



False Spiritual Warfare Teachings How the Church Becomes Pagan

BY BOB DEWAAY

“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.” (Colossians 2:8)

A pagan is anyone who lacks special revelation from God. And had God not spoken in the manner described in Hebrews 1:1, 2, everyone in the world would be a pagan. This is to say that each of us would have to guess about the nature of the spiritual world we live in and develop techniques in order to contact or manipulate our world. We would wonder how we could manipulate the “gods” to better our situation. We would create a class of shamans with special abilities to contact and manipulate the spirits. That is what every pagan culture looks like.

Sadly, that is what the church looks like when teachers of the warfare worldview proceed as though they were pagans with no special revelation (i.e., Scripture) to guide them. They are trafficking in forbidden information—and that is pagan (we will show how later). Since the pagan temptation is all around us, we must be discerning about its many inroads into the church. We have discussed many of these in past CIC issues: In this issue we will explore spiritual warfare teachings and show the alarming manner in which they introduce Christians to a pagan worldview.

The Bible is our “firewall” against paganism. When we believe and practice scripture alone, we are sure to develop a Christian worldview—if we interpret the Bible according to the meaning of its Spirit-inspired authors. Scripture “alone” implies that using

extra-Biblical sources for spiritual information is forbidden. It also implies that God has revealed everything we need to know and that it is sinful to think or act otherwise. God has limited our access to spiritual information for our own good. He wants us to think like true Christians; not like pagans.

THE WARFARE WORLDVIEW

Dr. Greg Boyd describes the warfare worldview as that being held by pagans, but simultaneously claims it to be the view the Biblical authors held. I find his perspective amazing. He discusses the view of a particular pagan society: “The Shuar Indians of eastern Ecuador believe that there are two levels of reality: the ‘ordinary’ physical world, which we experience with our senses, and the ‘real’ one, which is experienced occasionally, and mostly in dreams or in shamanic journeys.”¹ In this view the “real” world is the world of the spirits which is not that accessible. But it is considered the cause of things in the “unreal” physical world. Boyd explains, “This invisible society of spirits is behind everything that occurs in the physical world—though one has to see past ‘the lie’ to discern this society.”²

Pagan societies, whatever their terminology, create a class of shamans, as mentioned above. Boyd explains how that works for the Shuar:

(medicine men) within the Shuar culture, as in many other primitive cultures, is to engage in warfare with these spirits on behalf of the members of his tribe. There is no “natural” evil here; there are only victims of supernatural evil. The shaman’s business, therefore, is to enter into the “real” nonordinary world and fight against such supernatural attacks.³

Spiritual warfare is the business of shamans. Boyd accurately describes the pagan “warfare worldview.”

What shocks me is that he claims it is the Biblical worldview. Boyd writes, “This central thesis of this work is that this warfare worldview is in one form or another the basic worldview of biblical authors, both in the Old Testament and even more so in the New.”⁴ He offers this definition: “Stated most broadly, this worldview is that perspective on reality which centers on the conviction that the good and evil, fortunate or unfortunate, aspects of life are to be interpreted largely as the result of good and evil, friendly or hostile, spirits warring against each other and against us.”⁵ This means that our welfare is in the hands of wicked spirits and if we cannot come up with a means of dealing with those spirits we shall become victims.

My disagreement with Boyd is not about the existence of spirits, principalities or powers, nor of Satan or of other spirit beings—or even that the Bible does portray a world influenced by such beings. My disagreement has to do with his conclusion that God is not fully in charge of His own universe. Boyd wishes to absolve God from any possible association with evil by limiting His providential rule of the universe.

The providential view claims that though God allows evil, He nevertheless remains fully in control of His own universe and brings history forward according to His good purposes. Those of us

The primary business of shamans

who believe it take passages like this to be literal: “also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will” (Ephesians 1:11). There are many other passages that assert that God providentially rules His own universe. The Bible says that He draws the boundaries of the nations (Acts 17:26), ordains the human authorities (Romans 13:1), determines what Satan is allowed to do (Job 1:7-12), that through Christ he created the “ages” (Hebrews 1:2) and “upholds all things by the word of His power” (Hebrews 1:3). The Psalmist wrote: “Your faithfulness continues throughout all generations; You established the earth, and it stands. They stand this day according to Your ordinances, For all things are Your servants.” (Psalm 119:90, 91).⁶

The warfare worldview is Boyd’s way of rejecting the providential worldview that I claim to be Biblical. He labels the view I defend the “providential blueprint worldview.”⁷ I cite Boyd because his is the most scholarly articulation of the warfare worldview—and he admits it is pagan. But other spiritual warfare teachers take this even further by seeking information and technology from the world of the spirits ostensibly to use for the purpose of warfare.

