

ABSTRACT

This research has explored the place of spiritual power in Christian life and ministry from an African perspective. Various African perspectives of spiritual power have been analysed and measured against biblical teachings with a view to correcting wrong notions of spiritual power among African Christians, and thereby contribute to the ongoing scholarship in African Christian Theology. Data gleaned from library research, questionnaires, and interviews combined to reveal the contemporary African Christian's perspective of spiritual power. The attitude of many African Christians to issues of spiritual power has been a great source of consternation. Whereas the Bible teaches complete obedience, dependence and commitment to God and to His word, the general attitude of the African Christian has been to try other sources of power where the Christian one does not appear to work, or is long delayed. Church members and pastors alike have been found to consult negative spiritual powers in times of great need. This reflects the seeming inadequacy or ineffectiveness of spiritual power among Christians.

This researcher and many more Christians are aware, however, that there is no limit to the power of God in meeting the needs of His people. Two major problems of the African Christian are: (1) having been used to oppression from negative forces, the African frets at any sign of spiritual attack. Rather than stand his ground, he easily succumbs to fear and goes to pacify the oppressive powers. (2) These African Christians come from the background of African traditional worship which makes it easy for them to quickly secure the services of an herbalist or witch doctor in very trying situations.

THE PLACE OF SPIRITUAL POWER IN CHRISTIAN LIFE AND MINISTRY
FROM AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE.

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This research has explored the place of spiritual power in Christian life and ministry from an African perspective. Various African perspectives of spiritual power have been analysed and measured against biblical teachings with a view to correcting wrong notions of spiritual power among African Christians, and thereby contribute to the ongoing scholarship in African Christian Theology. Data gleaned from library research, questionnaires, and interviews combined to reveal the contemporary African Christian's perspective of spiritual power. The attitude of many African Christians to issues of spiritual power has been a great source of consternation. Whereas the Bible teaches complete obedience, dependence and commitment to God and to His word, the general attitude of the African Christian has been to try other sources of power where the Christian one does not appear to work, or is long delayed. Church members and pastors alike have been found to consult negative spiritual powers in times of great need. This reflects the seeming inadequacy or ineffectiveness of spiritual power among Christians.

This researcher and many more Christians are aware, however, that there is no limit to the power of God in meeting the needs of His people. Two major problems of the African Christian are: (1) having been used to oppression from negative forces, the African frets at any sign of spiritual attack. Rather than stand his ground, he easily succumbs to fear and goes to pacify the oppressive powers. (2) These African Christians come from the background of African traditional worship which makes it easy for them to quickly secure the services of an herbalist or witch doctor in very trying situations.

This research has identified the scourge of syncretism in Africa as being largely due to a lack of manifestation of spiritual power in the churches. This is partly why church members run outside the church, to other places, for help. The solution to these problems lies in a proper understanding of spiritual power; it is the God-given supernatural ability by which the Christian acts in obedience to God in all situations, and influences others to love and obey God. This power enables the Christian to stand for God in all situations, to resist spiritual attacks, and to succeed in life and ministry.

The study has also revealed that it is most unlikely for anyone to live victoriously and to minister effectively, to the glory and honor of God, without a good grasp of the nature and proper place of spiritual power in his/her life and ministry. There are various levels of manifestation of God's power but the truth is that no one can become a Christian without the power of God. Let the basic and all encompassing position of spiritual power, therefore, be maintained in Christian life and ministry and the outside world will bow to Jesus the Christ.

5.2 CONCLUSION

Spiritual power must be understood by the Christian as the God-given supernatural ability by which the Christian acts in obedience to God in all situations, and influences others as a genuine witness for Christ. This power of God enables the Christian to stand for God in all situations. It helps the Christian to resist spiritual

attack, to successfully handle spiritual assignments and to reject all manner of ungodliness and sin.

The agent of this spiritual power is the Holy Spirit. The simple truth is that no one can become a Christian without a level of this spiritual power. It is a function of the grace of God and, therefore, is given by God. Jesus told His disciples to wait in Jerusalem until endued or clothed upon with power. This is real spiritual power. The African has been used to this divine power and also to the demonic powers; he oftentimes tries to combine the two. This syncretic practice is a major reason for this research work. The African must come to understand that God is very much against all manner of idolatry. God is jealous and would not want anything less than complete allegiance to Him and to His word. The Spirit of God is holy and manifests His power in diverse ways but these manifestations are characterized by holiness and love. The person who would be a channel for this power of God must value his relationship with God above all other considerations.

The African Christian has sometimes desired power for the sake of power and for very selfish ends, but the genuine spiritual power is not self-centered, manipulative, exploitative or competitive. Rather, it is nurturing, genuinely loving and integrative. A proper understanding of the nature of this spiritual power and of God's intention for making it available will clearly reveal that nothing should be attempted in the life and ministry of a Christian without dependence on God's power. Christian life and ministry is not by human power and might, but by the Spirit of God.

Jesus teaches against high-handed use of spiritual power. He said, "the Son of man did not come of destroy men's lives but to save them" (Lk.9:56, NKJV). The

use of spiritual power requires meekness, humility, self-control, and an ability to endure and suffer wrong.

The African Christian must, therefore, awake to God's call to power, receive it by faith and jealously guard his relationship with God. Spiritual power is a basic and fundamental requirement of Christian life and ministry. Without this power "we cannot express the Lordship of Christ in practical terms" (Akanmu 5). "While the Westerner equates religion with truth, those in the Third World equate it with power" (Kane 215). While the Westerner asks, "is it true?", those in the Third World ask, "does it work?" The African Christian must, therefore, seek the face of God that He may grant him greater manifestation of spiritual power that will bring other Africans to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. "We should make the Gospel relevant in every situation every where without compromise" (kato 2). This requires spiritual power.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

In the words of Moyo: "the task of African Christian theology is to translate and make alive the message of Christ in a contemporary African cultural setting" (98). The researcher, therefore, recommends that there be sound teaching of the complete doctrine of the New Testament in every Christian church and fellowship.

Besides, theological institutions and church training programs must read and understand the gospel from the biblical worldview, and not from the western worldview. Churches must invest in proper discipleship training and groom true followers of Christ who will manifest true spiritual power in the fear of God.

Since deeper relationship with the Holy Spirit enhances true spiritual power, it is recommended that the churches teach more on the Person and work of the Holy Spirit. Prayer is a sure means of operating and experiencing spiritual power. There is need for greater individual and corporate prayer to create more conducive

atmosphere for the manifestation of God's power. I further recommend that Christians be encouraged to be bold, rather than being intimidated by dark powers. They should enthusiastically and faithfully manifest the power of God, to the honour and glory of God alone.