**Study of the phrase “in him” in I John**

One thing we observe as we read through I John is that John repeatedly uses the little phrase, “in him,” and variations of that phrase. For instance, John frequently speaks of the believer “in” Someone as in I John 2:5, 6 (the “Someone” in this case is obviously Jesus):

*“But whoso keepeth His word, in him verily is the love of God perfected; hereby know we that we are IN HIM.*

*“He that saith he ABIDETH IN HIM ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked.”*

In addition, John often speaks of *the believer* “in” something, as in I John 2:9, 10, 11 (you’ll note even though we now see the believer in something, instead of a Person, that thing is most definitely RELATED to God and Christ – “THE LIGHT,” or is related to and stands for the Satanic realm – “DARKNESS”):

*“He that saith he is IN THE LIGHT, and hateth his brother, is IN DARKNESS even until now.*

*“He that loveth his brother ABIDETH IN THE LIGHT, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.*

*“But he that hateth his brother is IN DARKNESS, and WALKETH IN DARKNESS, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness has blinded his eyes.”*

At other times, John uses the very reverse of this idea, and, in place of the believer “in” something, refers to something (such as “the truth” in I John 1:8 or “the Word of God” in I John 2:14) that is operating in a dynamic way *in the believer.* Again, John sometimes refers to Someone, either God or Christ, as operating in a governing or controlling way *in the believer* (as in I John 4:4, 12).

Below, I have attempted to chart all the various references John makes to this concept in His first epistle. I think it should be very fruitful for any student of the Word to consider how often John employs this concept and how he uses it in each case, to seek to understand John’s overall message to us as fully as possible.

As you can see, the references to something or Someone “in” the believer are on the left side of the page and references to the believer “in” Someone or something are on the right. A number of verses actually contain examples *of each –* something or Someone IN the believer, as well as the believer IN something or someone within the same verse! These verses I have put *in italics* in the center of the chart.

**Something or Someone “in” the Believer The Believer “in” Someone or Something**

1:8 “the truth is not IN US”

1:10 “His Word is not IN US”

2:4 “the truth is not IN HIM”

2:5 “know that we are *IN HIM”*

2:6 “abideth *IN HIM”*

2:9 “saith he is *IN THE LIGHT*

… is *IN DARKNESS* until now”

2:10 “abideth *IN THE LIGHT* … none

occasion of stumbling IN HIM”

2:11 “is *IN DARKNESS*, and walketh *IN*

*DARKNESS"*

2:14 “Word of God abideth IN YOU”

2:15 “love of the Father not IN HIM”

*2:24 “let that abideth* IN YOU *which ye have*

*heard from beginning … if that which ye have*

*heard from beginning remain* IN YOU*, ye also*

*shall continue IN THE SON and IN THE FATHER.”*

*2:27 “anointing which ye have received of Him*

*abideth* IN YOU *… ye shall abide IN HIM”*

2:28 “abide *IN HIM”*

3:3 “hope *IN HIM”*

3:5 “IN HIM is no sin”

3:6 “abideth *IN HIM”*

3:9 “His seed remaineth IN HIM”

3:14 “abideth *IN DEATH”*

3:15 “hath eternal life abiding IN HIM”

*3:24 “dwelleth IN HIM, and He* IN HIM*”*

4:4 “He that is IN YOU/he that is IN THE WORLD”

4:12 “God dwelleth IN US”

*4:13 “we dwell IN HIM, and He* IN US”

*4:15 “God dwelleth* IN HIM*, and he IN*

*GOD”*

*4:16 “he that dwelleth IN LOVE dwelleth IN*

*GOD, and God* IN HIM”

5:20 “and we are *IN HIM* that is true, even

*IN HIS SON*, Jesus Christ.”

So what does John mean to tell us by his frequent use of these phrases in I John?

The expressions “the Truth is not in us,” “His Word is not in us” “eternal life abiding in him” “He dwelleth in us” (referring to something or Someone “in” the believer) tell us what is having its way in determining our choices, our actions, our general direction; *what it is that is driving us or having its effect in us.*

John uses the expressions “we are in Him,” “he . . . is in darkness,” “abiding in Him” (where the believer is said to be “in” the Son or in God or in some other medium) to show what or whom we are *sourced in*, depending on, or *allowing* to have its way with us or effect in us.

John uses such expressions repeatedly in this epistle, and he uses them to speak of having a close relational connection in the sense of fellowship, communion, influence and empowerment. Linguistically, these phrases could be used to describe either a permanent or a temporary state. However, in this epistle, JOHN USES THEM CHIEFLY TO DESCRIBE A TEMPORARY STATE OR *CONDITION*, **NOT** a permanent standing or *POSITION*.

Again, John does NOT normally use the phrase “in Him” to describe the believer’s PERMANENT POSITION. As John uses the phrase, we can get “in” Him, “out” of Him, and back “in” Him again. Likewise, the believer is NOT “in Him” automatically by being “born again.” You and I as believers must meet certain conditions in order to remain “in Him.” THIS TEMPORARY STATE DESCRIBED BY JOHN MUST NOT BE MISTAKEN FOR THE PERMANENT POSITION OF THE BELIEVER REFERRED TO BY PAUL WITH THE PHRASE “IN CHRIST.”

Zane Hodges says: “It would be a mistake to equate the concept of being ‘in Him’ as John uses it here with the Pauline concept of being ‘in Christ.’ For Paul, the words ‘in Christ’ describe a Christian’s permanent position in God’s Son with all its attendant privileges. With John, the kind of relationship pictured in the vine-branch imagery describes an experience that can be ruptured (John 15:6) with a resultant loss of relationship and fruitfulness. Thus here in I John, the proof that a person is enjoying this kind of experience is to be found in a life modeled after that of Jesus in obedience to His Word. In short, I John 2:5-6 continues to talk about the believer’s FELLOWSHIP with God.”

Hodges also says: “The Vine and the Branches passage can rightly be understood as a metaphor for the relationship between a disciple and His Lord. This is made clear by the words that conclude the Vine/branches discourse: ‘By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; *so you will be my disciples.’ (John 15:8)* Unlike the salvation relationship, the relationship of a disciple to his Teacher can be lost”

Confusing John’s “in Him” concept (really, it is JESUS’ conception – John 15:1-11!) with Paul’s “in Christ” truths causes endless confusion that is nothing short of tragic, when one thinks of the consequences of misunderstanding God’s most holy and precious Word!

Paul’s truths of our position form the wonderfully encouraging basis for our Christian walk. As Church saints, we are “in Christ” permanently! The blessings that are accorded us because of this fact are manifold and truly awesome. Our position can never be lost, and can never be improved or diminished (see I Cor. 1:30; II Cor. 5:21; Eph. 1:6; Ro. 6:1-11).

The teaching in I John has mainly to do with our walk as believers. Though our position never changes and can never be lost, our fellowship with Christ is something that can be broken or interrupted – *often.* We can break our fellowship with the Lord Jesus by sinning willfully, or by refusing to come to the Light and confess our sins when our sin is revealed to us.

“Things that are different are not the same.”

I John teaches us that God has made perfect provision for His children to walk in continual, unbroken fellowship with Him. By following His instructions and making use of His provision, we can share in His Life, experience Eternal Life to the fullest possible extent, know “fullness of joy” in our lives as God intends, and bring forth fruit; fruit more abounding; fruit that remains; fruit that redounds to the glory of the Father.