Fulfilled Prophecies

Gifts Of The Spirit: Then And Now

By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† The gifts of the Holy Spirit played an important role in the first-century church. They weren't given as entertainment, personal status, or proof that one believer was more spiritual than another. They were given by God for a specific purpose during the establishment and maturing of the church.

† The apostles were preaching the gospel before the completed New Testament existed. God confirmed their message through signs, wonders, miracles, gifts of healing, tongues, prophecy,

and supernatural knowledge (Hebrews 2:3-4).
† The question isn't whether these gifts were real. Scripture clearly says they were. The question is whether every supernatural gift given during that foundational period was intended to continue throughout the entire history of the church.
† Scripture itself connects these gifts with revelation, confirmation, the apostles, and a period when the church was moving toward maturity (1 Corinthians 13:8-12; Ephesians 2:20).
† The Holy Spirit hasn't disappeared. God hasn't stopped working in His people. What ceased were the revelatory and sign gifts that served their first-century purpose. The Spirit still indwells believers, produces His fruit, strengthens us, teaches us through the truth He revealed, and equips us to serve one another (Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 3:16).

Acts 2:16-18
but this is what has been spoken through the prophet Joel: 'And it shall be in the last days,' God says, That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and your daughters will prophesy, And your young men will see visions, And your old men will have dreams; And even on My male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days, And they will prophesy.
† Peter didn't tell his audience that Joel's prophecy concerned people thousands of years in their future. He said, "this is that." The promised outpouring was taking place before their eyes.
† Peter identified his own time as "the last days." The supernatural manifestations of the Spirit belonged to that prophetic period surrounding the establishment of the New Covenant and the approaching end of the Old Covenant age (Hebrews 1:1-2; 1 Peter 1:20).
† Prophecy, visions, and inspired revelation had a purpose during that transition. God was revealing and confirming the message of Christ while the apostolic church was being established (John 16:13; Acts 1:8).

1 Corinthians 12:4-11
Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. 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.
† Paul gives us an unmistakable picture of supernatural gifts operating in the first-century church. There was prophecy, supernatural knowledge, healing, miracles, tongues, and interpretation.
† These weren't abilities that people learned through practice. The Spirit distributed them according to His will. A person couldn't attend a class and learn how to become an apostle, prophet, miracle worker, or supernatural healer.
† Paul also makes it clear that these manifestations weren't given to everyone. The Spirit distributed different gifts to different believers according to God's purpose (1 Corinthians 12:28-30).
† This is important today because claims that every Christian should speak in tongues, prophesy, or perform miracles don't agree with Paul's teaching. Even while those gifts were operating, not every believer possessed the same gift (1 Corinthians 12:29-30).

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.
† Hebrews tells us why signs and supernatural gifts accompanied the early preaching of the gospel. God was bearing witness to the message that had first been spoken by the Lord and then proclaimed by those who heard Him.
† Notice the language, the message "was confirmed to us by them that heard." Signs and wonders functioned as God's testimony confirming the authority of that apostolic message.
† Once a message has been revealed and confirmed, it doesn't need to be revealed and confirmed again in every generation. We have the apostolic testimony that those signs originally authenticated (John 20:30-31).
† This doesn't mean God is powerless today. It means we shouldn't confuse God's providential work, answered prayer, and spiritual transformation with the specific sign gifts that authenticated God's messengers during the apostolic period.

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.
For we know in part, and we prophesy in part;
but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away.
† Paul plainly says that prophecy would be done away, tongues would cease, and the supernatural knowledge being discussed would be done away.
† These gifts weren't described as permanent features of the kingdom. They belonged to a period when revelation was being given "in part."
† The Greek word translated "perfect" carries the idea of completeness or maturity. Paul's contrast is between the partial condition they were experiencing and the completed or mature condition toward which they were moving (Ephesians 4:11-13).
† This fits the first-century transition from the fading Old

Covenant order into the fully established New Covenant reality. The church was growing from its foundational apostolic stage into maturity (Hebrews 8:13; Ephesians 2:19-22).
† Love remains because love belongs permanently to life in Christ. The temporary revelatory gifts accomplished their purpose and ceased, but faith, hope, love, and the abiding presence of the Spirit weren't dependent upon continuing prophecy or tongues (1 Corinthians 13:13).

1 Corinthians 14:21-22
In the Law it is written: "By men of strange tongues and by the lips of strangers I will speak to this people, and even so they will not listen to Me," says the Lord. So then, tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophecy is not for unbelievers, but for those who believe.
† Paul specifically calls tongues a "sign." They weren't meaningless sounds or a private badge proving that someone possessed the Holy Spirit.
† Paul connects tongues with Old Testament judgment language concerning unbelieving Israel (Isaiah 28:11-12). Foreign languages had previously served as a covenant sign of approaching judgment, and Paul applies that passage directly to the tongues being experienced in his day.
† This gives tongues a first-century covenant setting. They functioned as a sign while the gospel was going into the nations and judgment was approaching the unbelieving covenant nation (Matthew 24:14, 34).
† Removing tongues from that historical setting turns a biblical sign into something Scripture never says every Christian throughout history must experience.

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 belonged to the foundational development of the church. Paul elsewhere says God's household was built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone (Ephesians 2:19-20).
† A foundation is laid so that the building can stand upon it. Scripture never describes generation after generation of new apostles continually laying new foundations or delivering new revelation.
† The first-century church was being built toward maturity. Apostles and prophets served that developing body while God's New Covenant revelation was being delivered and established.
† We still have the teaching of the apostles and prophets because their inspired testimony has been preserved for us. We don't need living apostles to receive new revelation when we already possess the apostolic message they delivered (Jude 3).

