A NEW REALITY: CHARLES KRAFT’S VIEW OF SPIRITUAL WARFARE

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Introduction

Charles Kraft has been on a spiritual journey for the past thirty years. Trained as an anthropologist to identity and understand worldview, Kraft never expected to be so challenged by what he experienced that he would undergo a complete paradigm shift in his own worldview. The impetus for Kraft’s new view of spiritual reality was ongoing exposure to power Christianity.¹ Over the past three decades, Kraft has moved from being highly suspicious of healings, exorcisms, and spiritual warfare in general to fully embracing healing and deliverance as the central components of his ministry. Kraft is, today, considered somewhat of an expert on ground level spiritual warfare. His beliefs are the subject of controversy and speculation and his writings come under attack by many conservative evangelical scholars.

This paper will present Charles Kraft’s views on spiritual warfare. I will attempt to present Kraft’s view from his own perspective. Particular attention will be given to Kraft’s understanding of key doctrines related to spiritual warfare as they function in his ministry. The structure of the paper is as follows. First, a biography of Kraft will provide the necessary background for the reader to understand just how great a paradigm shift Kraft has experienced. Second, an overview of Kraft’s position on key spiritual warfare doctrines will be presented. Third, Kraft’s personal practice of spiritual warfare through his healing and deliverance ministry will be outlined. Finally, I will offer a critique of Kraft’s perspective on spiritual warfare.

¹Power Christianity can be characterized as a ministry driven by full access to spiritual power used for gaining understanding of spiritual situations, confronting and casting out demons, physical and emotional healing, and a general atmosphere of authority and power in Christ through the ministry of the Holy Spirit
Biography of Charles Kraft

Kraft has led an interesting life. Most interesting is his shift from an anti-charismatic and skeptical view of healing and deliverance ministries to a full embrace of doctrine and tactics related to what Kraft calls power Christianity. Kraft’s worldview shift is best explored in four categories. First, Kraft’s conversion and theological training pushed Kraft away from any openness to power Christianity. Second, Kraft’s anthropological background gave him a framework for analyzing what was happening in his life as he began considering the reality of power Christianity. Third, Kraft’s encounter with powerless Christianity compared to his encounters with power Christianity at Fuller Seminary further challenged his worldview. Finally, Kraft moved into what he describes as the third wave movement of the Holy Spirit within Evangelicalism.

Kraft’s Conversion and Theological Training

Kraft was born in 1932 in Waterbury, Connecticut. His family attended a lifeless Congregational church and no one was particularly spiritual in the family. Kraft’s mother came to Christ after reading a letter sent from a missionary cousin. The change in Kraft’s mother was immediate and immense. The next summer, Kraft’s mother sent him and his brother to various church camps so they could be exposed to the gospel and biblical teaching. By 1944 both Charles and his brother had come to Christ as a result of their camp experiences. Kraft felt an immediate desire to become a missionary and began looking for opportunities to serve God.

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further. Many of the speakers, worship leaders, and missionaries Kraft met at the church camps had attended Wheaton College for their education and ministry training. Based on their recommendations, Kraft enrolled at Wheaton and majored in anthropology because he was told that it was the only degree that focused on other cultures.

While at Wheaton, Kraft was exposed to the intricacies of world religions, cultural differences, linguistic difficulties, and the need for Bible translation around the world. Kraft decided he needed further training in order to be effective on the mission field, particularly as a Bible translator. He enrolled at Ashland Seminary in Ohio to further study theology and the biblical languages. He then completed a summer program through the Summer Institute of Linguistics in Norman, Oklahoma. Here, Kraft met anthropological and linguistic legends such as Arthur Gleason, Eugene Nida, and William Smalley. These anthropologists encouraged Kraft to pursue a Ph.D in order to be most prepared for work as a missionary and Bible translator. Kraft enrolled in the anthropology and applied linguistics program at Hartford Seminary and began further training.

In the midst of his Ph.D work, Kraft was appointed a missionary to an unreached people in the remote northwest corner of Nigeria. Kraft’s mission agency, the Missionary Board of the Brethren Church, desired Kraft to learn and reduce the Hausa language to writing and translate the Bible. God brought many Hausa to faith and Kraft began baptizing hundreds of people a year. Kraft’s anthropology background allowed him a greater understanding of the role of Hausa cultural practices. Kraft allowed the Hausa to use or adapt their tribal dances for worshipping the God of the Bible and he baptized village leaders who were in polygamous relationships. Kraft’s mission board did not share his anthropological views on marriage and dancing and within two years, Kraft was dismissed as a missionary.

After returning to the United States, Kraft was offered a job teaching anthropology and African languages at Michigan State University. Several years later, Kraft was invited to teach African languages at UCLA, which at that time, had one of the most prestigious
anthropology programs in the country. While at UCLA, Kraft met Peter Wagner, Donald McGavern, and several missionaries studying at nearby Fuller Seminary. Kraft was asked to teach anthropology and linguistics part time at Fuller.

