in which the verb is usually combined with an ἐν phrase.¹⁷ Of the remaining examples, those that refer to the *being* of one or more persons ἐν Χριστῷ stand out in particular: How can one person be completely¹⁸ *in* another person? Accordingly, the focus will be on Pauline evidence in which a personal subject and a verb of being (εἶμι, ζάω or ζώή, γίνομαι) are encountered or implied (Rom 6.11; 8.1–2; 16.7, 11; 1 Cor 1.30; 2 Cor 5.17; Gal 3.26, 28; Phil 3.9). How should these examples of Paul’s phrase ἐν Χριστῷ be understood against the background of the Greek formulation ἐν τινι εἶναι?¹⁹

1. Ἐν τινι εἶναι in Greek Literature

One of the oldest references to the phrase under investigation comes from Homer’s *Odyssey*: shortly before Odysseus reaches his homeland, his ship is once again driven far out to sea. On the floating island of Aeolia, he asks its inhabitants, Aeolus and his family, for help: ἀλλ’ ἀκέσασθε, φίλοι· δύναμις γὰρ ἐν ὑμῖν (“But friends, heal us! For the power lies with you,” 10.69). Odysseus’s hopeless situation leads him to acknowledge his dependence on the abilities of Aeolus and his family.

Hesiod also uses the phrase ἐν τινι εἶναι in the context of seafaring. The best time for sailing is late summer. If Poseidon, lord of the sea, and Zeus, lord of humankind, do not wish anyone to die, the voyage will be successful, for the sea will be calm. “For the outcome of both good and evil depends on them [sc. Poseidon and Zeus]” (ἐν τοῖς [Ποσειδάωνι καὶ Διὶ] γὰρ τέλος ἐστὶν ὁμῶς ἀγαθῶν τε κακῶν τε, *Op.* 669). The two gods have the power to decide whether someone’s sea voyage will be successful.

There is ample evidence of the phrase ἐν τινι εἶναι from classical times. Euripides, *Alc.* 278, was already mentioned at the beginning of this essay. This reference is also interesting because Admetos (and the couple’s children) are dependent on Alcestis, meaning that she, as a woman, plays a decisive role in her family. In contrast, other parallels express the hierarchical relationship between men and women in marriage. Euripides’s *Medea*, for example, is desperate because her husband Jason left her. Lamenting her misfortune, she cries out, “For to me he was everything, I know it well! The most depraved of all men, my husband” (ἐν ᾧ γὰρ ἦν μοι πάντα, γινώσκω καλῶς, κάκιστος ἀνδρῶν ἐκβέβηχ’ οὐμὸς πόσις, *Med.* 228–229). She then laments the fate of all women who, through marriage, obtain a δεσπότης σώματος (“a ruler over their bodies,” 233). Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus* describes a woman’s dependence on her husband in a similar way. She denies having any power. Instead, “everything is in you [sc. the husband]” (τίς δὲ ἢ ἐμὴ δύναμις· ἀλλ’ ἐν σοὶ πάντα ἐστίν, 7.14). Aristophanes reverses this aspect in his comedy *Lysistrata* and exaggerates it: in order to end the war between the Greek cities, the protagonist Lysistrata develops a plan whereby the abstinence of women toward their fighting husbands would end the war. Thus, “the salvation of all Greece depends on women” (ἔλης τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἐν ταῖς γυναιξίν ἐστιν ἡ σωτηρία, 30).²⁰

¹⁶ Although these are also metaphorical expressions, this is less obvious in their case. They are to serve as examples of descriptive language in what follows and do not reflect the ideas directly associated with being ἐν Χριστῷ.

¹⁷ These include ἐλπίζω (1 Cor 15.19; Phil 2.19); καυχάομαι κτλ (Rom 15.17; 1 Cor 1.31; 15.31; 2 Cor 10.17; Phil 1.26; 3.3); χαίρω (Phil 3.1; 4.4, 10); πείθω (Phil 1.14; 2.24).

¹⁸ Through baptism into Christ (ἐβαπτίσθημεν εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν, Rom 6.3–4; Gal 3.27), believers are in the state of being in Christ (Rom 6.11; 8.1–2; Gal 3.26, 28; as already stated by Bousset, *Kyrios*; Schweitzer, *Mystik*, 118).

