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MONVEE—THE NEW EVANGELICALISM ABOUT ME A REVIEW OF JOHN ORTBERG'S *THE ME I WANT TO BE* BY BOB DEWAAY

Most CIC articles are prompted by reader request. And lately several have asked about the program Monvee, a new, technology-based approach to sanctification. People can subscribe on the Monvee Web site and take a personality test, and, based on the results of the test, receive a personalized plan for their sanctification. John Ortberg's book features the word ME on the cover in large text and is part of the plan.

I found reading the book to be a very distasteful exercise. Those who are truly regenerate know that the more they consider themselves, the more discouraged they get. True encouragement results from knowing what God has done for us and appreciating His magnificent promises. Discouragement comes from contemplating how far removed we are from the perfect holiness that awaits us at the resurrection. But Ortberg directs the reader to focus on "ME." I cannot think of a worse topic.

The problems with Ortberg's book and theology are many. He has no concept about God's means of grace. He assumes that mysticism is valid, and his heroes themselves are actually mystics. He further assumes that we must integrate psychology with the Bible if people are going to be helped. He supposes that his readers cannot process theological terminology but must be told a story every few paragraphs in order to maintain their interest. Most disturbing about the book and its content (but perhaps not surprising) is that Ortberg is a

popular evangelical pastor. As such, the thinking as expressed in his book illustrates what is fatally wrong with modern evangelicalism. It is that concern that motivates me to write this article.

BEING A BETTER "ME"

It would seem entirely appropriate to use Biblical terminology to write about an important topic like sanctification. In the first century Paul wrote to the Romans, whom he had not met. He assumed that these people, without the benefit of electric lights, computers, or printing presses and only a limited ability to read and write, could understand ideas like justification, sanctification, propitiation, the distinction between the flesh and the spirit, and so forth. Paul's letter probably had to be read aloud by someone in the church in order for all to get the message. So if these Romans could understand such concepts, why does John Ortberg assume that we cannot today? Why does he write a book about sanctification and never teach the Biblical doctrine of sanctification anywhere in the book? Evidently he assumes that we are incapable of thinking deeply about the matter.

Here is how Ortberg describes the topic: "He [God] wants to help you be the real you, the best version of you. He wants to help you be you-ier."¹ It strikes me that if this is how we are to think about sanctification, then why doesn't the Bible describe it that way? The Bible speaks of dying to self, not becoming "you-ier." I cannot understand how

someone who claims to believe the Bible to be true would write on a Biblical topic but fail to use biblical terminology.

The Bible describes sanctification as a process of becoming more like Christ. It never talks about an "idealized me." Consider this passage: "Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him" (Colossians 3:9, 10). Ortberg strays from Scripture, but so do many in the evangelical realm. Why is it that in the 21st century, supposed Bible-believing pastors cannot bother themselves to expound the scriptures that are most pertinent to their topic? This is a serious problem, and one that manifests itself in the current Christian publishing industry through the writings of popular pastors. Too many have an aversion to writing seriously about Christian theology. One can purchase this "ME" book, visit the Monvee Web site, get all of the offered services, and never hear or read serious theological discussion about Paul's writings in Galatians and Romans about the flesh and the Spirit.² Evidently in Ortberg's mind, and in the minds of those of similar ilk, 21st century Christians cannot be expected to understand things known by first-century Christians.

Using a paraphrase of Romans 12:2 Ortberg comes to this conclusion: "Becoming the best version of yourself, then, rests on one simple directive: *Think great thoughts.*"³ He also describes this as, "resetting our minds to a better frequency."⁴ This is not a reasonable exposition of Romans 12:2. Does it matter to Ortberg what the text really means? Apparently not. Romans 12:2 does not teach Norman Vincent Peale's philosophy.

Ortberg also mimics Emergent writers. Consider this:

One day there will be a glorious harmony between God and all that he has made. God wants no one left out. As you flourish, you help in God's re-creation of the world he wants to see.⁵

This implies universalism and glosses over the issue of coming judgment. God does not need our help to create the world He wants to see. He is coming again and is going to judge the present world. That fact never comes up in Ortberg's book. (In fact the gospel itself never comes up other than in a very truncated form on page 253.)