At that time, Kraft and Fuller Seminary were highly suspicious of faith healers and deliverance ministries. Faculty meetings at Fuller largely centered around discussions of why some churches were growing around the world and others were not. Pentecostal churches in particular were the fastest growing churches in the world. Peter Wagner met John Wimber and the two began moving toward a charismatic understanding of ministry. Wimber was invited to teach an experimental class entitled, “Signs, Wonders, and Church Growth” at Fuller in 1982. The class consisted of a short teaching time on signs and wonders and then Wimber would conduct a healing and deliverance session for the remainder of the class. Kraft and his wife sat in on the class to see what it was like but were highly skeptical of what Wimber was teaching and doing in class. This class and Kraft’s budding friendship with Wimber proved to be the turning point in Kraft’s perspective on spiritual warfare.⁵

**Anthropological Contribution**

Kraft’s background in anthropology strongly influenced his move toward power ministry. Kraft knew that every person in the world is a product of their own culture’s conditioning and is prone to ethnocentrism. As one grows up, one is usually exposed to only one view on most issues. That view seems to be the only option since it is without competitors. Later, when other views are encountered, a person assumes his or her view to be correct and the new perspective to be wrong. The reason for rejecting competing views is that perception of reality is largely socially constructed.⁶ People are taught to trust the predominate view of reality

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⁵Kraft, "My Pilgrimage in Mission," 162-64.

within their culture because they trust the ones who taught them that view, often their parents and grandparents. Kraft concludes that his and others’ view of spiritual power is tied to the source from which the view was learned. If someone is not exposed to expressions of spiritual power, he will distrust those who claim to have healing and deliverance ministries.\(^7\)

Kraft holds to the critical realist perspective of reality. This view states that objective reality exists because God exists. However, man can only partially know reality because of the transcendence of God. Through critical assessment, though, one can know reality in an accurate but incomplete way. Kraft states that the Apostle Paul was operating under a critical realist perspective when Paul wrote that what we know now is only partial but when we see Christ face to face, our understanding of knowledge will be complete.\(^8\) Until then, everyone must be open to new experiences and correction of perceived views of reality.\(^9\)

Kraft understood that the culture he grew up in had a massive impact on his understanding of reality. Kraft maintains that no one can know all that is or happens. Our culture teaches us to filter what is even possible and to reject what is deemed impossible. Then we filter what we deem possible through what we experience. The following diagram depicts how we conclude what is real or not.\(^10\)

![Diagram](attachment://Reality_Diagram.png)

Our perception of reality is further complicated by our willingness to accept something that challenges our previous understanding of what is possible. Additionally, sin is present and can cause our rebelliousness against truth, unholy motives to accept something as true, or to just

\(^7\)Kraft, *Christianity with Power*, 12.

\(^8\)1 Corinthians 13:12.


\(^10\)Diagram taken from Ibid., 19.
plain confuse our understanding of reality.\textsuperscript{11} As Kraft began experiencing things he had not deemed possible, he relied on his anthropological training to help him understand what was happening. Because of his background learning about the goodness of culture and “the other,” he was actually more open to new aspects of Christianity than he originally thought.

**Early Shift and Encounter with Powerless Christianity**

Kraft felt well prepared theologically, culturally, and linguistically when he arrived in Nigeria as a missionary. He quickly realized that despite all of his seminary training, he was totally unprepared to deal with the Nigerian view of the spirit world. The missionaries Kraft met never connected Jesus or the gospel to dealing with infertility, relational issues, or troublesome weather. The result was that the Hausa would come to church to learn about how to get to the afterlife but then go to village witch doctors for day to day needs and to gain the spiritual power needed to prosper in life.

Kraft felt the Western perspective on Christianity was severely lacking to meet the needs of the Hausa. Kraft looked at the practices and results of Western non-believers and believers alike in matters of handling illness, accidents, education, fertility, and agriculture. The practice and results were the same for both camps and Kraft concluded that something needed to change. This reality hit home when a medicine man began attending Kraft’s church in Nigeria. After a few weeks, the man stopped coming. Kraft wondered what had happened to push the man away. The answer was that the man heard sermons about an amazing miracle worker named Jesus who once lived and manifested great power but the local Christians had none of this power. There was no greater power among the Christians than what the medicine man already possessed so why should he join the church?\textsuperscript{12} Kraft felt his understanding of spiritual power

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., 22.

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., 4-6.
was faulty but he did not know what to do about it. Shortly thereafter, Kraft was dismissed by his mission agency for some of his controversial practices.

As stated above, while teaching at Fuller, the faculty discussions centered around why the church was growing in certain parts of the world. Pentecostal churches were the fastest growing and Kraft attributed that growth solely to emotionalism. However, over time he realized that emotions alone were not the answer for the growth. Based on the influence of Wagner and Wimber, Kraft, in his own words, opened his mind to the idea of the spiritual power Pentecostalism possessed could be a reason for the church growth. As more and more Pentecostal students came to Fuller, Kraft got to know them and realized most were normal people and unlike the television faith healers Kraft despised. Through the students, Kraft learned of what God was doing around the world through the Pentecostal Church. Wimber’s class in 1982 brought sharper focus to Kraft’s understanding of spiritual power.

