

Cooke, TonyMiracles and the Supernatural Throughout Church History

12. The Flow Continues

This chapter argues that the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit did not stop when the apostolic age ended. It traces the spiritual life of three early church leaders connected in a direct line of discipleship from the apostle John: Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp of Smyrna, and Irenaeus of Lyons.

Key takeaways

- Ignatius (bishop of Antioch, martyred c. 115) urged Polycarp to seek 'invisible things' so he would lack nothing and abound in every spiritual gift — echoing Paul's words to Corinth.
- Polycarp, a disciple ordained by John, showed the Spirit's gifts near the end of his life: a vision foretelling he would be burned alive, and supernatural grace to face martyrdom at age 86 without wavering.
- Irenaeus, Polycarp's disciple, testified that at the end of the second century the church still saw exorcisms, prophecy, visions, healing by laying on of hands, raising of the dead, and tongues.

- Irenaeus distinguished these gifts from pagan magic: believers work miracles freely, in Jesus' name, to help people — never for deception or reward.
- The chain John → Ignatius/Polycarp → Irenaeus shows the New Testament gifts flowing on after the last apostle died.

Passages worth keeping

“Eighty-six years I have served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King who has saved me?”

Polycarp's refusal to deny Christ, showing Spirit-given resolve in martyrdom.

“It is not possible to name the number of the gifts which the Church, scattered throughout the whole world, has received from God.”

Irenaeus affirming that spiritual gifts remained abundant and normal in the church.

How it connects

The chapter ties the post-apostolic church directly back to Paul's teaching on spiritual gifts, using an unbroken discipleship chain from John to argue the Spirit's power is normal, not something that ended with Acts.

Scripture referenced

- **1 Corinthians 1:7** -- Paul's 'not lacking in any gift' — echoed in Ignatius's words to Smyrna.
- **1 Corinthians 14:1** -- 'Desire earnestly spiritual gifts' — the posture Ignatius urged.
- **Revelation 2:8-11** -- Jesus' message to Smyrna; 'be faithful until death' likely shaped Polycarp's martyrdom.
- **John 21:19** -- Jesus foretelling the death by which Peter would glorify God — a path Polycarp shared.
- **Hebrews 11:35** -- The tortured who refused release, hoping in resurrection — describes Polycarp.