WHO ARE THE "EVANGELICAL HEROES"?

When I began reading about "ME" in this book I knew immediately there were problems with it. Ortberg has written curriculum with mystic Ruth Haley Barton. He praises false teacher Dallas Willard. He praises the Roman Catholic Saint Benedict. He praises Roman Catholic mystic Henri Nouwen. He cites New Age writer Teilhard de Chardin favorably. He cites the Roman Catholic Thomas Merton favorably. He promotes the Roman Catholic Richard Rohr's teaching on the Enneagram. It would not be unfair to say that there is no popular, "Christian" mystic he does not approve of.

The salient question is why those such as Ortberg, who promote Roman Catholic mystics, are considered evangelical. If the great leaders who should be emulated are Roman Catholic, why not just go back to Rome? The answer is that many are doing just that. I wrote an article about a *Christianity Today* issue that promoted mysticism and showed no respect for the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura*.⁶ I predicted that if *sola scriptura* was rejected as a formal theological principle, people would return to Rome. Indeed, after writing the article and hosting a radio show about it, I started hearing from evangelicals who had indeed gone back to Rome. One

was a man I knew in seminary. In today's evangelicalism, to say that someone's teaching is a rejection of the principles of the Reformation is a pointless argument. They do not care. Obviously Ortberg doesn't care.

As I was reading this book, I remembered a book I read early in my Christian life by Francis Schaeffer entitled *True Spirituality*, published in 1971. It is on the same topic as Ortberg's book. Schaeffer's book is an amazing contrast with Ortberg's. If anyone wishes to study how evangelicalism has changed from 1971 to 2010, I would suggest he or she read both books and compare and contrast them. To conclude that what we have now is a totally different religion would not be unreasonable. Schaeffer's book starts with the gospel of Jesus Christ. He speaks of our guilt and need for Christ. Let me share an example from Schaeffer:

God exists, God has a character, God is a holy God, and when men sin (and we all must acknowledge we have sinned not only by mistake, but by intention) they have true moral guilt before the God who exists. That guilt is not just the modern concept of guilt-feelings, a psychological guilty feeling in man. It is a true moral guilt before the infinite-personal, holy God. Only the finished, substitutionary work of Christ upon the cross as the Lamb of God — in history, space, and time — is enough to remove this. Our true guilt, that brazen heaven which stands between us and God, can be removed only upon the basis of the finished work of Christ *plus nothing* on our part. The Bible's whole emphasis is that there must be no humanistic note added at any point in the accepting of the gospel. It is the infinite value of the finished work of Christ, the second person of the Trinity, upon the cross, *plus nothing*, that is the sole basis for the removal of our guilt. When we thus come, believing God, the

Bible says we are declared justified by God; the guilt is gone, and we are returned to fellowship with God — the very thing for which we were created in the first place.⁷

This is from the third paragraph of Schaeffer's book. There is more Christian theology in that single paragraph than in the entirety of Ortberg's book. How can 40 years of history destroy a movement? How did our heroes become Roman Catholic mystics?

Knowing that history is complex, I believe I can provide a reasonable answer. Theology has been downplayed, if not removed and replaced, by sociology and psychology. Sociology underlies the church growth movement. Donald McGavran, who invented the movement by applying sociology to missions at Fuller Seminary in the 1950s, had a famous axiom: "People do not become Christians for theological reasons; they become Christians for sociological reasons." His book *Understanding Church Growth* was required reading for me at seminary.⁸ I do not think that McGavran's intent was to drive theology out of the evangelical movement, but eventually that was the effect. The church growth movement is based on McGavran's use of sociology to grow the church. It makes theology a side point.

