

THE GIFT OF TONGUES

Charles Hodge, D.D.

From *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (1857)

1 Corinthians 12:10

To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another (divers) kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues.

To another divers kinds of tongues. That is, the ability to speak in languages previously unknown to the speakers. The nature of this gift is determined by the account given in Acts 2:4-11, where it is said, the apostles spoke "with *other* tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance;" and people of all the neighbouring nations asked with astonishment, "Are not all these that speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue wherein we were born?" It is impossible to deny that the miracle recorded in Acts consisted in enabling the apostles to speak in languages which they had never learnt. Unless, therefore, it be assumed that the gift of which Paul here speaks was something of an entirely different nature, its character is put beyond dispute. The identity of the two, however, is proved from the sameness of the terms by which they are described. In Mark 16:17 it was promised that the disciples should speak "with *new* tongues." In Acts 2:4 it is said they spoke "with *other* tongues." In Acts 10:46 and 19:6 it is said of those on whom the Holy Ghost came, that "they spake with tongues." It can hardly be doubted that all these forms of expression are to be understood in the same sense; that to speak "with tongues" in Acts 10:46 means the same thing as speaking "with other tongues," in Acts 2:4, and that this again means the same as speaking "with new tongues," as promised in Mark 16:17. If the meaning of the phrase is thus historically and philologically determined for Acts and Mark, it must also be determined for the Epistle to the Corinthians. If *tongues* means languages in the former, it must have the same meaning in the latter. We have thus two arguments in favour of the old interpretation of this passage. First, that the facts narrated in Acts necessitate the interpretation of the phrase "to speak with other tongues" to mean to speak with foreign languages. Second, that the interchange of the expressions, *new* tongues, *other* tongues, and *tongues*, in reference to the same event, shows that the last mentioned (to speak with tongues) must have the same sense with the two former expressions, which can only mean to speak in new languages.

A third argument is, that the common interpretation satisfies all the facts of the case. Those facts are,

1. That what was spoken with tongues was intelligible to those who understood foreign languages, as appears from Acts 2:11. Therefore the speaking was not an incoherent, unintelligible rhapsody.
2. What was uttered were articulate sounds, the vehicle of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, 1 Cor. 14:14-17.
3. They were edifying, and therefore intelligible to him who uttered them, 1 Cor. 14:4, 16.
4. They admitted of being interpreted, which supposes them to be intelligible.

5. Though intelligible in themselves, and to the speaker, they were unintelligible to others, that is, to those not acquainted with the language used; and consequently unsuited for an ordinary Christian Assembly. The folly which Paul rebuked was, speaking in Arabic to men who understood only Greek. The speaker might understand what he said, but others were not profited, 1 Cor. 14:2, 19.

6. The illustration employed in 1 Cor. 14:7, 11, from musical instruments, and from the case of foreigners, requires the common interpretation. Paul admits that the sounds uttered were "not without signification," v. 10. His complaint is, that a man who speaks in an unknown tongue is to him a foreigner, v. 11. This illustration supposes the sounds uttered to be intelligible in themselves, but not understood by those to whom they were addressed.

7. The common interpretation is suited even to those passages which present the only real difficulty in the case; viz., those in which the apostle speaks of the understanding as being unfruitful in the exercise of the gift of tongues, and those in which he contrasts praying with the spirit and praying with the understanding, 14:14, 15. Although these passages, taken by themselves, might seem to indicate that the speaker himself did not understand what he said, and even that his intellect was in abeyance, yet they may naturally mean only that the understanding of the speaker was unprofitable to others; and speaking with the understanding may mean speaking intelligibly. It is not necessary, therefore, to infer from these passages, that to speak with tongues was to speak in a state of ecstasy, in a manner unintelligible to any human being.

8. The common interpretation is also consistent with the fact that the gift of interpretation was distinct from that of speaking with tongues. If a man could speak a foreign language, why could he not interpret it? Simply, because it was not his gift. What he said in that foreign language, he said under the guidance of the Spirit; had he attempted to interpret it without the gift of interpretation, he would be speaking of himself, and not "as the Spirit gave him utterance." In the one case he was the organ of the Holy Ghost, in the other he was not.

Fourth argument. Those who depart from the common interpretation of the gift of tongues, differ indefinitely among themselves as to its true nature. . . .

The arguments against the common view of the nature of the gift of tongues, (apart from the exegetical difficulties with which it is thought to be encumbered,) are not such as to make much impression upon minds accustomed to reverence the Scriptures.

1. It is said the miracle was unnecessary, as Greek was understood wherever the apostles preached. This, no doubt, is in a great degree true. Greek was the language of educated persons throughout the Roman empire, but it had not superseded the national languages in common life; neither was the preaching of the apostles confined to the limits of the Roman empire. Besides, this supposes that the only design of the gift was to facilitate the propagation of the gospel. This was doubtless one of the purposes which it was intended to answer; but it had other important uses. It served to prove the presence of the Spirit of God; and it symbolized the calling of the Gentiles and the common interest of all nations in the gospel. See the remarks on Acts 2:4.

2. It is said God is not wont by miracles to remove difficulties out of the way of his people, which they can surmount by labour.

