The False Teaching of "The Secret" – A Christian Evaluation

Kerby Anderson examines The Secret and The Law of Attraction from a biblical perspective and finds it teaches a dangerous mixture of half truths and outright lies.

Rhonda Byrne and *The Secret*

The book is called *The Secret*, but it didn't remain a secret for very long. Already the book has sold more than three million copies, and there are nearly two million DVDs of the teaching. There seems to be no end to the public's interest in this message presented by Rhonda Byrne.

Some call *The Secret* a transformative message. Others see it as a popular combination of marketing that parallels the success of *The DaVinci Code* with the message found in Eastern religions and philosophies throughout the centuries. Whatever it is, it has exploded in our culture ever since Rhonda Byrne's first appearance on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*.

The Secret has been promoted as "a feature length, historic and factually based account of an age old secret" which is said to be four thousand years in the making and "known to only a fortunate few." The DVD and the book reveal "this great knowledge to the world." Supposedly it is the secret to wealth, the secret to health, the secret to love, relationships, happiness, and eternal youth.

The basic premise of *The Secret* was borne from the troubles that affected Rhonda Byrne. She is a television producer and mother in her fifties. A number of years ago she "hit a rocky patch in her business and personal lives."{1} Her father died suddenly and her relationships with her family and work

colleagues were in turmoil. It was at that moment of despair when she "wept and wept and wept" that she discovered a long-neglected book entitled *The Science of Getting Rich*.{2}

In the book she discovered how to let your thoughts and feelings give you everything that you desire. She then dedicated herself to sharing these principles with the world in the form of *The Secret*.

Many have called it marketing genius. After all, all of us want to be in on a secret. So why wouldn't we all want to know *the* secret to life? That is what Rhonda Byrne promised in her DVD. "Torchlights flicker on the 90-minute DVD and the soundtrack throbs portentously before it gets down to giving you the secret for getting your hands on that new BMW."{3}

Its success shouldn't be too surprising. After all, many self-help authors have become celebrities and quite financially successful by addressing American's desperate need for happiness and significance.

Several show up as contributors to *The Secret*. For example, Wayne Dyer has written nearly thirty books on the subject of self-help. His 1976 book, *Your Erroneous Zones*, has sold over thirty million copies. Jack Canfield is best known for his *Chicken Soup for the Soul* book series. There are currently over 115 titles and 100 million copies in print.

The Law of Attraction

Rhonda Byrne's book and DVD on *The Secret* supposedly bring together "the oral traditions, in literature, in religions and philosophies throughout the centuries."{4} These pieces are brought together to produce this life-transforming message.

While it is passed off as new and exciting, there are many other teachers who preceded *The Secret* with a similar message. Charles Fillmore, who founded the Unity School of Christianity, talked about "The Twelve Powers of Man," arguing

that the causes of all things are “essentially mental.” Norman Vincent Peale is best known for his *The Power of Positive Thinking*. Deepak Chopra talks about “The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success.” Motivational speaker Tony Robbins believes “it’s our decisions, not the conditions of our lives, that determine our destiny.”{5}

Rhonda Byrne not only relies on people she calls the guardians of *The Secret*, but also upon a documentary released a number of years ago called *What the Bleep Do We Know?* The film makes all sorts of metaphysical claims based upon their particular interpretation of quantum physics.

According to Rhonda Byrne, the key element of *The Secret* is what is called “The Law of Attraction.”{6} You can summarize the law with three words: “Thoughts become things.” In other words, if you think hard enough about something, it will take place. Think good thoughts, and you will reap good things. Think bad thoughts, and bad things will happen to you. You create your own circumstances, and you can change those circumstances with your thoughts.

A central teaching of “The Law of Attraction” is that nothing can come into your experience unless you summon it through persistent thoughts. Thus, everything that surrounds you right now (both good and bad) has been attracted to you. As you focus on what you want, you are changing the vibration of atoms of that thing so that they begin to vibrate to you.{7} Ultimately, you determine the frequency or vibration so that you can best acquire wealth, health, and fulfillment.