In Wimber’s class, people would be healed immediately or slowly throughout the semester right in the class. Though Kraft was suspicious of the kookiness associated with healing ministries, none of that strangeness was present in class. Kraft saw first hand what he had been seeking to experience since his days in Nigeria – God moving in power. Kraft relaxed and just “let it happen.”\(^{13}\) Kraft saw Wimber minister in power and authority. God seemed to answer Wimber’s prayers immediately and Wimber had access to information about the demonic that Kraft had never seen before. Kraft remembered a time in Nigeria when a local church leader was sick. Kraft prayed, “Oh Lord, if it be your will, please heal Vangawa.” He then confessed that there was no authority in that prayer and no claiming of the power God has given to minister healing. Kraft was ashamed that he really only thought the man could be healed at the hospital by modern medicine. Here in class, Kraft saw healing first hand. Though still highly skeptical,

\(^{13}\text{Ibid., 52.}\)
Kraft was well into a worldview shift that was to shape the rest of his life and ministry.\textsuperscript{14} Kraft wanted all that God has for the church, including in the arena of power. However, unlike some Pentecostals, Kraft wanted to experience spiritual power in a balanced and reasonable way. The common extremes in power ministries bothered Kraft. Change did not come at once, however. Kraft had opened himself up to change through being exposed to new experiences. He saw hundreds of people healed or delivered from demonic oppression. Kraft began believing such a ministry was possible. His perception of reality was changing. However, just because Kraft was open to healing and words of knowledge did not mean that he was able to perform the miracles himself. Over time, however, God began to work in Kraft’s life and eventually, Kraft was conducting healing and deliverance sessions on his own. Before moving on to Kraft’s individual views and practices, it is helpful to set him within the larger third wave movement within the charismatic realm.

**Kraft as Part of the Third Wave Movement**

Kraft continually refers to himself as a traditional evangelical.\textsuperscript{15} Kraft’s beliefs on key doctrines as well as his unusual ministry practices substantially diverge from commonly held evangelical positions, particularly historical evangelicalism from the Reformation until the early 1900s. Kraft classifies himself as a third wave practitioner within the larger evangelical spectrum. The first wave refers to the Pentecostal movement begun in the early twentieth century and is often tied to the Azuza Street revival. The first wave focuses largely on the work of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, and features highly emotionally charged worship. The second wave is the charismatic movement or renewal movement. This movement seeks to be more doctrinally sound than the first and encourages those experiencing second blessings of the Holy Spirit and tongues to remain within their churches. Charismatics do not often require a

\textsuperscript{14}Ibidl, 37.

\textsuperscript{15}Kraft, *Confronting Powerless Christianity*, 11.
second blessing of the Holy Spirit as evidence of salvation. The third wave is a movement of the Holy Spirit among Evangelicals, who, largely choose to remain Evangelical. The third wave is generally quieter than the first two waves. Adherents assert the validity of all gifts but focus more on healing than on tongues. The first wave focuses on the Holy Spirit while the third wave focuses on the work of Christ.

Ministers associated with the third wave often focus on physical and emotional healing. According to Kraft, emotions themselves should not be high in the minister or the one being healed. High levels of emotion can take away one’s receptivity to the work of God. Kraft writes that it is too easy to confuse emotion with faith or to feel that high emotion magically brings results. Kraft specializes in inner healing and seeks to find the root cause for physical and emotional damages. The root is often some past “garbage” or demonic stronghold that allows present demonic influence. Through visiting the past, demonic garbage can be taken care of and the present can be fixed.

Third wavers believe in the filling of the Holy Spirit for additional power to minister effectively. Without this additional filling, the minister could be ineffective to command demons to leave. The filling does not come automatically at conversion, nor does it come by being spiritual. The minister must ask for it. Kraft carried out his ministry for a number of years but was largely ineffective until he asked for a second blessing by the Spirit and received it through a laying on of hands. Kraft felt an immediate increase in his ability to minister and began speaking in tongues three or four years after being filled with the Spirit. Now that an overview of Kraft’s move from skepticism to full acceptance of power Christianity has been made, I will now

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16 The term “Third Wave Movement” was coined by Peter Wagner and popularized at Fuller Seminary. John Wimber and the Vineyard Church are part of the third wave. Wagner provides a history and description of the third wave in his book *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit: Encountering the Power of Signs and Wonders Today* (Ann Arbor: Servant Publications, 1988).

17 Kraft, *Christianity with Power*, 143.

18 Ibid., 168.
overview Kraft’s views on key doctrines related to spiritual warfare.

**Kraft’s Views on Key Doctrines Related to Spiritual Warfare**

The Bible is important to Kraft and he attempts to root many of his beliefs and practices in the Scripture. Kraft has a somewhat unique position on the closure of the cannon and has derived several theological understandings that are not immediately clear in the Bible. It is important to understand how Kraft views the relationship of the Scripture to personal experience. Doctrinal matters most salient to Kraft’s beliefs and practices are presented below.

**Kraft’s View of Scripture**

Kraft does not clearly articulate his view of Scripture in his writing. He does call himself a “card-carrying evangelical.” One might assume from this title that Kraft would believe in the traditional evangelical view of the inspiration and authority of Scripture. However, in other places, Kraft seems to question the traditional understanding of those terms.

What Kraft does state is that in Scripture we are only given the bare bones account, without seeing the motivations of those involved or underlying spiritual dynamics related to demonic encounters. We are left to infer both. Kraft argues that evangelicals embrace Sunday School, three-point sermons, and denominational structures that are not prescribed in Scripture, so why should the power realm be any different? He believes a case can be made for the continuous leading of God in ways that take us beyond what is endorsed in the inspired writings. Kraft concludes that a practice is valid if it is not tied to a scriptural principle as long as the practice does not contradict one. Kraft concludes we do not need a chapter and verse to support

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19 Kraft, *Confronting Powerless Christianity*, 12.