Psychology's effect has been to change how the church views sanctification. Sanctification formerly was something viewed as the effect of sitting in faith under the means of grace. God gradually sanctifies people, changing them through the normal means explained in the Bible. But in the 20th century the idea became prominent that we should use the new science of psychology to enhance the process. Ortberg's book is a grand illustration of the result. For example, he defines fellowship as "the flow of living waters between one person and another."⁹ But he doesn't specify that they both must be Christians and he never deals with Biblical material on the term such as that found in 1John 1. Rather he cites *The Journal of Happiness Studies* to pro-

mote the idea of “connectedness.” He also cites a social researcher: “The single most common finding from a half-century’s research on life satisfaction, not only from the U.S. but around the world, is that happiness is best predicted by the breadth and depth of one’s social connections.”¹⁰

Notice that sociology and psychology have pushed theology out of the picture. Ortberg speaks of connecting with “somebody,” but that is not the Biblical concept of fellowship. We only have fellowship with one another if we have fellowship with God based on the blood atonement. Why do I need a supposed Christian book from a Christian publisher to learn psychological and sociological ideas stolen from the world? I do not. Frankly, the church doesn’t need this tripe.

Schaeffer wrote: “Every human problem, as I have stressed in *Escape From Reason*, arises from man’s trying to stake out something as autonomous from God, and as I have emphasized, as soon as anything is made autonomous from God, then ‘nature eats up grace.’”¹¹ When Ortberg writes on the topic of “fellowship” he includes nothing that defines fellowship Biblically—nothing specifically Christian. Nature has eaten up grace. Evangelicalism has in fact pushed the means of grace to the sideline in favor of what can be gleaned from the natural world. Paul’s teaching in Romans 1 about being able to know about God through nature does not indicate that such knowledge is a saving knowledge—rather it is a condemning knowledge.

ORTBERG’S DOCTRINE OF HUMAN ABILITY

Like fellow modern evangelical Rick Warren, Ortberg thinks we do not need more Christian doctrine. He writes: “People would rather debate doctrine or beliefs or tradition or interpretation than actually do what Jesus said. It’s not rocket science. Just go do it.”¹² Obviously he assumes we can do what Jesus taught without means of grace. He also says, “You already know more than you need to know.”¹³ That statement

proves that Ortberg’s theology is man-centered. He assumes if we know something, we have the ability to do it. Clearly we then would not need Bible teaching as a means of grace if we had read through the Bible even once.

Peter would totally disagree with Ortberg. Peter wrote: “*Therefore, I will always be ready to remind you of these things, even though you already know them, and have been established in the truth which is present with you. I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder*” (2Peter 1:12, 13). Sitting under the teaching of God’s word is one of His means to change us into the image of Christ. Why have the Lord’s Supper if the church already knows what it means? The answer: because God uses it.

Furthermore, simply *knowing* something does not imply the ability to do it. Jesus taught this: “*Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect*” (Matthew 5:48). If Ortberg is right and all we have to do is go out and do what Jesus taught because it is not “rocket science,” then all Christians could be perfected right now if we just went out and did it. But Ortberg says, “It is easier to be smart than be good. You don’t need to know more from the Bible; you just need to do what you already know.”¹⁴ This is appalling. No wonder Bible-teaching churches are disappearing from America. Our Christian leaders think we have a technological problem that can be solved by applying knowledge with the correct technique. God uses the teaching of the Bible to sanctify Christians. Sanctification is not a “how to” issue.

I suppose Monvee and Ortberg are the products of a long process dating back to the heretical Charles Finney.¹⁵ Finney taught the doctrine of human ability more fully than anyone since Pelagius himself. Finney believed that if God issued a moral law, then all people were capable of obeying it with no special work of grace. I cannot prove that Ortberg has studied Finney and learned his ideas from him. But they are the same ideas. It would not be overstating the matter to say that Finney ultimately

destroyed American evangelicalism. In place of the gospel and the means of grace, we got the American ideal of pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps. Monvee merely carries Finney’s ugly legacy from the 19th century into the 21st century.