Do you want something? Then you need to focus on it. In one segment in the DVD, a kid who wants a red BMX bicycle cuts out a picture of it from a catalog. He concentrates on it and even obsesses about it. He is rewarded with a bike.

Do you want to lose weight? Do the same thing. Rhonda Byrne talked about the weight she gained after her pregnancies. But

once she applied “The Law of Attraction,” she realized her error: “Food is not responsible for putting on weight. It is your thought that food is responsible for putting on weight that actually has food put on weight.”

Do you want to get healthy? Visualize health. One woman in the DVD claims to have cured her breast cancer in three months without chemotherapy or radiation. She claims she did this by visualizing herself well and watching funny movies on television.

The Seductive Message

The incredible popularity of *The Secret* illustrates the spiritual hunger in our culture. But while people are hungry for spirituality, they are not willing to attend church to be fed spiritually. Instead they go to the bookstore and buy this book or DVD along with other books dealing with spirituality.

A buyer for West Hollywood’s popular metaphysical bookstore, The Bodhi Tree, said that DVD of *The Secret* had “become the biggest selling item in the 30-year history of our store.” Why has it become so successful? Here is what a writer for *Time* magazine concluded:

> Mixing the ancient conspiracy hoodoo of *The DaVinci Code* with the psychic science of 2004’s cult hit *What the Bleep Do We Know?*, it interweaves computer graphics, historical recreations and interviews with “experts” into a study of “intention-manifestation” – the philosophy that contends our emotions and thoughts can actually influence real-world events. In other words: if you really, truly believe you can beat the lottery and visualize scratching off a winning ticket, you can do exactly that.{8}

The appeal of *The Secret* is understandable. People want to be wealthy and healthy. But this false philosophy leads to death and destruction. In Colossians 2:8, Paul warns Christians:

“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of the world rather than on Christ.”

There are countless examples that demonstrate that “The Law of Attraction” does not work. If you don’t think so, try this simple experiment. Visualize that you have a million dollars in your checking account. Think lots of positive thoughts about all the money you assume is in your checking account. Then go to the bank and write a really big check. The cashier might even have positive thoughts about your account. But then you will come face-to-face with reality. The bank’s computers don’t have positive thoughts about your checking account, nor do they have negative thoughts about your checking account. They are just doing the math. Despite all the positive feelings you can muster, your check will bounce.

Even those who accept the metaphysical basis of *The Secret* are concerned with its seductive message that appeals to our materialism. After all, practitioners are using this supposed ancient wisdom to acquire material goods. One of the “experts” in the film says: “*The Secret* is like having the universe as your catalog.”{9}

Many wonder if acquiring more possessions is what *The Secret* should be all about. “The get-rich-quick parts really bothered me,” says the buyer at the Bodhi Tree. “It’s my hope that people won’t use creative visualization to obtain wealth for themselves, but in more positive, altruistic ways.”{10}

Spiritually Dangerous

We have already shown that the premise of *The Secret* is false. You cannot alter reality simply with your thoughts. “The Law of Attraction” can essentially be summarized with three words: “Thoughts become things.” That is not true.

But the teachings of *The Secret* are not only false; they are

spiritually dangerous.

Rhonda Byrne makes this observation in her book: “So whatever way you look at it, the result is still the same. We are One. We are all connected, and we are all part of the One Energy Field, or the One Supreme Mind, or the One Consciousness, or the One Creative Source. Call it whatever you want, but we are all One.”{11}

Essentially she is teaching that we can become gods. We are God in a physical body. We are the creative source and the have the cosmic power to manipulate the universe according to our own desires. We are creating our own reality and thus can manipulate that reality to our own ends.{12}

Contrast that with the temptation in the Garden of Eden where Satan tells Eve “you will be like God” (Genesis 3:5). Why is *The* Secret so popular? Because we are tempted to be “like God.”

