

An Understanding of the Spirit World

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Recently, while preparing to go abroad to hold leadership seminars for third world church leaders I was impressed by the Lord to add a new subject to the seminar syllabus. The new subject is the spirit world.

For more than twenty years it has been my observation that the church in America is woefully lacking in its comprehension of the spirit world. Oh, we give lip service to the subject with phrases such as, "The devil is tempting me," "Satan is oppressing me," or, "I'm doing spiritual warfare." Yet with few exceptions there is a lack of understanding across the complete spectrum of American Christianity, including the clergy, of what these phrases really mean.

By "spirit world" I mean the very real realm in which God, angelic beings, Satan, and demonic beings exist. From the Scripture we know that there are two realms of existence, the natural and the spiritual. "So we fix our eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." (II Cor 4:18 NIV). The natural realm is the one in which we live, work and play...but it is only temporary. The spiritual realm is permanent. God created man to be eternal citizens of the permanent, spiritual world. And it is in this spiritual realm that the forces of light and darkness do battle, worship God or Satan, try to dominate our minds, and so on.

As I discuss the spirit world with Christians in the third world I am amazed at their acceptance of the reality of the spirit world. Among most third world people knowledge of the spirit world's impact in daily life is common. I have heard of many instances of human interaction with the spirit world in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Names and rituals vary from place to place, continent to continent, but in the third world, human interaction with the spirit world is a common practice.

Most disturbing is the fact that though there is an awareness of the reality of the spirit world, I have found few among third world believers who adequately understand the Biblical perspective of the spirit world. Because we don't have a proper understanding of what the Bible teaches, practicing Christians both here and abroad frequently engage in occult activity not realizing that what we are doing is wrong. This lack of understanding exists among the rank and file parishioner, the clergy...and even extends to many of our Bible schools and seminaries.

Further analysis of this lack of understanding seems to place the blame at the feet of the Western Christian church which took Christianity to the third world. Since the Western church, as the sending agent, doesn't possess an adequate grasp of the spirit world, it can't properly

teach the subject as it spreads Christianity throughout the world. Hence, third world pastors who are products of our missionary effort bring an acceptance of the spirit world into their churches but do not possess a Biblical understanding of how to properly deal with it as a Christian.

Though third world Christians readily embrace the Biblical concepts of love and forgiveness of Jesus they quickly discern our lack of understanding of the spirit world. The faithful believer who approaches the missionary asking for help to overcome a demon that is tormenting a member of his family soon learns not to make similar requests again! Too often he is told, "it's only your imagination...demons can't touch Christians!" or worse yet, he is often patronized. Such response has produced two results: 1) the door is left wide open for third world Christians to continue going to the spiritist practitioners and, 2) they no longer speak about such problems to Westerners. Rodney Henry, in his book *Filipino Spirit World*, calls this non-communication the "conspiracy of silence."

Let me point out here that I am not blaming the thousands of missionaries, many of whom gave their lives for the sake of the gospel. The fault lies in the theological system that trained them.

How did the Western church lose its grasp of the spirit world? In the eighteenth century something occurred in the church theological realm which had a lasting impact on the development of church doctrine. This happening became known as "The Enlightenment." The Enlightenment leaders said, "Religion is within the bounds of reason only" or, to state it more simply, "If you can't see it, measure it or weigh it, it doesn't exist."

Men such as Immanuel Kant, Christian Wolff and others exalted the power of logic and reason over things of the unseen spirit world. Logic and reason became the dominant force and came to influence even Bible interpretation. Since "reason" permeated the leading Christian thinkers and writers of that day the result or impact of that philosophy has biased theological thinking in the Western church for two centuries.

Hence in our Western church doctrine today little is known about the spirit realm. Our Christian doctrines have developed in a "civilized, educated" environment. We perpetuate a setting which tends to bolster logic and reason over that which is spiritually perceived. Objectivity has been more credible than subjectivity. On the other hand, people who are born in the third world quickly come to know subjectively the reality of the spirit world and its mystical powers. They are not bound by this Western

"reasoning" mindset.

Figure 1 graphically portrays human needs as they are met in the third world by much of today's Western Christianity.

