

Cooke, TonyMiracles and the Supernatural Throughout Church History

17. The Spirit's Flame in the Reformation

This chapter traces the Holy Spirit's work through the Protestant Reformation, centering on Martin Luther. It covers Luther's discovery of salvation by faith, the five solas, and his surprising openness to miracles and healing despite the era's corrupt relic-trade. It then turns to the Anabaptists, who pressed the case for the ongoing gifts of the Spirit.

Key takeaways

- Luther, a guilt-ridden monk who nearly wrecked his health trying to earn salvation, found peace in Romans 1:17 — the just live by faith, not works.
- His 95 Theses (Oct 31, 1517) attacked the sale of indulgences and sparked the Reformation.
- The Reformation's core is summed up in the five solas: Scripture alone, grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone, glory to God alone.
- Reformers distrusted miracle claims because so many were tied to fake relics and money — Erasmus joked there were enough 'true cross' pieces to rebuild the Ark.

- Yet Luther himself prayed for healing, and dramatic recoveries of his friends Melanchthon and Myconius were credited to his prayers.
- Luther rejected cessationism: he taught the church still holds the power to do signs, even if not often exercised.
- The Anabaptists (radical reformers) rejected infant baptism and church-state union, and were persecuted brutally — 4,000-5,000 executed.
- Anabaptists like Pilgram Marpeck strongly affirmed the Spirit's ongoing miracles and the diverse gifts working within the community of believers.
- The movement had aberrations (the failed Münster rebellion) but found stable, Scripture-honoring leadership in Menno Simons, namesake of the Mennonites.

Passages worth keeping

“For the same power is in the church still. And though it is not exercised, that does not matter; we still have the power to do such signs.”

Luther rejecting the idea that miraculous signs ceased after the apostolic age.

“God has a free hand even in these last days. He has performed miracles and signs before, and even does so today for him who has eyes to see.”

Anabaptist Pilgram Marpeck affirming ongoing miracles.

How it connects

The chapter argues that even in a movement built on 'Scripture alone,' the reformers did not shut the door on the Spirit's power — Luther and the Anabaptists both expected God to still heal and act.

Scripture referenced

- **Romans 1:17** -- The verse behind Luther's conversion — the just shall live by faith.
- **John 14:12** -- Luther cites it to argue believers still do Christ's works and greater.
- **1 Corinthians 12:29** -- Marpeck on the diversity of gifts — not all are apostles or prophets.
- **1 Corinthians 14** -- Cited by Anabaptists on tongues, interpretation, and prophecy in the congregation.