3. Others pronounce it impossible that a man should speak in a language which he had never learnt. But does it thence follow that God cannot give him the ability?
4. It appears that Paul and Barnabas did not understand the speech of Lycaonia, Acts 14:11-14. The gift of tongues, however, was not the ability to speak all languages. Probably most of those who received the gift, could speak only in one or two. Paul thanked God that he had the gift in richer measure than any of the Corinthians.
5. The gift does not appear to have been made subservient to the missionary work. It certainly was in the first instance, as recorded in Acts, and may have been afterwards.
6. Paul, in 1 Cor. 14:14-19, does not place speaking with tongues and speaking in one's own language in opposition; but speaking with the understanding and speaking with the spirit; and therefore to speak with tongues, is to speak without understanding, or in a state of ecstasy. This is a possible interpretation of this one passage considered in itself, but it is in direct contradiction to all those passages which prove that speaking with tongues was not an involuntary, incoherent, ecstatic mode of speaking. The passage referred to, therefore, must be understood in consistency with the other passages referring to the same subject. Though there are difficulties attending any view of the gift in question, arising from our ignorance, those connected with the common interpretation are incomparably less than those which beset any of the modern conjectures.

To another, the interpretation of tongues. The nature of this gift depends on the view taken of the preceding. Commonly, at least, the man using a foreign language was able to understand it, see 14:2, 4, 16, and may have had the gift of interpretation in connection with the gift of tongues. It is possible, however, that in some cases he did not himself understand the language which he spoke, and then of course he would need an interpreter. But even when he did understand the language which he used, he needed a distinct gift to make him the organ of the Spirit in its interpretation. If speaking with tongues was speaking incoherently in ecstasy, it is hard to see how what was said could admit of interpretation. Unless coherent it was irrational, and if irrational, it could not be translated.

1 Corinthians 13:1

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become (as) sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

The gift of tongues, on which the Corinthians so much valued themselves, is mentioned first, because it was the prominent subject in this whole discussion. *The tongues of men* are the languages which men speak. As this is the obvious meaning of the expression, it serves to prove that the gift of tongues was the gift of speaking foreign languages. *The tongues of angels* are the languages which angels use. A mode of expression equivalent to 'all languages human or divine.' Paul means to say, that the gift of tongues in its highest conceivable extent with love is nothing.

1 Corinthians 14:2-25

For he that speaketh in an (unknown) tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth (him); howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries. (v. 2)

What is here taught is, First, that he who speaks with tongues speaks not to men, but to God. Second, that this means that men do not understand *him*. Thirdly, that the reason of his not being understood is in the medium of communication, not in the things communicated. *Speaketh not unto men, but unto God*; or, speaks not *for* men, but *for* God. *Sibi canit et musis*, according to the Latin proverb. CALVIN. His communion is with God, and not with man. *For no man understandeth him*. Literally, *no man hears*, i.e. hears any articulate sounds. He hears the sound, but does not distinguish the words. This, however, does not imply that the sounds uttered were in themselves unintelligible, so that no man living (unless inspired) could understand them. When the apostles spake with tongues on the day of Pentecost, what they said was understood. The meaning is, not that no man *living*, but that no man *present*, could understand. It is not the use of the gift of tongues that he censures, but the use of that gift when no one was present who understood the language employed. *Howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries*. *Spirit* does not mean the man's own spirit as distinguished from his understanding. The Scriptures do not distinguish between the *νοῦς* and *πνεῦμα* as distinct faculties of the human intelligence. The latter is not the higher spiritual powers of our nature, but the Holy Spirit; comp. 2:14. In favour of this interpretation is,

1. The prevailing use of the word *spirit* in reference to the Holy Ghost in all Paul's epistles, and especially in this whole connection.
2. That the expression to speak *in* or *by* the Spirit, is an established Scriptural phrase, meaning to speak under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
3. When *spirit* is to be distinguished from the *understanding*, it designates the affections; a sense which would not at all suit this passage.
4. The meaning arrived at by this interpretation is natural, and suitable to the connection. 'Although he who speaks with tongues is not understood, yet, guided by the Spirit, he speaks mysteries. *Mysteries* mean divine truths; things which God has revealed. In Acts 2:11 they are called "the wonderful things (*τὰ μεγαλεῖα*) of God." To make the word mean, things not understood by the hearer, is contrary to the usage of the word. A secret disclosed, is no longer a secret; and a mystery revealed ceases to be a mystery, for a mystery is something hidden. Besides, Paul would then say, 'No man understands him, yet he speaks what is not understood.' The meaning obviously is, that although not understood, yet what he utters contains divine truth. The difficulty was in the language used, not in the absence of meaning, or in the fact that inarticulate sounds were employed. This verse, therefore, contains nothing inconsistent with the commonly received view of the nature of the gift in question. 'He who speaks with tongues, speaks to God and not to men, for no one (in the case supposed) understands him, although what he says is replete with the highest meaning.' The implication is that these *tongues* were foreign to the hearers; and therefore it is said, 'no man understands him.'

But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men (to) edification, and exhortation, and comfort. (v. 3)

The prophet spoke in the native language of his hearers; the speaker with tongues in a foreign language. This made the difference between the cases. The one was understood and the other was not. The prophet spoke with a view to *edification*. This is a general term including the sense of the two following. He edified the church either by exhortation or comfort; either by arousing believers to do or suffer, or by pouring into their hearts the consolations of the Spirit.

