

“The Great Life”
Colossians 2:6-15
Series: Book of Colossians [#5]
Pastor Lyle L. Wahl
February 15, 2009

Theme: **God Offers Every Believer A Great Life.**

Introduction

One company begins its pitch by saying, “We fill our lives with so much noise, and we seldom stop to hear the music. Stop. Listen. Choose. *Live the Great Life.*” This company offers training for fulfillment in any area of your life, for greater success and satisfaction in your career, and family relationships. It says it can help you challenge the fixed beliefs and barriers that keep you from getting the results you want in your life, and help you awaken to the brilliance within. You can create life-long success and joy.

“*The Great Life.*” There are countless definitions. The key question is not how we or others define it, but how God defines it. There are many Christians who believe that a full, rich, rewarding life is beyond them; that is only for others. Then there are hucksters in Christian dress who take advantage of many searching Christians by offering their bogus *secrets* to wealth and health, to “*The Great Life.*”

We have come to the core or central theme of Paul’s letter to the Colossians today beginning at chapter 2 verse 16. He tells us we are complete in Christ. In these first verses in this section he tells us that God offers every believer a great life, that is, a full, rich, rewarding life, experiencing God’s peace, love, joy and truth in the tough as well as good times. Paul begins with our part in this, with...

The Challenge Of Commitment.

Let’s start with the positive side: Paul, God challenges us to live by faith. The opening verse of the section, verse 6, “Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.” “As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord.”

How did you receive Jesus Christ? How did you become a child of God, one who belongs to the body of Christ? The Bible tells us,

- Acts 8:31, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved...”
- It is summarized in Ephesians 2, beginning at verse 8, “by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

So it was for you and is every believer. After you heard the gospel and accepted it as true, you made the decision to trust Jesus and what He has done for you. When you placed your confidence, your faith in Him, you received Him; you took Him to yourself. You and I, everyone who truly is a child of God has received Christ Jesus the Lord through *faith*.

Verse 6 concludes the phrase, “so walk in Him.” Here is the positive challenge of commitment: just as we received Jesus Christ as our Savior by faith, so we are to keep on waking, to keep on living by faith in Him. Faith is indispensable to walking or living “worthy of the Lord,” which Paul mentioned back in 1:10. Habakkuk 2:4 says, “the righteous will live by his faith.” Paul cites this in Romans 1:17, “For in it [i.e., the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘But the righteous man shall live by faith.’”

People were telling the Colossian believers that they needed to follow the Old Testament Law, add certain works, or have a special experience and/or secret knowledge in order to have a *full life*, or to be saved at all. When Paul wrote to the Galatian churches, he addressed the threat they faced with strong words at the opening of chapter 3,

“You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” (1-3)

God’s challenge, His plan and provision for us and every believer is a life of faith. Keep on trusting God, guided by and relying on His truth in the Bible. Yes, it can be challenging because, as Hebrews 11 tells us, “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (verse 1). As God instructs, prompts and convicts you with His truth, always respond by trusting Him.

Moving from the positive to the negative, Paul presents the challenge: “Don’t be taken captive.” Drop down to verse 8.

“See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.”

The 1947 Boy Scouts Scoutmaster’s Handbook gives the rules for what it called one of the most popular outdoor games for Scouts. The idea for the game came from ancient warfare. The game: *Capture The Flag*. Set up two teams. The goal is to capture the other team’s flag located at its base and take it to your own base. There have been countless variations and spinoffs of this game. For example, there are multi-team, multi-site computer hacking contests where each team’s target is a multi-host network. They have to hack their way through a number of servers in order to *capture the flag*.

The warning Paul issues here is not about a game. This is *real life* and is very serious. When we receive Christ we become His. Nothing, no one can remove or separate us from our relationship with Him. We are also thrust into a lifelong spiritual battle. We now want to please God and become more and more like Christ, but Satan’s forces and our natural self oppose that, “waging war...” to make us “a prisoner of the law of sin,” as Paul wrote in Romans 7 (verse 23).

One tactic we face is false teaching—teaching that often has a ring of truth, but is not actually “according to Christ” (8). Every generation faces this attack of *new, up-to-date, interesting* ideas, although most are new variations on old ideas.

Paul mentions two types here: philosophy and empty deception. Two types that are characterized by being “according to the tradition of men.” That is, man-made rather than God-revealed, and man-focused rather than God-focused; and, being “according to the elementary principles of the world.”

This last phrase is difficult to understand. While there are other interpretations, I think the NASB, NIV, NKJV wording captures the sense of it. The term “elementary principles” was often used to refer to basic, essential principles, such as the basic principles of logic or physics, etc. So, in this view, the sense is that the observance of special days, avoiding certain foods and circumcision were *elementary principles* that have now been fulfilled in and set aside by Christ. However we take it, the key point is the last phrase of verse 1, “rather than according to Christ”—anything, everything that is not according to Christ.

