

## Detoured by the Supernatural (1)

In recent years North American Christianity has witnessed yet another rebirth of fervor and prurience for the spectacular. A new generation of “signs and wonders” leaders has arisen, taking the movement to a new nadir. One new “spiritual general” is the “young champion” (17) Todd Bentley, who has been touted as having a “contagious” ministry that will “infect you” (17, 13). His teachings are lauded with adulations such as “Brilliant! Anointed! Cutting edge!” (back cover). They are not. Rather, his teachings steer seeking believers down a slippery slope away from the genuine experience of Christ Himself.

Bentley’s four-hundred-page manual encourages believers to have greater intimacy with God by seeking encounters with angels, being teleported to other parts of the world, having physical visitations from Jesus so tangible that you can see and smell Him and have prayer meetings that are filled with “holy smoke and fragrance” (86). Christians are told that they should not settle for the same old “boring Christian life ever again” (18) but instead should seek supernatural encounters. His book *The Reality of the Supernatural World* (hereafter *Supernatural*) is a mélange of story-telling, self-promotion, and exhortations to “actively seek and expect” supernatural experiences (20). He proclaims that the time has come to “teach the Body to exercise their spiritual senses” (20) because “God wants to take the spookiness out of our idea of the spirit realm and spiritual visitations” (23). With apostolic certainty, *Supernatural* declares that “this is the direction He has for the Church” (23). Sadly, tens of thousands of believers in North America have followed this spiritual detour. What follows is a description of *Supernatural*’s more significant errors and, given that backdrop, a brief presentation of the truth on each topic.

### The Christian’s Spiritual Inheritance

*Supernatural* argues that the supernatural realm, including experiences such as transportations and angelic visitations, is the inheritance spoken of in the New Testament. *Supernatural* tells its readers that “out of body experiences, or *translation*, is another biblical spiritual adventure” that believers have “legal access” to (54). Using drug-culture terminology, he cheapens the

apostle Paul’s experience of being caught away to the third heaven, telling us, “Man, he really tripped!” and “Today, God is giving these experiences to more and more believers” (56). *Supernatural* tells us that the Lord told Bentley, “The Body of Christ is ready, on a corporate level, for the kind of anointing that you have touched and seen hidden away in back rooms” (63).

*Supernatural* describes “the playful side” of an angel who visited a seven-year-old boy in a meeting: “The angel actually pulled up his gown to show the boy he was wearing running shoes!” (67). Then we are emphatically told that this kind of experience of the supernatural “is the inheritance of His sons and daughters” (67). *Supernatural* purports to know what the Father wants: “The Father wants to endorse ministry in North America with miracles, signs, and wonders. He wants us to reach for this inheritance. We need to say, ‘Thank You, Lord, that it’s mine’” (69).

*Supernatural*’s error concerning our spiritual inheritance lies symptomatically in that small word quoted above—*it’s*. We are told that “the supernatural needs to become a part of our consciousness” (69). In other words, the Christian’s inheritance is an *it*—a thing. It is the supernatural. We need to think about it all the time and talk about it every day and thank God for it (69). God has a “supernatural treasure chest for us,” and these “tremendous riches,” such as angelic visitations, trances, and transportations, are heaven’s supernatural blessings and inheritance for believers (102). This erroneous teaching misdirects believers, defrauding them of their true inheritance testified clearly in the Scriptures.

Our spiritual inheritance is not an “it” but a person! Christ Himself is our spiritual inheritance. Speaking of our inheritance, Colossians 1:12 tells us that Christ is “the allotted portion of the saints.” Ephesians 2:14 also reveals that our inheritance is a “who,” not an “it.” God has given us all that we need, summed up in the precious being of Christ. He is also our real treasure. To seek spiritual treasures besides Christ is to deviate from “the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” that are in Him (Col. 2:3). Paul also tells us that Christ “became wisdom to us from God: both righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30). We do not need wisdom or

anything else as an item by itself; rather, we need Christ as our wisdom and everything. All that we need is Him.