21 Kraft, *Confronting Powerless Christianity*, 34.
everything we do.\textsuperscript{22}

Additionally, Kraft states that most westerners think of the Word only as written Scripture. He blames our attachment to literacy as the reason the Word is seen as written rather than spoken. Kraft finds power in the spoken word. He quotes Isaiah 55:11 where it is written “The word that I speak . . . will do everything I send it to do.” Also, Kraft cites Hebrews 4:12 where the Word is described as living and active. Kraft feels that the West’s view of the Word is stale and static. Our tie to literacy coupled with a suspicion of God speaking and working today has led to a static and powerless Christianity. However, Kraft writes that if God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, then He must still be speaking and interacting with people today, just as in “biblical” times.

Some have accused Kraft of basing his ministry on what amounts to new revelation. Kraft disagrees and states that the words of knowledge and other communication he receives from God is not new revelation because it is not in contradiction with Scripture but in fulfillment of how God has revealed Himself to us in the written Word.\textsuperscript{23} He writes, “Though we feel we have discovered what for us is new biblical truth, we are unwilling to let this overbalance the foundational understandings [of Scripture] we have lived with for most of our lives.”\textsuperscript{24} To Kraft, new biblical truth is not new revelation from God. Kraft states that he would read Scripture and pray but then “hang up the phone” without hearing from God. Kraft used to expect information to come through Scripture rather than seeking what God might have to say to him personally about his own life and attitudes.\textsuperscript{25} He has since moved heavily to the latter, and his personal experiences with God largely drive his ministry.

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., 35-36.

\textsuperscript{23}Kraft, \textit{Christianity with Power}, 44-45.


\textsuperscript{25}Kraft, \textit{Christianity with Power}, 49.
The Place for Experience

Kraft writes that “experience clearly has a prominent place in our interpretation of Scripture and life.” Kraft goes on to write:

It has been in vogue for traditional evangelical theologians and Bible teachers to warn people against basing doctrine on experience, as if reason is a more sure way of arriving at truth. Yet, in the real world, experience counts for a lot . . . . How we interpret the Bible, then, is strongly influenced by our experiences. This fact divides those who have experienced spiritual power from those who have not. According to Kraft, we are to experiment, discover, and learn in the spiritual realm. Kraft believes there are laws and principles not listed in the Bible that deal with the relationship between spirit beings and humans. Effective ministers need to discover these laws and minister accordingly.

Power Christianity operates above a glass ceiling most evangelicals do not access. Kraft understands ginōsko to mean experiential truth rather than mere knowledge. For example, he translates John 8:32 as “You will experience the truth and the truth will make you free.” One does not break through the glass ceiling by simply knowing about the power. One has to experience it. Some criticize Kraft for his practices and ask for the scriptural justification. Kraft does not feel he needs specific scriptural justification. His defense is that the critics have not personally experienced power ministry and they critique it from theory alone. Their Scripture interpretation does not have the luxury of insight from experience so they fail to properly interpret the Bible.

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26 Kraft, Confronting Powerless Christianity, 32.
27 Ibid., 9.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid., 16.
Words of Knowledge

Aside from personal experience, Kraft’s main ministry tool is the words of knowledge and leadings he receives from God. Kraft calls the words the most fascinating, stunning, and exhilarating aspect of ministering in power. Kraft is frustrated that he rarely receives words of knowledge while publically ministering at a healing session. More regularly he receives specific thoughts and insights while praying and ministering in a one on one counseling session. Kraft notes that God makes known specific insights concerning physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual problems within the person being counseled.

Though Kraft often hears from God through thoughts, others receive words of knowledge by feeling pain in their own body indicating where they should focus prayer on the one being ministered to. Other times a picture will form in the mind of the minister. Kraft writes, “Apparently God individualizes his relations to humans.” Kraft states it is risky to proceed on vague feelings of insight and admits his hunches are often wrong. He acknowledges that words of knowledge, like all aspects of power ministry, can be and frequently are misused.

Kraft’s View of the Believer

All believers have the power and authority to exercise a healing and deliverance ministry. Kraft affirms healing and deliverance are not always specific spiritual gifts, rather, in obedience to Scripture, we are to imitate Jesus and take authority to heal others. Kraft believes that believers are wrong to assume that we must pray for God to heal someone. He observes that Jesus prayed before but not during his healing. When he healed, he simply dispensed authority. We are to do the same, on Jesus’ behalf.

Kraft believes that all people possess some level of spiritual power, both unbelievers

30 Kraft, Christianity with Power, 157-58.
31 Ibid., 159.
32 Ibid., 126, 136.
and believers. Kraft knows of several non-believers who were “given the gift” to see the spiritual power present in believers, even if the believers themselves did not realize their inherent power. Believers have varying levels of spiritual power and those with a high level ward off evil by their very presence.\(^{33}\)

Kraft’s position on the ability of demons to enter Christians is controversial. When asked, “Can believers be demonized?,” Kraft responded, “Don’t ask me how a Spirit-filled Christian can be demonized.”\(^{34}\) Kraft states that demonization of believers does not completely make sense but based on experience, Kraft believes without a doubt that Christians can become demonized. Many challenge the fact that Kraft claims to cast demons out of Christians. His response is that “this challenge is based on the theoretical assumption of those without experience that if the Holy Spirit lives in a person, no demon can live there. All of us who deal with demonization, however, soon discover that we have to evict demons out of Christians.”\(^{35}\) Kraft claims three-hundred first hand experiences of driving demons out of professing Christians.

Kraft’s position is nuanced a bit. He writes that demons cannot indwell a believer in the same way as the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit can never be driven away but demons are “squatters and temporary intruders.” As such, they are subject to eviction. The Holy Spirit attaches to the spirit of the believer and demons, on the other hand, can only attach to the mind, emotions, body parts, or will of a person.\(^{36}\) As a final defense Kraft believes the burden of proof for whether Christians can be demonized should lay with those who claim believers cannot. Kraft rests on the supposed documented evidence of his and others’ accounts of exorcism of


\(^{34}\)Kraft, *Christianity with Power*, 130.

