

THE PNEUMATIKOS IN MARK 9:17–19 AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR DISCIPLESHIP IN BENUE STATE

GEORGE ODAFE, PhD

Department of Christian Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts, College of Humanities, Education, and Law, Kaduna State University, Kaduna.

George.odafe@gmail.com +2347062937610

&

DANIEL ADAWOFUOYI OGIDI

Remnant Christian Network Theological Seminary-Adullam, Makurdi

ofuoyi@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The contemporary Christian landscape in Benue State, Nigeria, is characterized by significant numerical growth, yet this expansion is increasingly decoupled from deep spiritual formation and moral transformation. This seminar paper examines this disconnect, termed the crisis of spiritual competence, by analyzing the concept of the *pneumatikos* (the Spirit-governed life) through an exegetical study of Mark 9:17–19. Utilizing a historical-grammatical and narrative-critical methodology, the study demonstrates that the disciples' public failure to exorcise the mute spirit (*pneuma alalon*) was not a programmatic or technical failure, but a theological and relational deficiency characterized by a lack of sustained dependence on divine power. This biblical narrative serves as an interpretive mirror for contemporary discipleship practices in Benue State, where leadership is frequently characterized by functional autonomy, performance-driven spirituality, and a reliance on formulaic deliverance models. By drawing on African contextual hermeneutics, this paper critiques the pragmatism of local deliverances and the academic-ecclesial divide in theological education. It ultimately proposes a *pneumatikos*-oriented pedagogical framework that integrates continuous spiritual formation, relational mentoring, and a disciplined theology of prayer into pastoral training and church-based discipleship programs in Benue State.

Keywords: *Pneumatikos*, Mark 9:17-19, discipleship, spiritual competence, spiritual formation, theological education, Benue State.

Introduction

The rapid numerical expansion of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly within the Middle Belt of Nigeria, remains one of the most significant demographic shifts in modern religious history (Jenkins, 2017). Benue State, historically designated as the agricultural hub of Nigeria, has witnessed a corresponding proliferation of ecclesial institutions, ranging from classical missionary denominations to highly dynamic Pentecostal and charismatic ministries (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024). However, contemporary theological reflection increasingly notes a troubling paradox within this expansion, as the numerical growth of the church has not been matched by a corresponding depth in discipleship and moral transformation (Ehusani, 1996). This disconnect manifests in widespread nominalism, syncretism, and a highly transactional approach to spiritual power, suggesting a systemic crisis of spiritual competence among both ecclesial leaders and the laity (Gwamna, 2008). In many contemporary contexts, Christian discipleship has been reduced to administrative compliance, dogmatic assimilation, or participation in performative deliverance

rituals, leaving the deeper dimensions of character and spiritual formation largely unaddressed (Burggraaff, 2015).

To address this crisis, theological scholarship must return to the biblical foundations of spiritual empowerment and discipleship. In the New Testament, discipleship is presented not merely as the cognitive acquisition of doctrinal propositions, but as a holistic, Spirit-governed existence (Green, 2003). This reality is captured by the Pauline term *pneumatikos*, which denotes a mode of being that is consistently shaped, directed, and empowered by the Holy Spirit (Fee, 1994). Although the term is most explicitly developed in the Pauline epistles, its narrative and theological foundations are deeply embedded in the Synoptic Gospels, particularly in the ministry and pedagogical methods of Jesus (Schnelle, 2009). The Gospel of Mark, characterized by its realistic and often stark portrayal of the disciples, provides a critical framework for examining the tension between human inadequacy and divine power (Hooker, 1991).

The narrative of the failed exorcism in Mark 9:17–19 provides a poignant historical and theological paradigm for the contemporary discipleship crisis. The public failure of the disciples to cast out the "mute spirit" (*pneuma alalon*) from the afflicted boy, despite having previously received authority from Jesus (Mark 6:7), exposes a profound deficiency in their spiritual orientation (Lane, 1974). This failure is met with a sharp Christological rebuke, as Jesus characterizes them as part of a "faithless generation" (*genea apistos*), indicating that their powerlessness was not a technical or programmatic limitation, but a fundamental misalignment with the divine source of power (France, 2007).

