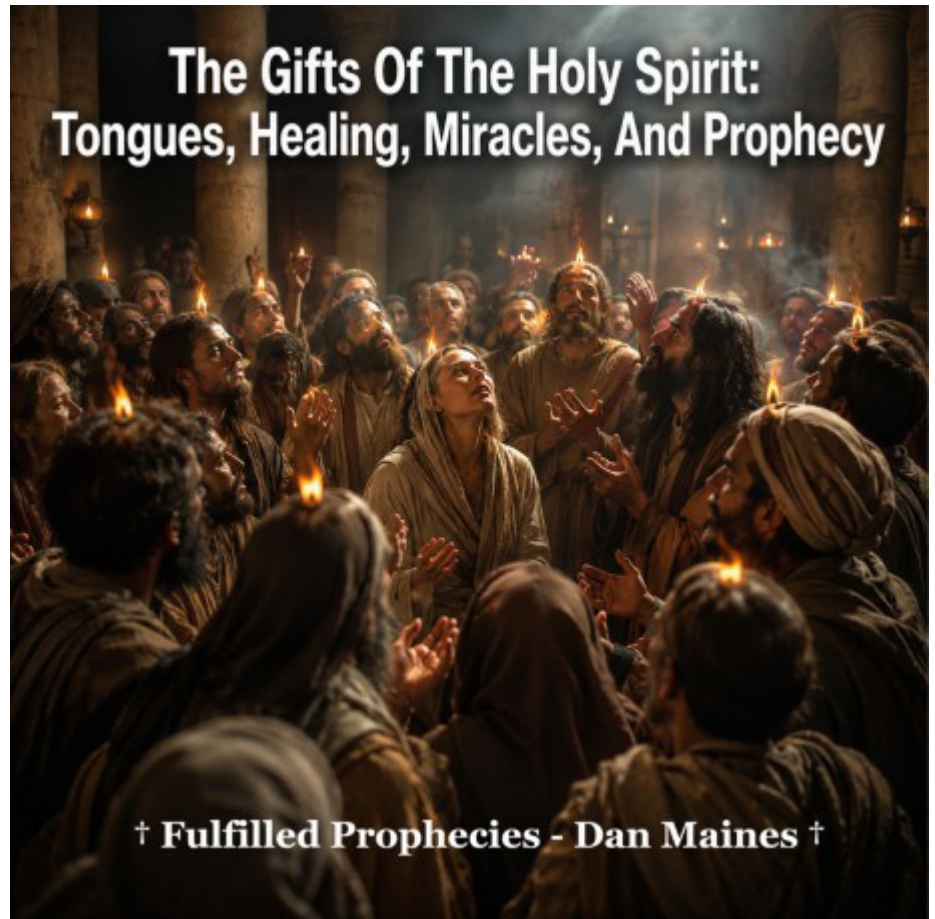


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The Gifts Of The Holy Spirit: Tongues, Healing, Miracles, And Prophecy



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† The gifts of the Holy Spirit are among the most misunderstood subjects in the church today. Churches claim tongues, miraculous healing, prophecy, words of knowledge, visions, and direct personal messages from God. The important question isn't whether people sincerely believe these experiences are happening. The question is whether Scripture teaches that these revelatory and miraculous gifts were intended to continue

throughout the entire Christian age.

† We need to distinguish between the Holy Spirit Himself and the miraculous gifts given by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit hasn't disappeared. God hasn't stopped working in His people. The question is whether the miraculous signs that authenticated God's messengers and revealed inspired truth were permanent features of the church.

† The New Testament places these gifts within a specific period when the gospel was being revealed, confirmed, and established. Before the completed revelation of the New Covenant message, God gave apostles, prophets, tongues, miraculous knowledge, healings, and other signs to establish His truth (Hebrews 2:3-4).

† This also means we shouldn't confuse God's providence with miraculous gifts. We can pray for the sick. We can thank God when someone recovers. We can trust God to guide our lives through His revealed truth. None of that requires us to claim that someone possesses the apostolic gift of healing or receives new revelation directly from God (James 5:13-16).

