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Speaking in Tongues

A Survey of the New Testament Evidence

BY ROBERT BANKS AND GEOFFREY MOON

THIS survey intends to determine the precise nature of the New Testament teaching concerning speaking in tongues. At the present moment this subject is engaging the attention of many Christians, and a vast amount of literature is being produced. There has probably been no other time in Christian history when the matter has come so much to the fore. It is all the more necessary, then, to consider carefully the New Testament evidence. Much of the current literature, both in support and in criticism of the phenomenon, relies more on the experiences of people than the teaching of the New Testament. Such references to the latter which do occur are often guilty of a flagrant mishandling of the text, or, at least, a superficial treatment of it. It is hoped that this investigation may correct some of these exegetical abuses, and throw further light on aspects of the question which are commonly discussed without reference to the New Testament at all.

In the New Testament, the gift is referred to in a number of different ways :

Speaking in tongues—Acts 10 : 46 ; 19 : 6 ; 1 Cor. 14 : 5, 6, 18, 23, 39.

Speaking in a tongue—1 Cor. 14 : 2, 4, 13, 14, 19, 27.

The tongues—1 Cor. 14 : 22.

A tongue—1 Cor. 14 : 26.

Kinds of tongues—1 Cor. 12 : 28.

Other tongues—Acts 2 : 4.

New tongues—Mark 16 : 17.

Tongues of men—1 Cor. 13 : 1.

Tongues of angels—1 Cor. 13 : 1.

Three different suggestions have been made to explain the description of this gift as a "tongue" :

- (a) that the word refers to the organ itself,
- (b) that the word refers to archaisms, provincial idioms, which interspersed themselves in the otherwise unintelligible discourses of those exercising the gift.
- (c) that the word refers to the actual language being uttered.

The first explanation founders on the use of the plural with reference to the individual Christian. He is said to speak not only "in a tongue", but also "in tongues" (14 : 5) and to possess the gift of speaking in "various kinds of tongues" (12 : 10). The second, based upon a rare usage of the Greek term, does not fit easily into the Acts and Corinthian accounts. In the former there is no hint that the speech was half intelligible and half not. In Corinth, the emphasis on complete unintelligibility is very strong. The third explanation is much to be preferred. To speak in a tongue is to speak in a language of some sort

or other. This is why one person is able to speak in " various kinds of tongues " that is, various kinds of languages (1 Cor. 12 : 10, 28). It gives a better account of the events in Acts 2, and is quite compatible, as we shall see, with all that Paul has to say in 1 Corinthians.

Turning from these explanations for the choice of the word "tongue", to the interpretation of " speaking in tongues " itself, four main views have been held. The manifestation has been described as :

- (a) an unintelligible ecstatic utterance,
- (b) a mixture of known and unknown languages,
- (c) the gift of speaking foreign languages,
- (d) the ability to speak a spiritual language which might be either the language of men or of angels.

Reasons for accepting the last interpretation will become clear in the exegesis of the New Testament passages which follows.

* * * *

The Gospels

The only reference in the Gospels to " speaking in tongues " is in Mark 16 : 17. On the basis of internal and external evidence Vincent Taylor says that it is an " almost universally held conclusion that 16 : 9-20 is not an original part of Mark ". The passage is omitted by a number of MSS. Taylor himself feels that it reflects a date of about 100-140 A.D.

If it is not part of the original gospel, it is most likely a summary of the resurrection appearances and of Christ's commission to the disciples added to round off a gospel whose original ending had become in some way marred or lost. This solution is suggested by a number of scholars. A. E. J. Rawlinson believes that the fragment is based on Lucan writings and supplemented by other traditions. Certainly many of the signs recorded in verses 17, 18 have their counterpart in other places in the New Testament, and particularly in Luke. It would seem, then, that what we have here is a summary of events recorded in the other gospels influenced by the experience of the Church after Pentecost. It should be added that, though verses 9-20 do not seem to have been part of the original gospel, there is still the possibility of verses 17-18 having come from the mouth of Jesus in some form or other. Perhaps a comparison can be drawn with the story of the woman taken in adultery in John 8. That is an example of an early tradition which may very well be genuine and is undoubtedly primitive, though not belonging to the gospel text as it stands.

As for the interpretation of the verse, most scholars make no apology for linking it with others in the Acts and Epistles that contain reference to speaking in tongues. The word " new " is omitted by some MSS, but it is read by the great majority of authorities which contain the longer ending and most likely should be accepted. C. E. B. Cranfield says that the word points to the tongues as being a foretoken of the age to come, in which God will make all things new (cf. 2 Cor. 5 : 17 etc.) Others remark that the term fits uneasily into that interpretation of tongues which sees it as the gift of speaking existing foreign languages. It is interesting to note that these " accompanying signs " are not

limited to the apostles but are intended for "all those who believe". Calvin and others point out that this does not mean that they will accompany every individual believer, but rather the community of believers as such.