This seminar paper offers a critical examination of the concept of the *pneumatikos* in Mark 9:17–19 and evaluates its implications for discipleship within the contemporary church of Benue State. By combining historical-grammatical exegesis with African contextual hermeneutics, this study seeks to demonstrate that the disciples' ancient failure is mirrored in the contemporary practices of Benue State churches, where spiritual leadership is frequently divorced from sustained dependency on the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, this paper proposes a constructive, *pneumatikos*-oriented framework designed to bridge the gap between academic theology and lived discipleship, thereby fostering a more resilient and spiritually competent leadership in the region.

The Concept of the Pneumatikos and Spiritual Competence

To understand the nature of the disciples' failure in the Markan narrative, it is first necessary to establish the theological and semantic boundaries of the term *pneumatikos*. Within New Testament theology, *pneumatikos* functions as a key category for defining the identity and operational capacity of the Christian believer (Fee, 1994). Derived from the noun *pneuma* (Spirit), the adjectival form *pneumatikos* describes that which belongs to, is influenced by, or is entirely governed by the Holy Spirit of God (Kittel, 1964). Standard lexicographical tools define the term as pertaining to the divine Spirit, emphasizing a reality that transcends the purely natural, physical, or intellectual dimensions of human existence (BDAG, 2000).

In Pauline literature, where the term appears most frequently, *pneumatikos* is consistently contrasted with the natural or unspiritual person (*psychikos*) and the carnal or fleshly person (*sarkikos*) (Fee, 2007). In passages such as 1 Corinthians 2:14–15, Paul asserts that the *psychikos* person cannot accept or understand the things of the Spirit of God, whereas

the *pneumatikos* person is capable of discerning all things because they possess the mind of Christ. This distinction is not merely metaphysical or ontological, it is deeply ethical and functional (Dunn, 1998). To be *pneumatikos* is to embody a life whose ethical output is characterized by the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23) and whose functional output is characterized by the constructive exercise of spiritual gifts for the edification of the community (1 Corinthians 12:4–11).

While the Gospel of Mark does not explicitly employ the term *pneumatikos*, the underlying theological reality of Spirit-empowered existence is central to its narrative progression (Voigt, 2025). Mark begins his Gospel with the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus at his baptism (Mark 1:10), establishing the *pneuma* as the driving force behind Jesus' messianic mission, his confrontation with demonic powers, and his pedagogical formation of the disciples (Kee, 1968). Throughout the Markan narrative, Jesus operates as the ultimate archetype of the *pneumatikos* (the Spirit-governed life), demonstrating a perfect, unmediated alignment with the power of God through continuous prayer and obedience (Stronstad, 2018).

Consequently, spiritual competence within the New Testament framework cannot be defined through the lens of human technique, academic achievement, or administrative efficiency. Rather, spiritual competence is a derivative, relational reality (Osborne, 2010). It is the capacity to participate in the authority and power of God, a participation that is strictly contingent upon the believer's ongoing alignment with the Holy Spirit (Fee, 1994). When Christian leaders or disciples attempt to exercise spiritual authority apart from this sustained dependence, they experience a collapse of spiritual competence, reducing their ministry to powerless, programmatic routines (Wilhoit, 2008).

In the African theological context, this understanding of spiritual competence intersects with indigenous cosmologies that are inherently open to the spiritual realm (Mbiti, 1999). Scholars of African Christianity observe that the African worldview does not artificially separate the physical from the spiritual, leading to an intense desire for spiritual power and deliverance (Bediako, 1995). However, without a robust biblical definition of the *pneumatikos*, this desire can easily devolve into a highly pragmatic, power-oriented spirituality that values external manifestations over internal moral transformation (Turaki, 2008). True spiritual competence, therefore, must hold together the reality of spiritual power with the ethical and relational demands of the Gospel, guarding against the twin dangers of rationalistic reductionism and superstitious syncretism (Kato, 1975).

Exegetical Analysis of Discipleship Incompetence in Mark 9:17–19

The pericope of Mark 9:17–19 must be interpreted within its immediate literary context of Mark 9:14–29, which occurs immediately after the Transfiguration of Jesus (Mark 9:2–8). This abrupt transition from the mountain of divine glory to the valley of human crisis is a deliberate literary and theological device employed by the evangelist to expose the profound inadequacy of the disciples (France, 2007). While Peter, James, and John are witnessing the eschatological revelation of Jesus' identity on the mountain, the remaining nine disciples are locked in a public, unproductive dispute with the scribes, surrounded by a crowd that is witnessing their complete inability to heal an afflicted boy (Hooker, 1991).

To understand the structural and lexical dynamics of this encounter, Table 1 provides a detailed analysis of the key Greek terms and syntax within Mark 9:17–19, illustrating how the grammar itself carries the theological weight of the narrative.