¹⁹ For additional references and a comprehensive discussion of the evidence, see Barbara Beyer, *Determined by Christ: The Pauline Metaphor “Being in Christ”*, NovTSup 191 (Leiden: Brill, 2024).

²⁰ See 2 Tim 2.10 for a similar construction involving the combination of σωτηρία and ἐν.

Interestingly, *Aristotle* already reflected on this use of the preposition ἐν and its ability to express a relationship of dependence: ἐτι ὡς ἐν βασιλεῖ τὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων (“one can also say ‘the affairs of the Greeks lie in the king,’” *Phys.* 4.3.21–24 [201a]).²¹ Aristotle goes on to explain this use of ἐν as follows: “the most important meaning, finally: something is in a vessel, generally, in a place.”²² It is clear, then, that Aristotle recognized both the fundamentally local meaning and the possibility of using ἐν to express the dependence of people’s fate on a king.

Deissmann had already examined evidence for the use of the phrase ἐν τινι εἶναι in archaic and classical times. However, due to the considerable time gap between this period and Paul, this evidence is only of limited use. The following evidence from the Hellenistic and imperial periods is therefore of particular importance.

Thus far, ἐν τινι εἶναι has often been encountered in connection with an outstanding decision or urgent situation. However, the phrase can also describe past actions, such as in Polybius. In his description of the organization of a Roman army, Polybius discusses patrol duties. If inconsistencies arise with the sentries, the matter must be investigated. “If, therefore, the disturbance lies with the guards” (ἐὰν μὲν οὖν ἐν τοῖς φύλαξιν ᾗ τὸ κακόν, *Hist.* 6.36.9), consequences must be drawn.

Like the Pauline Epistles, the novel *The Life of Aesop*, with its distinctive use of ἐν τινι εἶναι, dates to the first century. It describes a dialogue between the slave Aesop and his future master Xanthos. The latter asks the slave whether he will run away if he buys him. But Aesop responds with a counter-question, asking which of the two this would depend on (τὸ δὲ δραπετεύειν ἐν τίνι ἐστίν, ἐν σοὶ ἢ ἐν ἐμοί, *Vita Aesopi* G 26). He repeatedly emphasizes that it depends on Xanthos (οὐ, ἀλλ’ ἐν σοί), because if Xanthos mistreats his slave, Aesop will flee. But if he is treated well by his master, Aesop will stay with Xanthos. As a free man, Xanthos has the power to make this decision, whereas Aesop, as a slave, is subordinate to him.

The relationship of dependency between two individuals is similarly strong in the narrative about the life of the philosopher *Secundus*. Even when Emperor Hadrian threatens him with death, he refuses to speak, which greatly surprises Hadrian. In response to why he remains silent, Secundus writes: “But I, O Hadrian, will not fear you because of death. For it is yours alone to kill me, since you have been found to be the ruler of this age. But you have no power over my voice and my spoken word” (Ἐγὼ μὲν, ὦ Ἀδριανέ, οὐ φοβηθήσομαι σε ἕνεκεν τοῦ ἀποθανεῖν. τὸ γὰρ με ἀποκτείνειν μόνον ἐν σοὶ ἐστίν. ἀρχὼν γὰρ τοῦ καιροῦ τούτου εὐρέθης. τῆς δ’ ἐμῆς φωνῆς καὶ τοῦ ἐμοῦ προφορητικοῦ λόγου οὐδεμία σοὶ ἐστίν ἐξουσία, *Vita et sententiae Secundi* 74.17–20).

One of *Dio Chrysostom*’s speeches is addressed to the inhabitants of Rhodes and contains two examples of ἐν τινι εἶναι. First, he criticizes the inhabitants for changing the inscriptions on statues by engraving new names.²³ This behavior will harm them in the future if they do not stop it. For if a deity announced an evil that would come as a result of misconduct, the inhabitants would seek to avoid it at all costs, if it were within their power (οἶμαι δ’ ὑμᾶς, εἴ τις θεῶν φανερόν ὑμῖν ποιήσκει τὸ μέλλον αὐθις ποτε λυπήσειν τὴν πόλιν, πάντως φυλάξεσθαι τοῦτο, ἐν ὑμῖν γε ὄν, *Rhod.* 145).²⁴ Later, Dio Chrysostom appeals to their honor and pride by comparing them to the sole male heir of a distinguished, wealthy family. This heir is now responsible for maintaining his family’s prominent position – “everything depends on him” (ἐν ἐκείνῳ πάντα ἐστί, 159). The inhabitants of Rhodes, he says, are also in a prominent

²¹See Hans Wagner, *Aristoteles. Physikvorlesung*, 5th ed., Werke in deutscher Übersetzung II (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 87, who translates the sentence as “das Schicksal der Griechen hängt am König”; ET: “the fate of the Greeks depends on the king.”

