

Colossians: The Empire or Kingdom of God?

What does it look like to be a Christian in our world? Paul's letter to the Colossians addresses people ensconced in the ethics of the Roman Empire. Jesus challenged Christians to follow a new set of values. Will we follow the "Empire" which surrounds us or will we embody the counter-cultural values of the reign of God?

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**BIBLE
SOCIETY**

Live light

Scripture taken from The Holy Bible: (NRSV)

Day	Readings	Reference	Reflection/Question	Prayer
1	For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him as you bear fruit in every good work, and as you grow in the knowledge of God.	Colossians 1:9-10	<p>The church at Colosse was entrenched in the culture of the Roman Empire. It was a brutal regime that demanded loyalty to its values and style of operation. Yet these Christians had given their complete loyalty and worship to Jesus Christ, risen Lord of the universe. Paul therefore prays that these Christians would have the discernment and wisdom to live lives "worthy of the Lord".</p> <p>What does it look like to live lives "worthy of the Lord" in today's "empire" or culture, which tempts us to worship anything other than God?</p>	Father, Son and Holy Spirit, help me to live a life worthy of your calling in a world that tempts me to engage in false narratives that bring me no life. Instead, I choose to live your story. Amen.
2	"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible whether thrones or dominion or rulers or powers- all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything"	Colossians 1:15-18	<p>This is a church living under the regime of the Roman Empire: an empire with its own leader who demanded to be seen as a god, an empire which promised you life, provision and safety, so long as you played by its rules. And we know these rules were unjust, prejudiced, sometimes violent and designed to force people into submission and subservience. It would have been difficult for the Colossian Christians to remember that the Roman Empire was not the ultimate reality. It is Jesus who asked for their ultimate allegiance, and ours too.</p> <p>Where do you place your ultimate hope for meaning and life? What gives you the most joy and satisfaction so that even if your whole world is crumbling, you can still stand?</p>	Father Son and Holy Spirit, you and only you are my reason for living. Without you Lord, life drains from my body. Help me to keep you as my ultimate thing and topple all the idols that have raised themselves over you. Amen.

Colossians: The Empire or Kingdom of God? (continued)

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3	“I am saying this so that no one may deceive you with plausible arguments”	Colossians 2:4	<p>Just as the Roman Empire sought to shape the lives of its citizens through the culture it established, our culture also seeks to shape our imagination, thoughts and beliefs. We are drawn to the power of possessions, the pursuit of individual passions, and the idolisation of the self. Each of these ideas vies for our loyalty and attention. However they run contrary to the story of the reign of God.</p> <p>Which of these ideas are you tempted to believe in?</p>	<p>Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I need discernment to work out the false stories in my society that I have succumbed to. Make them clear to me and then help me to live your story. Amen.</p>
4	“See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe and not according to Christ.”	Colossians 2:8	<p>In one sense, we are all captives to our own culture. Cultural analysis is difficult because it is the study of the very air we breathe. So we need to practice discernment over whether we have become captive to the human based philosophies that infiltrate the air we breathe and shape us. Moreover, we need to watch for when those philosophies have gripped us to the point that we are engaging with elemental spirits, and idols are forged in our lives.</p> <p>Can you identify anything that you love more than Jesus in your life?</p>	<p>Father, Son and Holy Spirit, there are many philosophies that want me to submit to them. Help me to identify any idols in my life and to only submit to you. Amen.</p>

Colossians: The Empire or Kingdom of God? (continued)

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5	<p>“Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons or Sabbaths. These are only a shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. Do not let anyone disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, dwelling on visions, puffed up without cause by a human way of thinking, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body nourished and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows with a growth that is from God.”</p>	Colossians 2:16-19	<p>Everyone has habits that they practice daily that shape them. The author of Colossians points to some religious habits of the inhabitants in the Roman Empire and questions whether those habits truly nourish a human being. Observing rules and regulations to try and become ‘religious’ or ‘spiritual’ does not produce real growth. Equally, the habits we learn from our secular culture can also stifle true human flourishing. The only source of true flourishing and nourishment is Jesus. As we stay connected to him we live out the story of the reign of God and bless our communities.</p> <p>What are your daily habits that you have learnt from our secular culture? What are your daily habits that shape you into a kingdom person?</p>	<p>Father, Son and Holy Spirit, help me to form daily habits that will shape me into a disciple of Jesus Christ for your glory. Amen.</p>
6	<p>“If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations, ‘Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch?’ All these regulations refer to things that perish with use; they are simply human commands and teachings. These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-imposed piety, humility and severe treatment of the body, but they are of no value in checking self-indulgence.”</p>	Colossians 2:20-23	<p>Sometimes our obsession with pleasure, possessions, passion and the self can function like religion in our lives. But it is empty religion because it is disconnected from Christ. As we practice the habits of consumerism or individualism or cynicism or hyper productivity which leads to exhaustion we get shaped into our world’s image and instead of a life-giving religion, we find ourselves empty. The story that this empire is trying to tell us is false.</p> <p>How can you become aware of those false stories and discern if your imagination has been captured?</p>	<p>Father, Son and Holy Spirit, again I ask God that you would by your Spirit show me any idols in my life and help me to lay them at your feet. Bring me from slavery to idols to freedom in you. Amen.</p>

Colossians: The Empire or Kingdom of God? (continued)