PERSON-SPECIFIC MEANS OF SANCTIFICATION

When I read books that I intend to write about, I make notations in the margins to help when I do the writing. As I flip through my notated book on “ME,” I see that the most common notation throughout the book is “no means of grace.” For example, Ortberg writes: “People often wonder how long they should be in solitude. You can experiment, because spiritual practices are about freedom.”¹⁶ He holds to an idea called “the flow of the Spirit” which is found throughout the book as well. I do not know what that is. But whatever it is, one is instructed to experiment to see how they specifically may find it. Where does the Bible ever promise that if we sit in solitude, we will find something called “the flow of the Spirit”? The answer is *never*. It is no wonder Ortberg promotes Catholic mystics—they invented various ideas about experimenting to find God.

I was teaching on this once and someone challenged me to prove that we cannot create our own ways to come to God or grow in God. The answer is found in the scripture. Paul is speaking of various religious practices invented by men. He writes: “*These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence*” (Colossians 2:23). The term “self-made” can also be translated “self chosen piety.” Self chosen piety is precisely what Ortberg teaches and Paul forbids. The means of coming to God and growing in God are revealed in scripture and are the same for all people. If we have different needs as we go through life they are covered by God’s providence—not by signing up for a personality test.

Further proof that the Biblical writers did not teach person-specific means of sanctification can be seen in this section of scripture:

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. (1Corinthians 6:9-11)

They were all justified and sanctified through New Testament teaching and the gospel Paul preached. There was no sanctification plan for fornicators that was different from a sanctification plan for swindlers.

One very bad idea churches have chosen is to divide people into fellowship groups based on their former sin. This only happened after evangelicalism began to believe that psychology could sanctify people. Therapy groups soon were brought into churches to replace normal fellowship. The great thing that Christianity has to offer, and found nowhere else, is the forgiveness of sins. If we were justified and sanctified as Paul said, then we can leave the past behind.

Paul elaborates on this theme in the 2nd epistle to Corinth:

Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. (2Corinthians 5:16, 17)

Somehow we have come to believe that for sanctification we must use modern

psychology to study each person's past and assume we are going to find answers for them. But God has released us from our sinful past and made us new creatures in Christ. We should be studying the Bible to see what that means.

This means that the basic premise of Monvee is false—the premise is that we need a person-specific sanctification plan, that studying self is a means of sanctification. Monvee is a similar idea to Rick Warren's SHAPE program, which also is a plan to study self. The concept of dying to self as Jesus taught has been laid aside in modern evangelicalism and replaced by the idea of studying self.

The prescribed means of sanctification is the same for all Christians—the person-specific means God takes care of through providence. We must put ourselves under the Biblically prescribed means of grace. If there is something else we need, God will make sure it happens. He is committed to conforming us to the image of Christ.

CONCLUSION

We must return to biblical theology and stop thinking that sociology and psychology will sanctify Christians. Consider what Francis Schaeffer wrote in 1971:

If men act upon the teaching of the Word of God, and as *proportionally* men live according to the teaching and commands of the Bible, so they have in practice a sufficient psychological base. God is good to his people. To the extent that a man lives in the light of the command of the revelation of Scripture, he has a psychological foundation. Find me the faithful pastor in the old village, and I will find you a man dealing with psychological problems on the basis of the teaching of the Word of God, even if he never heard the word psychology, or does not know what it means.¹⁷

The contrast between Schaeffer and

Ortberg could not be more stark. In 40 years the evangelical movement has gone from being Biblical to something else. Monvee illustrates what is wrong today.

In Ortberg's thinking, we need to be more "you-ier." The biblical concept is to be more Christ-like. We have gone from Christ-centered to self-centered. We have jettisoned the means of grace and replaced them with technology and the study of self. We are in serious need of repentance.

I never thought I would see a Christian book like Ortberg's published with the title "ME," but now I have. This is one of the worst "Christian" books I have ever read. May God raise up Christian writers more like Francis Schaeffer. We need them desperately.