Acts 2:1-4

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a noise like a violent rushing wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And tongues that looked like fire appeared to them, distributing themselves, and a tongue rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with different tongues, as the Spirit was giving them the ability to speak out.

† Biblical tongues weren't meaningless sounds produced through emotional excitement. Acts immediately explains that people from different nations heard the disciples speaking in their own languages (Acts 2:6-11).

† The speakers didn't learn these languages through normal study. The Holy Spirit miraculously enabled them to speak languages they hadn't previously known. That's what made the event a supernatural sign (Acts 2:7-8).

† Pentecost was also connected with the arrival of the last-days outpouring promised by Joel. Peter didn't tell his audience that Joel's prophecy concerned Christians thousands of years later. He said this was what had been spoken through the prophet Joel (Acts 2:16-17).

† Therefore, when someone today claims the biblical gift of tongues, we have every right to compare that claim with the biblical example. Experience doesn't define Scripture. Scripture evaluates experience (1 John 4:1).

1 Corinthians 14:27-28

If anyone speaks in a tongue, it must be by two or at the most three, and each one in turn, and one is to interpret; but if there is no interpreter, he is to keep silent in church; and have him speak to himself and to God.

† Even when tongues were operating in the first-century church, they weren't uncontrolled. Paul gave strict instructions governing their use.

† There had to be interpretation. Without an interpreter, the person speaking in a tongue was commanded to remain silent in the assembly. That's very different from meetings where many people speak simultaneously and nobody interprets (1 Corinthians 14:5, 9, 23).

† Paul repeatedly emphasized understanding and edification. A supernatural gift wasn't given so someone could display spirituality. Gifts were given for the benefit and building up of the body (1 Corinthians 12:7).

† This gives us an objective biblical test. A modern practice shouldn't automatically be called biblical tongues simply because the people participating in it are sincere.

1 Corinthians 13:8-10

Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away with; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away with. For we know in part and prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away with.

† Paul directly says that prophecy, tongues, and miraculous knowledge weren't permanent. Prophecies would be done away with, tongues would cease, and supernatural knowledge would be done away with.

† These gifts belonged to a period Paul described as knowing and prophesying in part. The early church was living during the transition from the old covenant age into the fully established New Covenant order (Hebrews 8:13; 9:8-10).

† From the fulfilled perspective, this fits the first-century transition perfectly. The church possessed genuine spiritual gifts while God's redemptive revelation and covenant transition were moving toward their appointed completion (1 Corinthians 1:7-8).

† We don't need continuing prophets to complete what God left unfinished. The apostolic gospel was delivered, confirmed, and entrusted to the church (Jude 3).

Ephesians 4:11-13

And He gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

† Apostles and prophets had a foundational function. Paul had already said that God's household was built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:19-22).

† A foundation isn't continually laid throughout the life of a building. Once the foundation has accomplished its purpose, the building continues on that established foundation.

† The first-century apostles and prophets revealed and established the New Covenant message. Christians today don't need another foundation, another gospel, or another stream of inspired revelation (Galatians 1:8-9).

† Pastors and teachers can teach God's revealed Word without claiming new inspired revelation. Teaching what God has revealed isn't the same thing as receiving additional revelation

from God.

Hebrews 2:3-4

how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders, and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

† Notice the purpose of the miraculous gifts. The salvation message was spoken by the Lord and then confirmed by those who heard Him. God testified with them through signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit.

† Miracles were God's supernatural confirmation that His authorized messengers were speaking His revelation. The signs confirmed the message and its messengers (Mark 16:20).

† Once we understand the purpose of the signs, we can understand why their absence today doesn't mean God has abandoned His church. We possess the message that those signs originally confirmed.

† We don't need the foundation to be laid again in every generation. We stand on the testimony that God already established through Christ and His apostles.

Acts 8:14-18

Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they would receive the Holy Spirit. (For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit. Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money,

† This passage provides an important detail concerning miraculous gifts. Simon saw that the Holy Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands.

† Philip had already preached in Samaria and performed

miracles, yet Peter and John came from Jerusalem and laid their hands on the believers (Acts 8:5-7, 14-17).