Unlike *Supernatural*, the apostle Paul never described his experience of being translated to the third heaven as one of the tremendous riches. Rather, he described the indwelling Christ, the “Christ in you,” as “the riches of the glory” (Col. 1:27). Instead of being conscious of and preoccupied with a supernatural realm as *Supernatural* exhorts, we should think about Him, talk about Him, and thank God for Him. Over a century ago, A. B. Simpson described our Christian inheritance in classic words:

I thank God we have been taught that it is not the blessing, it is not the healing, it is not the sanctification, it is not the thing, it is not the it that you want, but it is something better. It is “the Christ”; it is Himself...It is simply Christ and Christ alone. (3, 7)

God’s gift of Christ is given to every member of His Body. He is the portion of all the saints; He is “theirs and ours” (1 Cor. 1:2). There are no esoteric and hidden experiences previously reserved for spiritual generals huddled in some back room and only now made available to the rest of the church. There is no second blessing awaiting discovery. Though Christ is certainly enjoyed in varying degrees by His followers, this is due only to the degree of their seeking, not to the degree of His availability. God has eternally “blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ” (Eph. 1:3). The wonderful, all-sufficient Christ is all the inheritance that the church needs and should aspire to.

### The Christian’s Destiny and Calling

*Supernatural* is larded with inane pronouncements of what God intends for His believers. For example, the book asks the reader, “How would you like to smell the fragrance of the Lord or the aroma of His perfume?” (43). Bentley recounts, “I have been in meetings where God will manifest with the smell of vanilla, roses, cinnamon, and burning incense” (43-44). Even more inane, Bentley tells us that God will “sometimes even give me a revelation of the direction of the meeting by allowing me one whiff of His fragrance” (44). *Supernatural* tells readers that God is pleased to give them a “whiff” of Christ. Compare this to the Scriptures, where Paul says that “it pleased God...to reveal His Son in me” and that Christ wants to make His home in our hearts (Gal. 1:5-16; Eph.

3:17). The former is objective and extrinsic; the latter subjective and intrinsic.

*Supernatural* errantly builds up a false expectation that God intends to give Christians sensual experiences, exhorting readers to have their noses “open for what God wants to say” (44). Readers are also led to believe that their God-intended destiny is to “fall into” a “biblical trance-like state” to experience “God’s supernatural anesthetic” (49). *Supernatural* adds more to the Christian’s destiny: angelic visitations (50-51), Holy Ghost flashbacks (51-52), and corporeal visitations from the Lord such as the one in Bentley’s bedroom, where Christ shut the door, stepped out of the darkness with “a kaleidoscope of color” following Him, sat on his bed, and “squished down” the mattress (53-54). Then Bentley tells us that “He placed His hand in front of my nose, and I inhaled the awesome aromas of vanilla, cinnamon, rose, and sweet incense” (54). He tells us that “similar experiences are on the increase in the Body of Christ” (53) and that “God is giving these experiences to more and more believers” (56).

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*Supernatural* promises that if the reader will “set aside time every day to be with Him,” he should “get ready for supernatural encounters—sweet, great adventures in the spirit” (62). The book assumes prophetic authority, declaring that God wants to “make the supernatural natural and commonplace” (67) and that “it’s time for all His children to enter in” (63). *Supernatural* tells us that “we are destined to carry that supernatural anointing” (69), that “God created us to see signs and wonders” (70), and that “we are called to start living in the reality of the supernatural realm in these end-days” (81). In sum, God has destined, created, and called Christians for sensual and confabulated supernatural experiences.

*Supernatural*’s abuse of biblical terms like *created*, *destined*, and *called* is not only erroneous—it is painful to read. First, the Bible emphatically tells us why man was created: “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them have dominion” (Gen. 1:26). We were created for the lofty purpose of expressing God and representing His authority, His kingdom on earth. This grand purpose in creation is ultimately fulfilled in His Son Jesus Christ and then through the church, the Lord’s extension through time’s centuries and His expansion over the earth’s geography. Today Christ and the church, the Head and the Body, manifest God’s “eternal purpose” (Eph. 3:11). It is this purpose that motivated His work of creation. The fulfillment of God’s eternal purpose is the

basis of our existence, not a desire that His creation would merely be enthralled with signs and wonders.