He that speaketh in an (unknown) tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church. (v. 4)

This follows from what had been said. The speaker with tongues did not edify the church, because he was not understood; he did edify himself, because he understood himself. This verse, therefore, proves that the understanding was not in abeyance, and that the speaker was not in an ecstatic state.

I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater (is) he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying. (v. 5)

I would that ye all spake with tongues. It was not to be inferred from what he had said, that the apostle undervalued this gift. He admitted its importance as one of the manifestations of the Spirit, and he subsequently, v. 18, gives thanks that he himself possessed it in rich measure. From this it is evident that it was something of a higher nature than modern theories would represent it. *But rather that ye prophesied, (ἑέλω ἴνα).* *I would that.* The same particle often follows verbs of wishing, praying, exhorting, &c. *For greater is he that prophesieth, &c.,* i.e. he is more useful than the speaker with tongues, unless the latter interpret. "Nam si accedat interpretatio, jam erit prophetia." CALVIN. Speaking under the supernatural influence of the Spirit was common to both gifts; the only difference was in the language used. If the speaker interpreted, then he prophesied. *That the church may receive edification.* This proves that the contents of these discourses, delivered in an unknown tongue, were edifying; and therefore did not consist in mysteries in the bad sense of that term; i.e. in enigmas and dark sayings. This passage also proves that the gift of interpretation, although distinct from that of tongues, might be, and doubtless often was, possessed by the same person, and consequently, that he understood what he said. The absence of the gift of interpretation does not prove that the speaker himself in such cases was ignorant of what he uttered. It only proves that he was not inspired to communicate in another language what he had delivered. Had he done so, it would have been on his own authority, and not as an organ of the Spirit. It is conceivable that a man might speak connectedly in a foreign language under the inspiration of the Spirit, so as to be perfectly understood by those acquainted with the language, though he himself did not understand a word of what he uttered. But this hypothesis, though it would suit some passages in this chapter, is inconsistent with others, and therefore cannot be adopted.

Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine? (v. 6)

Now (νυνὶ δέ), since things are so, i.e. since speaking with tongues without interpreting is unedifying, what shall I profit you, asks the apostle, if I should come to you speaking in a language which you do not understand? He then varies the question, 'What shall I profit you unless I speak to you as a prophet,

by (or rather *with*, ἐν) a revelation, or as a teacher, with a doctrine.' There are not four, but only two modes of address contemplated in this verse. Revelation and prophecy belong to one; and knowledge and doctrine to the other. He who received revelations was a prophet, he who had "the word of knowledge" was a teacher.

And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? (v. 7)

This verse in Greek begins with the word ὅμως, *yet*, which is variously explained. The most natural interpretation is to assume that the word here, as in Gal. 3:15, is out of its logical place, and that the sentence should read thus: "Things without life giving sound, *yet*, unless they give a distinction of sound, how shall it be known," &c. The obvious design of the illustration is to show the uselessness of making sounds which are not understood. But what is the point of the analogy? According to some it is this, as musical instruments emit a mere jargon of sounds, unless the regular intervals be observed, so the speakers with tongues utter a mere jargon. The sounds which they utter are not articulate words, but a confused noise. From this it is inferred that the speaking with tongues was not the gift of speaking foreign languages. This would make Paul wish (v. 5) that all the Corinthians would utter unmeaning sounds, and give thanks that he produced more such jargon than any of them! It is plain from what follows, as well as from the drift of the whole discourse, that the simple point of the analogy is, that as we cannot know what is piped or harped, or be benefited by it, unless we can discriminate the sounds emitted; so we cannot be benefited by listening to one who speaks a language which we do not understand. It is not the nature of the gift, but the folly of the use made of it, which is the point which the apostle has in view.

For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? (v. 8)

This is a confirmation of the last clause of the preceding verse. The sound emitted does not produce its proper effect if it be unintelligible or uncertain. This teaches us the point of the whole illustration. The trumpet may sound the battle call, but if that call is not understood, who will heed it? So the speaker with tongues may announce the most important truths, he may unfold mysteries, or pour forth praises as from a harp of gold, what can it profit those who do not understand him?

So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air. (v. 9)

This is the application of the preceding illustration, and affords another proof of what the apostle intended to illustrate. It was not the nature of the sounds uttered, but their unintelligibility to the hearer, which was to be considered. *By the tongue*, i.e. by means of the tongue as the organ of speech. *Words easy to be understood*, or rather, *an intelligible discourse*. This does not imply, as is contended by the advocates of the modern theories, that those who spoke with tongues uttered inarticulate sounds. The opposite of ἐῴσημος, is not inarticulate, but unintelligible, i.e. what is not in fact understood. *Ye shall speak into the air*, i.e. in vain. Your words are lost in the air, no ear receives them. In 9:26 the man who struck in vain is said to smite the air.