As to the importance of this passage for speaking in tongues in the New Testament, the judgment of Alan Cole is a wise one: "In view of the uncertain textual evidence for this longer conclusion, it would be unwise to build up any theological position upon these verses alone. Whether or no such evidential manifestations were intended to be sporadic, must be considered in the light of the rest of the New Testament".

This leads to a question that has troubled many. Why do the gospels make no mention of the promised gifts of the Spirit except for this brief and disputed passage? Many suggestions have been offered, some of an extremely radical nature. The answer will best be found in the whole understanding of the place and work of the Spirit before and after Pentecost. In respect to the signs mentioned (all of which are commonly ascribed of the Spirit) it could be said that the Spirit "was not yet given". C. K. Barrett, in his influential book *The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition*, explains the silence in terms of the Messianic secret and eschatological programme of divine salvation-history. Jesus avoided direct emphasis on the Spirit because he was keeping his Messiahship secret. The Spirit does, of course, play a vital part in His ministry, but after the baptism and temptation the references to His activity are very few indeed. The Spirit appears to have been the possession of Jesus, as Messiah, alone, and in Him it was veiled. "The general gift of the Spirit belongs to the time of the vindication and manifestation of the Messiah and of the Messianic Kingdom. The period of the humiliation and obscurity of the Messiah and his people was to continue until its climax and the day of final glorification. In the former period the general gift of the Spirit was inappropriate. . . ." On the Day of Pentecost the Spirit was poured out and it was the church's task to explain His working from their own experience.

* * * *

Acts of the Apostles

There are three explicit references to speaking in tongues in the Acts of the Apostles—2 : 1-4, 10 : 44-46, 19 : 1-6.

2 : 1-4, "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting upon each one of them, And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance !"

1. First to be decided is the identity of those sharing in this experience. Is Luke speaking only of the twelve, or of the full company of one hundred and twenty? It is only the apostles who seem to have been present at the ascension of Christ (1: 2-11, though note 24-50) and of whom Luke writes in 1 : 14 when he says that on their return "all these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the

women and Mary the mother of Jesus and with his brothers". At a later stage a larger company entitled "the brethren" are gathered together, numbering one hundred and twenty (1 : 15-26). At the close of this meeting "Matthias . . . was enrolled with the eleven apostles" (1 : 26). The narrative concerning the day of Pentecost follows immediately. The close connection with the "eleven apostles" mentioned in the preceding verse, the language so reminiscent of 1 : 14, and the subsequent reference to Peter "with the eleven" in 2 : 14, seems to indicate that only the twelve were present on this occasion. Such is the judgment of Calvin and C. S. C. Williams and others.

There are grounds, however, for including the "brethren" in all that is described in 2 : 1-4, even though no explicit reference, natural enough due to their subordinate position, is made to them. Though the Spirit is not promised to all in 1 : 8, He certainly was given to all who believed (2 : 38) ; on a day as important as the day of Pentecost, it is very likely that the whole community would be together ; the preceding context involves the "brethren" and in view of the inclusive language of 2 : 1-4, it is unlikely that they are meant to be excluded ; the reference to Peter and the eleven in 2 : 14 is to their standing before the crowd, and in the light of 1 : 15 it is extremely likely that the rest of the 120 are envisaged as being seated around them ; the prophecy from Joel explicitly states that the Spirit, and the gifts, have been poured out upon "all" (2 : 20ff). Rawlinson and F. F. Bruce, in the light of this evidence, maintain that the full number were involved, and on balance this view seems the more probable. It has to be admitted, however, that the account is not fully clear.

2. Little is said by way of description of the manifestation. That the speakers were spiritually uplifted was very evident, and this was the point of the remarks in 2 : 13. The latter were not occasioned, as some have suggested, by the unintelligibility or half-intelligibility of their utterances. It should be noted in this connection, however, that the speaking in tongues was an activity in which both they and the Holy Spirit were involved. We are told that "they began to speak, as the Holy Spirit gave them utterance" (2 : 4). This need no more involve the suspension of their wills than did the Spirit's inspiration of the prophets as they preached, or as they committed their prophecies to writing (11 Peter 1 : 20-21). It is incorrect to assume an "ecstatic" or "hysterical" interpretation of the experience on the basis of this verse and 2 : 13.