Second, Christians are destined not for sensational miracles but “to be conformed to the image of His Son” (Rom. 8:29). We have been predestinated “unto sonship” (Eph. 1:5), that is, for Christ to grow in us to maturity, to expand in us and saturate us with Himself, live in us, mingle with us, and make Himself one with our entire tripartite being. *Supernatural’s* teaching will turn believers from the New Testament path of inwardly experiencing, knowing, growing, and gaining Christ and will cause them to take a detour on a disappointing quest for outward epiphanies. Though unseen by physical eyes, God’s way of dispensing Christ into us is much more real and substantial. God’s intention is to make Christ experiential in the most precious and subjective way, rather than to give mere outward sensations. In fact, by both His appearing and disappearing, the Lord spent forty days after His resurrection to train His disciples to live by His invisible presence. The Lord was making them accustomed to knowing Him subjectively. He told the disciples, “Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed” (John 20:29), indicating that a much more blessed condition was soon to come—knowing Christ according to an inward, organic, invisible union with Him. Watchman Nee said it well in a hymn: “The outward touch has passed away / For inward union worthier” (*Hymns*, #491). God has marvelously predestinated us to be His sons according to the full development of His life and nature within us. When believers see this profound revelation in the Scriptures, it becomes acutely evident that *Supernatural’s* exhortations are strikingly awry.

Third, God has never called us to seek supernatural encounters such as angelic visitations and teleported out-of-body experiences. Instead, God has called us “according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28), which includes the dispensing of Christ into His believers to be their life and living, and by that, making them “the church...the fullness of the One who fills all in all” (Eph. 1:22-23). Perhaps our calling is most clearly stated in 1 Corinthians 1:9, which says that we “were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” This means that God has called us into a constant participation in and an enjoyment of His Son in a spiritual, organic union with Him. When our whole being is occupied alone with Christ, we have truly been called “out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9). This fulfills our calling to “lay hold on the eternal life,” which is God Himself

(1 Tim. 6:12). By this continual fellowship with the Son, our calling will consummate with the words, “Blessed are they who are called to the marriage dinner of the Lamb” (Rev. 19:9). *Supernatural’s* “calling” is found wanting in the light of the high calling revealed in the New Testament.

### The Christians’ Seeking and Expectation

Early in the book, *Supernatural* states, “It is time to lift our standard and expectations of how much of God we can have and see now” (20). This is true enough. Every lover of Christ wants more of God. But the rest of the book’s message quickly wanders into error, exhorting readers to experience God through outward mediums and superficial experiences. *Supernatural* teaches a way that differs from the apostles’ teaching, telling readers that God “wants to draw His people closer by giving them revelation of the reality of the spiritual realm and supernatural encounters” (21) and that “we should actively seek and expect it in our lives” (20). *Supernatural* goes so far as to suggest that this kind of seeking is God’s “command” for us (26). Bentley tells his readers that he wants “to see the spirit realm more often,” including the demons whom he is trying to cast out during “deliverance” events (28).

Readers are told that it is biblical to desire “to see into the spiritual realm” (30). Then the book misuses Hebrews

4:16, reducing it from a very real experience of coming to the Lord during daily life to receive grace to an extraordinary teleportation event. *Supernatural* tells readers that the blood of Jesus has opened the door for us to be transported to “the throne zone,” where we can stand boldly, “feel the rumble of thunder,” and “blink when lightning flashes” as we feel our jaws drop when we see the living creatures (31). For *Supernatural*, coming forward with boldness to the throne of grace in times of need is a tangible, sensuous encounter experienced by physical sight and touch. But if this is what Hebrews 4:16 means, then we can only “receive mercy and find grace for timely help” during extraordinary encounters instead of moment by moment in our everyday life.