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7	And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him—provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel.	Colossians 1:21-23	<p>For Christians, our identity is in Christ. He is Lord of the universe but also Lord of each one of our hearts. This is very personal. Now we are holy, free from accusation, we have moved from darkness to light, death to life and slavery to freedom. It is Christ in us who is our life, and it is now Christ in us who shapes our identity. His presence is at work in us to make us fit for the reign of God.</p> <p>Consider that because you know God, he sees you as holy, blameless and beloved in him. How do you want to live today, in light of that?</p>	Father, Son and Holy Spirit, give me a spirit of wisdom and revelation to see how deep, wide and all encompassing is your love for me. Amen.
8	“For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was please to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven by making peace through the blood of his cross.”	Colossians 1:19-20	<p>Jesus is Lord of the universe. He is not only Lord of our hearts, he is Lord of everything. This passage critiques a religion that is only private and personal. It turns on its head a view which reduces Christianity to the mantra “I carry my own personal Jesus with me wherever I go”. No, Jesus is over all things in the universe. He has made all things and all things will be reconciled and restored through him.</p> <p>Do you believe that Jesus is both Lord of your own life, and Lord of the universe? How can it change how you live today?</p>	Father, Son and Holy Spirit, give me a glimpse today of your Lordship over the universe. Forgive me when I have made you to conform to my personal tastes, and instead, show me your full glory today. Amen.

Colossians: The Empire or Kingdom of God? (continued)

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9	For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.	Colossians 2:9-12	<p>We are no longer sinners; instead we are saints, holy daughters and sons of God in a large royal family. But don't for a moment get this mixed up with this world's view of royalty. No, that would be empire thinking which reflects privilege, power and domination. Our royalty consists in finding our identity in him, suffering with him, sacrificing for him, loving our enemies, courageously fighting for what is just and practicing mercy in a world that is merciless. We are like caterpillars that have turned into butterflies, we have left our former identity behind, and we live in a new reality in Christ.</p> <p>How do you feel about being part of God's royal family? What kind of royal will you be?</p>	Father, Son and Holy Spirit, thank you for making me part of your royal family. Teach me to serve and love like King Jesus. Amen.
10	So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.	Colossians 3:1-2	<p>These well-known verses are not saying to us that we should set our minds on heavenly things by escaping this world. Rather, the verses encourage us that we must not think in an earthly way anymore. We need to let go of those false stories that the world is trying to sell us. Let's start thinking in the way, the values and the practices of the story of God and engage in the world as people transformed by the grace of God.</p> <p>How can you practice living in the spiritual realms while still having your body in the earthly realms?</p>	Father, Son and Holy Spirit, let the truth that I am seated in the heavenly realms with Christ not only be a source of comfort and wonder for me today, but let it impact my service in my context for your mission. Amen.

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11	For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.	Colossians 3:3-4	<p>At the return of Jesus there will be perfect restoration of all things. But today, our real identity is hidden, in a way, and we wrestle with sin and doubt and difficulty. But the Spirit helps us in our weaknesses so that we might be strong in Christ. Our full glory is yet to be revealed, but Christ the hope of glory keeps us moving forward. Even though we stumble we stand up again because we are his daughters and sons, workers in his kingdom: waiting, watching, hoping for and participating in the renewal of all things.</p> <p>Think about how you have already failed today. How do these verses encourage you in the midst of those failures, weaknesses and sins?</p>	<p>Father, Son and Holy Spirit, help me to realise that I am being perfected in you and while that happens I will stumble, fall and fail frequently. Let your grace Lord, be sufficient for me today. Amen.</p>
12	Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry).	Colossians 3:5	<p>It is easy to read the command to put to death what is earthly as an excuse to retreat into our Christian huddles away from this messy world. But we are actually being called to put away anything that replaces the proper worship of God with other things. So we reorient our lives away from the worship of things to the worship of God as we live and serve in our messy world on the mission of God.</p> <p>Have you placed other things in the spot that solely belongs to God?</p>	<p>Father, Son and Holy Spirit, please help me to follow in your footsteps by living the love of Jesus in my neighbourhood. Amen.</p>
13	As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.	Colossians 3:12-14	<p>Here flows a very practical list of behaviours that are acceptable and are not acceptable for those who are in Christ. Those who are in Christ have stripped off their old self and they have put on a new self. That transformation has already happened just like a butterfly. But we must continue to develop habits and practices that will help us strip away "empire" thinking and form us into people who are fit for the reign of God.</p> <p>What sort of disciplines and habits have you put into place in your life to "strip away the old" nature and "put on the new"?</p>	<p>Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I want to walk in my new nature every day. Help me to strip away the false narratives of this world that try to shape me, and help me to engage in the story of the kingdom of God with its life giving values. Amen.</p>

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14	And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.	Colossians 3:17	<p>This verse reminds us that as Christians we refuse to be “Sunday Christians”. The gospel calls us to a lifestyle of worshipping God every moment of every day. As we do everything in the name of Jesus, we live in the story of the kingdom with its life giving values and we counter our world, which tempts us to give to it our allegiance.</p> <p>Are you guilty of being a Sunday Christian? Do you want to change?</p>	Father, Son and Holy Spirit, my allegiance is to you not the things of this world. Help me to be your child in the world, living for your mission. Amen.