That their speech was intelligible is clear from 2 : 6, 11. This miracle has received many different interpretations. Some have dismissed it as unhistorical, claiming that the glossolalia was of the unintelligible 1 Corinthians variety, and the miracle of speaking foreign languages was a Lucan creation. Others have denied that a miracle of speech was involved, and restricted the supernatural aspect to a miracle of hearing. A few have suggested that the utterances were a mixture of known and unknown languages. There have always been those who have asserted the full-blooded nature of the linguistic miracle. If one accepts the genuineness of Luke's account, it is impossible to accept the first two interpretations, and, in the light of 2 : 8 difficult to receive the third. The last explanation alone is adequate to Luke's narration of the events.

For what purpose were the tongues given? In 2 : 11 we are told that the crowd heard them "telling the mighty works of God". To whom was this "telling" directed—to the hearers or to God Himself? The generally accepted view up till the beginning of the last century (with some notable exceptions—for example, Tertullian) was that the tongues were addressed to the hearers, indeed that Peter's speech was likewise spoken in a tongue. It was a gift with an evangelistic intent. But this interpretation cannot stand when the text is carefully scrutinized. There is no suggestion in 2 : 4 that they were, in the first place, speaking to others. This is confirmed by 2 : 14 where it is mentioned that when the crowds began to take notice of what was happening Peter "lifted up his voice and addressed them". To that point the tongues were not fully audible, nor were they being addressed to outsiders. For this reason all modern commentators take 2 : 4, 11 as a speaking to God in praise, rather than a speaking to men in evangelism, and it is this that the crowd hears. This agrees with the evidence as to the purpose of tongues from the rest of Acts and 1 Corinthians. And as far as Peter's speech is concerned, as F. F. Bruce says, "there is no suggestion that Peter's address was spoken in a tongue unknown to himself". Rackham sums up the event when he says that "the utterances were addressed not to the crowd but to God. They were glorifying God, not preaching the gospel : that was reserved for St. Peter".

3. It only remains to determine whether there is a difference between the speaking in tongues here and that occurring elsewhere in the New Testament. It has been a common critical contention that the two are quite distinct. As the following pages make clear it is truer to say, with Bruce, that the phenomenon in 1 Corinthians is "another form of glossolalia, different only in that it was a different language other than foreign languages which was spoken". C. S. C. Williams well comments that "the common critical distinction between Luke's and Paul's presentations of the phenomena . . . is too clear cut. Paul is said to have thought of it simply in terms of ecstatic utterance unintelligible to a hearer without an interpreter, and Luke to have thought of glossolalia simply a speaking in a foreign language . . . even to Paul glossolalia may well have meant or included speaking in foreign languages, as well as unintelligible speech, not the latter alone". Paul makes it quite clear that there are "various kinds of tongues" (1 Cor. 12 : 10, 28), and that these included "tongues of men" and "tongues of angels" (1 Cor. 13 : 1). For both, speaking in tongues is primarily directed to God, not to man (Acts 2 : 4, 11 ; 1 Cor. 14 : 2). For both, the manifestations remained under the conscious control of the one who exercised the gift (Acts 2 : 4 ; 1 Cor. 14 : 27f.). For both, there could be a message to men—either directly through the Spirit giving foreign languages (Acts 2 : 6, 8), or indirectly through the Spirit inspiring an interpreter (1 Cor. 14 : 27). For both, the spiritual edification of the individual, quite obviously took place (Acts 2 : 13, 1 Cor. 14 : 2). In any case the later references in the Acts to the manifestation have much more in common with Paul's account in 1 Corinthians than the earlier event in Acts 2. W. D. Stacey is correct when he asserts that "the passages represent not two distinct phenomena, but one".

10 : 44-46. " While Peter was still saying this, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God."

All who received the word of Peter were filled with the Spirit, and all spoke in tongues. It seems clear that it was by reason of the " speaking in tongues " and " extolling God " that Peter, and those who were with him, recognized that the Spirit had been given to the Gentiles.

There is no evidence here for the tongues being utterances in a foreign language as in Acts 2, and the majority of commentators compare this instance unhesitatingly with that in 1 Corinthians. Even Calvin admits a distinction between this passage and Acts 2, and says that no evangelistic purpose is in view. The speaking in tongues are clearly associated with " extolling God " as an activity of praise, and F. F. Bruce places 10 : 46 in parallel with 2 : 11.