VICTIMS OF A SPIRITUAL LEGAL SYSTEM

The problem for those who adapt the pagan, warfare worldview is that they are dealing with an unseen world and they are doing it using an illegal tool chest. The spirits have been doing their wicked dealings in that realm for many millennia and they know their way around it. Pagans fear these beings because they know that the spirits exist, and they know spirits can bring much harm. That is why pagans develop a class of shamans whose job it is to understand the unseen world. Shamans claim pragmatic results. But how do they know that the shamans themselves are not being used by spirits? Pagans believe that good and bad spirits exist,

and that the good ones can be used to their benefit—a “benefit” determined on the basis of a pragmatic outcome.

For example, Jose Silva taught people how to contact spirit guides by using his Silva Mind Control program. When Christians asked how he knew these spirits are “good” ones, he answered “They solve problems.”⁸ (Of course he never considered that the spirits might solve temporal problems to keep people listening to them and not the gospel.) Deception is the spirits stock in trade. The shamans are as deceived by them as their clients are. And both are on a path to hell.

Nevertheless, those who adopt the warfare worldview are convinced they must find a means to do battle in the spirit world. Christians who claim such abilities assert that learning the “legal system” or “rules of engagement” of the spirit world is the key to having success in that realm. Since God is not sovereignly in charge of His own universe in that worldview, they instead suppose that God has set up a legal system that the spirits have to follow. Humans who learn the secrets of that legal system (they reason) have some hope of using it to control the spirits.

Famous exorcist Bob Larson explains, “Curses are exacting, legal arrangements of the spirit world. Just like human contracts contain fine print and carefully crafted language, satanic curses are often filled with minutia that required detailed voiding.”⁹ Do we know the details of this “legal” system? No! God has not taught us the details of such a system. This is how the warfare worldview takes us away from *sola scriptura* into the pagan world of the shamans. A special class of people is created (in this case deliverance counselors) who perform for the church what the shaman does for the pagans. Think of the burden these people have: if they miss something in the “fine print,” this error could derail the process. Bob Larson admits, “In some cases, I’ve discovered that leaving out one phrase or one word can make all the difference. Satan will exploit the smallest thing to keep the curse in effect.”¹⁰ Fine print is problematic in legal documents in the

real world, but how hopeless is it in a world that we cannot even see and in which there is no documentation?

C. Peter Wagner agrees with the idea of legalities in the spirit world:

One of the more curious aspects of my pilgrimage into the field of spiritual warfare during the past few years has been the discovery that those who had been talking about it did not agree among themselves about the nature of strongholds. They agreed that strongholds provide the forces of darkness as a legal basis for doing their evil deeds both in individual people on the ground level and in cities or nations on the strategic level. Almost all of them, however, had their own opinions about the nature or identity of these strongholds.¹¹

Of course they cannot agree because they cannot know! They are dealing in the realm of spiritual information that God has not revealed. Unless God speaks, we are left to guess at the causes, effects and workings of the spiritual world. This “disagreement” by those lacking special revelation is the basis for the arguments, such as what occurred between Job and his friends as they vainly sought for answers. Until God spoke, each had to guess as to the cause and nature of his afflictions—and they guessed wrong. These things are in the realm of “secret things” that belong only to God (Deuteronomy 29:29 which we will turn to later). To try to understand unrevealed, spiritual, legal systems is to put us back into the realm of the pagans who have been doing the same for millennia. The “Christian” curse breaker is hardly different than the pagan one.

Watchman Nee, an early innovator in this “Christian paganism,” also asserted an unrevealed, spiritual legal system that if not discovered, will give evil spirits access to Christians:

For each and every thing God has created there is a law. . . . Hence evil spirits also operate according to definite laws, one of which is that certain causes will produce

certain effects. Now should anyone fulfill the conditions for the working of evil spirits (whether he fulfills them willingly, such as the witch, the medium or the sorcerer—or unwillingly, such as the Christian), then he has definitely given ground to them to work on him.¹²

One thing these teachers have in common is that they deny that Christians have escaped from the wicked powers of the universe.¹³ The means of escape that they propose are knowledge and techniques that the Bible does not reveal.