End Notes

1. John Ortberg, *The Me I Want to Be*; (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010) 94.
2. For such a discussion see CIC issue 115: <http://cicministry.org/commentary/issue115.htm>
3. Ortberg, 90.
4. Ibid. 91.
5. Ibid. 19.
6. <http://cicministry.org/commentary/issue105.htm>
7. Schaeffer, F. A. (1996, c1982). *The complete works of Francis A. Schaeffer : A Christian worldview*. Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books
8. Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; revised edition, 1970).
9. Ortberg, 182.
10. Robert Putnam as cited by Ortberg, 183.
11. Francis Schaeffer, *True Spirituality*.
12. Ortberg, 112.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid. 113.
15. See the CIC article on Finney: <http://cicministry.org/commentary/issue53.htm>
16. Ortberg, 54.
17. Francis Schaeffer, *True Spirituality*

CHRISTIAN DREAM INTERPRETATION?

BY CHRISTINE PACK

Author Barbie Breathitt, described as a “respected teacher of the supernatural manifestations of God,” has just released a new book entitled “*Dream Encounters*,” in which she claims Christians can have access to a secret dream language that God uses to reveal “hidden knowledge” to believers. In this book Breathitt tells believers they will be enabled to use the “revelation” obtained from God through their dreams in order to unlock their “destinies” and live lives in which they are “productive, responsible, successful, prosperous, loved and fulfilled” (p. 138).¹ According to Breathitt, this is done by decoding information that God has “embedded” into our dreams and through which he continues to communicate with us in personal, ongoing revelation. But there are three significant problems with what Breathitt teaches, and I will attempt to develop why these issues are unsupported by Scripture. The three problems are as follows:

1. Breathitt’s teaching is more in alignment with a pagan and superstitious—even New Age—worldview than Christian

2. Breathitt puts forth the idea that each believer has a “destiny” waiting to be unlocked, accessed, known and lived out, an idea that is contrary to the teaching of Scripture—that, as Christians, we have no “rights” to our lives. And finally,

3. Breathitt’s teaching about ongoing, personal revelation from God goes against the clear teaching of *sola scriptura*, which is that God speaks to us through scripture alone.

DREAM INTERPRETATION IS NEW AGE

To help explain how I can make the assertion that Breathitt’s teaching on “dream interpretation” is much closer to

being New Age (pagan) than Christian, let me back up for a moment. I write this review not as a theologian but as a former New Ager who was saved by God’s grace out of New Age Spirituality. My testimony is this: after rejecting the church as a teenager, I went wholeheartedly into New Age Spirituality. While in the New Age, I went down many different paths to seek enlightenment, truth, hidden knowledge and, yes, God. I sampled from a buffet of religious practices and traditions, including psychological self-help, Hinduism, Buddhism, mysticism, paganism, shamanism, astrology, trance channeling, reiki, dream interpretation, yoga, astral projection, runes, numerology, chakra meditation, visualization, fortune telling, tarot cards, psychic readings and on and on. But the problem with this freestyle way of attempting to approach God is that, at its core, it is pagan and therefore cannot give anyone access to God. However, this “freestyle approach” is also the chief allure of New Age Spirituality: one is encouraged to choose any path or practice that “feels good” to them, that makes them feel closer to “God,” and gives them a sense of purpose. What I know now is that without God’s “special revelation” of Himself through His Word (the Bible) I *never* could have come to the saving knowledge of God. The Bible distinguishes between “general revelation” (found in nature) and “special revelation” (found only in God’s Word) this way: “**General revelation**” is revelation of God found through observing nature and the surrounding world. While “general revelation” gives enough revelation for people to know that there is a God to whom they are accountable, it does *not* give enough revelation for people to actually be saved. This was why God was so elusive to me while I was in the New Age. I was getting vague, shadowy glimpses of God through the many occult things I did but was unable to get a true understanding of his character, nature and what He required of me. For

this, I needed “**special revelation**,” found only in the Bible, God’s revelation of Himself, which teaches who He is and the way of salvation. New Age Spirituality, **at its essence**, is a pagan form of religion in that it can operate only within the realm of “general revelation.” Even though plenty of biblical terminology and even scripture itself is used in the New Age, salvation is found only through faith in the atoning death of a Messiah who made propitiation, died and was resurrected—the correct view of Jesus that is clearly rejected by adherents of New Age teaching.