Peter's words in 10 : 47, " can we forbid water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have ", can be taken in a number of different ways. On a straightforward reading of the text it infers that the " believers from among the circumcised " with Peter had also been filled with the Spirit and spoken in tongues. If this was the case it would go far towards indicating that it was a gift which normally accompanied the conversion of all the early Christians. He may, however, be referring in a general way to the day of Pentecost, and possibly, on the narrow interpretation, to the reception of the Spirit and the gift of tongues by him and the apostles alone. At first sight 11 : 15 might seem to lend support to this view (" as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning "). But two things need to be noted. Firstly, there is the addition, in this recounting of what happened to Cornelius and the others, of the words " at the beginning " which may be particularizing the more general reference in 10 : 47. And secondly, he is speaking to " the apostles and the brethren ", further evidence for the reception of the Spirit and the gift of tongues by all on the day of Pentecost. It is just possible, though hardly likely, that speaking in tongues is not in view at all, and that in this verse Peter is only referring to the reception of the Spirit, quite apart from any manifestations associated with it. Of these three possible interpretations (on which, by the way, the commentaries have nothing to say) it is the first, or the second in its general interpretation, which recommend themselves.

19 : 5-6. " On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them ; and they spoke with tongues and prophesied."

There is no need to inquire into the identity of these twelve disciples, not into the nature of their early experience. For our purposes it is sufficient to note that just as all received the Spirit, so all spoke in tongues and prophesied. In 19 : 6 the speaking in tongues is clearly dissociated from prophecy and it is again implied that it is a speaking to God rather than a speaking to men. As with Acts 10 there is no hint of foreign languages being spoken, or of the gift having any connection with evangelism.

There are no other explicit references in Acts to the gift, but a number of commentators have pointed to Acts 8 : 17-19 as being a very probable reference to it.

8 : 17-19. "Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostle's hands, he offered them money, saying . . ."

In 10 : 44-46 we read that when the believers *heard* the Gentiles speaking in tongues, they realized the Spirit had been given them. In Acts 2 : 33 Peter refers back to the speaking in tongues as something which the crowd could "*see and hear*". In this present passage we read that it was when Simon *saw* something that indicated the giving of the Spirit, that he made his request. There was a manifestation of some kind. Now it is true, as Beare says of the reception of the Spirit here, that "nothing is said of the way in which this was manifested", but the majority of commentators not only favour a manifestation of some kind, but on the principle of interpreting scripture by scripture, a manifestation of speaking in tongues. F. F. Bruce, for example, comments that "the context leaves us in no doubt that their reception of the Spirit was attended by external manifestations such as had marked His descent on the earliest disciples at Pentecost". Calvin, in more general terms, writes that "Luke is not speaking here about the general grace of the Spirit, by which God regenerates us to be like His own sons, but about those special gifts, with which the Lord wished some to be endowed in the first days of the Gospel, for the bestowing of honour on the Kingdom of Christ". Others refer more explicitly to the manifestation of glossolalia.

While it is not wise to be dogmatic here, it would not seem to be unfair, in agreement with the majority of commentators, if we see a reference to spiritual gifts, and particularly speaking in tongues, in this passage. If this does reflect a true understanding of the verse, a most significant fact emerges. As Rackham points out : "St. Luke gives us, in all, four accounts of the outpouring of the Spirit—(1) at Pentecost, on the original disciples ; (2) here, on the Samaritans ; (3) at Caesarea, on Cornelius and his company who were Gentiles ; (4) at Ephesus, on the disciples of John the Baptist. These are evidently meant as typical pictures. They represent each a different class of religious status ; and as the evidence that the Spirit is given to all classes alike, the gift is followed by external and extraordinary signs". That is to say, every mention in Acts of the giving of the Spirit is attended by a reference to speaking in tongues—in three cases explicitly, in one implicitly. Now it is often pointed out that there are very few references to tongues in Acts. This is true. There is no mention of the gift, for example, in the accounts of the conversion of the 3000 on the day of Pentecost, the Ethiopian eunuch, Paul, the new believers at Pisidian Antioch, Lydia and her household, the Philippian gaoler, etc. But there is no reference whatsoever in all these cases to the reception of the Holy Spirit either. (It is promised to Paul—but we know from 1 Cor. 14 : 18 that he spoke in tongues as well. Only four times do people receive the Spirit in Acts, and in each case, speaking in tongues is conjoined to the reception. Just as this is never taken to infer that only these four groups of people

received the Spirit, nor should it be inferred that these, and only these, received the gift of speaking in tongues.