† The text doesn't describe an endless chain in which every Christian who received a miraculous gift could then transmit that ability to another generation. It specifically draws attention to the apostles' hands.

† Once the apostolic generation passed away, the biblical mechanism associated with transmitting these gifts disappeared with it. This fits their temporary foundational purpose.

1 Corinthians 12:7-11

But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.

† These were genuine supernatural gifts. Paul includes healings, miracles, prophecy, tongues, interpretation, and supernatural knowledge among manifestations of the Spirit.

† Biblical healing wasn't simply someone feeling somewhat better after prayer. Jesus and the apostles demonstrated unmistakable supernatural power. The lame walked, the blind received sight, and even the dead were raised (Acts 3:6-8; 9:36-42).

† That doesn't mean Christians shouldn't pray when someone is sick. We absolutely should pray. But answered prayer isn't the same thing as possessing the first-century gift of healing.

† There's also no biblical justification for blaming a sick Christian because a supposed healer failed to heal them. The apostles didn't tell a lame person that the miracle failed because he lacked enough faith. When God performed these signs through His authorized servants, the results demonstrated

His power.

1 Corinthians 14:29-33

Have two or three prophets speak, and have the others pass judgment. But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, then the first one is to keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; for God is not a God of confusion, but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints,
† New Testament prophecy involved revelation. Paul specifically says, if a revelation is made to another. That's much stronger than having an impression, intuition, feeling, or educated guess.
† This is extremely important when discussing personal prophecy today. Statements such as God told me to tell you, God showed me who you're going to marry, God told me you're going to receive money, or God gave me a word specifically for your future are claims of revelation.

† If God actually revealed those things, then God has spoken. The problem isn't solved by calling the message personal instead of biblical. Revelation from God is revelation from God.

† Christians should be very careful about putting God's authority behind their personal thoughts. We can give advice. We can share wisdom. We can encourage someone. We can say what we believe would be wise. But we shouldn't turn our thoughts into divine revelation by saying God told me when God hasn't revealed it in Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

† This protects Christians from spiritual manipulation. Nobody should be able to control another person's marriage, finances, career, family, or personal decisions simply by claiming to have received a private message from God.

2 Corinthians 12:12

The distinguishing marks of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs, wonders, and miracles.

† Paul calls these miraculous works signs of an apostle. That statement loses much of its meaning if the same authenticating

signs were intended to remain ordinary throughout every generation.

† The apostles occupied a unique position as eyewitnesses and authorized representatives of Christ. Their signs helped authenticate that authority (Acts 1:21-22).

† Today's church doesn't have another generation of apostles equal to Peter, John, and Paul. We have their inspired testimony preserved for us.

† Our faith isn't weaker because we don't reproduce apostolic signs. Our faith rests on Jesus Christ and the testimony God established through His authorized witnesses (John 20:30-31).

Historical References

† Irenaeus, writing in the second century, described miraculous and charismatic activity that he believed was still occurring among Christians. His testimony is important because it shows that claims of spiritual gifts didn't immediately disappear from Christian history.

† Tertullian, writing in the late second and early third centuries, also referred to prophetic and charismatic experiences among Christians. Historical claims therefore continued after the apostolic age.

† John Chrysostom, writing in the fourth century, commented on 1 Corinthians 12 and indicated that the miraculous gifts described by Paul belonged to an earlier period and were no longer familiar through ordinary experience in his day.

† Augustine initially spoke of miracles as belonging particularly to the establishment of the church, although later in life he reported healings and extraordinary events that he believed occurred in his own time.

† History therefore shouldn't be oversimplified. There were post-apostolic claims of miracles and spiritual manifestations, while major Christian writers also recognized that the extraordinary apostolic manifestations weren't operating in the same manner they had in the New Testament.

† Historical testimony can help us understand what Christians believed, but it can't determine doctrine. Scripture remains the

standard by which every historical and modern claim must be tested.

How It Applies To Us Today

† We shouldn't deny the Holy Spirit simply because we deny that the first-century miraculous gifts continue today. Those are two completely different statements. Christians belong to Christ, walk by the Spirit, bear the fruit of the Spirit, pray, worship, love, serve, and grow spiritually (Galatians 5:22-25).