Table 1: Lexical and Grammatical Analysis of Key Terms in Mark 9:17–19

Verse	Greek Text (UBS5/NA28)	Key Lexeme / Syntax	Grammatical Classification	Theological & Semantic Significance
v.17	ἔχοντα πνεῦμα ἄλαλον	<i>Echonta pneuma alalon</i>	Present active participle Accusative noun with attributive adjective	Indicates a continuous, persistent state of possession rather than an episodic illness. Denotes a spiritual entity that actively destroys the boy's capacity for speech and relationship.
v.18	καὶ ὅπου ἐὰν αὐτὸν καταλάβῃ, ῥήσσει αὐτόν, καὶ ἀφρίζει...	<i>Katalabē Rēgnyei aphrizei</i>	Aorist active subjunctive Present active indicative Present active indicative	Encodes sudden, violent, and decisive acts of seizure by the demonic force. Describes the continuous physical manifestation of being thrown down and convulsing. Illustrates the ongoing physical trauma of foaming at the mouth.
v.18	καὶ οὐκ ἴσχυσαν	<i>ouk ischysan</i>	Negated aorist active indicative	Crucial Contrast: Indicates a definitive, historical moment of complete human powerlessness and failed capability.
v.19	Ἦ γενεὰ ἄπιστος, ἕως πότε πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἔσομαι;	<i>ō genea apistos heōs pote</i>	Vocative noun with adjective Interrogative adverb of time	A collective singular rebuke that places the disciples within the category of Israel's faithless wilderness generation. Reflects prophetic lament and the strain of divine patience in the face of persistent unbelief.
v.19	φέρετε αὐτὸν πρὸς με.	<i>pherete</i>	Present active imperative	A command for immediate and continuous action, shifting the focus of authority and resolution entirely to Christ.

The grammatical data presented in Table 1 reveals a sharp contrast between the active, destructive power of the *pneuma alalon* and the complete passivity and powerlessness of the disciples. In verse 17, the father introduces the problem by stating that his son has a "mute spirit" (*pneuma alalon*). The use of the present active participle *echonta* (having) indicates that this is not a temporary or fleeting physical condition, but an ongoing, oppressive spiritual reality (Keener, 2016). In Second Temple Jewish thought, muteness and deafness were frequently associated with demonic oppression, as these conditions isolated the individual from the communal hearing of the Torah and the verbal worship of God (Simkovich, 2018).

In verse 18, the father describes the physical violence inflicted by the spirit using a series of highly graphic verbs. The aorist subjunctive *katalabē* (it seizes) represents the sudden, unpredictable

nature of the demonic attacks, while the present indicatives *rēgnyei* (it throws down), *aphrizei* (it foams), *trizei* (it grinds), and *xērainetai* (it becomes rigid) portray the ongoing, devastating physical consequences of the possession (Lane, 1974). This detailed description highlights the severity of the boy's condition, emphasizing that the situation requires an extraordinary exercise of spiritual power (Twelftree, 2007).

The narrative climax of the father's report occurs in the simple, devastating statement: *kai eipa toise mathētaise sou hina auto ekbalōsin, kai ouk ischysan* ("And I told your disciples to cast it out, but they were not able"). The use of the negated aorist active indicative *ouk ischysan* is highly significant (BDAG, 2000). The verb *ischyō* denotes the possession of strength, capability, and resources to accomplish a task (Kittel, 1964). By stating that the disciples *ouk ischysan*, the text records a definitive, historical collapse of their operational capacity (France, 2007).

This powerlessness is highly puzzling because the disciples had previously been commissioned by Jesus, sent out in pairs, and granted explicit authority (*exousia*) over unclean spirits, an authority they had successfully exercised (Mark 6:7, 13). Their failure in Mark 9:18, therefore, indicates that spiritual authority in the New Testament is not a permanent, static possession or a magical technique that can be utilized at will (Fee, 1994). Rather, it is a derivative, contingent reality that requires continuous, active alignment with the divine source of power (Osborne, 2010).

Jesus' immediate response in verse 19 is not an act of gentle pastoral comfort, but a sharp, prophetic rebuke: *ō genea apistos, heōs pote pros hymas esomai; heōs pote anexomai hymōn*; ("O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you?"). The vocative construction *ō genea apistos* (O faithless generation) is a collective singular that encompasses the disciples, the scribes, and the surrounding crowd (Carson & Moo, 2005). By utilizing the term *genea* (generation), Jesus echoes the covenantal critique of Yahweh against Israel during the wilderness wanderings, specifically referencing the language of Deuteronomy 32:5, 20, where Israel is characterized as a warped and crooked generation, children in whom there is no faithfulness (Beale, 2011).