So don’t be deceived! Don’t be taken captive! Just as it was a serious matter then, so it is today. In Paul’s final face to face meeting with the elders from Ephesus he gave them a charge which included one of the most important responsibilities of church leaders to their church. Acts 20, beginning at verse 28,

“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”
(28-32)

Our leaders here at Knox take this very seriously. We are positive. We want to build bridges. We also know there are times when we must draw a line. While some people vacillate and give excuses, we do not have ties with people or organizations who are or who give a platform to deceptive false teachers, those who may have an acceptable formal doctrinal statement but who in practice preach and teach heresy. We examine claims of *new ideas* to make sure they are grounded in God’s revealed truth in Scripture, to make sure they are “according to Christ.”

So this is Paul’s *Challenge of Commitment* to us if we want to experience *The Great Life* Christ offers. Now let’s move to God’s provision for this *Great Life*, ...

The Provision Of Grace.

It is God's gift. Just as salvation is God's gift of grace, so stability, growth and maturity are gifts of His grace. Let's move on to verse 7,

“having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.”

God has firmly, securely placed you in Christ. He writes, “having been” or, “since you have been firmly rooted in Him.” This “firm rooting” is God's work, not ours. It is something that has been accomplished, that stands and will continue to stand. Our position with God is not shallow, temporary or weak, but deep, firm and permanent. In our first week in Colossians I mentioned the new neighbors we had in Oregon who immediately began changing things inside and out. The husband said his wife moved the plants so often, they didn't have roots anymore, but moccasins. Not so with are position with Christ. God in His grace roots us deeply, securely in Christ.

But there is more. God also is building us up in Christ. Paul loved to mix metaphors to paint rich pictures. Here he moves from deep, firm roots going down to a building going up. God, through the Holy Spirit, continues to build you up day by day to make you more like Christ. God is strengthening and establishing you in your faith. He does that through *instruction*, as Paul states here. For us it is instruction through the truth of the Bible. He does that in all of life—in your blessings and celebrations, and also in all your disasters and sorrows.

Because of this grace we can grow and mature, we can experience “*The Great Life.*” Without this grace, we never could experience it. This life grows out of our relationship with God. So now we need to turn to our response to God and His grace.

There are many ways in which we can and should respond to God's grace. Paul mentions just one here. It might be a bit surprising. At the end of verse 7 he writes that they, and we, should be “overflowing with gratitude.” We are to “walk in Christ” on the basis of having been firmly rooted, of being established in our faith, *and* by overflowing with gratitude.

This word *overflowing* can also mean to be *outstanding* in, to *excel* in. Listen to a few uses of this term in the New Testament:

- 1 Corinthians 15:58. “...be steadfast, immovable, always *abounding* in the work of the Lord...”
- 1 Thessalonians 4:1. “...as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God ... that you *excel* still more.” A few verses later he acknowledges that they practice love to other believers, but also urges them “*excel* even more” (10).

This phrase can be seen to have the force of a command, e.g., “So—in light of God's great grace—overflow with, excel in thankfulness!”

Ask yourself a question: “Do I overflow with, do I excel in thankfulness?” “As I review the last week, how thankful have I been, really?” “Have I been focused on what God has done and is doing for me much at all?” If so, has my heart, as the writer of Hebrews tells us, been “continually offer[ing] up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name”? (13:15)

If I live by faith, if I am careful to not be taken captive by false ideas and practices, if I am spending time in God’s Word and living the truth I learn, and if I am truly thankful, can I be certain, *how* can I be certain that I actually will experience “*The Great Life*”, a complete, full life? God guarantees it.

The Guarantee Of Christ.

Christ can and does guarantee this life, in fact, He Himself is the guarantee. *He is all*, all the fullness of God is in Him.

- Verse 9. “... in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.”
- Go to the middle of verse 10. “... He is the head over all rule and authority.”

This may sound familiar. Look back to chapter 1.

- Verse 15. “He is the image of the invisible God ...”
- Verse 19. “... it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him.”

Jesus Christ, eternal God the Son, is the exact image of the invisible God. Because He is eternal, all powerful God, He Himself is the guarantee of all that He says, all that He promises. So, when Jesus said in John 10:10, “... I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly,” He Himself is the guarantee of the promise.

Paul was telling the believers at Colossae that those who said you could not be guaranteed a full, *great life* with God without their added practices, knowledge or experiences were wrong. He was telling them that those who taught spiritual is good and physical is evil and so Jesus was just a man whom the Spirit of God came upon for His ministry were wrong.