These teachers often select phrases in the Bible and extrapolate them to create a system whose inner workings must be discovered through some extrabiblical means. For example, Nee uses the term “place” from Ephesians 4:27 to prove the existence of this legal system and the need to learn it.¹⁴ Nee says, “It pays no heed to whether one is a Christian or not; once the conditions are met, the evil spirits do not fail to act.”¹⁵ One of these conditions that Nee has in mind is “passivity of the will.”¹⁶ According to this thinking, any person who lacks strong willpower will become a prey of evil spirits. Any known or unknown sin of activity or omission also turns the spirits loose on the Christian.¹⁷ It is hard to imagine that any Christian who believes this teaching could think himself to be free from curses and spirits.

While Nee is concerned with personal sin and spirits, Wagner is interested in territorial spirits that afflict large groups of people:

One of the reasons evil spirits succeed in returning is that strongholds on which they had based their legal rights to control that area and its people have not been thoroughly removed. We know a great deal more about this than we did previously, largely through our understanding that a crucial part of much strategic-level spiritual warfare should be through identificational repentance. Through accurate and sensitive

spiritual mapping we can identify strongholds rooted in unremitted sins of past generations and we now understand the ways and means of dealing with those sins of the past in our own generation.¹⁸

Notice that Wagner claims spirits have “legal rights” conferred upon them by human actions in past generations. This is in keeping with the warfare worldview asserting that people are in bad situations because demons and other spirit beings have gained legal access to them by the actions of humans—some of whom no longer are alive—in a hidden cause/effect. But notice also that we consistently end up with the need for secret information. How else can we do “spiritual mapping.” The Bible provides no such map and doesn’t describe how to build a system of spiritual guidance.

For instance, a demon commended Bob Larson for his knowledge of the secret rules of the spirit world.

Demon: “Who taught you the rules?”

Larson: “What do you mean by that?”

Demon: “The spiritual rules that determine what we can and can’t do. Someone from our side must have taught you.”¹⁹

This underscores a major problem with the warfare worldview. The hidden “rules of engagement” for spiritual battles are seen as the key to victory; even if this were true the evil spirits live in this reality and we have to fish around with various means, guessing to gain even a partial, possibly wrong knowledge of them. In fact, we are forced to become like pagans and create a class of shamans who are better than most at gaining secret information. The church becomes dependent on unrevealed, forbidden, spiritual knowledge and the class of people that reveals it. Once that happens, the church has been paganized.

GAINING SECRET, SPIRITUAL INFORMATION

I find it truly shocking that highly educated Christians fail to see the implica-

tions of their own teachings. For example, C. Peter Wagner devotes an entire chapter (the second) of his book to allege that extrabiblical spiritual knowledge is available and valid. He uses the same tactic that others have used, claiming that the “logos” word is the Bible and “rhema” words are direct sources of spiritual revelation.²⁰ Having opened the door to extrabiblical knowledge of the spirit world, he follows it to amazing places:

In it [chapter 2] I suggest that it may be possible to receive selected, but valid, information from the world of darkness itself. I am careful to stress strongly that discernment is needed while attempting to do this because evil spirits are by nature deceivers and they must be treated as hostile witnesses. Nevertheless, certain people such as shamans, witch doctors, practitioners of Eastern religions, New Age gurus or professors of the occult on university faculties are examples of the kind of people who may have much more extensive knowledge of the spirit world than most Christians have. Some of the information they furnish is accurate.²¹

He tells us to use discernment when gaining information from the world of darkness. But discernment is impossible when going into an unseen world. The discernment the Bible gives us is objective and concerns the confession of Jesus Christ (1John 4:1-5). These shamans are disqualified on that ground. Wagner encourages Christians to seek truth from the very people God condemns in Deuteronomy 18.

Even if some of this information is accurate, it is nevertheless forbidden in the strongest terms possible. God forbids us access to secret knowledge for our own spiritual good, not because some of it might be inaccurate. It is forbidden because it is destructive—regardless of whether or not it is true!

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. (Deuteronomy 18:10-12)

This issue of accuracy is not mentioned; these are “detestable” persons and practices. Yet it is through these forbidden practices that pagans gain their spiritual information. Wagner has opened the floodgate for paganism to swamp the church.