²²Translation by Wagner, *Physikvorlesung*, 87.

²³See the introduction in James Wilfred Cohoon and Henry Lamar Crosby, *Dio Chrysostom. Discourses* 31–36, LCL 358 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1940), 4.

²⁴See Winfried Elliger, *Dion Chrysostomos. Sämtliche Reden*, BAW.GR (Zurich: Artemis, 1967), 412: “You yourselves would probably try to prevent a disaster that a god prophesied for your city in the future at all costs, if it were in your power.”

position among the Greeks and must defend the honor of all.

A passage from Josephus's *Antiquities* offers an interesting parallel to Paul: while the apostle often locates so-called salvific goods (*Heilsgüter*) ἐν Χριστῷ, such as God's calling (ἡ κλήσις τοῦ θεοῦ, Phil 3.14), Josephus writes that liberation is "in God." Thus, in a dire situation in the desert, Moses exclaims "For his deliverance depends on him and not on anyone else" (ἐν αὐτῷ γὰρ εἶναι τὴν σωτηρίαν αὐτοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἐν ἄλλῳ, *Ant.* 3.23).²⁵

Finally, it appears that the phrase ἐν τινι εἶναι was in use until late antiquity. In a letter from Libanius addressed to Modestus, an Alexandrian official, Libanius asks Modestus to return the money paid by the Arian bishop Georgius.²⁶ This depended on him – on his judgment and his position (ἐν σοὶ τε καὶ τῇ σῇ γνώμῃ καὶ τῇ σῇ χειρί, *Ep.* 70.2).

It has been demonstrated that the Greek construction ἐν τινι εἶναι occurs in texts from the eighth century BCE to the fourth century CE. These examples each express a form of dependence on a person or a thing.²⁷ The subject of the phrase can be a person,²⁸ an abstract concept such as the nouns δύναμις,²⁹ τέλος,³⁰ or σωτηρία,³¹ the adjective πάντα,³² an infinitive construction,³³ a substantivized verb,³⁴ or another subordinate clause.³⁵ While in Paul's letters a person – Christ – is the object of the ἐν construction, in examples from Greek literature this can also be an abstract concept.³⁶ The form εἶμι can be omitted or replaced by γίγνομαι.³⁷ In most cases, the phrase refers to a future outcome that depends on a present decision, especially in judicial contexts.³⁸ However, other passages also refer to past events.³⁹ Since the dative object of ἐν is capable of determining a situation, it often refers to deities⁴⁰ or people

²⁵Passages such as this from Jewish sources are rather rare; see Ps LXX 3.3: πολλοὶ λέγουσιν τῇ ψυχῇ μου Οὐκ ἔστιν σωτηρία αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ θεῷ αὐτοῦ, and Wis 5.15: Δίκαιοι δὲ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα ζώσιν, καὶ ἐν κυρίῳ ὁ μισθὸς αὐτῶν, καὶ ἡ φροντίς αὐτῶν παρὰ ὑψίστῳ.

²⁶See the note in Albert Francis Norman, *Libanius. Autobiography and Selected Letters*, vol. II: *Letters 51–193*, LCL 479 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 65 n. a.

²⁷With the help of insights from recent metaphor theories, it becomes clear why the spatial relation of being-in ultimately expresses dependence. According to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 29–30, humans experience the world exclusively as physical beings, so that their own skin separates the inside from the outside. Humans are therefore "containers" and communicate as if other, more abstract things also had boundaries. For example, states can be expressed using concrete, spatial relations such as "being in fear" (ἐν φόβῳ, 1 Cor 2:3) or "he saved us from such a great danger of death" (ἐκ τηλικούτου θανάτου ἐρρύσατο, 2 Cor 1:10), as Aristotle already noted in *Phys.* 4.3.21–44 [201a]. Such "container metaphors" are a subgroup of "ontological metaphors." Statements of this kind are often not perceived as metaphorical, as they are conventional components of language. At the same time, these spatial relations can express power relations – and in the case of ἐν, the dative object represents the determining entity, as is often the case in German ("in Angst sein" ["to be in fear"] or "in Sicherheit sein" ["to be in safety"]). While Lakoff and Johnson's theory can be criticized in many respects, these findings nevertheless help to better understand ἐν Χριστῷ statements.