\(^{35}\)Kraft, *Confronting Powerless Christianity*, 58.

\(^{36}\)Kraft, “Dealing with Demonization,” 91.
believers.  

Kraft’s View of the Demonic

Most of the information Kraft knows about demons has come through his personal interviews of them during deliverance sessions. He usually refers to demons as rats because they attach themselves to “emotional garbage” or sin within a person. Demons often have personal names that describe their function. Examples are spirits of death, darkness, rage, hate, fear, deceit, rape, pride, nicotine, caffeine, and perfection. Demons usually come in groups and are organized in a hierarchy with a head demon directing the affairs of the lesser demons.

Kraft classifies demonic strength on a scale of one to ten. Demons low on the scale flee quietly with a command from the believer. Those at levels three or four put up resistance, require several minutes of commanding, and may physically convulse the person in need of deliverance. Demons at the upper end of the scale often require several hours or multiple sessions to master. Kraft believes that “demonic strength is calibrated to the amount and kind of spiritual and emotional garbage in a person’s life.”

Demons have no access to a person who does not allow them to take over some part of life. Often, hanging on to bitterness, lack of forgiveness, fear, or a desire for revenge is the “hinge” the demons need to influence a person. Kraft writes, “Indeed, I believe there is no problem a person has with an evil spirit that is not tied to some such inner problem.” The more a person gives him or herself to sins, the stronger the demons become. Consequently, the more difficult they are to drive out. Deliverance is temporary and the demon may return if the person

37 Ibid., 90.
38 Kraft, “Dealing with Demonization,” 98.
40 Kraft, Confronting Powerless Christianity, 56.
41 Kraft, Christianity with Power, 129.
continues to indulge in the sins that allowed the demons a stronghold in the first place.42

Demonic Empowerment of Words and Objects

Kraft believes words and objects can be empowered by both God and Satan. Special power is given to words spoken authoritatively in Jesus’ name, the laying on of hands, and anointed oil that God “uses in exciting ways.” Kraft describes an exorcism where the pastor brought out oil that had not yet been anointed. The demon itself said, “That oil won’t work, it hasn’t been blessed.” The pastor blessed the oil in Jesus’ name, used it, and the demon came out.43 Satan empowers curses, physical objects, and buildings. For example, a rug brought from Pakistan had been the cause of demonic problems in one missionary’s house. Until the infested object is discovered and removed, strange occurrences and sickness were regularly experienced in the house. Kraft cites the empowerment of Paul’s handkerchief and apron, Peter’s shadow, and Jesus’ garment as scriptural evidence for the empowerment of objects.44 Kraft differentiates power Christianity from animism by stating that animists believe objects contain power in and of themselves. Christians believe objects convey rather than contain power. God, Satan, and demons can convey power through words and objects.45 Now that an overview of Kraft’s doctrinal positions has been explored, the focus of the paper will shift to Kraft’s personal spiritual warfare practices.

Kraft’s Spiritual Warfare Practices

Kraft understands there to be five major components to the practice of spiritual


43Kraft, Christianity with Power, 162.


45Kraft, Confronting Powerless Christianity, 22.
warfare. Different practitioners specialize in one or more of the five components. Kraft ministers in each area on occasion but primarily specializes in what he calls inner or deep healing. I will describe Kraft’s understanding and use of each major component but focus primarily on Kraft’s inner healing ministry. After over viewing the five components I will describe a typical Charles Kraft healing session, which he breaks into seven components.

**Physical Healing**

Kraft states that physical healing “is usually the easiest of the applications of spiritual power to verify.” Kraft states that physical healing is important to Kraft but is not complete until deeper issues are exposed and healed. Kraft refers to physical healing as surface level healing. Physical healing can provide a boost of faith leading to willingness for deeper healing. Kraft states that God has used him in hundreds of physical healings, though notes that many of the healings were small. Additionally, Kraft concedes that many of his leg lengthening healings were a result of the person being able to relax certain back muscles and not an actual growth of the bone. He still considers the muscle relaxation a genuine act of God. Kraft’s main purpose in physical healing is to bridge to minister to the whole person. Often, physical healing leads to emotional healing. Conversely, Kraft has observed many instances where inner healing has also resulted in physical healing.

**Blessing**

Kraft views blessing as one of the most common methods a minister can use in the healing process. His biblical evidence for the power of blessing is found in several places in

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46 Kraft, *Christianity with Power*, 126.

47 Ibid.

Scripture. Jacob blesses his sons (Gen. 48:49). Paul often begins his letters with a blessing (Rom. 1:7, 1 Cor. 1:3, 2 Cor 1:2, Gal 1:3). Jesus was blessed before he was born and shortly after his birth (Luke 1:42, 2:34). Jesus blessed children, believers, and his disciples (Mark 10:16, Matt 5:3-11, John. 20:26). Kraft believes blessings would have been featured more in Scripture if the action was not so universally assumed by those with a Hebrew worldview.\(^{49}\)

Additionally, spiritual power given through blessing empowers physical objects like Jesus’ garments, Paul’s handkerchief, and Peter’s shadow. The elements in the Lord’s Supper take on special power after they have been blessed. Kraft has seen people healed while participating in communion because the elements had been blessed.\(^{50}\) Kraft often begins his healing sessions with a word of blessing pronounced on those in the room. Many times, a sense of the peace of God and joy for those present results.