It is one of the enemy’s oldest tricks in The Book. Satan knows that we are vulnerable to this desire to be “like God.” Satan tempted Eve in the Garden with this tactic, and he is tempting millions today with the same tactic.

John warned us of the temptations in the world: “Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world” (1 John 2:15-16).

We must choose that which we love and worship. Are we going to love the world and all that is in the world? Or are we going to love God? We must choose what we will love and which view of reality we will accept.

We are admonished “to bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). The principles in

The Secret are not biblical principles but pagan, worldly principles that have been around since the beginning.

The Secret calls upon us to use our thoughts for our own selfish desires. Paul, however, tells us in Romans 12:1-2 that we are to present our bodies as a sacrifice to the Lord. We are to be selfless, not selfish.

(For more information on the spiritual dangers of *The Secret*, see Russ Wise's in-depth analysis, which uncovers the occultic connection with several contributors to the project.)

The Secret and Science

To prove "The Law of Attraction," the foundational principle in *The Secret*, Rhonda Byrne's DVD presents physicists who imply that the latest scientific discoveries validate this metaphysical principle. One of the "experts" in the film is Fred Alan Wolf who apparently talked about the relationship between quantum mechanics and consciousness. Evidently, most of this wound up on the cutting room floor.{13}

The other "expert" on the film is John Hagelin, who is affiliated with Maharishi University. Both Wolf and Hagelin distanced themselves from the ideas in the DVD and acknowledged that "The Law of Attraction" does not seem to work in reality the way it is described in *The Secret*.

Some of the ideas in *The Secret* can also be found in the film, *What the Bleep Do We Know?* The documentary combines interviews along with a fictional narrative to bring together thoughts about the possible connection between quantum physics and spirituality. The interviews and computer graphics imply that the latest scientific discoveries (in neuroscience, psychology, physics, etc.) suggest that we can manipulate the universe with our mind.

The film even sets forth the principle that the universe is

actually constructed from thought or mental images rather than some substance. It goes on to suggest that "empty space" is anything but empty. And it teaches that our beliefs about who we are and what is reality are influenced by our own thoughts and mental perspective.

The film may be interesting fiction and metaphysics; it is very poor psychology and physics. Scientists have rejected the ideas in the film as nothing more than pseudoscience with no relation to reality.

The message of *The Secret* also bears no relation to reality. It says, "Food is not responsible for putting on weight. It is your thought that food is responsible for putting on weight that actually has food put on weight." Science disagrees.

But the message is also dangerous. Karin Klein with the *Los Angeles Times* recounts the dangerous impact of *The Secret* on those who follow its prescription: "Therapists tell me they're starting to see clients who are headed for real trouble, immersing themselves in a dream world in which good things just come."{14}

It's not surprising that *The Secret* is popular. People are spiritually hungry, and the book and DVD partially feed that hunger. The message is seductive, but as we have also seen it is wrong, and more importantly, it is dangerous. It is one of the enemy's oldest tricks in The Book. We need to exercise spiritual discernment and realize the false teaching in *The Secret*.

Notes

1. Jerry Adler, "Decoding The Secret," *Newsweek*, 5 March 2007, 53.
2. Wallace Wattles, *The Science of Getting Rich*, 1910, www.scienceofgettingrich.net.
3. Adler, Decoding, 53-54.
4. Home page of The Secret,

www.thesecret.tv/home-synopsis.html.
5. Adler, Decoding, 55.
6. Rhonda Byrne, *The Secret* (New York: Atria Books, 2006), 28.
7. Ibid., 156.
8. Jeffrey Ressner, "The Secret of Success," *Time*, 28 December 2006.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Byrne, *The Secret*, 162.
12. Ibid., 164.
13. Adler, Decoding, 57.
14. Karin Klein, "Self-help gone nutty," *Los Angeles Times*, 13 February 2007.

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