²⁸Euripides, *Alc.* 278; Sophocles, *Oed. tyr.* 314.

²⁹Homer, *Od.* 10.69.

³⁰Hesiod, *Op.* 669; Demosthenes, *Cor.* 193; Andocides, *De pace* 3.41; Pindar, *Nem.* 10.29–30; Plutarch, *Art.* 18.3 [1020B].

³¹Aristophanes, *Lys.* 30; Herodotus, *Hist.* 8.118.

³²Euripides, *Med.* 228; Xenophon, *Oec.* 7.14; Herodotus, *Hist.* 3.80; Dio Chrysostomos, *Rhod.* 159.

³³Herodotus, *Hist.* 8.60; Antiphon, *In novercam* 22.

³⁴*Vita Aesopi* G 26.

³⁵Dio Chrysostomos, *Rhod.* 145.

³⁶Sophocles, *Oed. col.* 1443.

³⁷Plutarch, *Art.* 18.3 [1020B].

³⁸Antiphon, *In novercam* 22; Lysias, *Ep.* 1.34.

³⁹Herodotus, *Hist.* 8.100; Polybius, *Hist.* 6.36.9.

⁴⁰Hesiod, *Op.* 669; Josephus, *Ant.* 3.23.

in positions of power such as rulers,⁴¹ husbands,⁴² or slave owners.⁴³

On the basis of these findings, I will now show how Paul used this Greek construction to describe the current status of believers as determined by, dependent on, and ruled by Christ. This will be illustrated using Rom 1–8, a passage central to the ἐν Χριστῷ expressions.

2. Being ἐν Χριστῷ as a Relationship of Dependence in Rom 1–8

In Rom 1–8, Paul mentions three times that believers are ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.⁴⁴ Two of these references use either the verb ζάω (6.11) or the noun ζωή (8.2) instead of εἰμί.⁴⁵ This deviation occurs only here and is based, on the one hand, on the motif of death and life, which appears frequently in Rom 6–8, and, on the other hand, on the contrast with life in sin in 6.2 (οἵτινες ἀπεθάνομεν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ, πῶς ἔτι ζήσομεν ἐν αὐτῇ). The entire section of 6.1–14 implies that the addressees should follow their faith and baptism with a life pleasing to God: their co-burial with Christ took place for the purpose (ἵνα) of a new way of life (καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐν καινότητι ζωῆς περιπατήσωμεν, 6.4) and they should (imperative of λογίζομαι) consider themselves alive for God in Christ Jesus (ὑμεῖς λογίσεσθε ἑαυτοὺς ... ζῶντας δὲ τῷ θεῷ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, 6.11). Romans 8.1–17 also refers to living in accordance with the Spirit (8.4), godly conduct (8.8), and putting to death the deeds of the flesh (8.13) as a consequence of the new existence, so that when ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ is mentioned in 8.2, just as in 6.11, it has a proactive connotation. At the same time, it is only through God's saving action that believers have been freed to lead a godly life instead of their former sinful life (8.2–4). While ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ in 8.2 could also be an adverbial modifier of ἡλευθέρωσεν and then be interpreted instrumentally, a connection with ὁ γὰρ νόμος τοῦ πνεύματος τῆς ζωῆς is more plausible, not least because of its close relationship in content and terminology with 6.11. Furthermore, 8.1 briefly mentions τοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, such that the discourse on life ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ describes this existence in more detail.⁴⁶ The Spirit establishes a new norm (νόμος) that leads to life in dependence on Christ Jesus.⁴⁷

