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Miracles and the Supernatural Throughout Church History

15. Chapter Six — Outpourings in the East (Asia Minor)

This chapter traces the work of the Holy Spirit in Asia Minor (modern Turkey) after the New Testament era. The author examines four movements and leaders — the Montanists, Gregory Thaumaturgus, Basil of Caesarea, and John Chrysostom — arguing that miracles and spiritual gifts continued long past the apostolic age wherever the church stayed spiritually alive and welcomed the Spirit.

Key takeaways

- Asia Minor was central to New Testament Christianity (Peter's letter, Paul's churches, the seven churches of Revelation), and the Spirit's work continued there for centuries.
- Movements often lose their fire: a dynamic leader sparks revival, an institution forms, and the original power gives way to formalism, intellectualism, and ritual.
- The Montanists (c. 156, Phrygia) stressed prophecy, holiness, and the Lord's soon return against a church growing worldly and rigidly hierarchical. Respected historians (F.F. Bruce, Schaff) say they held orthodox doctrine and were unfairly labeled heretics.

- The author, drawing on his own 1977 Charismatic experience, explains that prophecy given 'in the first person' ('Thus saith the Lord') is not a claim to be God — Montanus was likely slandered on this point.
- Genuine prophecy is inspired at its source but comes through fallible people, so it must be tested against Scripture, never treated as equal to the Bible.
- Gregory Thaumaturgus ('the Wonderworker,' AD 213-270), a convert and pupil of Origen, won multitudes in Pontus through healings and miracles, praised by Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Jerome.
- Basil of Caesarea (AD 329-379) taught a balanced, active view of the Spirit's gifts — for the good of the whole church, freely given and freely shared — plainly assuming those gifts still operated in his day.
- John Chrysostom (AD 349-407) of Antioch and Constantinople seemed to say the gifts had ceased — but he was describing a corrupt, worldly church that had grieved and quenched the Spirit, not declaring a divine withdrawal of the gifts.
- The decline set in after Constantine: state favor and wealth flooded the church with unconverted people, love grew cold, and the extraordinary gifts faded — a pattern Wesley later diagnosed the same way.

Passages worth keeping

“The Montanists for the most part did not depart from the apostolic foundation of the Church.”

F.F. Bruce defending the Montanists' orthodoxy — key to the author's case that they were unjustly condemned.

“The Church was a heaven then, the Spirit governing all things... But now we retain only the symbols of those gifts.”

Chrysostom lamenting how far the church had fallen — the author reads this as grief over decline, not proof that gifts ceased by God's decree.

How it connects

The chapter's recurring theme is Jesus' 'new wine' needing new wineskins (cf. Luke 5:37-38): whenever the Spirit's fresh movement outgrows rigid structures, it is often resisted or condemned. Where the church stays humble and open, signs and wonders follow the gospel; where it grows cold and worldly, the gifts fade — not because God withdrew them, but because His people stopped welcoming Him.

Scripture referenced

- **1 Peter 1:1** -- Peter writes to believers across the provinces of Asia Minor, framing the chapter's setting.
- **1 Thessalonians 5:19-21** -- Do not stifle the Spirit or scoff at prophecy, but test everything — the rule for weighing prophetic words.

- **1 Corinthians 14:29** -- Prophecies are to be judged by the congregation — gifts corrected, not eliminated.
- **2 Timothy 3:16** -- All Scripture is God-breathed — the standard against which all prophecy is measured.
- **1 Corinthians 12:7-10** -- The list of spiritual gifts Basil affirmed as active in his day.
- **Matthew 10:8** -- 'Freely you have received, freely give' — Basil's principle for using the gifts.