

Paul's Letter to the Colossians

The Power of Christ

In times when we feel overwhelmed by political and economic “forces” we easily lose our sense of gratitude for what God has done and our trust in what God continues to do. Paul's letter to the Colossians refocuses our attention where it should have been all along – on Jesus – the “*firstborn over all creation*”.

Key Themes

Gratitude

Supremacy of Christ

Life in Christ's image

Series Schedule

Date	Passage	Theme	Notes	Worship
10 July	Col 1:1-14	Gratitude	Paul in prison, Paul most thankful for their love (1:8)	Creative ways of prompting thanksgiving.
17 July	Col 1:15-28	The Supremacy of Jesus Christ	The power of Christ, 15-20 a poem - an early hymn? Power that reconciles, etc	Pick up on 3:16 –pick a hymn or song that resonates with 15-20
24 July	Col 2:6-15 (16-19)	Life in all its fullness	Rooted in Christ, not blown away by false teaching	Images of growth, roots, etc
31 July	Col 3:1-11	A “Dress Code” for Life	The joy of a new way of life, the victory of the cross	Baptismal images in sanctuary and in song-prominence of the cross.

Commentary:

Principalities and Powers in the Ancient World

Ancient pagans, like some animists to this day, thought of the world as peopled with hostile, or potentially hostile, forces. If you were going on a sea voyage, you had better propitiate the sea-god first. If you were fighting a war, you needed Mars on your side. If you were in love, you had better make sure you'd got the help of Aphrodite.¹

The earthly battlefield and the heavenly battlefield were not separated by a great gulf; the heavenly was the hidden dimension of the earthly, the extra feature of ordinary reality that explained what was 'really' going on. The principalities and powers were not far away. They were the inner dimension of exterior events.²

"Forces" in the Modern World

Do we smile at this stuff? If we do, we are smiling at our own face in a mirror. Who runs *our* world? The politicians? Forget it. They profess themselves helpless; they are the victims of 'forces' beyond their control. They try to take the credit when things go well, but when things go badly the truth comes out. It's all a matter of economic forces. *Forces*? I see no forces. But they must be pretty powerful. They've kept us in recession these last three or four years. They create floods of refugees, and the most powerful people in the world can't sort them out. They have thrown millions of people out of work. They have pushed thousands of businesses into bankruptcy. Walk through our big cities today, and in one shop doorway after another you'll see young homeless people, begging. Who put them there? Ask any politician; ask any economist: it was economic forces, they'll say. It was the political climate. It was the world economic situation.³

Force; power; climate; entities bigger than the sum total of the human beings involved. A set of situations that nobody wants but nobody can do anything about. The only significant difference between us and our pagan ancestors appears to be that they recognized the situation and gave the forces vivid names, while we hide them behind the grey obscurity of vague words⁴

God's Plan

The powers were created good, but got too big for their boots because we humans allowed them to. On the cross, Christ has defeated these rebel powers, and stripped them of their ultimate power. Now he seeks to reconcile them, to create a new world, ordered by the **power of the love of God**. That is the context in which the Colossians have now been set free—**free from the powers, free to follow Jesus**.⁵

¹ Wright, N. T. (1994). *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship* (pp. 11–12). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

² Wright, N. T. (1994). *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship* (p. 12). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

³ Wright, N. T. (1994). *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship* (p. 12). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

⁴ Wright, N. T. (1994). *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship* (p. 13). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

⁵ Wright, N. T. (1994). *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship* (p. 16). London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.