As with the references to ἐν τινι εἶναι in Greek literature, the ἐν Χριστῷ phrases in Paul's writings are closely linked to the language and concepts of dominion. These statements of superiority and subordination often take the form of spatial determinations. One example worth mentioning here is the dominion of death over believers (ὁ θάνατος ἐβασίλευσεν, 5.14, 17). Once they remained or lived as those who were determined by sin (literally "were in sin": ἐπιμένω/ζάω ἐν τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ, 6.1–2) and under the law (ὑπὸ νόμον, 6.14–15) as slaves of sin (δοῦλοι τῆς ἁμαρτίας, 6.17, 20). Sin dwelt in them as their slave master (ἡ οἰκοῦσα ἐν ἐμοὶ ἁμαρτία, 7.17, 20). This combination of hegemonic and spatial language also comes into play when Paul describes the present state of believers: when they were baptized

⁴¹ Aristotle, *Phys.* 4.3.21–24 [201a]; *Vita et sententiae Secundi* 74.17–20.

⁴² Euripides, *Med.* 228; Xenophon, *Oec.* 7.14.

⁴³ *Vita Aesopi* G 26.

⁴⁴ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ in Rom 3.24 is instrumental; ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν in 8.39 refers metonymically to God's saving action through Christ.

⁴⁵ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν in 6.23 is connected with ζωή, but because of the analogous instrumental phrases with διὰ and ἐν at the end of chapters 5–8 (5.21; 7.25; 8.39), it is also instrumental. Furthermore, Paul's ἐν Χριστῷ phrases refer to the present, while 6.23 speaks of eternal life (ζωὴ αἰώνιος).

⁴⁶ For the interpretation that ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ refers to ζωή and not to ἡλευθέρω, see, for example, Theodor von Zahn, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Römer ausgelegt*, 3rd ed., KNT 6 (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1925), 375–376.

⁴⁷ In the case of τῆς ζωῆς (8.2), it is a genitive of direction and purpose; see Friedrich Blass, Albert Debrunner, and Friedrich Rehkopf, *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch*, 18th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001), § 166. Similarly, τῆς ἁμαρτίας καὶ τοῦ θανάτου also expresses the consequence of the opposite norm. On the interpretation of νόμος as "norm" or "principle" analogous to Rom 7.23–24, see Michael Wolter, *Der Brief an die Römer*, vol. 1: *Romans 1–8*, EKK 6,1 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2014), 473–474.

into Christ Jesus, namely into his death (ἐβαπτίσθημεν εἰς Χριστὸν/τὸν θάνατον αὐτοῦ, 6.3–4).⁴⁸ These verses refer both to the ritual of baptism and, in a figurative sense, to immersion in the death of Christ.⁴⁹ According to Gal 3.29, baptism brought about a change of ownership. Believers were once under the rule of the personified powers of sin, law, and death, but now they have a new Lord and Master – Christ. Therefore, they are also called upon to live for God in dependence on Christ Jesus (literally “in Christ Jesus”: ζῶντες ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, 6.11) as a consequence of the change in lordship and ownership that has taken place. Sin no longer rules over them (ἁμαρτία ὑμῶν οὐ κυριεύσει, 6.14); instead, they are under grace (ὑπὸ χάριν, 6.14–15). Accordingly, they should now serve righteousness and God as their slaves (ἐδουλώθητε τῇ δικαιοσύνῃ/δουλωθέντες τῷ θεῷ, 6.18, 22).

Romans 1–8 therefore contains many statements from the realm of spatial and dominion imagery such that the passages containing ἐν Χριστῷ in Rom 6.1; 8.1–2 should be understood within this context. Particularly striking is the reference to the mutual indwelling of Christ or the Spirit in believers and vice versa in Rom 8: while verses 1–2 speak of those who are determined by Christ Jesus (literally “are in Christ Jesus”: τοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, v. 1) and who should now live their lives in accordance with this dependence (literally “life in Christ Jesus”: τῆς ζωῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, v. 2), verse 10 states that Christ is in them (Χριστὸς ἐν ὑμῖν). Previously, there was already mention of believers being guided by the Spirit (literally “being in the Spirit”: ἐν πνεύματι, v. 9), while at the same time the Spirit dwells in them (πνεῦμα θεοῦ οἰκεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν, v. 9/τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ ἐγείραντος τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐκ νεκρῶν οἰκεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν, v. 11) – in contrast to those who are ruled by the flesh (οἱ δὲ ἐν σαρκὶ ὄντες, v. 8). This mutual indwelling is far removed from mystical ideas,⁵⁰ but becomes understandable against the background of Greek usage. For the control a spirit exercises over a person can be expressed by both formulations – either that the person is “in a spirit” or that “the spirit is in a person.” According to Josephus, the seer Balaam is controlled by the Spirit (literally “he is in the Spirit”: οὐκ ὦν ἐν ἑαυτῷ τῷ δὲ θείῳ πνεύματι, *Ant.* 4.118; cf. also Sib 12.297), whereas according to the LXX God’s Spirit is in Balaam and acts through him (ἐγένετο πνεῦμα θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ, Num 24.2; cf. also Gen 41.38). Similarly, in the Gospel of Mark, both formulations occur in the context of an evil spirit dwelling in a person.⁵¹ The use of οἰκέω in Rom 8.9 (πνεῦμα θεοῦ οἰκεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν) makes it clear that this is a metaphor for a house, that is, believers are the house or temple in which Christ and his Spirit dwell (see also 1 Cor 3.16; 6.19; 2 Cor 6.16).⁵² These