Before we go further, let me define paganism and explain how I can make the assertion that New Age is pagan at its core. Paganism is often thought of as sort of a nature religion, something practiced by primitive people groups who live in grass huts in remote areas and who carve idols and literally look to “signs” in nature in an attempt to know God. But in another sense, *every* religion that is not Christian can be considered to be pagan; there are simply different “flavors” of it. *All* false religions attempt to come up with ways to “reach” God, whether through yoga, meditation and fasting (Hinduism/Buddhism); mecca, prayers, Jihad (Islam); meditation, energy work, spells (Wicca). Paganism, then, is the “default setting” of the natural mind when it is does not have the revelation of God’s Word which *only* comes through the Bible (“special revelation”). As Pastor John MacArthur has said, “There are only two religions in the world....One is by works, the other is without works.” Without benefit of God’s “special revelation” given through his Word, pagans are forced to sift through the natural landscape, searching for clues about who God is and what he requires of them in the hopes of coming up with a system that makes sense of what they see. So even though I identified myself at various times with specific religions when I was involved in New Age Spirituality, I was living and functioning as a pagan.

In my view this kind of “functional paganism” is the main problem with Breathitt’s book. Though she quotes plenty of scripture in her book, she is continually pointing her readers back to the paganism of “divining” and interpreting omens and symbols in their dreams. Breathitt seems to want to make a distinction between the kind of “Christianized divination” she is teaching and what she considers to be unbiblical, occultic divination, **but the Bible makes no such distinction.** Even though Breathitt specifically names psychics, mediums, witches, wiccans and other New Age occultic means of divination as “counterfeits” (p 95), she is teaching her readers to do the same things that these occultic practitioners do. The Bible, though, has very strong words for anyone who attempts to divine hidden or secret knowledge belonging only to the Lord (Deut 29:29):

“There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. ‘For whoever does these things is detestable to the LORD; and because of these detestable things the LORD your God will drive them out before you.’ ”
(Deut. 18:10-12, my emphasis).

This passage in Deuteronomy makes quite clear what the Lord considers to be occultic and wicked. Yet two of the above practices (divination and interpreting omens) are exactly what Breathitt’s book is teaching! At least one third of Breathitt’s book is devoted to teaching readers how to interpret symbols in their dreams such as colors, stones, numbers, sounds, types of clothing, types of buildings, modes of transportation, animals, weather, insects and others. And incidentally, the type of dream interpretation as taught by Breathitt is virtually identical to the type of dream interpretation I was

taught and practiced as a New Ager. But these are pagan practices, and they are off-limits to Christians in that they are an attempt to usurp God’s power and authority over our lives by discerning hidden knowledge.

“A man will plan his course, but it is the Lord who determines his steps.” (Prov 16:9)

UNLOCKING OUR DESTINY?

In addition to the New Age practice of divination (which I have noted is an attempt to usurp power and authority that belongs only to God), another key teaching of the New Age is that people can direct their own destinies (which they do partly through divining the signs and omens in their life, dreams and in the world around them). The main thrust of this teaching is that every person has a “right” to a life of good health, prosperity, transcendent happiness, wonderful relationships and exciting careers. This brings me to my second problem with Breathitt’s book. She teaches that God has a “divine plan for us to be successful” and that each believer has a “destiny”—a word she uses repeatedly—waiting to be unlocked, accessed, known, and lived out. This kind of man-centered, positive self-help sort of teaching has always been popular in America. Over the years it has latched itself to the culture and taken shape in many different forms (“Law of Attraction,” “The Secret,” “Possibility Thinking,” “Word of Faith”). It has even taken on Christian terminology so as to become more palatable to confessing Christians who want a way to be “Christian” and still have control over their own lives and destinies. **Yet, this thinking is completely at odds** with the crucified, yielded life that is described of New Testament believers.