**Forgiveness**

Kraft believes that Jesus gives believers the power and authority to forgive in John 20:23. Believers may come to a ministry session burdened with their own sin and guilt. Kraft finds that those who confess their sins and receive a word of forgiveness by the minister experience freedom from their burdens.\(^{51}\) Inherent in all of Kraft’s healing practices is his understanding of the authority the minister has in Christ. As noted above, words spoken under Christ’s authority carry power and special blessing. The act of speaking forgiveness to the hurting believer often frees the believer from shame in a way that confession of sin cannot do.

**Deliverance**

Outside observers note that the deliverance session is “at the heart of Kraft’s approach

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\(^{49}\)Kraft, *Christianity with Power*, 130.

\(^{50}\)Ibid., 131.

\(^{51}\)Ibid., 132.
to a power encounter.”\textsuperscript{52} Deliverance for Kraft begins with taking authority over the ministry session. He next calls the demon or demons to attention and interviews them to discern their strength and why they were able to inhabit the believer. After a series of questions, Kraft identifies demonic strongholds, takes authority over them, and binds the demons. Many times, Kraft discovers a hierarchy of demonic control. He binds the lesser demons to the strongest demon and asks angels to place the demons in a box. Kraft asks the demons if they are indeed in the box, and after receiving an affirmative answer, Kraft asks Jesus to destroy the box.\textsuperscript{53}

**Inner Healing**

When Kraft writes of inner healing, he has in mind healing that occurs at a deep emotional or psychological level. Even after demons are cast out, emotional damage remains that must be dealt with. In fact, Kraft writes that “the most important aspect of a deliverance ministry is never the casting out of the demons. The aim is healing.”\textsuperscript{54} Kraft uses Tapscott’s definition of inner healing. Tapscott describes inner healing as “the healing of the inner [person]: the mind, the emotions, the painful memories, the dreams. It is the process whereby we are set free from feelings of resentment, rejection, self-pity, depression, guilt, fear, sorrow, hatred, inferiority, condemnation, or worthlessness, etc.”\textsuperscript{55}

Kraft describes inner healing as the restoring of healthy relationships in three key areas. Our relationship with God helps us see ourselves as new and growing creatures. Our relationship with self helps us understand how to accept, love, and forgive our self as God does.


\textsuperscript{53}Kraft, *Defeating Dark Angels*, 183-88.

\textsuperscript{54}Ibid., 140.

Finally, our relationship with others helps us accept, love, and forgive others as God does. In summary, Kraft advocates a combination of inner healing, deliverance, and counseling. This multi-faceted approach to ministry addresses the whole person. The next section of this paper will describe Kraft’s practices in a typical ministry session.

**Kraft’s Seven Step Ministry Session**

Kraft begins his ministry session by inviting the Holy Spirit to come, reveal God’s will, and lead the ministry time. This step is the key difference between what a healing minister does and what a secular psychologist does. Kraft believes that if psychologists invited the Holy Spirit in, their insights would be empowered by God to a greater level. Kraft claims the promise stating that the power of the Lord is present for Jesus to heal the sick (Luke. 5:17). He waits until the Holy Spirit manifests himself in some way before moving on. Often, the one undergoing healing is asked to confess sinful attitudes before the Holy Spirit will work. The Spirit will show Kraft any areas in the person’s life that need attention before moving on to healing or deliverance.

Second, Kraft pronounces a blessing on the person. He blesses them with peace, God’s love, and freedom from fear or worry. If Kraft discovers existing feelings of guilt and shame, he will pronounce the person forgiven through the authority of Christ.

Third, a time of interview is necessary to discern the problems the session must address. Kraft asks questions such as, “What would you like prayer for?” or “When did this problem start?” During the interview, God will provide words of knowledge and guide Kraft to ask further questions. For example, in one session, Kraft discovered significant emotional damage inflicted on a girl between the ages twelve and seventeen. Kraft was prompted to go on

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56 Kraft, *Defeating Dark Angels*, 143.

57 Unless otherwise noted, material for this section comes from Kraft, *Christianity with Power*, 150-57. The same general ministry procedure is also found in Kraft’s chapter, “Dealing with Demonization” in *Behind Enemy Lines*, 107-19.
a virtual journey with the girl through those years in order to find embedded problems at the various stages of life.

Fourth, a tentative diagnosis of the problems is made. The interviewee and God will reveal the direction the ministry session should take, though the path often changes and the initial diagnosis could be wrong. Kraft will talk about information gained during the interview time with the interviewee and pray and ask direction for the next steps.

Fifth, a tentative prayer strategy is determined. Past experience aids Kraft to ask certain questions of God and then move forward based on the receptivity of the one being ministered to. The actual steps of deliverance are determined such as taking authority, casting out demons, and dealing with physical and emotional issues. Kraft will consult other team members if they are present in order to come to a consensus about how to conduct the deliverance and healing components of the session.