The only One with exhaustive knowledge of the spirit world who could provide a spiritual “map” for us is God Himself. Why would we assume that He purposely withheld the knowledge we would need in order to evangelize cities, free people from Satan, remove curses, and bring forth His kingdom on earth only to have us glean it from shamans? God has given us exactly what we need—the clear revelation we find in scripture. The rest belongs to Him: “*The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law*” (Deuteronomy 29:29). The rejection of *sola scriptura* is the reason these pagan teachings penetrate so deeply into the evangelical movement and the practices appeal to people who are not satisfied with what God has chosen to reveal.

Wagner makes the mistake of assuming that *because* the spirit world where shamans practice their trade is *real*, the information gleaned from it might be accurate and useful:

[S]ome non-Christians, whether animist shamans, gurus, lamas, philosophers or whatever, may be able to communicate to us some information about the reality of the spirit world in which they have gained considerable expertise. These non-Christian sources, of course, must be evaluated with much prayerful scrutiny and cau-

tion. Still, we must keep in mind that the spirit world to which they are dedicated is a real world, not the figment of their “heathen” imaginations. Therefore, some things about it can be accurately known.²²

But the issues are neither the reality of the spirit world nor whether information about it may be accurate. Even we ourselves would concede that some shamans have effective processes that work for their clients. But the world of the occult is forbidden to the Christian. Prescribing “prayerful scrutiny” of a type of knowledge that is categorically forbidden in the Bible is absurd. The result of such a process would be “Christian” paganism—an oxymoron.

Wagner points out that when the words of demons are recorded in the New Testament, “*they speak the truth!*”²³ In his mind, that (which Wagner cannot know to be the case) makes seeking such information valid. Larson does too:

Someone should be designated to keep a log of the information received while interrogating the demons. As the internal structure of the victim’s demonic system is revealed, list the spirits according to their ranking, cite their right and occasion of entry, and note their legal ground for remaining.²⁴

This approach errs by asserting that simply because some demons spoke in Jesus’ presence, therefore it is a good thing for them to speak and that we should seek to speak to them in order to glean information. The gospels objective was to show that Jesus was who He claimed to be (God Incarnate), and that all things, including the spirit world, are under His authority. In addition, Jesus often told the demons to be silent. He was not gleaning information about the world of the spirits.

SPIRITUAL TECHNOLOGY

My claim is that God has limited us to what He has chosen to reveal to us concerning the reality of the spiritual world (i.e., in the Scripture). He gives us the

freedom to use our five senses and rational minds to engage the world of general revelation so we can survive as humans created in His image. But He blocks access to unrevealed spiritual information for our own good. He does not want His people to be like the pagans.

We see this in the Garden of Eden. God gave Adam and Eve access to all the trees of the garden except one. Adam was given the authority to name the animals. Eating from the trees, tilling the ground, and naming animals are valid uses of general revelation. They had special revelation as well: “You shall not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 2:17). The Serpent claimed that there was other knowledge that would be beneficial that God withheld from them. He was right that God withheld it, but he lied by implying it would be beneficial.

God has the right to withhold knowledge at His discretion. Their subsequent rebellion plunged them and their descendants into bondage to sin and death. So God allowed knowledge gleaned through ordinary means and spiritual knowledge given directly to them by God. But the “knowledge” obtained through forbidden means (listening to the serpent and disobeying God’s commands) is destructive and, if followed, leads to judgment. In the section of Deuteronomy where divination is forbidden it says this: “*When you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations*” (Deuteronomy 18:9). It is never God’s will that His covenant people gain their spirituality from pagans or pagan practices! But today that is precisely where many people in the church are looking. Paul speaks this same message in 1 Corinthians 12:2, “You know that when you were pagans, you were led astray to the mute idols, however you were led.”