The Bible teaches that it is God alone who reigns and rules sovereignly over our lives. And while Breathitt makes mention occasionally that only God knows what the future holds for us, she also repeatedly puts forth the idea that once we are saved we are able to access this “hidden knowledge” about

the “purpose” and “destiny” of our lives through dream interpretation and that our lives ought to be marked by happiness, success and prosperity. Breathitt asserts that it is the “right” of every Christian to access hidden knowledge through dream interpretation for the purpose of navigating their lives to “fulfilling destinies.” Indeed, Breathitt claims in her book that an astonishing array of blessings can and should be had by Christian believers if they will learn how to decode their dreams. Some of these claims are that believers, through dream interpretation, will be able to

- Unlock God's revelation
- Receive messages from God through angels
- Get answers to questions
- Steer clear of harmful events
- Fulfill their dreams and destinies
- Know the path to their future
- Be healthier, both physically and spiritually
- Achieve prosperity, success and increase
- Be more creative
- Live longer

But this teaching of physical blessing and prosperity flies in the face of the clear teaching of scripture, which is that we have no “rights” to our lives, and that it is God alone who knows and determines our destinies. In fact, a study of the apostles does not give a sense of lives marked by “living longer,” “steering clear of harmful events” or being “prosperous.” All but one of the apostles were killed for the faith, most of them having suffered torturous deaths. Paul himself was shipwrecked, beaten, stoned, left for dead, imprisoned and ultimately martyred.

Paul often referred to himself in his letters as a “slave to Christ,” and it is this language that gives us a more biblical understanding of a Christian’s “destiny,” according to Paul. Upon the moment of conversion, all “rights” to our lives are relinquished. We know that our lives are no longer our own; we have been bought for a price, and only God alone can know and direct our destiny. But oh, how this kind of language

and teaching chafes today's Christians, especially American ones, who have been taught to esteem liberation and freedom, choice and autonomy. But is this the picture that Scripture paints for the life of a Christian? We do not have "rights" to our lives, nor do we have the power or ability to navigate our lives to "fulfilling destinies," as Breathitt claims. If I make a plan for my life and God has a "destiny" in store for me other than the one I have mapped out, I must bend the knee in humble submission before God's greater plan for my life. Just ask Stephen, who was stoned to death after rebuking the Sanhedrin for their sinful rejection of the prophets and Messiah Himself. About Stephen, I wonder: did the "life of (his) dreams" include death by stoning? (Probably not, because in our flesh each of us is small, narcissistic, self-protective and vain.) But when submitted to the Lord, as Stephen was, and as we all must strive to be by God's grace, our lives have deeper meaning and serve eternal purposes that our finite minds cannot grasp. But not according to Barbie Breathitt, in whose teaching I saw nothing of the crucified life, a life yielded to its Maker for *His* purposes. Rather, Breathitt's teaching seems designed more to tickle ears and pander to worldly and fleshly appetites for success, comfort, prestige and wealth, than to exhort true believers to lay down their lives in service of the Lord and to take up the cross and follow Christ, wherever that may lead. Christ never promised his followers that they would have successful, prosperous, fulfilled lives. In fact, one thing that He did tell them about their "destinies" was this:

"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours." (John 15:18-20)

But to true Christians it doesn't matter. True believers don't come to Christ in the first place looking for "goodies" or worldly blessing; they come to Him because they know He and He alone offers forgiveness for sins and the way of salvation. True believers will follow Him anywhere, yielding their lives to Him, submitting their dreams, wants and desires to His perfect will (Mat 6:10), knowing that He alone knows what they need. This is what the Bible teaches: a crucified self (Rom 6:6), a life yielded to its Maker. Not a genie-in-a-bottle "God," or some hoop-jumping "God" or a "God" who is the outlet for us to "plug into" so we can get power for our dreams.