The double use of the interrogative *heōs pote* (how long?) reflects the rhetorical structure of prophetic lament (cf. Psalm 13:1; Numbers 14:27), revealing the strain of divine patience in the face of persistent human unbelief (Wright, 2003). This rebuke indicates that the disciples' powerlessness was not a technical oversight or a lack of administrative preparation, but a fundamental theological failure (Dunn, 1998). They had lived in close proximity to Jesus, witnessed his miracles, and received his teachings, yet they remained spiritually unaligned, relying on their own strength or on formulaic repetition rather than on active faith in God (Lane, 1974).

The resolution of the immediate crisis begins with Jesus' sovereign command: *pherete auton pros me* ("Bring him to me"). The present active imperative *pherete* demands immediate, obedient action (BDAG, 2000). This command serves as a performative speech act that reconfigures the entire narrative situation (Fee, 1994). By directing the father to bring the boy directly to him, Jesus shifts the focus away from the failed human agents and toward himself as the definitive locus of divine authority (Bauckham, 2006). This command represents a critical pedagogical moment, demonstrating to the disciples and the crowd that when human agency fails, resolution is found only through a radical, Christological reorientation (Wilkins, 1992).

The Crisis of Spiritual Competence in Benue State Discipleship

The ancient failure of the disciples in Mark 9:17-19 serves as an interpretive mirror for the contemporary church in Benue State, Nigeria. Benue State, located in the Middle Belt of the country, is characterized by a complex intersection of social, economic, and religious dynamics (Timin & Asemayina, n.d.). Despite a high rate of Christian adherence among major ethnic groups such as the Tiv, Idoma, and Iggede, the region is plagued by persistent socio-economic challenges, agricultural dependency, and recurring communal conflicts related to land use and farmer-herder tensions (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024; World Bank, 2024).

Within this context of trauma and instability, the desire for immediate spiritual deliverance, healing, and divine protection is exceptionally high, directly shaping how Christian discipleship is practiced and understood (Orobator, 2018). To evaluate the impact of these contextual factors on local ecclesial life, Table 2 presents the key empirical indicators of discipleship practices and theological trends within Benue State churches.

Table 2: Empirical Indicators of Discipleship Deficiencies in Benue State Churches

Discipleship Indicator	Contemporary Manifestation in Benue State	Underlying Theological Deviation	Markan Parallel (Mark 9:17-19)
Spiritual Warfare & Deliverance Models	Proliferation of prayer houses, deliverance ministries, and intensive spiritual warfare sessions emphasizing immediate deliverance.	Transactional pragmatism; treating faith as a mechanical formula to manipulate spiritual forces for survival.	The disciples' attempt to cast out the spirit using derivative authority without active dependence (<i>ouk ischysan</i>).
Moral and Ethical Transformation	High rates of church attendance contrasted with persistent corruption, communal conflicts, and ethical instability in public life.	Secular-sacred divide; divorcing doctrinal profession from lived ethical reality.	Proximity to Jesus without internal, Spirit-led transformation (<i>genea apistos</i>).
Theological Education & Pastoral Formation	Academic training in seminaries (e.g., ECWA Theological Seminary) remains highly theoretical and isolated from local church practices.	Dual system of theology; prioritizing cognitive information-transfer over holistic spiritual formation.	The disciples' exposure to Jesus' teaching without the capacity to apply it in moments of crisis.
Mentorship & Accountability Structures	Highly hierarchical and authoritarian pastoral models where discipleship is mediated solely through pastoral authority.	Clericalism and paternalism; marginalizing participatory, communal, and relational discipleship.	The reliance on institutional status rather than personal, prayerful communion with God.

The empirical data and theological indicators outlined in Table 2 reveal a systemic crisis of spiritual competence that directly mirrors the dynamics of the Markan narrative. A primary manifestation of this crisis in Benue State is the highly transactional approach to spiritual warfare and deliverance ministries (Uwah, 2021). Within many local churches, discipleship has been largely equated with participation in intensive prayer programs, deliverance sessions, and vigils designed to secure immediate physical survival, agricultural success, and protection from perceived spiritual threats (Agang, 2016).