Sixth, the minister moves into the time of deliverance and healing. Kraft keeps his eyes open while praying and ministering so he can see and respond to physical changes in the person. The appearance of sweating, grimacing, or weeping could indicate Kraft is on the right track, as demons will resist exposure to truth. Kraft will place his hands on the person during the time of deliverance unless the body part in need of healing is a “private part.” One of Kraft’s students provides further insight into Kraft’s practice of deliverance. Ma writes that as Kraft discovered embedded demons at each life stage in a young girl, he would focus on casting the demons out before moving on to the next life stage. If a demon resisted expulsion, Kraft would ask angels to cut the demon with a spiritual sword and impose pain on the demon so it would want to flee. Once the demons were weakened, Kraft would order them into a virtual box, lock it, and ask Jesus to dispose of it.\(^{58}\)

Seventh is the time of post-prayer counseling. Kraft believes this counseling time is

crucial to the ongoing healing of the individual. He notes that often the problem that was prayed for comes back days or weeks later. Kraft advises believers when they can take authority over their condition or when a further ministry session is required. Cases of deliverance from demons require the weak areas of the person that allowed the demonic presence to be strengthened. Additionally, if God chooses not to heal during the ministry session, further counseling is needed to ensure the person he or she is still loved and cared for by God.

In the preceding sections of this paper, Kraft’s general progression from skeptic to embracing power Christianity has been presented. Additionally, I have described Kraft’s view on key doctrines relating to spiritual warfare and his general ministry practices. I have attempted to present the data from Kraft’s point of view and without my own critique. The next section will present a critique of Kraft’s views and practices on spiritual warfare related to his healing ministry.

Critique of Kraft’s Understanding and Practice of Spiritual Warfare

Kraft has been heavily criticized for many of his views and practices. Most notable is the analysis made by Priest, Campbell, and Mullen in a paper presented at the Evangelical Missiological Society.\(^{59}\) That paper, along with a response from Kraft and a somewhat separate opinion by Patrick Johnstone has been published as a short book. My critique will draw from Priest, et al primarily, though I will add my own thoughts throughout.

Kraft’s Humility

Kraft writes with great humility, a trait not shared by several of his opponents. He is open and honest about his initial skepticism of healing and deliverance ministries. He often

acknowledges his own weaknesses and expresses sadness and frustration when God does not use him to bring healing. Kraft appears to genuinely care for those living in bondage to sin and constantly writes of his desire to minister in love. In fact, he identifies love as a key component of his ministry that is often lacking in television faith healers. To Kraft, it is unloving and unbiblical to tell a room full of people that God will heal them if only they have enough faith. Kraft acknowledges that in his own ministry, there are many instances when God does not heal. Kraft regularly admits that he does not understand God fully and does not claim to have healing and deliverance completely figured out.

Kraft’s Focus on Follow Up Counseling

Kraft is quick to state that simply casting out demons is not enough to bring healing to a person. One of his critiques of other faith healers is there is no follow up after a healing session. People can be devastated if God does not heal them. Kraft is intent on counseling further to assure people that God still loves and cares for them. Kraft spends time reminding the believer who they are in Christ because the enemy has been lying about their identity. Kraft encourages people to attend church and be a part of a small group for support and prayer. Additionally, he identifies specific ways the believer needs to change in order to avoid future sin and demonic influence. Kraft is to be commended for his focus on love and follow up counseling. He genuinely cares for those he ministers to. Genuine care, however, does not automatically bring a healthy or biblical approach to ministry.

The Practice of Interviewing Demons

Kraft often interviews demons for a lengthy period before he casts them out. In one account, Kraft states that he had reached an impasse in the deliverance process and could not

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60Kraft, *Confronting Powerless Christianity*, 84.

61Kraft, *Defeating Dark Angels*, 195-96.
proceed. After interviewing the very demons he was attempting to cast out, Kraft gained information needed to proceed. He states that he bound an English speaking demon and spoke with it and found out another demon named “control” was in charge. Based on the name of the demon, Kraft knew how he needed to proceed.\textsuperscript{62} In another account, Kraft discovers several “inner children” within a woman and speaks to these children to find further information about demonic inhabitation.\textsuperscript{63} The question begs to be asked, “Who are these inner children and where do they come from?”

God is a God of truth and Satan is the Father of Lies. God’s revelation in Scripture is clear and can be trusted. Satan is not bound to speak the truth and is exposed as a deceiver throughout Scripture.\textsuperscript{64} Kraft thinks that the Holy Spirit can force demons to speak accurately and give truthful information during an interview session. However, Satan often accurately speaks Scripture but uses it in a twisted way, such as when he quotes the Bible to Jesus during the temptation in the wilderness. As Priest and others conclude, “Unless we know on independent grounds (for example from Scripture) that what demons are asserting is in fact true, then we must not believe them.”\textsuperscript{65} Kraft’s view of Scripture is suspect, however, and is the next doctrine to be evaluated.

\textbf{Kraft’s Understanding of Scripture}

Despite calling himself a card-carrying evangelical, Kraft has strange views on Scripture, particularly its limitations. He often notes that we only have the “bare-bones” accounts of demonic encounters in the Bible and that we have liberty to fill in the blanks.\textsuperscript{66} Kraft

\begin{footnotes}
\item Kraft, \textit{Defeating Dark Angels}, 157-58.
\item Ma, “A ‘First Waver’ Looks at the ‘Third Wave,’” 202.
\item See John 8:44, Isa. 8:19, and 1 Tim 4:1 among other places.
\item Kraft, \textit{Confronting Powerless Christianity}, 34.
\end{footnotes}
imposes the boundary that any practice is acceptable as long as it does not contradict revealed
Scripture. The problem is that Kraft and others have built an entire theology related to spiritual
warfare on what they consider to be filling in the blanks of the Scriptural accounts. Kraft’s
practice of interviewing demons and coming up with a plan for exorcism is a good example.
Few if any of the steps in Kraft’s model are found in Scripture. Kraft’s defense against
accusations of claiming new revelation is that the information he has discovered about the
demonic world is not new but a fulfillment of what is already in Scripture. However, Kraft has
based nearly his entire practice of ministry, not clearly in Scripture, but on new information
obtained through extra-biblical means. Personal experience has become the driving force behind
Kraft’s ministry.