There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them (is) without

signification. (v. 10)

There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices. The words (εἰ τύχοι), properly rendered, *it may be*, are often used to render a statement indefinite, where precision is impossible or unimportant. It was no matter, so far as the apostle's object was concerned, whether the "kinds of sound" in the world were more or less. *There are so many*, or, as we should say, 'There are *ever so many*, it may be, languages in the world.' *Kinds of voices.* Calvin understands this of the voices or natural cries of animals. All animated nature is vocal; no living creature is mute or utters unintelligible sounds: tota igitur naturæ series quæ est a Deo ordinata, nos ad distinctionem invitat. The context, however, shows that the reference is to human speech, therefore the words (γέννη φωνῶν) should be translated *kinds of languages*, Gen. 1:11. And no one of them *is without signification*, i.e. inarticulate. The phrase is (φωνῆ ἄφωνος), *a language which is no language*, that is, without significancy, which is the essence of a language. The illustration contained in this verse goes to prove that speaking with tongues was to speak in foreign languages. The very point is that as all languages are significant, so the languages used by those who spoke with tongues were significant. The difficulty was not in the language used, but in the ignorance of the hearer. This is still plainer from what follows.

Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh (shall be) a barbarian unto me. (v. 11)

Therefore, i.e. because the sounds uttered are significant; because the man does not make a mere senseless noise, but speaks a real language, therefore, if I know not the meaning of the voice (i.e. the language), I shall stand in the relation of a foreigner to him and he to me. Otherwise it would not be so. If a man utters incoherent, inarticulate sounds, which no man living could understand, that would not make him a foreigner. It might prove him to be deranged, but not a stranger. The word *barbarian* means simply one of another country. All other people, whether civilized or not, were barbarians to the Greeks, or to the Romans. As ancient civilization came to be confined to those nations, not to be a Greek or Roman, was to be uncivilized, and hence barbarian or foreigner came to mean without civilization. Just as the true religion being confined to the Jews, *Gentile* (one not a Jew) came to be synonymous with *heathen*. In this passage, however, barbarian means simply foreigner. Comp. Rom. 1:14; Acts 28:24; Col. 3:11.

Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual (gifts), seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church. (v. 12)

Even so ye. That is, as the man who speaks a language which I do not understand, is a foreigner to me and I to him, so are ye. You too are foreigners to those who do not understand the language which you use. As all such unintelligible speaking is worthless, the apostle exhorts them to seek to edify the church. *As ye are zealous of spiritual gifts*; literally, *of spirits*. The most probable explanation of this expression is to be sought from 12:7, where it is said that "to every one is given a manifestation of the Spirit." One and the same Spirit manifests himself in different ways in different persons; and these different manifestations are called spirits. Somewhat analogous are the expressions, "spirits of the prophets," v. 32; "discernment of spirits," 12:11; "try the spirits," 1 John 4:1; and "the seven Spirits of God," spoken of in the Apocalypse. In all these cases *spirits* mean manifestations of the Spirit, or forms under which the Spirit manifests himself. It is not an unusual metonymy when the effect

receives the name of its cause. Comp. Gal. 5:17, "The spirit lusteth against the flesh," where *spirit* may mean the renewed principle produced by the Spirit.

Seek that ye may excel (or abound) to the edifying of the church. This is the common explanation of this clause. But taking the words in their order the passage reads, 'Seek (these gifts) with a view to the edification of the church, in order that ye may excel.' The former explanation is the more natural. The end or object to be sought is not *that they might excel*; that is not the ultimate object, but the edification of the church. The words ζητεῖτε ἵνα, κτλ., therefore, naturally go together. 'Seek that ye may abound unto the edification of the church,' i.e. that ye may possess in rich abundance those gifts which are useful.

Wherefore let him that speaketh in an (unknown) tongue pray that he may interpret. (v. 13)

This is an inference not only from the preceding verse but from the whole preceding argument, which was designed to show how useless it is to speak in a language which no one present understands. The verse admits of two interpretations. It may mean that the speaker with tongues should pray for the gift of interpretation; or, that he should pray with the purpose (ἵνα) of interpreting what he said. The principal reason for this latter interpretation is the assumption that the gift of tongues was exercised only in prayer and praise; in other words, that it consisted in an ecstatic but unintelligible and unintelligent pouring out of the heart to God. It is therefore inferred that "to speak with a tongue," v. 13, and "to pray with a tongue," v. 14, mean exactly the same thing; the former being no more comprehensive than the latter. But this whole assumption is not only gratuitous but contrary to Scripture. The gift of tongues was, according to Acts 2:5-11, exercised in declaring the "wonderful works of God." It is also apparent from what is said in this chapter, vs. 22-25, and v. 27, that the gift in question was not confined to acts of devotion. The former interpretation is therefore to be preferred. 'Let him pray that (ἵνα) he may interpret.' For this use of ἵνα after verbs of *entreating*, &c., see Robinson's Greek Lex. p. 352.

For if I pray in an (unknown) tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. (v. 14)

This is the reason why the speaker with tongues should pray for the gift of interpretation. Unless he interprets his prayer can do no good; or, as the same idea is expressed in vs. 16, 17, those who are unlearned cannot join in it. Praying with a tongue is specified, by way of example, as one mode of speaking with tongues. Though the general meaning of this verse is thus plain, it is the most difficult verse in the whole chapter. What does Paul mean by saying, His spirit prays? There are three answers given to this question.

1. That *spirit* (my spirit) here means the higher intellectual powers of the soul, as distinguished from the understanding. This verse and those which immediately follow, are the principal foundation of the theory that the speaker with tongues was in a state of ecstatic excitement in which his understanding was not exercised, so that he knew not what he said or did. How inconsistent this theory is with the facts of the case has already been shown. This view of the passage, therefore, cannot be admitted. Besides, it has already been remarked, that the Scriptures know nothing of this distinction between the *reason* and the *understanding*.