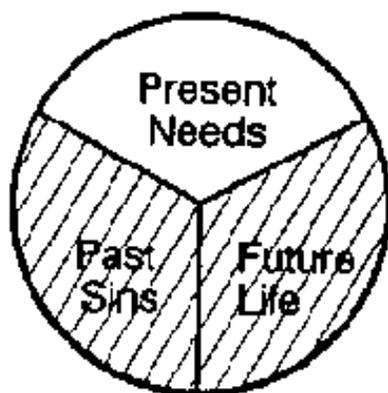


Figure 1

The shaded areas represent those segments of life's problems that are readily answered and explained by Christianity. The unshaded area represents the area of life's problems that aren't so easily met. The third world Christians know their past sins are forgiven and they are new creatures in Christ. They know they are going to heaven and have an eternity with the Father through Christ. But most in the poorer countries of our world ask, "How may I feed my children today? How can I get healing for my sick child today? And it is the answers to these and similar questions that bring us to the heart of the demonic hold on the third world, and this hold is on both believers and those not yet saved.

In almost every town, community or village of the third world there are spiritual practitioners. Their names will vary from region to region or country to country but their practice is the same. Depending on their location they may be called "folk healers," "practitioners," "medicine men," "witch doctors," etc. (And in America they are known as "palm readers," "fortune tellers," and "mediums.") Make no mistake about it, these people possess mystical powers, power to answer many questions regarding business, government, interpersonal relations or health matters. They possess power to find lost objects, power to heal the sick, power to control other people, etc. Of course many of these things done by the practitioner are "good." But there are things done by these practitioners that aren't "good." For example, they also possess the power to place a curse on your enemies for you. In some cases, such a curse will result in the death of the cursed person.

Looking again at Figure 1, the third world parishioner who has a present need, such as a severely sick child, is often denied medical treatment by reason of

distance or economics. Unfortunately, too often his church is capable of providing compassion and prayer, but not a trained doctor, medicine and so on. But he knows he has a third option...the spiritual practitioner. He knows he can go there and often get results...now.

At this point many readers may be questioning the validity of such results. Let me assure you again unequivocally that these practitioners do possess supernatural powers. In the Philippines some years ago a renown spiritist practitioner was observed by eye witnesses. They testified to seeing him move his finger over the skin of a person with a diseased organ...never touching the skin...and an incision opened in the body. He then removed the diseased organ and "stitched" the body back together...all without pain to the person being treated! This is meeting now needs, is it not?

Such practitioners vary in power and "specialties." Some will specialize in curing headaches while others specialize in stomach aches or recovering lost objects, etc.

Invariably people ask, "What's wrong with going to these practitioners if what they are doing is good. They are helping people, healing children, etc. What's so bad about that?"

These are valid questions and deserve answers. If one based judgement on apparent results no one could deny that many practices were "good." However, the Bible doesn't allow us such latitude. From a Biblical point of view we must make judgement of all these practices based on the source of power or information...not on the results. In other words, the key question we must ask is "Where does the power come from that the practitioner is using? Where does the information come from that the practitioner is using?" The Scripture says:

"If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, 'Let us follow other gods' (gods you have not known) 'and let us worship them,' you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer." (Deut 13:1-3 NIV).

From the above Scripture it is abundantly clear that the Biblical judgement criteria is not whether it comes to pass, not whether or not it is true, but rather, where did it come from? We may therefore conclude that regarding the deeds of the spiritist practitioners, the judgement criteria is not whether their deeds are "good," or whether they work, but where does their power come from?

Remember, in the spirit world there are two powerful, but unequal, beings - God and Satan. Just as God has countless angelic beings to do His bidding on

earth, Satan also has his demonic beings to do his bidding on earth. The individual man and his destiny is the object of the spiritual activity of both God and Satan. God, through the Holy Spirit, is calling man to eternal life through Jesus Christ. Satan, through lies, half-truths, deception and sometimes sheer force, is working to prevent man from having eternal life with God. Regarding the roles of Satan and of Jesus, the Scripture says, "The thief [Satan] comes only to steal and kill and destroy; but I [Jesus] have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (Jn 10:10 NIV).

But then, if Satan's plan is to steal, kill and destroy man, why would he grant miraculous powers to practitioners - to do good for man?

We have all heard the expression, "There is no such thing as a free lunch" and that is indeed the case here. Satan isn't going to cure your fever, heal your child or find your lost watch for you...all for free! He wants something in exchange for his "help." The tragedy lies in the fact that most who utilize the practitioners never know they are exchanging one problem for another...**bigger** problem! Sure, Satan will gladly heal your body...in exchange for the authority to place one (or more) of his demons in you! That's the deal! Those who go to spiritist practitioners are exchanging some "now needs" for an open door for demonic activity in their lives!