Wagner suggests that we can gain direct access to unrevealed spiritual information from both Christian and non-Christian sources:

It is important also to recognize that spiritual insight, which

receives information directly from the spirit world, is not an exclusive faculty of those who have been born again. Spiritual discernment certainly constitutes at least some dimension of the image of God in which all human beings, Christian or non-Christian, have been created. If this is correct, then human beings, whether Indo-Europeans, Melanesians, Amerindians, or whatever they may be, can and often do possess valid information about the spirit world.²⁵

These ideas expressed by Wagner are patently unbiblical. God speaks with certainty, through His ordained spokespersons, words which must be obeyed. The knowledge God gives to His people is mediated through specific humans, chosen by God and identifiable by God's people. The essence of occultism is seeking direct, unmediated knowledge of the spirit world that God has not chosen to reveal. The only difference between us and the pagans is that we have God's Word (special revelation) spoken to us by chosen men who spoke with and touched "God come in the flesh" (1John 1:1). To depart from *sola scriptura* by thinking that God gave all humans special faculties for gaining spiritual information is to reject Christian theism and embrace paganism. Wagner is right about one thing—there is not much difference between Christians and non-Christians directly accessing the spirit world for information. In fact there is a word that describes both categories: *deceived*.

Wagner goes further and prescribes developing and testing new, spiritual technology:

In this book, I am not claiming biblical *proof* of strategic-level spiritual warfare, spiritual mapping or identificational repentance. I will, however, claim that we do have sufficient biblical *evidence* to warrant at the least a working hypothesis we can field test, evaluate, modify and refine; At the *most* a significant, relatively new spiritual technology God

has given us . . . If this is the case, refusing to use it on the part of some might be to run the risk of unfaithfulness to the Master.²⁶

Here we find grave category errors. How does one "field test" unbiblical spiritual "technology?" The world of the spirits does not lend itself to such testing. In general revelation, technology can be developed and tested because of our ability to create a system of controls, to demonstrate repeatability, and to objectively test output. But how can one do this with unseen spirits who have sinister intentions and wills of their own; who also are unseen to us and are likely to manipulate the output to their advantage and our disadvantage?

Furthermore, the "testing" process is impossible to evaluate. Some have tried to use crime statistics to prove their spiritual warfare "worked." But having no control over the variables, they have no valid data. Crime goes up and down in various cities for various reasons, far too numerous to control. Groups going on "prayer walks" performing rites of "identificational repentance" cannot watch future crime statistics to see if their experiment "worked." In their minds they are living a pagan worldview that uses the "real" spirit world to control the less "real" visible world. But the visible world is filled with its own complex system of causes and effects; e.g. as economic conditions, family conditions, police policies, court systems, and political decisions. If the crime rate goes down after someone conducts a spiritual "experiment" does he take the credit? And if it goes up does he blame these other factors? The entire approach is fatally flawed.

The only question that matters is whether or not God has commanded us to perform prayer walks, bind territorial spirits, practice identificational repentance, or any of the other new spiritual technologies that Wagner and others propose with which to control the spirit world. Clearly God has not commanded these or there would be no need to "experiment." Prayer, as understood biblically, is practiced on the grounds of God's commands and promises. We

cannot try it and quit if we do not like the outcome. In contrast to this, Wagner claims he does not have Biblical proof for his technologies; but rather he "experiments." As I have shown, these experiments cannot be tested either. The whole process is a fool's mission.

Given this, how can Wagner claim that we risk "unfaithfulness to God" by failing to do what God never told us to do? He has jettisoned *sola scriptura* and "bound" his readers to processes he admits are taught nowhere in the Bible. Wagner threatens Christians with disobedience and sin if they fail to embrace his unbiblical experiments. This is totally unacceptable and should be forthrightly rejected.

BLESSING AND CURSING

Pagans live under unremitting fear of curses and threats from unseen and malicious spiritual causes and effects. They have techniques for creating curses and others for breaking them. They have practitioners of cursing and curse-breaking. In addition they have the greater fear that the sinister spirit beings have their own processes for handing down afflictions to their human victims. This thinking is the result of having a pagan worldview.

As with other teachings we have examined, there is a "Christian" version of pagan curse breaking. One of these is based on the idea of "generational" curses that are lifted out of Biblical context and used to explain various maladies and difficulties that Christians may experience.²⁷ The faulty logic behind it suggests that since God warned Old Testament Israel that He would "visit the iniquities of the fathers to the third and fourth generation," and that Deuteronomy chapter 28 lists the sort of bad outcomes that would be visited upon Israel for being unfaithful to the covenant, therefore one can examine symptoms and outcomes and assume that he is cursed because of the unknown sins of unknown ancestors.

