

# Locative of Sphere

## LOCATIVE OF SPHERE: MEANING & SIGNIFICANCE

The **locative** is the case of location or position. It shares the same form as the dative and instrumental but is distinguished by its use as it is translated by adding the word "in." For example: "in a son," or when used with the article "in the son." The root idea of the locative is clear and its application is readily identifiable. The word comes from the Latin locus "a place," "position," "a period," "a condition." The case "indicates a point within limits and corresponds to the English in, on, among, at, by." "In every instance it is not hard to see the simple root idea of the case, a point with limits set by the word and context. So in simplest terms we may define the location as the case of position. Its varieties in use are few and plain." (Dana and Mantley)

**Locative of Place.** The locative of place serves to limit spatially. It is used in this sense most frequently with prepositions. For example John 21:8: The disciples came **in** the boat.

**Locative of Time.** The locative of time serves to limit temporally. This usage serves to indicate the time when the action of the main verb takes place. For example Matt. 20:19: And **in** the third day He will be raised up.

**Locative of Sphere.** The locative of sphere serves to limit spherically (within the spheres of a thing). This is most often a metaphorical use of the locative. The limit is logical rather than spatial or temporal, confining the idea within the bounds of the sphere of a thing. For example Ro 3:24: being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is **IN** Christ Jesus) (cf. Ro 8:1; 8:2; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 3:16; Eph. 1:10; 1 Thes. 4:16; 2 Ti. 3:15; etc) ([Source](#))

[Alan Carr](#) adds this note on **locative of sphere** in the phrase "**in Christ**" - In the Greek, this phrase is known as a "**locative of sphere.**" A "**locative**" tells us where something is. The "**sphere**" speaks of a things location in relationship to other things. So, when the Bible says that we are "**in Christ,**" it means that we live within the sphere of Christ. In other words, Jesus Christ is that which surrounds us. No matter where we go, we cannot step out of Jesus. You can step out of a circle, but you cannot step out of a sphere. A sphere surrounds all that is within it. In like manner, Jesus Christ totally surrounds all those who are in Him. When you consider our location with regards too the area of our security, we are eternally safe because we cannot step out of the sphere of Christ. No matter where we run we still within His sphere and we cannot escape from Him. When we consider our position within the sphere of Christ with regards to our daily walk, it reminds us that every step occurs within the sphere of our relationship to Jesus Christ. Every action, every thought, every deed should be considered in the light of who we are, Whose we are and where we are. Because we are "in Christ," that is ever within the sphere of His presence, His influence and His will, we conform every area of our lives to His will. Simply stated, because we are "in Him," we should live like we are "in Him." ([see excellent Sermon](#))

And so we see that **Locative** simply means location. **Sphere** has the obvious meaning of something round (a ball is a sphere) and so **sphere** in the context of Scripture means "a specified field or environment." To reiterate what was stated above in Greek there is both a **locative of sphere** and a **locative of place**. A locative of place is simply a physical location. You would say your church is in \_\_\_\_\_ (name of city) and that would be locative of place, which is distinct from **locative of sphere**. If we speak of the church building, in the same way when we are in that building, we are speaking of locative of place. If we say we are in the Body of Christ, the church, that is the locative of sphere. And so when Paul describes believers as **IN CHRIST**, clearly he is not speaking of our physical location but is using a metaphorical description saying we are in the sphere of Christ. Here are a few Scriptures (of many) that illustrate the **locative of sphere**:

Romans 6:11+ Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God **IN CHRIST JESUS**.

Romans 8:1+ Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are **IN CHRIST JESUS**.

1 Corinthians 16:24 My love be with you all **IN CHRIST JESUS**. Amen.

2 Corinthians 1:21 Now He who establishes us with you **IN CHRIST** and anointed us is God,

Galatians 3:28+ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one **IN CHRIST JESUS**.

Colossians 1:28+ We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete **IN CHRIST**.