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 supernatural works "the signs of an apostle." That description matters. Miraculous signs helped authenticate the unique authority of Christ's commissioned apostles.
† If apostolic signs were ordinary abilities expected of every Christian in every generation, calling them signs of an apostle would lose much of its significance.
† The apostles occupied a foundational position that isn't repeatedly recreated throughout church history (Ephesians 2:20; Revelation 21:14).
† Modern claims of apostles possessing authority comparable to Peter, Paul, and the other foundational apostles should therefore be tested against Scripture rather than accepted because someone uses the title "apostle" (1 John 4:1).

1 John 4:1
Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.
† Christians aren't commanded to believe every supernatural claim. We're commanded to test what people claim comes from God.
† A dramatic experience isn't automatically divine revelation. A claimed prophecy isn't true merely because someone says, "God told me."
† The first-century church itself faced false prophets. John told believers to test them rather than surrender their judgment to anyone claiming supernatural authority (Matthew 7:15; 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21).
† God's completed revelation gives us an objective standard. No modern teacher, prophet, apostle, vision, dream, or personal impression has authority to add to or overturn the apostolic gospel (Galatians 1:8-9; Jude 3).

Galatians 5:22-23
But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.
† The cessation of revelatory gifts doesn't mean the Holy Spirit ceased working. The Spirit still transforms the lives of believers.
† The evidence of the Spirit's presence isn't whether someone can claim a miracle, speak in tongues, or announce a new prophecy. Paul points us toward transformed character, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.
† The Spirit strengthens believers inwardly, produces godly character, unites us in Christ, and equips the body to serve in love (Ephesians 3:16; 4:15-16).
† We don't need new revelation to know God's will concerning salvation and life in Christ. We have the testimony delivered through Christ's apostles and prophets, preserved for the

church.

Historical References

† John Chrysostom, writing in the fourth century in his Homilies on First Corinthians, acknowledged that the passage concerning spiritual gifts had become difficult to understand because the extraordinary manifestations described there were no longer occurring as they had in the apostolic church.

† Augustine provides an important historical qualification. Earlier statements of his are sometimes associated with cessation, but in The City of God, Book 22, he reported miracles that he believed were still occurring in his own time. Church history therefore shows that Christians didn't speak with one voice about every miraculous claim after the apostolic period.

† Eusebius, in Ecclesiastical History, preserved accounts showing how questions about prophecy, miraculous claims, and spiritual authority became major issues after the apostolic generation. The historical record demonstrates why Scripture, rather than later claims alone, must remain our standard.

† The historical evidence should therefore be used carefully. Our primary case doesn't rest upon later Christian writers. It rests upon the biblical purpose and setting of apostles, prophets, revelation, signs, wonders, tongues, and supernatural confirmation.

How It Applies To Us Today

† We don't need modern apostles delivering new revelation from God. The foundational apostolic testimony has already been given (Ephesians 2:20; Jude 3).

† We don't need prophets announcing additional messages from God. We have the message delivered through Christ and His authorized witnesses (Hebrews 1:1-2; 2:3-4).

† We shouldn't measure someone's spirituality by tongues, visions, dreams, healings, or supernatural claims. We should look for faithfulness to Christ, truth, love, and the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

† We can still pray for the sick. We can still ask God for help,

wisdom, strength, healing, and provision. Believing that apostolic sign gifts fulfilled their purpose doesn't require believing that God stopped answering prayer or working providentially in our lives (Philippians 4:6-7; James 1:5).
† We should never confuse the cessation of temporary revelatory gifts with the absence of the Holy Spirit. Every believer in Christ belongs to Him, and God's Spirit dwells in His people (Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 3:16).
† The greatest evidence of the Spirit today isn't someone claiming a new revelation. It's people transformed by Christ, walking in love, serving one another, growing in truth, and displaying the fruit of the Spirit.
† The gifts served their purpose. The foundation was laid. The gospel was revealed and confirmed. The kingdom remains, Christ reigns, and the Holy Spirit continues to dwell and work within God's people.

Q & A Appendix
Q: Were the supernatural gifts of the Spirit real?
A: Yes. Scripture clearly records prophecy, tongues, healing, miracles, supernatural knowledge, and other manifestations of the Spirit in the first-century church (1 Corinthians 12:4-11).

Q: Why were signs and wonders given?
A: They accompanied and confirmed the message delivered by Christ's authorized witnesses (Hebrews 2:3-4; 2 Corinthians 12:12).

Q: Did Paul say some gifts would cease?
A: Yes. Paul specifically said prophecy would be done away, tongues would cease, and supernatural knowledge would be done away (1 Corinthians 13:8-10).

Q: Does that mean the Holy Spirit is no longer active?
A: No. The Holy Spirit continues to dwell in believers, strengthen them, produce spiritual fruit, and build up God's

people (Romans 8:9; Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 3:16).

Q: Should Christians accept someone as a prophet simply because that person claims God spoke to them?
A: No. Scripture commands believers to test spiritual claims (1 John 4:1). No claimed revelation has authority to replace, contradict, or add another gospel to the apostolic message (Galatians 1:8-9).

Q: Can Christians still pray for healing today?
A: Yes. The end of the apostolic gift of healing doesn't mean Christians can't pray for the sick or ask God to heal. God remains sovereign and hears prayer. The distinction is between asking God for healing and claiming to possess the supernatural sign gift exercised during the apostolic period (Philippians 4:6-7).

Q: What should characterize Spirit-filled Christians today?
A: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control should characterize lives directed by the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †
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Source Index
† Acts 2:16-18; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; Hebrews 2:3-4; 1 Corinthians 13:8-10; 1 Corinthians 14:21-22; Ephesians 4:11-13; 2 Corinthians 12:12; 1 John 4:1; Galatians 5:22-23
† John Chrysostom, Homilies on First Corinthians; Augustine, The City of God, Book 22; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History

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