† We should pray for people who are sick. We should pray with confidence in God while recognizing that prayer doesn't give an individual the apostolic gift of healing (James 5:16).

† We shouldn't condemn every person who claims a spiritual gift as intentionally dishonest. Many people sincerely interpret powerful emotional or religious experiences according to what they've been taught. Sincerity, however, isn't the biblical test of revelation (1 John 4:1).

† When someone claims to speak in tongues, we should compare the practice with biblical tongues. When someone claims the gift of healing, we should compare it with biblical healing. When someone claims prophecy, we should compare it with biblical prophecy.

† Personal prophecy is particularly dangerous when someone says, God told me something about you. That statement places divine authority behind a human message. Christians shouldn't be pressured into life-changing decisions because another person claims private revelation from God (Colossians 2:18-19).

† God has already given us His revealed truth. We don't need to chase prophets, visions, secret messages, or new revelations to have a relationship with Him. We can know Christ, study Scripture, pray, exercise wisdom, encourage one another, and trust God's providential care.

† The greatest evidence of the Spirit isn't an emotional display or a spectacular claim. A life transformed by Christ, characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control demonstrates the Spirit's work in God's people (Galatians 5:22-

23).

Q & A Appendix

Q: Does the Holy Spirit still work in Christians today?

A: Yes. The ending of miraculous revelatory gifts doesn't mean the Holy Spirit disappeared. Christians belong to Christ and are called to walk by the Spirit and produce the fruit of the Spirit (Romans 8:9-14; Galatians 5:22-25).

Q: Are tongues today the same as the tongues in Acts?

A: The biblical gift was the supernatural ability to speak actual languages the speaker hadn't learned. Acts specifically says the listeners heard them speaking in their own languages (Acts 2:6-11). Any modern claim should be evaluated against that biblical description.

Q: Should Christians pray for healing?

A: Yes. Christians can and should pray for the sick (James 5:13-16). But praying for healing isn't the same thing as possessing the miraculous gift of healing demonstrated by Christ and the apostles.

Q: Can God heal someone today?

A: God is sovereign and can answer prayer according to His will. The question isn't whether God has the power to heal. The question is whether individuals today possess the supernatural gift of healing that operated through Christ's authorized messengers (1 Corinthians 12:9; 2 Corinthians 12:12).

Q: What about someone who says, God told me to tell you something?

A: That person is claiming revelation from God. We shouldn't accept that claim merely because the person sounds sincere or spiritual. Christians are commanded to test spiritual claims (1 John 4:1). God's revealed Word provides the standard (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Q: What if someone's personal prophecy later comes true?

A: A correct prediction by itself doesn't establish someone as God's prophet. Scripture warns against accepting a spiritual claim merely because something impressive occurs (Deuteronomy 13:1-3). The message and messenger must be judged according to God's revealed truth.

Q: Does God still speak to us personally?

A: God speaks to us through the truth He has revealed in Scripture. The Holy Spirit can bring Scripture to our attention as we know and remember it, and biblical truth shapes our wisdom, conscience, decisions, and prayers. But we shouldn't turn thoughts, feelings, dreams, impressions, or circumstances into new revelation by claiming, God told me (2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 1:1-2).

Q: If miraculous gifts ceased, what do Christians have now?

A: We haven't been left with less Christianity. We have Christ, the New Covenant, the completed apostolic testimony, access to God, the indwelling Spirit, prayer, fellowship, and the revealed gospel. The signs pointed to and confirmed the reality that God's people now possess in Christ (Hebrews 2:3-4; Ephesians 2:18-22).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† Acts 2:1-4; 1 Corinthians 14:27-28; 1 Corinthians 13:8-10; Ephesians 4:11-13; Hebrews 2:3-4; Acts 8:14-18; 1 Corinthians 12:7-11; 1 Corinthians 14:29-33; 2 Corinthians 12:12

† Historical writers: Irenaeus; Tertullian; John Chrysostom; Augustine

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