

are not prophets, all are not teachers, all are not workers of miracles, all have not the gift of healing, all do not speak with tongues. That is what he desires to say, what in effect he does say; but by the employment of the figure of speech which rhetoricians call interrogation, at the same time that he appeals to the observation and experience of his readers, he adds a spirit and force to his style which it would not otherwise possess. Besides, the fact that these gifts are associated with the various orders and offices in the Church—orders and offices which are admittedly exceptional and extraordinary—is itself significant. It shows that he would have them regarded in the same light. Even the order of these offices in the Church should not be overlooked. It is not by accident, we may be well assured, that Paul says: “first,” “secondarily,” “thirdly.” The things which are thus numerically distinguished, do not stand on the same plane, though they are all important and valuable to the Church; there is a gradation in their value and importance. The apostle is more valuable, more important to the Church than the prophet; and the prophet has an importance that does not belong to the teacher. And this suggests the idea that the apostle would have the same discriminative principle applied to the various *charismata* of which he speaks. They, too, have a graduated value and importance. Now the order in which he arranges these things is this: (1) miracles, or powers—the ability to use the power of God, within a certain limited range, and on particular occasions, these being determined by the will of God; (2) the gift of healing—subject to the same limitation, and the same in kind as the other, but differing from it in that it is confined to a narrower sphere—being applicable only to the healing of diseases; (3) then come what our translators have rendered “helps, governments,” the gift of executive ability and wise counsel in the administration of discipline and the management of the business of the Church; and (4) the gift of tongues and the interpretation of tongues.

It is evident from this gradation of gifts, as well as from the disparaging comparison which he makes of the gift of tongues with prophecy that he did not consider it worthy to be regarded as the crowning glory, the typical gift, of the new dispensation. While fully recognizing its divine origin, and its value to its possessor, so far as the edification and enlargement of the Church was concerned, he evidently looked upon it as the least important of all the gifts. And this fact is in itself important as indicating, if not what the nature of this gift was, at least what it was not. The theory which seems to have been held generally in ancient times, though not universally, was that the gift of tongues consisted in the ability of the person possessing it to speak one or more foreign languages that he had never learned. If this had been the nature of it, one cannot conceive it possible that Paul would have been disposed to rank it so low. He knew too well the value of languages in connection with the missionary work of the Church, and the labour and drudgery of acquiring them, to hold, in even comparatively low esteem, a gift which would confer so great advantages, both of a negative and positive character. It is not, however, possible to study with candour 1 Cor. xii. and xiv., without coming to the conclusion that what Paul writes respecting this gift, as it existed in the Corinthian Church, cannot on any rational principle of interpretation be reconciled with this theory.