

(1) If the gift of tongues consisted in the ability to speak one or more foreign languages, it would not have been true as affirmed (1 Cor. xiv. 2), that "he that speaketh in a tongue speaketh not unto men but unto God; for no man understandeth him; but in the spirit he speaketh mysteries." Surely this cannot be truthfully affirmed of speaking in any language. The very purpose of language is to be the medium of communication between man and man; and it cannot be affirmed of any language, broadly and without qualification, as the apostle does of this tongue-speaking, that "no man understandeth him," that speaks it. (2) Then if this were the nature of this gift, there would be no ground for the contrast of it (v. 6) with revelation, knowledge, prophesying or teaching. All these may be done in any language, and with one language, providing it is fully developed and thoroughly organized, as well as another. (3) Upon the theory under consideration, the difficulty arising from the absence of an interpretation of which the apostle speaks (v. 25) would have been impossible, for every one who spoke in a foreign language which he understood, would be able to translate it into his own vernacular. (4) This theory can scarcely be regarded as consistent with what the apostle says of his own practice (v. 18), though he possessed the gift of tongues in a high degree, he tells us he did not exercise it in the Church—the inference is that he only used it in private, and we can scarcely imagine such a thing as that he should have been in the habit of performing his private devotions in a foreign language. (5) Finally, this theory is inconsistent with the apostle's treatment of the subject in 1 Cor. xii. and xiv. He does not say a single word about the propriety of using this gift when foreigners happened to be present in their assemblies, or about its value as a means of preaching the Gospel in foreign parts, enabling men to speak to the heathen in languages they had never learned. The silence of Paul, and indeed all the New Testament writers, on this aspect of the subject is entirely inexplicable on this theory.

For these and other reasons—some of them too critical to be appropriately introduced in this article—the most learned of the modern commentators have found themselves compelled to abandon what is certainly the most ancient, and is probably still the most generally accepted view of the gift of tongues. Neander and Meyer and Beet, though among the most reverent and conservative expositors of the Word of God, have been forced to the conclusion that the theory that the gift of tongues was a miraculous gift of languages, or that the speaking in a tongue was speaking a language at all, in the ordinary acceptation of the term, is entirely untenable. The difficulty, however, which all of these learned expositors have found to be most perplexing is how to reconcile what is clearly the teaching of St. Paul (1 Cor. xii. and xiv.), with the account given (Acts ii.) of the descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost and the effects which followed. From the former of these sources Neander concludes as follows:

"In the gift of tongues the high and ecstatic consciousness in respect to God alone preponderated, while the consciousness of the world was wholly withdrawn. In this condition the medium of communication between the deeply moved inward man and the external world was wholly wanting. What he spoke in this condition, from the strong impulse of his emotions and inward