⁴⁸For a metaphorical interpretation of baptism, which does not exclude literal immersion in the baptismal ritual, see Cilliers Breytenbach, “‘Taufen’ als Metapher in den Briefen des Paulus. Randbemerkungen zur Wendung βαπτισθῆναι εἰς τι/τινα,” in *Ethos und Theologie im Neuen Testament*, FS Michael Wolter, ed. Jochen Flebbe and Matthias Konradt (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2016), 263–288, here 275–281.

⁴⁹For this spatial interpretation of εἰς ἐν σῶμα in connection with 1 Cor 12:13, see Lars Hartman, “*Into the Name of the Lord Jesus*”: *Baptism in the Early Church*, SNTW (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 67; Wolfgang Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, vol. 3: 1 Kor 11,17–14,40, EKK 7,3 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1999), 216; Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 152.

⁵⁰It was particularly a tendency of the history of religions school to view ἐν Χριστῷ from the perspective of “Pauline mysticism” and, in part, under the influence of mystery religions, as was particularly the case with Reitzenstein, *Mysterienreligionen*; Alfred Wikenhauser, *Die Christusbaptismus des hl. Paulus*, BZf 12, 8–10 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1928); Schweitzer, *Mystik*. At the same time, the concept of “mysticism” in various (and mostly undefined) meanings has persisted to this day, at least since E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 453–456, also under the term “participation.”

⁵¹See Mark 1.23–26; 5.2–13. Among pagan references, Socrates’s δαιμόνιον is probably the best known. Dio Chrysostom, *Gen.* 1 states that a δαίμων has control over someone (τὸ κρατοῦν ἐκάστου) and that every human being lives accordingly (καθ’ ὃν ζῇ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἕκαστος), since this is their master (κύριον τοῦ ἀνθρώπου). See also Marcus Aurelius, *Med.* 3.5; Plutarch, *Amat.* 18 [762E].

⁵²Furthermore, in Rom 6.1–2; 7.17–18, 20, sin is encountered as the (slave) master of human beings, who are determined by it and also have it within them.

overlapping statements about indwelling thus underscore the dominion of Christ and the Spirit over believers.

There are, therefore, significant overlaps between the Greek phrase *ἐν τινι εἶναι* and the *ἐν Χριστῷ* phrases in Rom 1–8. They each describe a hierarchical relationship between the subject of the *ἐν* construction, which is lower in authority (in this case, the believers), and the object of *ἐν*, which is higher in authority (Christ). Having conquered death through his resurrection, he is the supreme Lord to whom believers are subject (6.9; Phil 2.11). Therefore, their entire existence now depends on Christ and is determined by him. While in most Greek literature the decision or action is still pending, for Paul the decisive event has already taken place: Christ has chosen them (Rom 8.28). His death and resurrection now determine believers; they depend on him to live in their new existence. The parallel texts made it clear that the formulation was not rigid, but could be combined with different subjects, objects, and verbs because of the versatile meanings of *ἐν*, just as in Paul.⁵³ Accordingly, the two examples from Euripides, *Alc.* 78, and Sophocles, *Oed. tyr.* 314, which, like Paul, combine a personal subject and object, *ἐν*, and a verb of being, are a particular expression of a broader analogy between *ἐν τινι εἶναι* and the Pauline *ἐν Χριστῷ* formulations.

