



Whether we can clearly articulate it or not, we all have an overarching philosophy of life or some loosely organized ideas about how life works and how we can make it work to our advantage.

We absorb a lot of these thoughts from free-floating ideas in our culture. Many of these ideas contain a core of truth and lend themselves to a measure of success, but they draw us away from faith in Christ and into a subtle confidence in our own ability to figure things out and make life work on our own.

The tragic flaw in this approach to life is that we end up settling for our best, rather than experiencing God's best. The two are not even close! Even more tragic, we usually come to the end of our lives before realizing how empty and bankrupt these ideas really are.

Many of these ideas weave their way into popular Christian books and media. While they speak the right language and contain a measure of truth, they shift our focus from the heart of the gospel to our own "success and happiness." They move us from a "Christ-centered" approach to life to a "me-centered" approach to life.

Paul warns us not to be taken captive by hollow and deceptive philosophy, even hollow and deceptive philosophy that seems to be, on the surface, thoroughly Christian. We are never on more unsteady footing than we are when we build our lives on anything other than what Christ has accomplished for us on the cross.

### AVOIDING EMPTY PHILOSOPHY (v. 8)

1. What do you think it means to be taken captive by a “hollow and deceptive” philosophy?
2. According to Paul, what was the source of the Philosophy that threatened to take the Colossian believers captive?
3. What are some of the unintended consequences of adopting an approach to life that depends on anything other than Christ?

### PURSUING FULLNESS IN CHRIST (v. 9-15)

1. Look at verses 9-10. What do you think Paul means when he says, “You have been given fullness in Christ?”
2. In verses 11 & 12, Paul uses two powerful images to describe the fullness we have received in Christ—circumcision and baptism. He actually links the two together.
  - a. In the Old Covenant, circumcision involved cutting away a small (but not inconsequential) piece of flesh as a sign and seal of the covenant.
    - i. In the circumcision that is performed by Christ on those who have faith in the working of God, what is cut away?
    - ii. What is the significance of what has been cut away?
  - b. Not only do we lose something—that part of us which was cut away; we gain something. What do we gain when we are “raised with him?”
  - c. Most of us put a lot of confidence in our own ability to make life work, where does this passage encourage us to place our trust?
  - d. How would you describe “the working of God” in the life of a believer?

3. In verses 13-15, Paul describes several things that happened on the cross.
  - a. What are they?
  - b. Which one is most significant to you?
  - c. Why?
4. Throughout this passage Paul has referred to spiritual forces that are at work in this world. The philosophy that threatens to take the Colossians captive depends on the “elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.” Jesus is described as “the head over every power and authority;” and finally in verse 15, Paul tells us that Christ has “disarmed the powers and authorities and made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” Paul seems to suggest that many of the harmless philosophies we embrace have a more sinister spiritual force lurking in the background.
  - a. How would you describe these forces?
  - b. How do we play into their hands when we adopt seemingly harmless approaches to life that depend on “the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ?”
  - c. What are the practical implications for our life in Christ, that Christ has “disarmed these powers and authorities,” and “triumphed over them on the cross?”