2 Timothy 3:12+ Indeed, all who desire to live godly **IN CHRIST JESUS** will be persecuted.

**BELOW ARE SEVERAL EXPLANATIONS OF LOCATIVE OF SPHERE** - Take a moment to read these examples and you will get a good sense of the meaning and significance of the locative of sphere.

**Wuest** on Php 2:1+ - "**to all the saints in Christ Jesus**" - The phrase "**in Christ Jesus**" was necessary in defining just who these saints were. The Greek word "**saint**" was used in Philippi as a name for individual worshippers in the pagan Greek religions. Paul wished to differentiate the **saints** of God from the "**saints**" in the Greek mystery religions. The word "**in**" is used with the **locative of sphere**. These saints were saints in the sphere of Christ. That is, Christ is the sphere in which the believer has his new life and all his interests and activities. The believer's new existence is circumscribed by Christ. Paul put this in other words in the expression, "For to me to live is Christ." That is, the new life Paul has is Christ (cf Col 3:4+ literally reads "Christ our life" - no verb "is" in the Greek), which issues in a Christ-like life. Here again we have separation, for that which surrounds the believer, namely, Christ in Whom he is ensphered, separates him from all else.

#### **Related Resource:**

- in Christ see also in Christ & in Christ Jesus & in Christ
- **Uses of IN CHRIST** (and "Christ Jesus") - Not all are locative of sphere but most are - Acts 24:24; Rom. 3:24; Rom. 6:11; Rom. 6:23; Rom. 8:1; Rom. 8:2; Rom. 8:39; Rom. 9:1; Rom. 12:5; Rom. 15:17; Rom. 16:3; Rom. 16:7; Rom. 16:9; Rom. 16:10; 1 Co. 1:2; 1 Co. 1:4; 1 Co. 1:30; 1 Co. 3:1; 1 Co. 4:10; 1 Co. 4:15; 1 Co. 4:17; 1 Co. 15:18; 1 Co. 15:19; 1 Co. 15:22; 1 Co. 15:31; 1 Co. 16:24; 2 Co. 1:21; 2 Co. 2:14; 2 Co. 2:17; 2 Co. 3:14; 2 Co. 5:17; 2 Co. 5:19; 2 Co. 12:2; 2 Co. 12:19; Gal. 1:22; Gal. 2:4; Gal. 2:16; Gal. 2:17; Gal. 3:14; Gal. 3:26; Gal. 3:28; Gal. 5:6; Eph. 1:1; Eph. 1:3; Eph. 1:10; Eph. 1:12; Eph. 1:20; Eph. 2:6; Eph. 2:7; Eph. 2:10; Eph. 2:13; Eph. 3:6; Eph. 3:11; Eph. 3:21; Eph. 4:32; Phil. 1:1; Phil. 1:26; Phil. 2:1; Phil. 2:5; Phil. 3:3; Phil. 3:9; Phil. 3:14; Phil. 4:7; Phil. 4:19; Phil. 4:21; Col. 1:2; Col. 1:4; Col. 1:28; Col. 2:5; 1 Thess. 2:14; 1 Thess. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:18; 1 Tim. 1:14; 1 Tim. 3:13; 2 Tim. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:9; 2 Tim. 1:13; 2 Tim. 2:1; 2 Tim. 2:10; 2 Tim. 3:12; 2 Tim. 3:15; Phlm. 1:8; Phlm. 1:20; Phlm. 1:23; 1 Pet. 3:16; 1 Pet. 5:10; 1 Pet. 5:14

**Wuest** (commenting on Ro 12:7+ "if service, **i**n his serving; or he who teaches, **i**n his teaching;") has this informative note (specifically commenting on the preposition "**en**" = "**in**" in Ro 12:7+ - "*en te diakonia...en te didaskalia*" = "**i**n his serving...**i**n his teaching"): The word "**ministry**" is in the **locative of sphere**. The exhortation is that the one who renders service should render service **in the realm or sphere in which God placed him and for which He gave him that gift** Moule says of this word, "Almost any work other than that of inspired utterance or miracle-working may be included in it here." Godet says; "An activity of the practical nature exerted in action, not in word." As to teaching, it is aimed at the understanding, with reference to exhortation, at the heart and will (Vincent). Both words are in the **locative of sphere**, the idea being that the one who is given a teaching gift **should remain within the exercise of that gift**, and the one who has been given the gift of exhortation, **within the exercise of that gift**. It is a wise man who **stays within the sphere of service** for which God the Holy Spirit has fitted him, and does not invade some other field of service for which he is not fitted. (Wuest's Word Studies) (Bolding added)