Logically, this creates a belief system in which everyone would be convinced they must be cursed. Derek Prince, whose book teaches that Christians are

under curses they must discover, explains:

Conversely, any one of the four generations preceding us, by having committed these sins, could be the cause of a curse over us in our generation. Each of us has two parents, four grandparents, eight great-grandparents, and sixteen great-great-grandparents. This makes a total of thirty persons, any one of whom might be the cause of a curse over our lives. How many of us would be in a position to guarantee that none of our thirty immediate ancestors was ever involved in any form of idolatry or the occult?²⁸

The answer, of course, is no one. This belief creates a need for a class of people capable of gaining secret information (about *which* ancestral sin is causing *which* curse) and devising a process to break the curse. Once again, pagan thinking has come into the church and created the perceived need for a class of shamans and associated shaman training. For them, the contents of the Bible cannot directly provide the necessary information (which sins and curses) and neither can general revelation. So they are back fishing for answers in the sea of the spirits like their pagan ancestors.

What is missed by these teachings and teachers is that in the Bible, blessing and cursing are relational, not symptomatic. A person who is in right, covenant relationship with God is blessed, even if he finds himself in unpleasant circumstances. A person in rebellion to God is cursed even if life is going very well for him. For example, included in the list of persons who "gained approval through their faith" are ones who were mocked, beaten, sawn in two, destitute, afflicted and had other horrible things happen to them (Hebrews 11:35-39). But popular books on the topic of blessing and cursing have Christians looking at the symptoms of their own lives to determine if they are cursed.

Derek Prince lists the following as symptoms of curses: "mental and/or

emotional breakdown, repeated or chronic sickness (especially if hereditary), barrenness, a tendency to miscarriage . . . breakdown of marriage and family alienation, continuing financial insufficiency, being accident prone, and a history of suicides and unnatural or untimely deaths."²⁹ If any of these things existed in the four generations of your ancestors or in your life, Prince suggests that you are cursed, even if you are a Christian. Obviously everyone would have to consider themselves cursed.

This teaching is clearly unbiblical. For example, Prince claims that people who have "financial insufficiency" are cursed. But here is what Jesus said: "*And turning His gaze toward His disciples, He began to say, 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God'*" (Luke 6:20). Citizens of the kingdom are blessed even if they are poor.

Prince gets his ideas from applying the curses of Deuteronomy 28 to Christians, suggesting they first determine whether or not they have any of those negative outcomes. If so, they may be under a curse. He says that the presence of one or two of those is not conclusive that a curse is at work. Each person must seek supernatural information in order to determine if they are cursed.³⁰ But that puts us back into the need for extra-biblical revelations which makes us have to again behave like pagans.

There is a logical fallacy going on here as well. It goes like this: If a creature is a normal cat, it has four legs. Fido has four legs; therefore Fido is a cat. But that is a fallacy called "asserting the consequent" in an "if/then" logical formulation. There is more than one possible cause for having four legs. To apply this to curses found in Deuteronomy 28: If Israelites in covenant with God break that covenant and go after other gods, then these curses will come upon them (Deuteronomy 28:16-68). Suzie exhibits several of the symptoms listed in those 52 verses, therefore Suzie is under a curse. That reasoning contains two fallacies: 1) Suzie is not an Israelite under the old covenant; 2) the fallacy of asserting the consequent has been committed. There could be other reasons for

her being in one of the many conditions listed in those verses besides being cursed for breaking covenant.

So objectively examining symptoms is not sufficient for diagnosing curses. That means we cannot know by either special revelation (the words of the Bible) or general revelation (examining physical symptoms) whether or not a curse is in operation. That means we are back to a need for a shaman. Again we have invited paganism into the church and believe that what is clearly revealed in scripture is not sufficient to deliver us from curses.

BLESSING AND CURSING FROM A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

The truth is much simpler than the confusing false teachings that are so prevalent. It goes like this: "*Thus says the Lord, 'Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind and makes flesh his strength, And whose heart turns away from the Lord'*" (Jeremiah 17:5); "*Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord And whose trust is the Lord*" (Jeremiah 17:7). With a Biblical worldview, as we have claimed, blessing and cursing are relational; not symptomatic. That message is very clear in many places, such as the book of Job and the beatitudes. Some people who are blessed by God have negative symptoms from a human perspective, and some people who are cursed because they do not know God are happy and healthy.

Here is another example: "*For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them'*" (Galatians 3:10). Paul's conclusion is that it is impossible to be anything *but* cursed if one tries to be justified by works of the Law. One transgression and you are cursed. One cannot be in right relationship with God by works. Here is the alternative:

Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel before-

hand to Abraham, saying, "All the nations will be blessed in you." So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer. (Galatians 3:7-9)

Blessing is relational—those who are "sons of Abraham" are blessed because they have the type of justifying faith Abraham had. There is no need to look for symptoms other than for signs of saving faith.