Now it would not be correct to argue from this conclusion in a positive direction—that is, all receive the Spirit so all do in fact speak in tongues. All that can be said is that wherever Luke mentions the gift of the Spirit he also mentions the gift of tongues. The possibility of the gift being exercised by all the early Christians should not be excluded. It seems highly likely. But it cannot, from the accounts in Acts, be proven. Moffatt has summed up well the most that can be said. "Luke *suggests* that it is an invariable accompaniment of conversion and baptism."

* * * *

1 Corinthians 12-14

1. *Speaking in tongues is a gift of the Spirit to the Church.*

That Paul does not regard speaking in tongues as a counterfeit of Satan is clear from his whole argument in these chapters. That the gift can be abused is beyond doubt ; indeed it is this that is taking place at Corinth. He makes it clear, however, that the correct treatment for abuse is not disuse, but proper use. This attitude is grounded in his belief that the Spirit is the source of the gift (12 : 4, 11). To despise it would be to despise the one who gave it. It is true that there is some ground for asserting that it was the least of the gifts, at least in the church. It is often argued that in the list of gifts in 12 : 8-10 tongues is placed last. However, prophecy, which Paul regards as the gift *par excellence*, is also well down the list, and there does not seem to be any particular importance attached to the order of gifts as they are presented here. More support for this approach to tongues can be found in the list at the end of the chapter (12 : 28). Most commentators feel that the placing of tongues at its end is quite deliberate. This is a legitimate inference, but caution is still necessary, for in 14 : 4 tongues *plus* interpretation is equated with prophecy. This seems to indicate that interpreted speaking in tongues could fit into the category of 'higher gifts' mentioned in 12 : 31.

The relationship between these two lists (12 : 8-10, 12 : 28) needs closer attention. Godet speaks for many when he distinguishes between the gifts considered from a psychological point of view in the first, and in their ecclesiastical character in the second. A better distinction may be that between the various items as considered in their relation to the Spirit in 12 : 8-10 and in their relation to the Church in 12 : 28. However, this is not the full answer, for there are differences between the two lists. This has led some commentators (Beza, Grotius, and Estius in the past, and Hodge and Olshausen in more recent times) to apply the first list to gifts and the second to the specific offices in the church held by those who possessed particular gifts. Those who disagree with this position, point out that the activities at the bottom of the list in 12 : 28 (such as tongues etc.) are not of a permanent ecclesiastical character. Grosheide, for example, distinguishes between the first three (apostles, prophets, teachers) which he terms "offices", and the remainder which he terms "services". The latter are simply some of the gifts considered from the aspect of

service (cf. 12 : 4f.). He feels that the general nature of Paul's argument here is to compare these "offices" with the "gifts" to show that there is a diversity and unity in both. This is to show the Corinthians that the differences in the distribution of gifts is not an isolated phenomenon; on the contrary, it is analogous to the diversity of offices. The point of the questions following in 12 : 29f. is now apparent. Do all have the same office in the church? Of course not. Then neither do all exercise the same service with respect to gifts. Speaking in tongues therefore is a gift given to some of the Christians at Corinth (12 : 10) so that through its exercise there may be a service or ministry to the congregation (12 : 28). That it is not granted to all *for this purpose* is clear from 12 : 11 and 12 : 30.

Other verses throughout 1 Corinthians 14 emphasize the validity and value of this gift to the Church, though all along its proper position in relation to the other spiritual gifts, particularly prophecy, is stressed (cf. 14 : 5, 12f., 15, 27f., 39). The only verse which has been used in an attempt to prove that Paul was really seeking to discourage (or even terminate) speaking in tongues, and the other spiritual gifts as well, is 12 : 31 : "But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way". Some have taken this to mean that Paul is diverting the attention of his readers to another course altogether, that motivated and controlled by love. Such a course has no real need of spiritual gifts at all. Closely associated with this is a second interpretation, which takes the phrase "higher gifts" as not referring to spiritual gifts but to the fruits of the Spirit. A third explanation claims that Paul is directing the attention of the Corinthians away altogether from the lower gifts (such as tongues) toward the higher spiritual charismata. The first view stands or falls on the interpretation of the phrase "the more excellent way". Does it mean a more excellent way than desiring spiritual gifts? This is ruled out by a true understanding of the verse. Hodge translates it : "Seek the better gifts, and moreover, I show you an excellent way to do it". Similarly the majority of commentators. Grosheide would like to strengthen the "excellent" and translate it "the most excellent way" to do it, whereas Godet would prefer to render the first few words, "Seek gifts, and the better ones". It does not matter which of these be adopted. Grosheide's translation does not change the sense of Hodge's statement, and Godet's, if correct, only makes it more plain that seeking all the gifts, as well as the best ones, is not to be excluded from the way of love. The second suggestion, that higher gifts be taken as fruits of the Spirit, claims a meaning for charismata in this chapter, and for that matter anywhere in the New Testament, which is foreign to the use of the word. The third view is shown to be incorrect, by Olshausen's dictum that 12 : 31 has its commentary in 14 : 1, "Follow after love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy". Godet's translation of 12 : 31, if it is accepted, would also point in the same direction. Here lies that interpretation of the passage which is truest to the text and which is in harmony with Paul's teaching throughout these chapters. He is urging them to seek love over and above everything else, and then the spiritual gifts, especially the most important ones, as an accompaniment, yet not so as to exclude the