"But I didn't know I was giving authority to a demon!" No, you didn't, but after all Satan is the father of lies...he is a master of deceit, and furthermore, he has had thousands of years of practice!

No, neither do most of the people involved, including the practitioners, realize the rules of the deadly game in which they are involved. Few would tell you they get their power from a demon - for they themselves may be ignorant of this fact...because they don't know what the Bible teaches. Those who are ignorantly serving Satan in this manner are dupes. They are deceived or tricked into his service. Those who are knowingly serving Satan are witches or warlocks. Most of the practitioners will tell you that a "good spirit" is their source...thinking that spirit to be of God or some "god power." The spirit itself frequently will say, "I serve god." But the issue immediate becomes, which god?

The next question is how can we determine the source of power? How may we know if this practitioner is a true servant of Jehovah God or a medium of Satan? Here again the Bible provides a fool-proof means of determination.

"Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This

is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. (I Jn 4:1-3 NIV).

That's simple enough, but it's important that we properly apply this principle. Don't ask a leading question like, "Did Jesus come in the flesh?" Of course a demon will say "Yes" to that! But rather ask the practitioner to describe Jesus, ask him or her to tell you all about who He is, where He came from, how He came, why He came...then the final question, who is Jesus to you?

If the response is something like, "Praise God! Jesus is the Son of the Living God who came down to earth from heaven in human form to be a ransom for my sins! He is my Lord risen from the dead!" then you are dealing with a believer. But if there is hesitation, vagueness, many words that speak confusion, ambiguity, lots of talk about "god" then you are dealing with a false prophet. Furthermore, if you submit to their practice you are entering into an agreement with Satan!

Now that we understand the source of these mystical powers, what are the consequences of spiritual intercourse with spiritual practitioners who receive their power from demons? Obviously, the consequences are enormous. From the moment of the exchange a demon gains access to the one being treated or counseled. At first there may be no evidence of the demon's presence. But as months and years pass the demon begins to act. Problems develop in the person's life. It may be psychological problems like abnormal fears, night-mares, lying, belligerence, being overly-selfish, schizophrenia, paranoia or, it may be physical problems like unexplainable pain or weakness, epilepsy, arthritis, cancer, etc. Please note that the problems listed above aren't brought about only by demonic activity...such problems often have natural, medical causes. But from the list above remember that "the enemy comes to steal and kill and destroy!"

If someone has been unwittingly drawn into this position, is there a way to break this demonic hold? Yes, the person so bound must 1) be or become a committed Christian, 2) he or she must renounce all dealings with spiritist practitioners and other occult activities, 3) have prayer for the exorcism of the demon(s) and 4) he or she must remain fully committed to Jesus Christ.

Now, let's go back to Figure 1 and deal with an issue we haven't answered. That of the seeming inability of the church to supply the "now needs" of its parishoners. While this may be the case as viewed by the natural man, such a view is contrary to the Scripture which says,

"And my God will meet all your needs according to

his glorious riches in Christ Jesus." (Phil 4:19 NIV).

So we see that God has made abundant provision for all our needs...past, present and future. That provision is in the Person of Christ Jesus our Lord.

Note that this encompasses "now needs." Yes, I realize that this is a conditional promise. The condition is that we be fully given over to Jesus. But isn't that the way it's supposed to be anyway?

Going back to our third world church - a church snared in the grip of real spiritual warfare - how can they be set free? If such freedom is to occur for a church, a city, or a country, it must come through the Christian leaders of that country. One of my objectives as I travel to the nations is to teach the third world church leaders how to extricate themselves and their sheep from the devil's snare. They must be taught how to deliver themselves, their church and their country from Satan's grip. In short...they must first come to truly understand what the Bible says concerning the players in the spirit world and then they must teach it to others. Our aim must be to help every Christian leader to see into the spirit world and teach them how to take authority over it and the demonic forces whose intent is to steal and kill and destroy lives, families, churches and countries.

"And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? How can they preach unless they are sent?" (Rom 10:14-15 NIV).

Pray God to send teachers...teachers who have overcome The Enlightenment handicap and who know and understand the demonic world and how to properly deal with it.

"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!' He said, 'Go and tell this people....'" (Is 6:8-9 NIV).

NOTE: For a thorough, detailed study on the subject of spiritual warfare and demonism please go to the [Books](#) page to review the book [How To Defeat Demons: An International Manual](#) which is offered by Hundredfold Ministries, Int'l through the Web site.

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