



Laurie Beth Jones' Four [Pagan] Elements of Success

By Bob DeWaay

Modern evangelicalism has a voracious appetite for self-discovery. Various approaches to discovering one's temperament have played a prominent role in this. In the 70's and 80's the ancient Greek terminology of Choleric, Sanguine, Phlegmatic, and Melancholy, were used to describe temperaments in a series of popular Christian books. When I was in seminary, Gary Smalley was brought in to present his version of temperaments: Otter, Lion, Golden Retriever, and Beaver. Recently, Rick Warren introduced his S.H.A.P.E. program for self-discovery which uses the Myers Briggs indicator for the "P" part of the program. If these approaches are not enough to satisfy our urges for self-discovery, there are always D.E.S.A, DiSC, and even Charlie Brown characters.

Now, Laurie Beth Jones enters the market promoting yet another version of temperament study: Earth, Wind, Fire and Water. Using these ancient pagan categories, she has developed her Path Elements Profile (PEP) and sells the program to businesses. She claims, "Insights surrounding PEP have helped save marriages, unite families, discern career directions, and select everything from jobs to spouses." (from her book *The Four Elements of Success*). Starting from the assumption that the pagan idea of the four elements (shared by ancient Chinese philosophy, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Astrology) can accurately describe one's temperament, she promises, "Understanding and utilizing this personality profile tool will revolutionize your understanding of who you are and help you clarify why you do the things you do." What is the outcome if this type of self-discovery? – "With your new knowledge of the four elements, you will also have keen insights into the needs and values of others and thus be more persuasive when it comes to getting your own needs met."

Jones claims to have invented this system, not because the others were not valid, but that they were too hard to remember. She says, "Recognizing the importance of self-image, I decided to use the four elements of earth, water, wind, and fire to help people in their self-identity process." It seems that there is an insatiable hunger for more self-identity that fuels the sales of ever multiplying temperament theories and indicators. This

is not surprising in the world since the worldly minded, because of the sin nature, are obsessed with SELF. But didn't Jesus tell His disciples to deny self?

Jones does provide a Biblical basis for her approach: "Jesus referred to Himself as 'living water.' In the Scriptures the Holy Spirit is described as being 'wind' or 'fire.' Adam literally means 'made from clay.'" So there you have it, water, wind, fire and earth are all found in the Bible, used to describe God and man. Of course there is the problem of authorial intent. Actually Jesus offered to give "living water" and did not technically call Himself that. But laying that aside, this type of interpretation is nothing more than random association. Jones' claim is that there are four personality types or temperaments, and that these can be accurately described by four "elements." That Adam means "earth" because God gave him that name (because of where he came from) has no relationship to a modern personality theory. Likewise, that fire is used as a symbol of the Holy Spirit has no relationship to distinctive human personalities or temperaments. If we take her use of Scripture to be valid, then any theory whatsoever could be "proved" by merely finding a word in the Bible that matches a word that describes our own man-made theory.

But, to further gain credibility, she adduces other religions: Native American religion, Chinese *feng shui*, and Hinduism are cited as evidence that the four elements (by the way, these are not really "elements" other than in pagan superstition) are significant. Jones even cites ideas from the mystical Kabbalah: "The Kabbalah, a form of Jewish mysticism, reveals that the four symbols representing the Hebrew YHWH, or Yahweh, actually are a tetragrammaton that stands for the four elements of earth, water, air, and fire." No the Kabbalah does not "reveal" the meaning of God's name because it does not contain God's revelation, it contains false religious ideas of men. Finally she cites occultist Carl Jung as the modern source of temperament theory (which he is).

Jones admits that some Christian friends told her that her ideas sounded New Age, and that others pointed out that these elements are related to astrological signs. She simply says that for the purpose of her book the elements have nothing to do with astrology. She offers this disclaimer: "I remain firmly rooted in my Christian faith and tradition, and I believe that the elements are fascinating reflections of the different characteristics of God, the Creator, yet have no separate divine power in and of themselves."

The rest of the book consists of processes to discover one's element (or more accurately combination of elements) and then gain tools to use these to become successful. It includes personal "meditations" for the benefit of readers who have now discovered their element. For example: "I am Earth. I give soil and substance to support those around me. I support and protect all living things. . . I am sure. I am steady. I am Firm." It is not shocking that the world loves this material. But clearly it is not Christian. Yet TBN recently (July 6th, 2006) interviewed Jones and told the audience about her other book *Jesus CEO* and how to get her books. There is nothing wrong with businesses doing studies on people's differences and personalities if they think it will help their business. But why is the church importing this material, especially a version of it that has such pagan roots?

Her theory and others like it have no relationship to the gospel or sanctification. At the best they are a huge side-track for churches that adopt them because they engage people in studying self rather than denying self and serving Christ. At the worst they are pagan and opposed to the gospel. Since Jones herself admits the pagan roots of her system, it is not hard to discern that her process is not Biblical.

We do not need to discover self; we need to serve God and others by His grace. Peter wrote: "*Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God*" (**1Peter 1:22**). For those who have been born of God, obedience to the truth changes lives. God has revealed the means of grace whereby Christians grow in sanctification.

Pagan element theories have no power to conform us to the image of Christ. Paul said, "*But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?*" (**Galatians 4:9**) Paul gives further reason to not waste our time studying "self" in hopes of achieving success: "*He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. Therefore from now on we recognize no man according to the flesh*"

(2Corinthians 5:15, 16a). Jones' elements theory is not compatible with serving the resurrected Christ in newness of life.

Critical Issues Commentary

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