lower gifts. They too are gifts of the Spirit to the Church, humble though they be.

2. *Speaking in tongues is a gift for the individual Christian.*

In the two lists in chapter twelve, it is important to bear in mind that Paul nowhere has in view the private life of the Christians at Corinth. His only concern is with the exercise of the gifts in the congregation. That is the issue some of the Corinthians have raised, and that alone is the issue with which he deals. This is borne out by a closer inspection of 12 : 8-10. There, for ministry to the congregation, only to "one" is given the utterance of wisdom, of knowledge, faith, prophecy, tongues, etc. But at home these are precisely the gifts which God gives to each individual for his or her own edification. In private communion with God they would have experienced the gift of wisdom (there is no need for utterance of it here for none else is present), or of knowledge, or prophecy to their own situation, or faith for a particular problem, and—need we doubt?—the gift of tongues as well. This is not an attempt to prove from these verses that this was so, but the passage leaves the possibility fully open that all these gifts were experienced in private in this way as God gave them. That this not negated by the question in 12 : 30, "Do all speak in tongues?" has already been shown. In the congregation not all exercise this gift. It is not correct to draw inferences in the direction of their private lack of this gift as is done by many commentators.

We now turn to three passages which have been taken by some to indicate that this was so.

(i) 14 : 18. "I thank God that I speak in tongues more than you all".

Moffat considers this verse to be more in the nature of a concession to the Corinthians, than an indication of the positive value Paul attributed to his own speaking in tongues. But most commentators agree that Paul is here placing a high emphasis on the gift. However, it is the phrase "more than you all" which particularly concerns us. Does the "all" include every Corinthian? Is it instead a loose way of saying "more than occurs among you"? Perhaps, as many have suggested, it simply means more than "all you who speak in tongues". The commentaries are of little help. Only two comment on the word at all, preferring the second or third explanations. The first, however, should not be ruled out as a possibility.

(ii) 14 : 23. "If therefore, the whole church assembles, and all speak in tongues . . ."

It is clear from the phrase "the whole church" that those "*apistoi*" and "*idiotai*" mentioned in verse 24 who enter into the service, are not considered to be a part of it. They are not Christians as Stanley and Olshausen assert, nor those who do not possess the gift of tongues, as Beet, Meyer, and Robertson and Plummer claim. Morris's suggestion that they were catechumens is a little more convincing but not entirely so. Far better to reckon them, with Grosheide, Hodge, Ellicott, and the majority of commentators, as complete outsiders. This being so, Paul envisages at least the possibility of "all" the Corinthians being able to speak in tongues. Again, some interpreters restrict the "all"

to ' all those who are able to speak in tongues ' ; most, however, refer it to the whole company. Paul certainly envisages in 14 : 1 that " all " may prophesy, and in the verse following 14 : 25 they do just that. So in 14 : 5 he envisages the possibility of all speaking in tongues, and there seems to be no reason why this is not in view here. Stanley's dictum that the situation is a hypothetical one should be kept in mind, but Paul clearly considered it a situation which could become a reality. It again leaves open the possibility that all may have been able to speak in tongues.

(iii) 14 : 26. " What then, brethren? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. . . . "

No one has ever suggested that this means that " each one " comes with all these gifts to the worship, yet this is precisely how the Greek reads. To limit the " each one " to the charismatics among them is going too far in the other direction. Better to understand Paul meaning that each one had some contribution to make. Still, the first possibility should not be ruled out altogether. It can make good sense of the passage even if it does at first sight seem a little far-fetched. If Paul had meant to say that each one brought one gift only why did he not phrase this sentence another way? Does he state it in this fashion because this is precisely what was happening at Corinth—they were all coming with a number of gifts to share with others—and hence the limitations in the following verses?

One cannot claim, on the basis of these three passages, that all in fact spoke in tongues. But these passages do indicate at the very least that many of the Corinthians did so, otherwise Paul could never speak in the way that he does; that he could foresee the possibility of all exercising the gift; that it does remain open that all did exercise the gift in private.