While this emphasis on spiritual power resonates strongly with traditional African worldviews that affirm the reality of spiritual forces (Mbiti, 1999; Bediako, 1995), it frequently devolves into a form of pragmatic manipulation (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005). Faith is often treated not as a relational trust in the sovereignty of God, but as a technical formula, a set of verbal decrees, or a ritual performance designed to guarantee health, wealth, and security (Gwamna, 2008).

This pragmatic approach to spirituality represents a significant deviation from the New Testament model of the *pneumatikos* (Kärkkäinen, 2018). In the Markan narrative, the disciples' failure occurred precisely because they attempted to exercise authority as a mechanical technique, relying on their past commission rather than on a living, dependent relationship with God (Lane, 1974).

Similarly, in Benue State, the overemphasis on performative deliverance and miraculous breakthroughs has created a class of Christian leaders who are highly skilled in liturgical dramaturgy and ritual performance, but who lack the deep spiritual competence that comes from sustained, quiet dependency on the Holy Spirit (Omenyo, 2006).

Furthermore, this crisis of competence is evident in the sharp disconnect between formal theological education and the grassroots practice of discipleship (Swinton & Mowat, 2016). Benue State hosts several reputable theological institutions and Bible colleges, such as the ECWA Theological Seminary and various Catholic and Protestant seminaries, which provide rigorous academic training for pastors and church workers (Osmer, 2008). However, this training remains highly theoretical, focusing extensively on historical, systematic, and administrative disciplines while neglecting the structured, experiential formation of the pastor's own spiritual life (Ogunewu, 2015).

The result is what Omenyo and Akoto (2021) describe as a "dual system of theology," where pastors graduate with high cognitive literacy but remain ill-equipped to navigate the complex spiritual and pastoral realities of their congregations. When faced with the deep-seated spiritual anxieties, communal trauma, and demonic manifestations that characterize ministry in Benue State, these leaders frequently default either to sterile academic rationalism or to the uncritical, highly sensationalist deliverance models of the popular religious marketplace (Imasogie, 1983).

This educational disconnect is compounded by the highly hierarchical and authoritarian structures of leadership that dominate many Nigerian churches (Oshitelu, 2014). Discipleship is frequently conceptualized as absolute submission to the authority of the "man of God," creating a culture of dependency and passivity among the laity (Ukah, 2020). This clericalism isolates pastoral leaders

from mutual accountability and relational mentoring, fostering a sense of functional autonomy (Pickett, 2019). Like the disciples in Mark 9, who disputed among themselves about who was the greatest (Mark 9:34) while failing to minister to the suffering boy, contemporary leaders can easily become preoccupied with status, institutional authority, and public reputation, completely severing their ministry from its divine source of power (Mumuni, 2018).

Finally, the socio-economic realities of Benue State, marked by high poverty rates and recurring farmer-herder conflicts, exert a powerful, distorting pressure on discipleship (World Bank, 2024). Under conditions of persistent trauma and displacement, believers naturally gravitate toward a "theology of survival" (Marshall, 2021). In such contexts, the church is often tempted to adapt its message to meet these immediate physical needs, offering simplistic promises of financial breakthrough and protection (Adogame, 2017).

While the church must engage with suffering, this pragmatic adjustment can easily eclipse the core demands of Christian discipleship, which include self-denial, cross-bearing, and ethical integrity (Mark 8:34–38). When discipleship is stripped of its transformative and moral dimensions, it fails to produce believers who can act as agents of reconciliation, justice, and social transformation in the midst of communal conflict (Orobator, 2018).

Towards a Pneumatikos-Oriented Model of Leadership Formation

To resolve the crisis of spiritual competence in Benue State, the church must undergo a systematic and pedagogical reorientation. This reorientation requires a move away from programmatic, performance-driven discipleship models and toward a *pneumatikos*-oriented framework of leadership formation (Wright, 2012). Drawing on the pedagogical corrective of Jesus in Mark 9:17–19 and his subsequent private instruction in verses 28–29, this study proposes a constructive model that integrates rigorous academic theology with intentional spiritual formation and contextual relevance.

The core of this proposed model is the integration of spiritual formation as a foundational, non-negotiable discipline within theological institutions and church-based discipleship programs (Wilhoit, 2008). Theological education must transcend the mere transfer of cognitive data and embrace a holistic pedagogy that engages the student's identity, character, and relational habits (Green, 2003). Seminaries and Bible colleges in Benue State must restructure their curricula to ensure that spiritual direction, contemplative disciplines, and guided retreat experiences are given equal academic and pastoral weight alongside systematic theology, biblical languages, and administrative management (Omenyo & Akoto, 2021).