Let us take this even deeper. Consider this passage: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive" (1Corinthians 15:22). Everyone born is born "in Adam" and therefore under the curse of sin and death. Our relationship with Adam curses us. But everyone in Christ is blessed with the promise of eternal life. We are "in Adam" by natural generation and can only be "in Christ" by supernatural regeneration—being born again. That is why the gospel of Jesus Christ is the only means of escaping the curse. (See Romans 5:12-21 for Paul's teaching on the Adam/Christ analogy.)

Being in a right relationship with God means that one cannot be cursed by any lesser being—be it spiritual or human. Balaam, a famous curse maker, tried to earn money to curse God's blessed people Israel. Here is Balaam's conclusion about that attempt: "God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good? Behold, I have received a command to bless; When He has blessed, then I cannot revoke it" (Numbers 23:19, 20). But Balaam did not give up. He knew that the only way to get Israel cursed was to tempt them with paganism to disobey God's Word and then God would curse them: "But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality" (Revelation 2:14; see Numbers 31:16). If God's people apostatize, they put themselves out of a right relationship with God and that is the only thing that will curse them.

Embracing a pagan worldview is a path to apostasy. I believe God will preserve us from that. But we would be utter fools to ignore the warnings against apostasy on the grounds that we deem ourselves secure.

BELIEVING LIKE PAGANS

Pagans are perpetually insecure because they have no way of knowing that they are safe in the hands of their gods. That is, they have no certain, special revelation about God or from God concerning the nature of the spiritual world they live in. To the degree that Christians are influenced by pagan thinking, they also become more insecure. They are never sure when they might be cursed. They are never sure when a demon may invade them. They imagine they need some spiritual technology gleaned from the spirit world in order to insure a successful outcome for their endeavors. They need a "Christian" version of a shaman to mediate between them and the spirit world (usually called "prophets" or "deliverance counselors"). In short, they are like pagans in most respects.

Some adherents, like Greg Boyd, who are more theologically sophisticated, have emotional or philosophical reasons to prefer the pagan worldview. Boyd cannot accept the implications of the doctrine of God's providence and willingly says so. The providential worldview is the Biblical worldview, though Boyd denies it, instead offering paganism as the alternative. The teaching of the Bible clearly claims that God is indeed in charge of His own universe and knows all things. That is what God told Job when Job found himself the victim of what Boyd calls "gratuitous evil."

But exchanging the Biblical doctrine of providence for the pagan belief in the warfare worldview creates the type of insecurities common for pagans. Boyd realizes this: "Whatever else may be said about the classical-philosophical blueprint model of God's providence [Boyd's way of discrediting the doctrine of providence], it does provide the believer with a certain kind of security that the warfare worldview seems to

lack—so long as one steers clear of concrete atrocities."³¹ In other words, it may be more comforting to believe that God is providentially ruling over His own universe to bring history forward according to His saving purposes; but it is not emotionally satisfying to think of God allowing evil in His universe for His own good purposes. To think that evil happens outside of God's foreknowledge and providential control seems more satisfying to some (such as Boyd). The implication, of course, is that to avoid being victims of gratuitous evil that God did not foresee and chooses not to control, we must figure out how to battle the spirits and find shelter from their malicious power. If we fail to embrace the shamans and their teaching, the evil spirits may very well get the upper hand and destroy us.

Is it better to live in fear of being a spiritual casualty than to believe that if one is in right relationship with God, he is blessed and God is providentially working through all things to bring him to glory (Romans 8:28-39)? The warfare worldview gives little comfort because most of what is important is unknown and out of our control or God's. Boyd realizes the fear this creates: "It is, I think, undeniable that the warfare worldview on one level depicts a scarier world than the providential blueprint worldview, for the simple reason that opening one's eyes to the reality of war is indeed scary."³² Like the others we have critiqued in this article, Boyd thinks the issue is about the existence ("reality") of the spirits and the battle. It is not about that. It is about whether God is in charge of all beings, spiritual or otherwise, and good or evil. It is about whether Satan must get permission from God (as he did with Job and Peter) to "sift" believers. It is about whether God has left us to fight a battle against unseen foes when they have all the information about the workings of the spirit world and we do not.