Other parts of the Pauline argumentation also provide evidence that *ἐν Χριστῷ* expresses a relationship of dependence. In Gal 3.26, 28, immediately following the reminder to believers of their being *ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ*, that is, their dependence on Christ Jesus (*πάντες γὰρ υἱοὶ θεοῦ ἐστε διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ . . . πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἰς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ*), we find the statement that they belong to Christ as his possession (*ὑμεῖς Χριστοῦ*, v. 29).⁵⁴ According to 2 Cor 5.14, Christ's love determines Paul and his current judgment (*ἡ γὰρ ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ συνέχει ἡμᾶς*). If someone is now determined by Christ, he or she is a new creation (*ὥστε εἴ τις ἐν Χριστῷ, καινὴ κτίσις*, v. 17) – as the apostle himself experienced. Finally, in Phil 3.7–11 Paul contrasts his former life as a zealous Pharisee with his present existence in light of his knowledge of Christ. While he usually speaks of “Jesus Christ our Lord,” the use of the possessive pronoun in the first person singular (“my Lord”) is unique here (*τοῦ κυρίου μου*, v. 8). This is immediately followed by the desire to be found in the final judgment as someone who is determined by Christ (*ἵνα . . . εὐρεθῶ ἐν αὐτῷ*, vv. 8–9).⁵⁵ Some attestations of the formulation *ἐν τινι εἶναι* were also encountered with this meaning in the context of court judgments and decisions. The present existence *ἐν Χριστῷ* therefore expresses a state of being determined and ruled by Christ, based on the hierarchy between the risen Lord Jesus Christ and those who believe in him.

3. Results

The Pauline *ἐν Χριστῷ* phrases are fundamentally versatile and should not be viewed in a generalized manner. Evidence from Greco-Roman literature now contributes to a better understanding of those formulations in Paul that speak of “being ‘in Christ,’” in which *ἐν Χριστῷ* is associated with a personal subject and an expression of being (Rom 6.11; 8.1–2; 16.7, 11; 1 Cor 1.30; 2 Cor 5.17; Gal 3.26, 28; Phil 3.9).⁵⁶ To be *ἐν Χριστῷ* then means that believers are determined by Christ – they depend on him as

⁵³For example, with *ζῶω*: Rom 6.11; with *ισχύω*: Gal 5.6.

⁵⁴See also the attributions of possession in 1 Cor 1.12 with being *ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ* in v. 30.

⁵⁵For the use of *εὐρίσκω* in legal language, see Frederick W. Danker (ed.), *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature. Based on the Sixth Edition of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der übrigen urchristlichen Literatur*, ed. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, with Viktor Reichmann and on previous English editions by W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F.W. Danker, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000), s.v. 2. See also Luke 23.4, 14, 22; John 18.38; 19.4; Acts 23.9; 24.20; Josephus, *Ant.* 2.133.

⁵⁶However, the interpretation of *ἐν Χριστῷ* as a matter of dependence does not exclude the “spatial interpretation”: since “being ‘in Christ’” is metaphorical language that is based on normal usage, is highly conven-

their ruler.⁵⁷ The apostle thus used a Greek phrase to metaphorically portray believers as being in the power of Christ. Thus, ἐν Χριστῷ already became one of Paul's most concise expressions for describing the relationship between believers and Christ – a development that has continued to this day.⁵⁸

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tional, and ultimately expresses the determination of Christ in words, both concepts are closely intertwined and interchangeable. See also n27.

⁵⁷See already Bultmann, *Theologie*, 328; Neugebauer, *Christus*, 42; du Toit, "Christ," 132; Christopher Tuckett, "The Church as the Body of Christ," in *Paul et l'unité des chrétiens*, ed. Jacques Schlosser, SBen 19 (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 161–191, here 177; Udo Schnelle, *Paulus. Leben und Denken*, 2nd ed., De Gruyter Studium (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), 520. Wolter, *Paulus*, 242–246, also concludes that ἐν Χριστῷ ultimately describes a dependence on Christ, but rejects the meaning of the Greek parallel expression and any spatial interpretation.

⁵⁸For example, the Deuteropauline letters contain sixty-eight references. Deissmann, *Formel*, 84, would describe the phrase today as a "chameleon" – "virtually meaningless, because it can mean anything."

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