By intentional spiritual formation, we do not mean the passive endorsement of subjective emotionalism, but a disciplined, academically grounded engagement with the classical spiritual traditions of the Christian church, including *lectio divina*, silent retreats, and regular spiritual direction (Sheldrake, 2016). This curricular integration ensures that future pastors are not merely "theologically informed," but are actively trained in the habit of sustained dependency on the Holy Spirit, equipping them with the spiritual competence necessary to navigate the complex spiritual warfare and pastoral crises of local ministry (Fee, 1994).

Furthermore, this model demands a radical restructuring of local church discipleship programs, shifting from mass-produced, programmatic instruction to relational, life-on-life mentoring (Coleman, 1993). In Mark 3:14, the primary calling of the disciples was "to be with Him," indicating that spiritual formation occurs through proximity, shared life, and imitation of Christlike character (Green, 2003).

Local churches in Benue State must transition from large-scale, information-driven Sunday schools and prayer programs to small, highly disciplined covenant groups where believers can experience authentic accountability, theological reflection, and communal support (Shirley, 2008). Within these small groups, discipleship must be defined not by the mechanical performance of religious duties, but by the gradual, Spirit-led cultivation of Christlike character, directly addressing local ethical challenges such as corruption, tribalism, and communal hostility (Ngewa, 2014).

A critical dimension of this *pneumatikos*-oriented model is the recovery of a biblically sound, disciplined theology of prayer (Fee, 1994). In Mark 9:29, Jesus explicitly identifies prayer (*proseuchē*) as the indispensable key to spiritual power, reframing the disciples' failure as a failure of prayer (Lane, 1974). Within the African context, where prayer is frequently viewed as a mechanical tool for self-protection or the vocal manipulation of spiritual forces, the church must teach prayer as an act of radical submission and communion with God (Turaki, 2008).

Prayer must be understood not as a performative ritual to secure immediate physical breakthroughs, but as the essential posture of the *pneumatikos*—a continuous, humble alignment with the will and purposes of God (Kärkkäinen, 2018). This understanding of prayer acts as a critical corrective to the transactional Deliverance Ministries of Benue State, reminding leaders that spiritual authority is never a personal possession but is always derivative, contingent upon ongoing communion with Christ (Uwah, 2021).

Finally, this model must be contextually sensitive, addressing the unique socio-economic and political challenges of Benue State through a practical theology of hope and reconciliation (Orobator, 2018). In a region marked by persistent communal conflicts, farmer-herder tensions, and high poverty rates, discipleship cannot remain an abstract, privatized spiritual exercise (World Bank, 2024).

A *pneumatikos*-oriented discipleship must equip believers to actively participate in God's mission of restoration, training them to be agents of peace, justice, and trauma healing within their communities (Agang, 2016). By holding together the reality of spiritual power with the ethical and social demands of the Gospel, this model ensures that the church in Benue State produces disciples who are not only spiritually competent to confront demonic forces, but are morally and socially transformed to act as the salt and light of their society (Stassen & Gushee, 2003).

Conclusion

The exegetical and contextual investigation of the *pneumatikos* in Mark 9:17–19 reveals that the contemporary crisis of discipleship in Benue State is fundamentally a crisis of spiritual competence, rooted in a reliance on human technique and a transactional approach to spiritual power. The public failure of the disciples in the valley of human crisis serves as a timeless warning



that proximity to Jesus, institutional authorization, and programmatic efficiency are completely inadequate when confronted with the deep realities of spiritual conflict and human suffering. Spiritual competence is not a static possession or a mechanical formula, but a derivative, relational reality that requires continuous, active alignment with the Holy Spirit through disciplined prayer and dependent trust.

To resolve this crisis, the church in Benue State must undergo a systematic and pedagogical reorientation, integrating rigorous academic theology with intentional, structured spiritual formation. By restructuring seminary curricula, transitioning local church discipleship from programmatic instruction to relational mentoring, and reclaiming a biblically sound theology of prayer, the church can bridge the divide between formal theology and lived practice.

This *pneumatikos*-oriented framework provides a constructive way forward, equipping Christian leaders with the spiritual competence, moral integrity, and social responsibility necessary to navigate the complex challenges of contemporary Benue State, thereby fulfilling the true biblical vision of the Spirit-governed life.



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