We too need to remember and rejoice in the fact that Jesus is all, that all the fullness of God is in Him. Just as He is the guarantee of our salvation, He is the guarantee of a full life. Rest in, rejoice in the fact that Christ is all, in Him is all the fullness of God. He is the guarantee of all that He has said.

Paul goes on to tell us that Christ is all we need. He reminds us that Christ has given us life and identity. Drop down to verse 11.

“...in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who

raised Him from the dead.” (11-12)

Physical circumcision was a required sign of being part of the nation, the people of Israel. It did not remove the problem and punishment for sinfulness and sin. Paul comments on this in Romans 2, where he wrote,

“For indeed circumcision is of value if you practice the Law; but if you are a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision” (25).

Again, “... he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh” (28).

This picture of circumcision in verse 11 speaks of the domination, condemnation and death of our sinfulness being removed as we are forgiven, made acceptable and given new life in Christ as one of His own. Romans 6:6 tells us “... our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin.” So, we read in 1 Corinthians 5:17, “... if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”

The picture of spiritual baptism here also makes the point, as we also see in 1 Corinthians 12:13.

“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”

With the same almighty power that raised Christ from the dead, God has given every believer new life and identity.

Next Paul reminds us that Christ has given us the guarantee of victory. Victory is guaranteed because He has forgiven our sins. Verse 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.*”

This is all Christ’s gracious doing.

Then, victory is guaranteed because He has cancelled the record of our sins. Go on to verse 14.

“having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.”

Jesus’ death and resurrection were the full payment for our sin. The record is not only marked “paid in full,” but it is actually “wiped out.” There is no trace, no record of any of our sins!

I've shared the story before about one young boy at a shopping mall with his mother. It wasn't one of his better days. He behaved badly. He wanted this, that, everything; he ran off ahead and all over the place. As they were driving home, he knew his mom was not happy with him. He said, "When we ask God to forgive us when we've been bad, He does, doesn't He?" "Yes." his mother said. "And when He forgives, He buries our sins in the deepest sea, doesn't He?" "Yes, that's what the Bible says," she answered. He was silent for a while. Finally he said, "I've asked God to forgive me, but I bet when we get home, you're going fishing for those sins, aren't you!"

Remember God's word, His promise on this.

- Micah 7:19, "...You [God] will cast *all their sins* into the depths of the sea."
- 1 John. 1:9, "If we confess our sins He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from *all unrighteousness*."
- Psalm 103:12, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."
- Isaiah 43:25, God speaking, "I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, and *I will not remember your sins*."
- Jeremiah 31:34, "...I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin *I will remember no more*."

Also, victory is guaranteed because Christ has triumphed over all. Verse 15. "When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him." Satan's and his forces are still very active, still very powerful, can still be very effective against us in our spiritual conflict. *But*, Christ in His triumph sealed their defeat and our position with God. Our destiny is guaranteed. Our victory day by day is guaranteed as we rely on Him.

Finally, victory is guaranteed because, as Paul writes in verse 10, "...in Him you have been made complete." Here again is the central theme of this letter: "*You are complete in Christ!*" The Colossians did not need, we do not need man-made rules, measurements, knowledge or experiences. "*Christ is all you need*."

One the one hand it sounds so basic, it almost goes without saying. On the other hand, there is a constant stream of false teachers who attract large followings from God's people. Those who distort the faith and put us in charge, saying we can have whatever we want if we follow their teaching ... and support their ministries. Those who hold out supposed new insights, claiming, directly and indirectly, that the church has been wrong for much if not all of its history. And, why is it that the false cults with all their added and twisted beliefs keep on attracting most of their followers from those who say they are Christians?

Conclusion.

“*God offers every believer a truly great life.*” I began with the pitch from one company that claims they can help you live “*The Great Life.*” How about a couple more:

- The headline of the Franklin Covey organization, with its “Seven Habits” books, training, consulting and products, is “We Enable Greatness.” The statement is expanded, “We’d like to help you and everybody else live a great life.”
- Then there is the Real Estate firm that welcomes you to their website with “Welcome ‘To The Great Life Team.’” It goes on to say, “Whatever your vision our goal is to help you live... ‘The Great Life’ in your own unique space... enjoying life to the fullest... your way.”

God give the true definition and gives a truly great life to all of his children who take up to the challenge, live in and respond to His grace and rely on the sufficiency of Christ.

In these next few quiet, personal moments with God, thank Him for all that He has done, that is doing and will do for you. Reject those thoughts of “It’s for others, not me,” and determine to move forward, to keep on pressing on and remember Jesus says to you, “I came that [you] may have life, and have it abundantly.” He is more than able to give you abundant peace, abundant hope, abundant love, abundant joy, and abundant service.

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