It is decidedly not better to believe like pagans. Boyd chooses to believe the pagan, warfare worldview because the implications of the Biblical doctrine of providence offend him. But he under-

stands the material quite well. The other authors critiqued here are much less sophisticated in their theology. Unlike Boyd, they have gone into the pagan warfare worldview because they fail to see the implications of it and why the Bible warns so forcefully against it. But nevertheless they contribute to the paganization of the church. Even without false teaching in the church, Christians sometimes fall into the pagan worldview because it is all around us, and it is the default position of the human race. They have not had their minds sufficiently transformed by the whole counsel of God to see it for what it is.

CONCLUSION

When the Christians at Colossae felt threatened after being tempted back into pagan thinking and practices through the warfare worldview, Paul assured them that Christ had triumphed over the powers of darkness through the cross. Paul preached Christ to them and taught against pagan deliverance technology because it was damaging and denied the power of the cross. Paul offered comfort and assured the Ephesians that God works all things after the counsel of His will, and that they were seated with Christ above the hostile powers—regardless of their feelings or circumstances. Ephesians 1 in itself is enough to refute Greg Boyd's theology. Paul preached these truths to the Ephesians and Colossians because the believers in Asia Minor and had spent their lives steeped in the warfare worldview, fearing bad fate at the hands of invisible hostile powers. These early Christians lived in the shadows of the pagan temples, were attacked by pagan oracles and prophets, and needed assurance of the sufficiency of Christ. Whatever the pagans around us believe always tries to work its way into the church—in Paul's day and ours.

Today the evangelical church is a hotbed of pagan thinking and pagan practices. This happened through various trends that made *sola scriptura* obsolete in the minds of many. Because the words of scripture are not considered

sufficient, people seek unmediated contact with the "spirits", thinking it is the Holy Spirit with new revelations. They devise and fund spiritual technology to control the spirit world, and create a class of "Christian" shamans to manage the whole process. The result is that the church is as pagan as the world itself. This is more harmful because it claims these spiritual innovations are "Christian."

People do not blush when, for example, they teach Yoga in their churches. Our respected leaders do not blush when they counsel Christians to seek information from New Agers and gurus. Church leaders do not blush when they set aside Bible classes to make time for eastern meditative practices. Pastors do not blush when they teach that the pagan warfare worldview is the one we should adopt as biblical. Evangelicals do not blush when they bring Roman Catholic mystics to their churches to teach their congregations paganism. Jeremiah described this in his day: "*Were they ashamed because of the abomination they had done? They certainly were not ashamed, And they did not know how to blush*" (Jeremiah 8:12a).

Pray that our evangelical movement will learn how to blush and be brought to repentance. In the meantime I implore anyone who wants to think and practice as a Christian—and not a pagan—to flee paganism and find refuge in a church that that practices *sola scriptura* and preaches the whole counsel of God.

END NOTES

1. Greg Boyd, *God at War*, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1997) 11.
2. Ibid. 12.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid. 13.
5. Ibid.
6. CIC Issue 98: <http://cicministry.org/commentary/issue98.htm> includes a discussion of providence.
7. Boyd 292.
8. Silva Mind Control on VHS video; John Ankerberg Show
9. Bob Larson, *In the Name of Satan* —

How the forces of evil work and what you can do to defeat them; (Nashville: Nelson, 1996) 109

10. Ibid.
11. C. Peter Wagner, *Confronting the Powers*; (Ventura: Regal Books, 1996) 237.
12. Watchman Nee, *The Spiritual Man* Vol. 3; (New York, Christian Fellowship Publishers, 1968 – written in 1927) 90.
13. See CIC Issues 69, 70, 71 on the Colossian Heresy which is what this is.
14. Nee, 91.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid. 93.
17. Ibid. 92.
18. Wagner, 158, 159.
19. Larson, 205.
20. Wagner, 52, 53.
21. Ibid. 148.
22. Ibid. 69.
23. Ibid. emphasis his.
24. Larson, 208.
25. Wagner, 67.
26. Ibid. 89.
27. A comprehensive discussion of this issue can be found in CIC Issue 68, January/February 2002.
28. Derek Prince, *Blessing or Curse – You Can Choose!*; (New York: Chosen Books, 1990) 74.
29. Ibid. 45.
30. Ibid. 46.
31. Boyd, 292.
32. Ibid.

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