

Sometimes we stand amazed as we marvel over the products of construction professionals. We wonder, "How did they build that?" "How did they hold it together until it was finished?" "Where did they stand while building it?" Of course, we realize that things looked much different during the construction process than afterward. During construction, scaffolds and cranes surrounded the structure, making construction possible. Afterward, they were removed so the edifice could project its intended appearance ... and ... because they were no longer needed.

We look upon Christ's church today and wonder the same thing: "How did this all come about?" "Why did people believe the testimony of Christ's apostles and prophets?" "How did untrained people become so quickly capable to perform such difficult tasks?" As in the construction scenario, we need to also understand that the Lord's church appears much different today than it did in its infancy. God provided supernatural assistance for those "pioneer" Christians to help them establish an infant church. In the New Testament, these temporary "scaffolds" (so to speak) are called "Spiritual Gifts" or "Gifts of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 1:11; Hebrews 2:4). Christians in the first century were empowered with nine extraordinary traits which are listed by Paul in I Corinthians 12:8-10. He said, "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**."

You might wonder, "What was the purpose of these Spiritual Gifts?" In order to understand, you need to imagine yourself being one of the apostles -- Paul for instance. Your task is to convince people that Jesus was raised from the dead, that the words you speak are the words of God, and that they should devote the remainder of their lives to Christ. That's all you have to do! Unfortunately, these people have never met you before in their lives. But you breeze into their town, stay and teach for a very short while, then move on -- supposedly leaving a stable church behind which can now carry on without your help. How are you going to do all of this? Why should people listen to you or believe you? How will they remember all that you taught or have the wisdom to carry on without you? This is where a little divine help was needed. You see, if you performed miracles in their presence and spoke in their native language, you would get their attention. They would listen to the message of God you had to tell them. Then, if you had the ability to give them spiritual gifts, as an apostle could (Acts 8:18), you could leave them with spiritual knowledge and wisdom; then they could perform miracles and speak in other tongues; then the church would grow quickly and remain established in every city.

The Bible teaches that the miraculous gifts of the Spirit were given for these very purposes. In Hebrews 2:3-4, the writer explains that signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit were given to "confirm" the message of God's salvation. It was always the message which was paramount; not the signs. Spiritual gifts **did not replace** the message of salvation, they merely **proved** that the messenger was representing God. As amazing as they were, miraculous signs and wonders never solved a problem permanently. Healed people became sick again. Resurrected people died again. Spiritual gifts were never intended to be permanent solutions for our physical problems. They were intended to accomplish but two purposes: 1) they demonstrated that the words uttered by inspired spokesmen were indeed revealed from God; and 2) they assisted the infant church in becoming quickly established throughout the world. Spiritual gifts accomplished their intended purposes; however, some early Christians misunderstood the purpose for these gifts and clamored after their powers. Chapters 12 through 14 of I Corinthians address this problem. Yet, some today still make the same mistake, lusting more for the temporary signs than for the message of eternal salvation those signs confirmed.

People today wonder why we no longer see the dead raised to life (as in Acts 9:40) and why other wonders of God are no longer demonstrated in an undeniable and irrefutable manner.

Miraculous signs of the first century could not be denied, even by the enemies of the church (Acts 4:16); but the impotent imitations of some today are clearly seen to be just that, impotent imitations.

The reason why spiritual gifts have ceased is simple and reasonable. First of all, the revelation of God has been completed and confirmed. God has revealed what He has done for our sins and what we must do to be saved. No further revelation could explain it better. The pattern for the Lord's church is recorded in written form; thus, there is no new revelation to be confirmed by miraculous signs. Second, the church of Christ is well established today and reproduces itself through the preaching and teaching of inspired scripture. Third, the Bible teaches that spiritual gifts would cease. After listing the spiritual gifts in I Corinthians 12, Paul emphasized the superiority of love in chapter 13. To stress the permanent nature of love, Paul compared it to three of the temporary spiritual gifts which he had listed in chapter 12. He said, "Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away" (I Corinthians 13:8-10). The word "perfect" means "full-grown; completed; accomplished; developed; entire". The temporary "knowledge" and "prophecy" imparted by spiritual gifts would eventually be completed. Thus, the "gifts" would cease when the revelation was complete. In vs 11, Paul compares this to doing away with childish things. Spiritual gifts helped to verify divine revelation for an infant church. But when that church was grown and that revelation complete, the "childish things" were put away. In effect, when the building was finished, the scaffolds were taken down.



1. What were the nine "Spiritual Gifts" (I Cor 12:1) listed by Paul in I Corinthians 12:8-10?

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2. Who had the power to impart these "Spiritual Gifts" to first century Christians?  
(Romans 1:11; Acts 8:18)

3. How did "Spiritual Gifts" help the apostles in maturing an infant church?

4. What purposes did "Spiritual Gifts" accomplish? (Hebrews 2:3-4)

5. Do you believe the "prophecy," "tongues," and "knowledge" of I Corinthians 13:8 was intended by Paul to refer back to the list of "spiritual gifts" in chapter 12:8-10?

6. When did Paul say these things would "be done away"? (I Cor 13:9)

7. How do the illustrations of "construction scaffolds" (from the lesson sheet) and "childish things" (I Cor 13:11) help us understand the termination of "spiritual gifts"?

8. Why do we not see dead people miraculously called from the tomb today?