Our souls should thirst for God (Psa. 42:2), and we should hunger for more of Christ (John 6:57). But Bentley implies through his testimony that instead of hungering for Christ, we should position ourselves in faith and then contend and hunger for supernatural experiences. Teachings and testimonies like this have a subtle effect of distracting unsuspecting believers from

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the genuine experience of Christ to hunger instead for experiences of the supernatural. The healthy teaching of the New Testament apostles always arouses a longing, an appetite, for Christ Himself. But *Supernatural's* descriptions of garish encounters incite a voracious appetite for an experience that is, in and of itself, an "anesthetic." Bentley sums up: "I hope I have stretched your faith and that you press in for these experiences" (61).

If not "the supernatural realm," what then should the Christian seek for? Having found redemption in the Savior and having once for all settled the question of our eternal destiny, in what pursuit should we spend our days? The apostle Paul answers this question with utmost clarity in his Epistle to the Philippians. He gives us six marvelous expressions that should direct our seeking today: magnify Christ, live Christ, gain Christ, be found in Christ, know Christ, and pursue Christ (1:20-21; 3:8-10, 12).

Paul had a genuine experience of being translated to both Paradise and the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:1-4). Above all others, he certainly was qualified to steer us into the pursuit of the supernatural, but he did not. Instead, he showed by his own life what we should seek. For example, Paul tells us that life's sufferings, such as persecutions, afford believers the greatest opportunities to magnify Christ, that is, to enlarge and expand Him in the sight of others and "to express Christ in His unlimited greatness" (Recovery Version, Phil. 1:20, note 1). This was Paul's aspiration. Christ was not only his life but also his living. Paul declared, "For to me, to live is Christ" (v. 21), mentioning nothing about hungering and contending for supernatural encounters. Paul and Christ lived as one person, and to live Christ meant everything to Paul. He also counted all things loss in order to gain Christ—to appropriate by experience all the riches of Christ. Paul wanted to be found in Christ—to be so immersed in the Lord and saturated with Him that those whom he contacted would find him both positioned and

dispositioned in the wonderful person of Christ (cf. Acts 19:15). Paul was also driven by the desire to know Him, not in the way of mere knowledge but by experience. Finally, concerning Christ, Paul declared, "I pursue" (Phil. 3:12). Paul's chief aim was to pursue Christ—to press toward and follow after Him. When given the opportunity, Paul mentioned nothing to the church in Philippi about signs and wonders. Instead, he showed them how subjectively real Christ can be to those whom He indwells.

It is true that at times signs and wonders follow the Lord's servants, but His servants should never follow signs and wonders. Instead, the Lord's disciples should follow Christ and seek Him alone. If believers follow the misguided path encouraged in *Supernatural*, they will not only be disappointed; they will also be in danger of falling into the flesh. Whenever genuine, subjective experiences of Christ are replaced by a pursuit of sensations and marvels that appeal to the body's senses, the flesh is not far away. Sadly, recent church history is replete with the record of "spiritual generals" who have proved this again and again. We should be governed instead by the healthy teaching of the New Testament apostles, which makes Christ the believer's center and universe.

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#### Footnote from the Recovery Version of the Bible

"Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you, so that you do not lack in any **gift**, eagerly awaiting the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:6-7).

**gift:** *Gift* here refers to the inward gifts issuing from grace, such as the free gift of eternal life (Rom. 6:23) and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38) as the heavenly gift (Heb. 6:4). It does not refer to the outward, miraculous gifts, such as healing, speaking in tongues, etc., mentioned in chs. 12 and 14. All the inward gifts are constituents of grace. They are the initial things of the divine life that are received of grace. All these need to grow (3:6-7) to their full development and maturity. The Corinthian believers were not lacking in the initial gifts in life, but they were desperately short of the growth in life. Hence, however much they had been initially enriched in grace, they were still infants in Christ, soulish, fleshly, and even fleshy (2:14; 3:1, 3).