Finally, we turn to two passages which make it clear that, whether or not all possessed the gift, Paul most certainly desired them to have it. (iv) 14 : 1. " Follow after love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy ".

This verse has already received some discussion, but one or two further comments are necessary. Both Calvin and Grosheide claim that this direction is not made to the individual Christians but to the congregation as a whole, and that as a result there might well be some who receive no gift at all. This, however, does not agree with further injunctions in the chapter which are explicitly made to individuals in the congregation (e.g., 14 : 5, 13, 26, etc.). Others have pointed to the incongruity of the command to " strive " here, with the sovereignty ascribed to the Spirit in his distribution of the gifts in 12 : 11. But, as Meyer points out, the necessity of striving " does not conflict with v. 11, because the will of the communicating Spirit is not an arbitrary one, but makes the receptive capacity and the mental tendency of the individual to be elements in their own self-determination ". One could compare Christ's words about eternal life being granted only to those to whom it is the Father's will to give it, and his instruction to strive to enter in at the narrow gate, etc.

(v) 14 : 5. " Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy. . . . "

Some feel that by means of the comparison Paul is disparaging the practice of speaking in tongues, and asking his readers to bypass it altogether. This view, however, is at variance with the rest of this chapter, with the second part of this verse, and with the plain words of the text. A better explanation is to see it as Paul encouraging all, including those who do not speak in tongues, to exercise the gift though only so long as they see the gift in its proper perspective and desire to exercise prophecy even more. Let Hodge speak for the majority of commentators who exegete the verse in this way : " It was not to be inferred from what he said that the apostle undervalued this gift. He admitted its importance as one of the manifestations of the Spirit . . . from this it is evident that it was something of a higher nature than modern theories would represent it ". Calvin remarks : " Thus you see that there is no question of his wanting to abolish tongues, or keep them out of the Church "; and again : " There is no doubt that the Holy Spirit has bestowed undying honour on tongues in this verse ". It should be mentioned, though it is not started by any commentator, that it is just possible that they do already speak in tongues, and here Paul is urging them to continue.

The result of the investigation of the verses in this section is as follows. Nowhere does Paul forbid the seeking or exercise of this gift. It remains possible that all did speak in tongues at Corinth, though this cannot be demonstrated with certainty. In any case, he desires all to possess the gift, and can envisage this taking place.

3. Speaking in tongues is a gift which remains under the conscious control of the individual.

One of the commonest errors in connection with this gift is its interpretation as an ecstatic utterance, in which the will is carried away completely by the Spirit, so that the one who exercises it has no conscious control over it. It is this misunderstanding which lies behind the NEB translation in these chapters.

We begin with 1 Cor. 12 : 1-3. Many commentators feel that we have here a reference to speaking in tongues. Grosheide writes : " Paul could hardly mean that a Corinthian had actually said : Jesus be cursed. In the first place, the words of the text do not support this view. Secondly, the point of Paul's argument is such that the only thing we can assume is that the Corinthians who did not understand glossolalia feared that something might be said that was wrong or irreverent. The correct interpretation is that Paul, without referring to an actual statement, assures his readers that no one who speaks in the Spirit of God will say : Cursed be Jesus ". Others approach it as a statement in church by means of one of the spiritual gifts, though not necessarily speaking in tongues. What Paul says is that where a true spiritual gift is exercised two things will differentiate it from its pagan counterpart—the content will glorify Jesus and not blaspheme Him—the method will not be by means of an uncontrollable utterance, but " an influence from God, congruous to our nature, and leading to good " (Hodge). As

Stanley says : " Paul criticizes the irrational state of heathenism, in which the worshippers were blindly hurried away by some overwhelming power . . . without any will or reason of their own . . . this is contrasted with the consciousness of an indwelling Spirit, moving in harmony with their spirits, and controlled by a sense of order and wisdom ". So, whether or not Paul has speaking in tongues specifically in mind here, it is certain that what he says is as applicable to it as to the other spiritual gifts. It is not true to say, as Godet does here, that " this characteristic of superiority would apply only imperfectly to the gift of tongues, the exercise of which excludes the use of the faculty of understanding ". The bypassing of the mind in speaking in tongues is not in dispute. But it is a *non sequitor* to equate this with bypassing of the will. The will is separate from the understanding. This confusion has led most modern commentators into error, for they identify (and here both the psychology and theology of tongues are against them) lack of understanding and lack of control, two very different activities.