**Wuest** in another note on Jude 1:20+ - The words, "**praying in the Holy Ghost**" show how the saints are to build themselves up on their most holy faith. That is, prayer is the vital factor in the Christian life which activates all the other departments of the Christian experience. "Ghost" is the translation of pneuma (πνεῦμα), the word in other places rendered "Spirit." "Ghost" is obsolete English as used here for the word "spirit." "In the Holy Ghost" is **locative of sphere**. That is, all true prayer is exercised **in the sphere of the Holy Spirit, motivated and empowered by Him. That means that if the saint expects to really pray, he must be Spirit-filled or Spirit-controlled. The fullness of the Holy Spirit is the prerequisite to effectual praying.** (READ THAT AGAIN BELOVED!) The Spirit, when yielded to, leads us in our petitions and generates within us the faith necessary to acceptable and answered prayer. The expression "praying in the Holy Ghost" is also instrumental of means. We pray by means of the Holy Spirit, in dependence upon Him.

**Wuest** on Ephesians 1:6+ - "to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved." The words "**in the Beloved**" are **locative of sphere**. That is, God the Father freely bestowed on us the grace which saved us, and did so in the sphere of the Lord Jesus, His Person and His work on the Cross.

**Wuest** on Eph 2:1-2+ - "trespasses and sins, **IN** which you formerly walked" - We have here the **locative of sphere**. The unsaved order their behavior, regulate their lives **within the sphere of trespasses and sins**. All their thoughts, words, and deeds are ensphered by sin. Not one of their acts ever gets outside this circle of sin. That is what is meant by total depravity. The word "walked" is in the aorist tense, the classification, constative, a construction which looks at a thing or an action as a complete unit, looks at it in a panoramic view. The whole life of the unsaved person is nothing but sin.

**Bob Utley** on 1 Th 2:14+ - **"in Christ Jesus"** This phrase takes the LOCATIVE OF SPHERE CASE, which means "in" or "surrounded by"—an atmosphere, like a fish in water. A very common Pauline expression, it speaks of our union with Jesus. We live and move and have our being in Him. For an example of Paul's use of this form notice Eph. 1:3–14: (1) "in Christ" Eph 1:3, 10, 12; (2) "in Him" Eph 1:4, 7, 9, 10, 13 (twice); (3) "in the Beloved" Eph 1:6+...."In Christ" (a LOCATIVE of sphere) is Paul's most common way of identifying believers. For life, true life, abundant life, believers must remain in vital union with Christ by faith (cf. Jn 15). (ED: The idea of **"remain"** speaks of our practice, for we are positionally in Christ forever. Sadly our practice often does not match our position!)

**Bob Utley** on Ro 8:1+ "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are **IN CHRIST JESUS.**" - This characteristic phrase (i.e. a **LOCATIVE of SPHERE**) of Paul's is equivalent to the modern expression "personal relationship." Paul knew, loved, served and rejoiced in Jesus. The gospel is both a message to be believed, and a Person to be welcomed. The power to live issued from his relationship with the Risen Christ, whom he met on the Damascus Road. His experience with Jesus preceded his theology of Jesus. His experience issued not in a cloistered mysticism but in aggressive missionary service. To know Him is to serve Him. Mature Christianity is a message, a Person, and a lifestyle!