The Rejection of *Sola Scriptura*

"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world." (Hebrews 1:1-2)

Which brings me to my third and final point: According to Breathitt, believers will receive personal, ongoing revelation from God if they will learn how to "read" the "dream language" God supposedly gives them, which to her is the way He desires to communicate with believers. But this is a rebellion against and rejection of the means God has chosen by which to reveal Himself to us, which is through the Bible, a concept known as *sola scriptura*. *Sola scriptura* teaches that we "hear" from God through the Bible alone. **In fact, this idea of personal, ongoing revelation from God is unbiblical, in that Hebrews 1:1-2 explains to us that God has spoken directly to prophets of His choosing in past ages, but that once His full revelation has been given, culminating in Jesus Christ, the final and greatest Prophet, the canon is then closed and no further revelation will be given in the last days beyond what has been given in Scripture.**

Let me point out that although Breathitt quotes a lot of scripture in her book, it must be understood that the usage of scripture does not necessarily mean that someone is teaching truth and that applying Scripture to wicked and forbidden practices does not somehow "cleanse" these practices of evil. Let me repeat, the sprinkling of scripture atop wicked practices will not sanctify them, nor will it imbue some kind of mystical protection over a Christian who innocently wanders into the occultic realm. I can attest from my own experience that the occult is a very dangerous realm and nothing to meddle with. Even for Christians the occult is a dangerous realm. I often hear the argument that once a person is born again and sealed with the Holy Spirit they have a "supernatural protection" against deception. "Well, I hear what you're saying about things being occultic, but I would know if I were being deceived." But isn't that the whole point of deception? If we *knew* we were being deceived, we wouldn't be deceived. Deception is evil masquerading as good. A "Christian" book by a "Christian" author teaching readers to do unbiblical things in the pursuit of forbidden, hidden knowledge is an example of this. A writer or teacher being loaded up on Christian terminology or scripture doesn't necessarily mean that biblical truth is being taught. All Christians are exhorted by scripture to test everything, to hold fast to what is true and to be like the Bereans, who were commended for their diligence in studying Scripture. In short, Christians are not to blindly accept any and all teaching at face value. In fact, Paul exhorted believers not to believe even himself if he should come bearing a message that was different from the one handed down to the saints! Very strong words, and believers should take this as an exhortation to examine all teaching of scripture to take care that it is being taught correctly and in context.

As far as I can tell from reading Breathitt's book, the Bible functions as little more than a handbook of symbols for believers to search through for the purpose of decoding their dreams to

“unlock” their destinies and live prosperous, successful lives. Again, Breathitt seems to be deliberately pandering to sinful desires with this teaching. Pandering to the flesh and to the human desire for hidden knowledge is nothing new at all:

“Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” (Gen 3:1)

Isn't Satan himself insinuating to Eve that there is hidden knowledge being withheld from her? And lest we forget, it did not turn out well for Eve when she began to long for the fruit God had forbidden. And we must also remember that Satan will rarely present himself in all his awful glory. He delights in taking evil and presenting it as something good and alluring, such as a luscious piece of fruit that is “a delight to the eyes and good to taste.” In American culture, so rife with materialism and excess, the “forbidden fruit” that we seem to be continual lusting for is some form of worldly success or prosperity.

CONCLUSION

In closing, I believe Breathitt does her readers a grave disservice in her book by directing them *away* from the special revelation contained in the Bible and toward a “Christianized” kind of divination in which they will be reduced to living as functional pagans. While Breathitt does often quote scripture, her references are heavily lopsided toward passages describing dream sequences, visions and the like. As far as Breathitt's teaching goes, the Bible seems only to be useful as a kind of “omens handbook.” This is amazingly bad theology coming from someone who professes to be a Christian, as Breathitt does. And contrary to Breathitt's teaching, Christians do not have some kind of “right” to access “hidden knowledge” once they are born again. They do not have the ability or power to navigate their own destinies toward prosperity, success and comfort. And the pursuit of “hidden knowledge” for the purpose of such is sinful and condemned by God, as it is God alone who knows and directs the destinies of believers. I sim-

ply cannot recommend this book to Christians, as it will lead them not into a deeper understanding of the one true God as revealed in Scripture but rather into the shadowy world of pagan divination and a lust for hidden knowledge and worldly comfort. Buyer beware.

End Note

1. Barbie Breathitt, *Dream Encounters – Seeing your Destiny From God's Perspective* (North Richland Hills, TX: Breath of the Spirit Ministries, 2009)

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