These two administrations or dispensations may be described as

1. the common gift of the Holy Spirit
2. the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit

If we just take for granted that whenever the Scripture speaks of receiving the Holy Spirit it always refers to the same thing, we cannot hope to get straight the scriptural facts about miraculous signs. We must realise that there were two entirely different ways in which the Holy Spirit was received. There was the common gift that is in a category by itself, and there was Holy Spirit baptism and the miraculous spiritual gifts that are in a different category altogether.

The Common Gift

Dealing first with the common gift, we quote Peter: "Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is unto...all" (Acts 2:38-39).

Here it is made clear that everyone baptised in the name of Christ --with his authority-- was given the gift of the Holy Spirit. This was the common gift, in that it was part of "the common salvation" imparted equally to every Christian (Jde 1:3). Of inestimable value to the experience and welfare of the inner man, it means that the Holy Spirit dwells within us, producing in our lives "the fruit of the Spirit" (Ga 5:22-23). The common gift allows every Christian to come to God in prayer, to overcome temptation, and to increase in spiritual stature and understanding of the truth.

The Miraculous Gifts

Keeping in mind that there were different administrations of the Spirit, we pass next to the group of special spiritual gifts. In this connection Paul says,

"There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations..." (1Co 12:4-6).

There were two operations that were like breathing air and drinking water to the early church; upon these two operations the church depended for its life.

Revelation and Confirmation of the Word

The young church's power was not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth..." (1Co 2:4-13). Without the word of God the church would have died and the world remained lost. They had no New Testament Scripture such as we have it, so they needed some instrumentality by which God's word could be revealed. It was partly this that was the very purpose of the spiritual gifts. Some gifts were miraculous in revealing the word. Some gifts had another purpose: confirming the word with signs following. It was one thing for the disciples to be able to speak the mind of God, and another thing to be able to prove that they could. They not only affirmed that they had a revelation from God, they confirmed the fact. Unfortunately today there are plenty of affirmations to be heard, but no confirmation to be seen.

The two operations of revealing and confirming the word of God were done through the spiritual gifts; hence the description "miraculous gifts". These gifts were operative in, and used only in connection with, revealing and confirming the word.

The nine gifts --listed in 1Corinthians 12:7-10 following the previous quotation-- were those of wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues, and interpretation of tongues. While some gifts such as wisdom, knowledge, prophecy, and tongues provided for the revelation of the word, gifts like healings, miracles, mountain-moving faith (1Co 13:1) and tongues provided for the signs which gave confirmation to the word.

Piece by Piece Till Perfect

Through the operation of the special gifts, more and more of God's word was revealed and confirmed. This brings us to an extremely important observation. The time came when God's word was revealed and confirmed in its entirety. Both revelation and confirmation were accomplished fully. The miraculous gifts had done their job. The faith was "once for all delivered unto the saints" (Jde 1:3); "the whole counsel of God" had been declared (Acts 20:27); "all things which pertain to life and godliness" had been given (2Pe 1:3). The New Testament Scriptures were completed to provide all that God revealed through the miraculous gifts. Not only so, but these Scriptures contained duly attested records of signs wrought by the Lord through miraculous gifts --records sufficient as confirmatory evidence for all time. "These are written that ye might believe" (Jhn 20:30-31).

So the jigsaw puzzle was complete and the picture finally revealed in its entirety. Piece by piece the word of God was revealed and confirmed until the piecemeal ministry of miraculous gifts was eventually replaced by the written scriptures, perfect and complete. Today, the New Testament Scriptures render the spiritual gifts inoperative. God's word is perfect now, revealed not in part but in whole. Looking forward to this Paul said,

"Love never fails; but where there are prophecies, they shall be done away; where there are tongues, they shall cease; where there is knowledge, it shall be done away. For we know in part, and we prophecy in part, but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away" (1Co 13:8-10 RV).

The Apostles' Hands

There is another reason why the miraculous gifts, and consequently the signs, do not obtain today. We have noticed their purpose and found it no longer exists. Now we should notice the means by which these gifts were imparted. We shall see that the means of receiving the gifts, like their purpose, no longer exists. If Acts 8:5-18 is read carefully, the following facts will be observed:

1. Philip preached in Samaria confirming the word with signs (Acts 8:5-8)
2. Many believed and were baptised (Acts 8:12). In Acts 2:38 it is said that everyone who is baptised in the name of