

So as with nearly all false teaching, the flaws of *The Secret* are most visible when you examine what it has to say about the Bible and Jesus.

If I had to commend something about *The Secret*, I would mention its emphasis on gratitude and the importance of the thought life. Byrne devotes several pages to “The Powerful Process of Gratitude” (pp. 74-80). Though she does not base it on the Bible, Byrne nevertheless encourages just what the Bible teaches in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, “in everything give thanks.” She says that regardless of the situations awaiting her, “By the time I am ready for the day, I have said ‘Thank you’ hundreds of times” (p. 76). Remarkably, she never says to whom thanks should be given. Nor is her motivation kindred to the one stated in the verse above: “this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

Regarding the thought life, *The Secret* reminds us that there is a powerful connection between our thoughts and our actions. While the thoughts Byrne wants us to repeat are typically contrary to Scripture, she rightly observes that the thoughts we constantly affirm influence our feelings and our behavior. This conforms to the declaration of Scripture that Christians are “transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). For us to live for the glory of God and in increasing conformity to Christ requires not only that we grow in our knowledge of God’s Word, but also that we constantly reaffirm specific truths of Scripture, despite feelings or circumstances that contradict them.

The problem with *The Secret* is that it focuses our hope selfward and not Godward. It is all about self-empowerment, self-fulfillment, and getting whatever we want. But Jesus warned, “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?” (Matthew 16:26). *The Secret* disregards the fact that God has a Law and we have broken it (James 2:10). What Byrne fails to realize about her law of attraction is that our sinful hearts deceive us (Jeremiah 17:9) and attract not only more sin and guilt, but ultimately, the wrath of God.

However, God in His mercy sent His Son to receive this wrath as a Substitute for all who will repent of their self-centeredness and believe in Him. And “through the true knowledge of Him”—not Rhonda Byrne’s book—“His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3).

“The Secret to everything” (to use Byrne’s term) is God Himself. God, the “Great Secret,” has been revealed in Jesus Christ, “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). And God has freely told us in the Bible everything we need to know about discovering the unlimited “treasures of wisdom and knowledge” found in Christ. And He remains an unknown Secret only to those who will not look for Him there.

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A REVIEW OF *THE SECRET* BY RHONDA BYRNE

BY DONALD S. WHITNEY

Rhonda Byrne, *The Secret* (New York: Atria Books, 2006) 198 pages.

A video by the same title was released earlier in 2006.

I had never watched an entire episode of *Oprah* until her program on *The Secret*. In the promo for the show, Oprah announced that the program would present “the secret” to making more money, losing weight, finding the love of your life, and achieving job success. Who could resist hearing more about such a claim, especially when it is made by the most influential woman in America and touted as the key to all her success? Apparently I wasn’t alone. After the show, Oprah’s website was overwhelmed, emails poured in, and within hours *The Secret* had become the best-selling book in the nation.

A week later, while unpacking in a hotel room, I powered up the TV. Oprah and two guests from the week before appeared on the screen, effusive about the transforming power of *The Secret*. Her website called the episode, “A follow-up to the show everybody is talking about!”

People are not only talking about *The Secret*, they are buying it. I am writing this review in a Barnes & Noble bookstore, and this particular branch has completely sold out of the book—again. Only two days ago—so I am told—a storewide announcement assured a horde of anxious shoppers that another large shipment of the book had arrived and would be brought to the sales floor momentarily. Readers quickly grabbed every copy. Almost impossibly, *The Secret* is even outselling (at this writing) the final Harry Potter book. And if that weren’t enough, the audio edition of the book follows these two as the nation’s number-three seller.

The Australian author of *The Secret*, Rhonda Byrne, introduces the book by admitting, “A year ago, my life had collapsed around me” (p. ix). Through searching for answers in a variety of books new and old, she began to trace what she believed was a common thread in them all. She dubbed it the “Great Secret—The Secret to Life” (p. ix).

Byrne became convinced that this was the key to explaining the success of “the greatest people in history” (p. ix). As she started practicing this secret, Byrne says that her life immediately began to change in ways nothing short of miraculous. She decided to make a video called *The Secret* to share her discoveries with others. In March of 2006 it was released on the Internet, but soon went to DVD. By late autumn, the phenomenal success of the video placed it on two episodes of *Larry King Live*. Shortly after, two of the teachers featured on *The Secret* were guests on Ellen Degeneres’ daily TV show. Before Christmas, *The Secret* DVD had spun off a book by the same title which Oprah Winfrey catapulted to the top of the charts in February of 2007.

The essence of *The Secret* is “the law of attraction.” According to Byrne and the twenty-nine co-contributors whom she quotes extensively,

everything in the Universe (which is always capitalized and usually synonymous for “God”) vibrates on a particular frequency. When you think in harmony with the frequency of something, you attract it to you. If you think about wealth, you will receive wealth. If you think instead about your debt, you will receive more debt. You attract what you think about; your thoughts determine your destiny.