2. Others say that *spirit* here means the affections. 'My feelings find utterance in prayer, but my understanding is unfruitful.' This would give a good sense; but this meaning of the word spirit is of rare occurrence. In most of the passages quoted by lexicographers as examples of this use of the term, it really means the Holy Spirit. And in this whole discussion, *spirit* is not once used for the feelings.

3. *My spirit* may mean the Holy Spirit in me; that is, my spiritual gift; or, my spirit as the organ of the Spirit of God. Each man has his own spirit, (comp. v. 12) i.e. his own spiritual gift. And Paul means to say, that when a man prays in an unknown tongue, his spiritual gift is indeed exercised; in other words, the Holy Spirit is active in him, but others are not profited. The speaker with tongues is not to be set down as an enthusiast, or as a man in a frenzy, or, as the mockers said, as a man full of new wine. He is really the organ of the Holy Ghost. But as the influence of the Spirit under which he acts, is not irresistible, he should not exercise his gift where it can do no good to others. He may pray in silence, v. 28. This interpretation seems much more in accordance with the use of the word and with the whole drift of the chapter.

What is meant by saying, *my understanding is unfruitful*? It may mean, My understanding is not profited, gains no fruit; that is, I do not understand what I say. Though the words in themselves may have this meaning, this interpretation contradicts all those passages which teach that the speaker with tongues did understand himself. The words, therefore, must be understood to mean, 'my understanding produces no fruit,' i.e. it does not benefit others. This is in accordance with all that precedes, and with the uniform use of the word, Eph. 5:11; Tit. 3:14; 2 Pet. 1:8; Matt. 13:22. Paul had, from the beginning, been urging his readers to have regard to the edification of the church, and he here says, that if he prayed in an unknown tongue, though he acted under the guidance of the Spirit, his prayer could not profit others. This interpretation is confirmed by vs. 16, 17, as remarked above, where the same idea is expressed by saying, the unlearned could not say Amen to such a prayer. By his understanding being unfruitful is therefore meant, that others did not understand what he said.

The great objection to the preceding interpretation is, that *my spirit* and *my understanding* must be explained in the same way. If the latter means *my own* understanding, the former must mean *my own* spirit. The Holy Ghost, it is said, never is, and cannot be called *my spirit*, for the very reason that it is distinct from the spirit of man. The interpretation given above, however, does not suppose that *my spirit* means the Holy Spirit as a person, but the Holy Spirit as a manifestation; it is the way in which the Spirit manifests himself in me. In other words, it is my spiritual gift. The objection, if it have any force, bears as much against the conceded meaning of the phrase, "the spirits of the prophets," as it does against the explanation just given of the expression, "my spirit." The spirits of the prophets means the Holy Ghost as manifested in the prophets, or the spiritual influence of which they were the subjects. And that is just the meaning of *my spirit* in this passage.

What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also. (v. 15)

What is it then? i.e. what is the practical conclusion from what has been said? That conclusion is expressed by Paul's avowal of his own purpose. The interpretation of this verse of course depends on that of the preceding.

[1.] Accordingly, some say, the meaning is, I will pray not only with the reason, but with the understanding also, i.e. not only with the higher powers of my nature in exercise, but also with such a command of the understanding as to be able to comprehend and to interpret what I say.

2. Others say the passage means, 'I will pray with the heart and with the understanding; my mind and feelings shall unite in the exercise. A very good sense, but entirely foreign to the context. The sentiment is correct in itself, but it is not what Paul here says.

3. According to the third interpretation the sense is, 'I will not only pray in the exercise of my spiritual gift, but so as to be understood by others;' i.e. not only spiritually but intelligibly. If τῷ νοῷ, *with the understanding*, may mean, as the moderns say it does, 'with a view to interpret' (MEYER); it certainly may mean, 'with a view to be understood.' That is, this is what is implied and intended in what the apostle says. When a man spoke τῷ πνεύματι, *with the Spirit*, the Spirit was the *principium movens*, the moving principle, determining him to speak, and what to say. When he spake with τῷ νοῷ, *with the understanding*, the understanding was that controlling principle. These two could be combined. The man could so speak under the guidance of the Spirit as to be intelligible to others.

I will sing. The word (ψάλλειν) means *to touch*; then *to touch the cords* of a stringed instrument, i.e. to play upon it; then to sing or chant in harmony with such instrument; and then to sing or chant. This last is its New Testament meaning. It appears from this as well as from other passages, that singing was from the beginning a part of Christian worship. Pliny, about forty years later, says, Christianos solitos fuisse canere antelucanos hymnos Christo.