**Robert Peterson** on Revelation 1:9+ - I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are **IN JESUS**, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus." -- Here at the beginning of Revelation John refers to himself as one who is actively involved (he is a "partner") with all other Christians in both struggles and victories by virtue of his union with Christ. I take **"IN JESUS"** as a **locative of sphere** indicating Christ's realm, His domain. This realm involves cross and crown, which Christ Himself taught and showed, as Beasley-Murray reminds us: "Tribulation and kingdom belong to the messianic pattern (Luke 24:26). To be **IN JESUS**, therefore, is to experience the reality of both, and it enables that patient endurance of tribulation which ensures participation in the kingdom." .... (ANOTHER NOTE ON LOCATIVE OF SPHERE) "Paul's use of "in Christ" in 1 Cor 15:22 is to be read over against his use of "in Adam" in the same verse. As such, "in Christ" reflects the basic locative sense of the expression, used figuratively to denote realm. All those in Adam's domain die; all those in Christ's domain will be made alive at his return. (ED: AND ARE ALIVE EVEN NOW!!!)(Salvation Applied by the Spirit - Union with Christ).

**Bob Utley** on 1 Cor 1:2+ "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified **IN CHRIST JESUS**, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours: " - **IN CHRIST JESUS** -- This grammatical form is designated as a **LOCATIVE OF SPHERE**. Believers are sanctified by the Father (the source, cf. John 17:7; 1 Th. 5:23) through Jesus (the grounds, cf. 1 Cor 1:2; Eph. 5:26). Both aspects come together in Heb. 2:11. It is normally the Holy Spirit to Whom this is attributed (the agency, cf. Ro 15:16; 2 Th 2:13). This is Paul's favorite way to designate believers. A good example of this is Eph 1:3, 4, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13. **It means vital, personal union with Jesus** (cf. Acts 17:28).

**Bob Utley** - Phil 1:1+ - **"in Christ Jesus"** This is a **LOCATIVE of sphere**. This is Paul's favorite description for believers. It speaks of the necessary atmosphere or environment in which Christians live (cf. Acts 17:28+). Theologically it is parallel to John's "abide in Him" (cf. John 15). This construction is often associated with an intimate fellowship with Christ. It refers to the believer's theological position, and believer's subjective experience (cf. Ro. 3:24; 4:17; 8:39; 15:17; 1 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 2:17; Eph. 1:4, 7; Phil. 1:13; 2:1, 5; 4:7, 13).

**Rod Mattoon** - The expression in 1 Th 1:1+, "The church of the Thessalonians **IN** God," has in it the same idea, for the Greek case is **locative of sphere** which means it is in the sphere of God, circumscribed by God, surrounded by Him. We are under God's care and He will bring us home to Glory when it is our time. Until then we are under His care. Paul rested in this truth.

Jude 1:21+ we read **"keep** ([aorist imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) yourselves **IN** the love of God" where **IN** is **locative of sphere**, indicating as Wuest translates it **"within the sphere of God's love."** Let love be the "atmosphere" you breathe and in which you obey Jude's command to keep yourselves. The expression in 1 Thessalonians 1:1+, "The church of the Thessalonians **IN** God," has in it the same idea, for the Greek case is **locative of sphere**. That is, it is in the sphere of God, circumscribed by God, surrounded by Him.

**Wuest** on Galatians 5:16+ (click here for Wuest full article "The Christian and Trench Warfare") - The Christian is exhorted to **walk** ([present imperative](#) see [our need to depend on the Holy Spirit to obey](#)) **in the Spirit**. The word **"walk"** is used in an early Greek manuscript in the sentence, "I am going about in a disgraceful state." The writer of this sentence was commenting upon the kind of life he was living, how he was conducting himself. The form in the Greek shows that it is a command to be constantly obeyed ([present imperative](#)). "Be constantly conducting yourselves in the Spirit." The word "Spirit," referring here to the Holy Spirit, is in the **locative of sphere**, and could be charted by a dot within a circle. The dot is ensphered within the circle. (ED: AND BELOVED, YOU AND I ARE REPRESENTED BY THAT "DOT"! ) The exhortation therefore is, **"Be constantly conducting yourselves in the sphere of the Spirit."** That is, determine every thought, word, and deed by the leading of the Spirit through the Word, and think every thought, speak every word, and do every deed, in an attitude of entire dependence upon the Holy Spirit's empowering energy,

"Bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5+).