Byrne restates the law of attraction in various ways: “Nothing [good or bad] can come into your experience unless you summon it through persistent thoughts” (p. 28). “Your thoughts are the primary cause of everything” (p. 33). “Your current reality or your current life is a result of the thoughts you have been thinking” (p. 71). According to the product description on the DVD, “This is *The Secret* to everything—the secret to unlimited joy, health, money, relationships, love, youth: everything you have ever wanted.

Byrne promises with ironclad certainty: “There isn’t a single thing that you cannot do with this knowledge. . . . *The Secret* can give you whatever you want” (p. xi). By it “you will come to know how you can have, be, or do anything you want” (p. xii).

In the final analysis, ***The Secret* is nothing more than Name It-Claim It, Positive-Confession, Prosperity Theology (without God and the Bible), built on a foundation of New Age self-deification.** In other words, the book is just a secular version of what some TV preachers have taught for decades, namely, if you will sustain the right thoughts, words, and feelings, you will receive whatever you want. But *The Secret* adds this important twist: your thoughts can bring anything into your life because you are god.

Books that promise health and wealth for their practitioners are published every day. But few associate such promises with Byrne’s breathtaking audacity. She proclaims to her readers,

You are God in a physical body. You are Spirit in the flesh. You are Eternal Life expressing itself as You. You are a cosmic being. You are all power. You are all wisdom. You are all intelligence. You are perfection. You are magnificence. You are the creator, and you are creating the creation of You on this planet (p. 164).

If that weren’t blasphemous enough, realize that the book your neighbors and coworkers are reading more than any other also tells them,

The earth turns on its orbit for You. The oceans ebb and flow for You. The birds sing for You. The sun rises and it sets for You. The stars come out for You. Every beautiful thing you see, every wondrous thing you experience, is all there for You. Take a look around. None of it can exist, without You. No matter who you thought you were, now you know the Truth of Who You Really Are. You are the master of the Universe. You are the heir to the

kingdom. You are the perfection of Life. And now you know *The Secret* (p. 183).

This would be beautiful if it were addressed to the God of Heaven. But as Byrne thinks this is what we should say to the person in the mirror, it is the heresy of heresies. Her “Secret” is nothing less than Satan’s original lie in the Garden of Eden, “You will be like God” (Gen. 3:5).

It is no exaggeration to say that this book implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) denies virtually every major doctrine in the Bible. For starters, the authority of Scripture is undermined in *The Secret*, because the Bible apparently has value only insofar as it (according to Byrne) teaches *The Secret*. Moreover, the Bible is neither unique nor supremely authoritative, for Byrne maintains that the holy book of every religious tradition contains *The Secret*. Thus Byrne’s teaching is *eclectic*, that is, she believes that all religions and their scriptures are equally valid in their authority and basically teach the same thing.

Without mentioning Jesus, she quotes Him in Matthew 21:22 and Mark 11:24, claiming that the teaching to ask, believe, and receive in prayer is the way to “create what you want in three simple steps” (p. 47). And of course, it is not God we’re to ask, but “the Universe.” Thus *The Secret* is *pantheistic*, that is, it teaches that God is not a Person; rather He is to be equated with the totality of everything.

Despite this brief nod to the Bible, Byrne’s book is marketed upon the implication that readers probably would never discover *The Secret* on their own. “It has been passed down through the ages, highly-coveted, hidden, lost, stolen, and bought for vast sums of money. . . . Now *The Secret* is being revealed to the world” (from the back cover). Thus the book is *Gnostic*, that is, it makes you dependent upon a small, elite group (namely, Rhonda Byrne and her panel of enlightened experts, “avatars,” and relatively obscure historical sources) to tell you what you need to know. In fact, in true Gnostic style, Byrne and her illuminati expressly refer to what we need to know as a *secret*—“the Great Secret.” And of course, you must pay—in this case, the price of the book or the DVD—to learn *The Secret*.

There’s no mention of sin in *The Secret*. The cause of all the problems in the world and in our individual lives is merely bad thinking, specifically the failure to recognize and appropriately use the law of attraction. Therefore the solution to everything lies within us. And that, of course, eliminates the need for a Savior, a Substitute, or a Sacrifice. The cross and resurrection of Jesus become irrelevant.

Curiously, there’s not a single reference to death or the afterlife in the book. Apparently this is a non-issue for contributors to *The Secret*, for one of them assures us, “no one will stand in judgment of [your life], now or ever” (p. 177). Another, when questioned about this on Oprah’s second show on the book, suggested that Heaven and Hell were present experiences, not future destinations.