Else, when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified. (vv. 16, 17)

Else, i.e. since in that case. That is, in case you do not speak intelligibly (τῷ νοῷ as well as τῷ πνεύματι). *If thou shalt bless with the spirit.* That is, bless God, including praise and thanksgiving. The word translated *to give thanks*, in the last clause of the verse expresses the same idea. *By the Spirit*, i.e. under the influence of the Spirit, or in the exercise of your spiritual gift, as in the preceding verse. *How shall he that occupieth the place of the unlearned*, i.e. (ιδιώτου) *of a private person.* The word is used to designate one out of office in opposition to officers; and in general, one who does not possess the distinguishing characteristic of the class to which it is opposed. It here designates the ungifted in opposition to those who had the gift of tongues; or rather, it is applicable to any one who was ignorant of the language used by the speaker. Comp. vs. 23, 24; Acts 4:13; 2 Cor. 11:6. The context shows that Paul does not refer to laymen in opposition to church officers; for the officers were just as likely to be (ιδιώται) *unlearned* as to the language used as others. *To fill the place* means to occupy the position; not a particular part of the place of assembly assigned to laymen, but to sustain the relation to the speaker of one unacquainted with the tongue which he uses. *Say Amen at thy giving of thanks*, i.e. assent or respond to it. *Amen* is a Hebrew adjective signifying *true* or *faithful*, often used adverbially at the end of a sentence to express assent to what is said, in the sense of *so let it be*. In the Jewish synagogue it was the custom for the people to respond to the prayers by audibly saying Amen, by which they signified their assent and participation in the petitions which had been offered. . . . Men

cannot assent to what they do not understand, because assent implies the affirmation of the truth of that to which we assent. It is impossible, therefore, to join in prayers uttered in an unknown tongue. The Romish church persists in the use of the Latin language in her public services not only in opposition to the very idea and intent of worship, but also to the express prohibition of the Scriptures. For the very thing here prohibited is praying in public in a language which the people do not understand. It is indeed said that words may touch the feelings which do not convey any distinct notions to the mind. But we cannot say Amen to such words, any more than we can to a flute. Such blind, emotional worship, if such it can be called, stands at a great remove from the intelligent service demanded by the apostle. *Thou verily givest thanks well*, i.e. in a way acceptable to God and profitable to yourself. This proves that the speaker must have understood what he said. For if the unintelligible is useless, it must be so to the speaker as well as to the hearer. If it was necessary that they should understand in order to be edified, it was no less necessary that he should understand what he said in order to be benefited. This verse is therefore decisive against all theories of the gift of tongues which assume that those who used them did not understand their own words. The Scriptures recognize no unintelligent worship of God, or any spiritual edification (in the case of adults) disconnected from the truth; whether that edification be sought by sounds or signs, whether by prayers or sacraments.

I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that (by my voice) I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an (unknown) tongue. (vv. 18, 19)

That Paul should give thanks to God that he was more abundantly endowed with the gift of tongues, if that gift consisted in the ability to speak in languages which he himself did not understand, and the use of which, on that assumption, could according to his principle benefit neither himself nor others, is not to be believed. Equally clear is it from this verse that to speak with tongues was not to speak in a state of mental unconsciousness. The common doctrine as to the nature of the gift, is the only one consistent with this passage. Paul says that although he could speak in foreign languages more than the Corinthians, he would rather speak five words *with his understanding*, i.e. so as to be intelligible, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue. *In the church*, i.e. in the assembly. *That I might teach others also*, (*κατηχέω*) to instruct orally, Gal. 6:6. This shows what is meant by speaking *with the understanding*. It is speaking in such a way as to convey instruction.

Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men. (v. 20)

There are two characteristics of children; the one a disposition to be pleased with trifles, or to put a false estimate on things; the other, comparative innocence. There is a great difference as to every thing evil between a little child and a full-grown man. The former of these characteristics the apostle wished the Corinthians to lay aside. The latter he wished them to cultivate. They had displayed a childish disposition in estimating the gift of tongues above more useful gifts, and in using it when it could answer no good purpose. A little child, however, is some thing so lovely, and is so often held up in Scripture for imitation, that he could not say, without qualification, *Be not children*. He therefore says, *Be not children as to understanding*; but as *to malice*, a comprehensive word for evil dispositions, *be ye children*. So our Lord said, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven, Matt. 18:3.

In the law it is written, With (men of) other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord. (v. 21)

In the law. The word *law* signifies that which binds; especially that which binds the conscience as a rule of faith and practice. That rule may be revealed in our hearts, in the whole Scriptures, in the Pentateuch, or in the moral law; and hence the word as used in Scripture may refer to any one of these forms in which the will of God is made known; or it may include them all. The context must decide its meaning in each particular case. Here, as in John 10:34, Rom. 3:20, and elsewhere, the reference is not to the Pentateuch, but to the Old Testament. The passage quoted is Is. 28:11, 12, which in our version stands thus, "For with stammering lips, and another tongue, will he speak to this people. To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear." The apostle gives the 11th verse in a free translation, and the concluding words of the 12th. He does not quote the passage as having any prophetic reference to the events in Corinth; much less does he give an allegorical interpretation of it in order to make it a condemnation of speaking with tongues. It is a simple reference to a signal event in the Jewish history from which the Corinthians might derive a useful lesson. The Jews had refused to hear the prophets speaking their own language, and God threatened to bring upon them a people whose language they could not understand. This was a judgment; a mark of displeasure designed as a punishment and not for their conversion. From this the Corinthians might learn that it was no mark of the divine favour to have teachers whose language they could not understand. They were turning a blessing into a curse. The gift of tongues was designed, among other things, to facilitate the propagation of the gospel, by enabling Christians to address people of various nations each in his own language. Used for this purpose it was a blessing; but to employ it for the sake of display, in addressing those who could not understand the language employed, was to make it a curse. The Spirit of God often confers gifts on men, and then holds them responsible for the way in which they exercise them.

Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying (serveth) not for them that believe not, but for them which believe. (v. 22)

There are two inaccuracies in this version which obscure the sense. The first is the introduction of the word *serveth* after prophesying. The clauses are parallel. Tongues are for a sign to one class, and prophesying to another. Nothing need be supplied; what is implied is, that prophesying *is for a sign*. The introduction of the word *serveth* is not only unnecessary, but contrary to the context. The second inaccuracy is expressing the force of the datives (πιστεύουσι and ἀπίστοις) by *to* in the first member of the verse, and by *for* in the second member. There is no reason for this change. The relation expressed is the same in both cases. 'Tongues are *for* the one, prophesying are *for* the other;' or, 'Tongues are for a sign *to* the one, and prophesying *to* the other,' The connection between this verse and what precedes is indicated by the word *wherefore*, or *so that*. The inference may be drawn either from the immediately preceding clause, viz., "For all that they will not hear me, saith the Lord;" or from the historical fact referred to in the whole verse. If the former, then the design of the apostle is to show that as teaching the Hebrews by men of other tongues did not render them obedient; so speaking in other tongues would not profit the Corinthians. If the latter, then the design is to show, that as sending foreigners among the Hebrews was a mark of God's displeasure, so speaking in the Christian assemblies in foreign languages would be a curse and not a blessing. The latter view is demanded by the whole context.

The inference from the preceding verse is that tongues are a sign not to the believing but to the unbelieving, and prophesying just the reverse. This difficult verse is variously explained.

1. The word *sign* is taken in the sense of *mark* or *proof*, as when it is said, "the signs of an apostle," 2 Cor. 12:12, that is, the tokens by which an apostle may be known. Comp. Luke 2:12; 2 Thess. 3:17. The meaning of the passage would then be, 'Tongues are a proof that those among whom they are used are not believers, but unbelievers; and prophesying is a proof that they are believers, and not unbelievers.' But when the word is used in this sense, the thing of which it is a sign is put in the genitive. It is a sign *of*, not *to* or *for*.

2. It may mean a *prodigy* or *wonder*. This is a very common sense of the word, as in the familiar phrase, "signs and wonders." The meaning is then commonly made to be, 'Tongues are a wonder designed not for the benefit of believers, but for unbelievers; and on the other hand, prophecy is a wonder designed not for the benefit of unbelievers, but for the benefit of believers.' But this is neither true nor in accordance with v. 24. It is not true that the gift of tongues was designed exclusively for the conversion of unbelievers. Why should not that gift be exercised for the edification, as well as for the conversion of men? Their conversion would not enable them to understand the native language of the apostles. Much less is it true that prophecy was designed exclusively for the edification of believers. The prophets and apostles were sent forth for the conversion of the world. And in v. 24 the conversion of unbelievers is specified as the very effect to be anticipated from the use of this gift. A still more decisive objection to this interpretation is, that it does not give the true conclusion from the preceding verse. The nature of the premises must decide the nature of the inference. It is not a fair inference from the fact that although God sent foreigners to teach the Hebrews they still continued disobedient, that foreign tongues were designed for the conversion of unbelievers. The very opposite conclusion would naturally follow from that fact.

3. *Sign* may here mean a *warning* or sign of punishment. 'Tongues are a warning, designed not for believers, but for unbelievers,' who are understood to be, not those merely without faith, but positive infidels, or obstinate rejectors of the truth. To this, however, it may be objected, that the word unbeliever (*ἄπιστος*) is used in v. 24 for those without faith, and that to assume a change of meaning in the same context is most unnatural. A still more serious objection is, that this interpretation cannot be carried out. It cannot be said that prophecy is a warning designed for believers. The two members of the sentence are so related that whatever is said of the gift of tongues, must be true, *mutandis mutatis*, of prophecy. If the one be a punishment designed for unbelievers, the other must be a punishment designed for believers.

4. The most satisfactory explanation is to take *sign* in the general sense of any indication of the divine presence. 'Tongues are a manifestation of God, having reference, not to believers, but to unbelievers; and prophecy is a similar manifestation, having reference, not to unbelievers, but to believers.' By *tongues*, however, is not to be understood the gift of tongues, but, as v. 21 requires, foreign languages, i.e. languages unknown to the hearers. The meaning is, that when a people are disobedient, God sends them teachers whom they cannot understand; when they are obedient, he sends them prophets speaking their own language. This is the natural conclusion from the premises contained in v. 21. When the Hebrews were disobedient God sent foreigners among them; when obedient, he sent them prophets. *Wherefore*, i.e. hence it follows, that unintelligible teachers are for the unbelieving; those who can be understood are for the believing. This view is also consistent with what follows, which is designed to

show that speaking in a language which those who hear cannot understand is the cause of evil; whereas speaking intelligibly is the source of good. It must be remembered that it is not the gift of tongues of which the apostle speaks, but speaking to people in a language which they do not understand. And therefore this interpretation does not imply any disparagement of the gift in question. When used aright, that is, when employed in addressing those to whom the language used was intelligible, it was prophecy. The obscurity of the passage arises in a great measure from the ambiguity of the expression *to speak with tongues*. It means to speak in foreign or unknown languages. But a language may be said to be unknown either in reference to the speaker or to the hearer. It is said to be unknown to the speaker, if not previously acquired; and it is said to be unknown to the hearers if they do not understand it. The apostle uses the expression sometimes in one sense and sometimes in the other. When it is said that the apostles, on the day of Pentecost, spake with tongues, it means that they used languages which they had never learned; but when Paul says he would rather speak five words intelligibly than ten thousand words with a tongue, he means in a language unknown to the hearers. Speaking with tongues in the one sense, was a grace and a blessing; in the other sense, it was a folly and a curse. It was of speaking with tongues in the latter sense the apostle treats in these verses.