**Wuest** on 1 Jn 1:6+ "and yet walk **IN** the darkness ([skotos](#))" - The case of the noun (darkness) is **locative of sphere**. He walks, that is, orders his behavior, conducts himself ([peripateo](#) - present tense) in the sphere of the darkness ([skotos](#)) of sin. His actions and words are ensphered by sin. Nothing of God's righteousness or goodness ever enters that circle of sin which surrounds this person. The individual making this claim of fellowship with God while at the same time ordering his behavior within the sphere of sin, is an unsaved person. John says that in making that claim, he is lying, and he is not doing the truth.

**MacArthur** has a negative example of **locative of sphere** in Col 2:13+ " When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions." - Like all of sinful mankind, the Colossians were dead in their transgressions before their salvation (cf. Eph. 2:1). The Greek construction is a **locative of sphere**. Unbelievers exist **in the sphere or realm of spiritual death**. To be spiritually dead means to be devoid of any sense, unable to respond to spiritual stimuli, just as to be physically dead means to be unable to respond to physical stimuli. It is to be so locked in sin's grasp that one is unable to respond to God. The Bible and spiritual truth make no sense to one in such a state. Those who are spiritually dead are dominated by the [world](#), the [flesh](#) and the [devil](#) and possess no spiritual, eternal life. (MNTC-Colossians)

**MacArthur** on Ephesians 2:1+ - And you were dead **IN** your trespasses and sins - And what is the activity of the death-walker? Look at it, verse 1; "Dead in trespasses and sins." Functioning **IN** the area of sin, functioning **IN** the area of trespass. Now I want you to notice something, we are not dead because of sin we are dead because we were born sinful. We are not dead because we commit sin, we don't do a sin then die, we're born dead that's why we sin. I always think of it this way, I am not a liar, I am not called a liar because I lie, I lie in the first place because in my heart ... what?... I'm a liar. A man does not kill and thus he is a murderer, he kills because he is a murderer. The Bible says that it is what comes out of a man that defiles the man. And we are dead and that deadness functions in sinfulness. The in here, in the Greek, is what is called a **locative of sphere**. It is talking about the sphere in which we live. It is not a **BECAUSE OF**... it is an **IN**... it is a location, a position. And, by the way, the opposite of being **IN CHRIST** is being **IN TRESPASSES AND SINS!** ([Coming Alive in Christ](#)).

Additional Note by MacArthur from "A Simple Christianity" - Before we were saved, we were like every other person who is separate from God—"dead in ... trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1+). The Greek construction here is a locative of sphere, indicating the sphere, or realm, in which something or someone exists. We were dead not because we had committed sin but because we were in sin. Committing sinful acts does not make us sinners; we commit sinful acts because we are sinners.

**Wuest** on Romans 2:28-29+ "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward **IN** the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God."- Wuest paraphrases it (WHICH IS MORE LITERAL FOR THE GREEK "IN" IS USED 5 TIMES WHICH IS NOT APPARENT IN THE NAS TRANSLATION). "For, not he who is so **IN** outward fashion is a Jew, nor even that which is **IN** an outward fashion **IN** flesh is circumcision. But he who is so **IN** the sphere of the inner man is a Jew, and circumcision is of the heart **IN** the sphere of the spirit, not **IN** the sphere of the letter, concerning whom the praise is not from man but from God." Wuest comments - "'Outwardly" is [phanerós](#), "apparent, manifest, evident, known." It refers to that which one can observe on the outside. "Inwardly" is [kruptos](#), "hidden, secret, concealed." It speaks of the inner part of a man, his soul-life. **IN** spirit" and "IN letter" are **locative of sphere**. It is that behavior of an individual which is **in the sphere of** man's spirit, his religious, God-conscious inner life, rather than in the realm of an outward meticulous observance of law, concerning which the apostle is speaking."