The Role of Personal Experience

Interestingly, Kraft identifies as unbiblical much of the television healing ministries,
the “name it, claim it” teaching, and the demon-under-every-bush perspective. His basis for
condemnation is, “I label these teachings heretical because they are not biblical and are
regrettable because they are taught by some very visible ‘faith healers.’”

How can Kraft make such an accusation, however, when he does the same things he criticizes the television faith
healers for? Kraft states numerous times that some of his practices are not found in the Bible but
claims he is simply using experience to fill in the gaps missing in scriptural accounts. When
experience because the deciding hermeneutical measurement, though, just about any practice can
be substantiated. Kraft fails to see that television healers and name it, claim it theologians have
their own perceived scriptural basis, just as he does

Kraft writes experience and results prove what works. He believes working from
experience rather than theoretical presuppositions is the most accurate way to find truth. Kraft

67Ibid., 54.
rests, confident that his experiences cannot be denied, no matter what argument Priest and others use. Kraft also acknowledges that Satan performs similar healings and miracles as believers do. Kraft always assumes, however, that the results he obtains are from God. When the bulk of his practice is extra-biblical, however, there is no way to prove who is behind the healings. Could it be that Satan himself provides the results in order to keep people hooked on deliverance ministries, cosmic level warfare, and other tactics that take up a lot of time?

**Lack of Emphasis on Evangelism**

Kraft rarely mentions healing or deliverance as a means of evangelism. He does not often describe the details of those he has healed in his stories, though most of the time it appears he is dealing with believers. It may not be Kraft’s intent to use his ministry for evangelistic purposes, however, it seems that many of Jesus’ healings in Scripture were focused on unbelievers. As Jesus travelled about, he preached the good news and healed disease, sickness, and cast out demons from unbelievers (Matt. 4:23-25). Jesus healed a paralytic and declared his sins forgiven (Matt. 9:2). Jesus cast a legion of demons out of a man and then sent him back to his village to evangelize (Mark 5:1-20). In the Gospels, Jesus used healing and deliverance to announce to an unbelieving world that the Kingdom had broken in. People were called to repentance and faith, something Kraft does not describe doing in his writings.

**Misuse of Critical Realism**

A final critique is Kraft’s misuse and overemphasis on one aspect of critical realism. Kraft understands critical realism to mean that we can never know truth absolutely, as only God does. However, we can know truth adequately. Kraft acknowledges that his view of reality can be different from someone else’s. He sees the beauty of critical realism in that he and

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68Ibid., 68-69.

another can sit down and talk about their views of reality and learn from each other. Kraft believes, “God has buried so much treasure in the Scriptures that we will never find it all until the interpretive perspectives of each of the languages and societies of the world have been applied to them.” Problems arise when other cultural approaches to hermeneutics are applied uncritically, especially views from highly animistic societies. I am a critical realist as well. I do not believe we can know all truth fully but we can have a fairly accurate understanding of reality. The difference between myself and Kraft is that I draw my ministry practices from what is clearly revealed in Scripture and Kraft operates almost entirely in the areas of perceived reality not confirmed in the Scripture. Kraft has too much faith in his own ability to understand perceptions of reality not confirmed by God’s revelation. It is extremely unhealthy and dangerous to base an entire ministry on “laws and principles” about spiritual realities not found in Scripture.

**Conclusion**

Charles Kraft is a well-intentioned man seeking to build up the church in an area he feels is sorely lacking – that of power Christianity. Kraft’s journey is fascinating. Few people come from a highly skeptical, anti-charismatic background and end up fully embracing the extreme end of the charismatic perspective. Kraft’s background in anthropology gave him a framework to understand what was happening to his own worldview as he made the shift. His training helped him to be more open to cultural expressions different from his own. I believe it was this same anthropological background that is proving to lead him astray. His over application of critical realism allows Kraft to feel comfortable with his doctrinal positions and practices even though they are far from what is found in Scripture. Kraft tells himself that he can have an accurate understanding of reality based on his experiences alone. The reality is, the

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70 Ibid., 18. This perspective is originally found in Jacob Loewen, *Culture and Human Values* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1975).
majority of his ministry is based on principles and practices not found in Scripture at all.

Kraft’s story is useful for several reasons. First, he is correct to call the western church to acknowledge the reality of the demonic and spiritual warfare. Satan has an easy time deceiving the church when nearly half of its members do not believe he exists or continues to work today. Second, we can find encouragement from Kraft to love and care for those we minister to and to minister in humility. Third, we can see the results of an unchecked emphasis on personal experience in Kraft’s ministry. Kraft seems no longer open to correction from anyone who does not claim to have personally exorcised demons. Kraft has become so distanced from evangelicals that he has lost a voice in the larger context. Perhaps this distance is a good thing because of the harmful influence Kraft may have. Finally, we are reminded of the duty of the church to ensure healthy and sound doctrine is taught (Titus 1:9). Unpleasant as it may be, strong critiques are sometimes necessary in order to protect the church. Such a critique must be done in love and with the aim, not to tear down an individual, but to build up the church so that it might walk in the fullness of life through Christ.

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