If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in (those that are) unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? (v. 23)

If *therefore*. The inference from the preceding representation is, that speaking in languages not understood by the people is undesirable and useless. To show the justness of this conclusion the apostle supposes the case which follows. *If the whole church be come together in one place*. That is, if all the Christians of the place, or the whole congregation, be assembled. This is one of the conditions of the hypothesis. Another is, that *all should speak with tongues*. This does not necessarily imply either that all present had the gift of tongues, or that all who possessed the gift spoke at one and the same time, although from vs. 27 and 30 it may be inferred that this was sometimes done. All that the words here require is that all who spoke used foreign languages. *To speak with tongues* must mean to speak in languages unknown to the hearers. The third condition of the case supposed is, that unlearned and unbelievers should come into the meeting. Who are the (ἰδιῶται), *the unlearned* here intended?

1. Some say they were Christians ignorant of the gift of tongues, because they are distinguished from *unbelievers*, or those not Christians.
2. Others say that the *unlearned* are those who were ignorant of Christianity, and the (ἄπιστοι) *unbelieving*, are those who knew and rejected it, i.e. infidels. This is giving to the word a force which it has not in itself, and which the context does not give it.
3. The simplest explanation is that the *unlearned* were those ignorant of the language spoken, and the *unbelieving* those not Christians, whether Jews or Gentiles. Such persons were doubtless often led, from curiosity or other motives, to attend the Christian assemblies. The two classes (the unlearned and the unbelieving) are not so distinguished that the same person might not belong to both classes. The same persons were either ἰδιῶται or ἄπιστοι, according to the aspect under which they were viewed. Viewed in relation to the languages spoken, they were *unlearned*; viewed in relation to Christianity, they were *unbelievers*. The apostle asks what impression such persons, in the case supposed, would receive? Would they not say *ye are mad*? John 12:20; Acts 12:15; 26:24.

But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or (one) unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on (his) face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth. (vv. 24, 25)

This is another part of the inference from what was said in vs. 21, 22. Speaking in languages unknown to the hearers is not adapted to do good; speaking intelligibly is suited to produce the happiest effects. *If all prophesy*, i.e. if all the speakers speak under the guidance of the Spirit in a language which the hearers can understand. *If one that believeth not, or one unlearned*. From these words it is manifest that the unlearned were not Christians as distinguished from Jews or Gentiles here called unbelievers, for the same effect is said to be produced on both. The unlearned were therefore as much the subjects of conversion as the unbelieving. The meaning is, if any person, either ignorant or destitute of faith, should come in, he would be *convinced by all*. That is, what he heard from all would carry conviction to his mind. He would be convinced of the truth of what he heard; convinced of sin, of righteousness and of judgment, John 16:8; convinced that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, Acts 9:20, 22; and that it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ is come into the world to save sinners, 1 Tim. 1:15. *He is judged of all*, i.e. examined, searched into (*ἀνακρίνεται*); for the word of God is a discerner (*κριτικὸς*) of the thoughts and intents of the heart, Heb. 4:12. The result of this searching examination is, *that the secrets of his heart are made manifest*; that is, they are revealed to himself. His real character and moral state, with regard to which he was before ignorant, are made known to him. The effect of this is humility, contrition, self-condemnation, and turning unto God. This is expressed by saying, *so*, i.e. in this condition of a convinced sinner who has been brought to the knowledge of himself, *falling down on his face, he will worship God*. The first step in religion is entire self-abasement; such a conviction of sin, i.e. of guilt and pollution, as shall lead to self-condemnation and self-abhorrence, and to a complete renunciation of all dependence on our own righteousness and strength. When the soul is thus humbled God reveals himself sooner or later, in mercy, manifesting himself as reconciled in Jesus Christ; and then we *worship him*. This expresses reverence, love and confidence. It is the return of the soul to the favour and fellowship of God. One who has had such an experience cannot keep it to himself. The apostle therefore describes the convert as *declaring*, i.e. *proclaiming aloud that God is in you of a truth*. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation," Rom. 10:10. It is not enough to believe the truth, it must be publicly professed; because confession is the natural fruit of faith. When there is a proper apprehension of the value of the truth, and a sincere appropriation of the promises of God to ourselves, there will be the desire to acknowledge his goodness and to proclaim the truth to others. The thing acknowledged is, *that God is in you*, i.e. that Christianity is divine; that Christians are not deluded fanatics, but the true children of God, in whom he dwells by his Spirit. The convert therefore joins himself to them to share their fate, to take part in whatever of reproach or persecution falls to their lot. This confession is made with confidence. *Declaring that God is in you of a truth*. It is not a mere conjecture, but a firm conviction, founded on experience, i.e. on the demonstration of the Spirit, 2:4.