This is confirmed by an examination of the rest of 1 Corinthians. Control of the gift is assumed in 14 : 15, 18f., and most of all in 27f. Here, those who speak in tongues are able to speak in turn in an orderly manner, or not speak at all. This indicates that the principle that is applicable to the prophets in 14 : 32 is also applicable to those who speak in tongues. " The spirits of the prophets (and speakers in tongues) are subject to the prophets (and speakers in tongues)." In line with this is the over-all injunction at the end of the chapter : " Let all things be done decently and in order " (14 : 40). In fact, Paul's whole argument here, *depends* upon the ability of those who speak in tongues being able to regulate them or contain them. Godet's remark : " It is then his feelings, and his feelings only, which are in activity, to the exclusion of his understanding and will ", is very wide of the mark. Hodge is more correct : " It is evident from the whole discussion, that those who spoke in tongues are self-controlled. They were, therefore, not in a state of uncontrollable excitement, unconscious of what they said or did ". As Morris says : " This shows us that we must not think of tongues as being the result of an irresistible impulse of the Spirit, driving the man willy-nilly into ecstatic speech ".

It is this aspect of tongues, among others, that has led many to conclude that it was the gift of speaking intelligible foreign languages. We would not wish to exclude this altogether from taking place, but to insist that all tongue-speaking was of this kind does not square up to a great deal of the evidence, not only from Acts but from these chapters as well. As Robertson and Plummer state, " verse after verse shows that speaking in a foreign language cannot be meant ". Leon Morris feels that " this is an attractive solution ; but nobody reading 1 Corinthians would think that this is what Paul had in mind. The gift is not part of the evangelistic programme of the Church, but it is exercised among believers. It is not understood by folk speaking other languages, but requires a special gift of interpretation. The gift of which Paul speaks was not one whereby men might more easily be understood by others, but one wherein they did not even understand themselves. The fundamental mistake of this interpretation is to make Acts 2 normative for the phenomenon, when it stands outside the other occurrences of the

manifestation. It is they which are normative, while Acts 2 represents a special and particular use by the Spirit of the gift ”.

4. *Speaking in tongues and its purpose and exercise in the congregation.*

The value of the gift in the area of congregational worship is limited by its unintelligible nature (14 : 2, 6-12, 27). Paul points out that its exercise, though edifying to the individual, in this instance is unedifying *to the church*, and that in striving for manifestations of the Spirit they should seek to build up the church. It is for this reason that prophecy is better than tongues. Still, in 14 : 5, he says that when a tongue is interpreted it can have equal place with prophecy. That, of course, is obvious. There is no suspicion placed on the content of tongues, but only upon their intelligibility. If that is removed by interpretation then the message which was hidden is revealed, and an equivalent to prophecy is given. This is why in the verse immediately following verse 12 (commanding them to “strive to build up the church”) we read “therefore he who speaks in a tongue should pray for the power to interpret”. That is, here is one legitimate way of building up the church. The same principle is at work in his injunctions in 14 : 27ff. In these last mentioned verses, we note the instructions laid down for the exercise of the gift in the congregation. Only two, or at most three, should speak in tongues. They should not do so all together, but in turn.

5. *Speaking in tongues is of great value to the individual.*

1 Corinthians is very interesting for the hints it contains as to the value of the gift for the Christian, perhaps silently in church, but pre-eminently at home. As has been mentioned several times before, Paul is not discussing the exercise of the gift by the individual, yet in his treatment of its place and purpose in the church, we can obtain certain information about it.

It is first and foremost a way of communing with God (14 : 2). As Grosheide says, “Glossolalia is adoration, a speaking to God”. It seems to have been a form of giving praise which enabled the Christian to do so in a way that was perfectly appropriate and extremely edifying. The value of the gift lies in the freedom that is given to a man's spirit to praise God unfettered by the rationalizings of the mind. Paul candidly admits that the mind is unfruitful in the activity, but he does not thereby condemn tongues on that account. It results in edification (14 : 4, and hence verse 5 following : “Now I want you all to speak in tongues”—that is, so that you can edify yourselves). His own testimony in verse 18 : “I thank God that I speak in tongues more than you all”, and the instruction in 14 : 28 : “Let him . . . speak to himself and to God”, also imply that tongues are edifying. So, “from his intimate communion with God, the glossolalete derives a blessing which, even though it is not transformed into precise notions by the exercise of the understanding, makes itself felt as a power in the soul” (Godet). “The one who speaks in a tongue ministers to himself . . . not necessarily by any knowledge of the purport of what he says, but by the glow of the soul associated with the exercise of the charisma” (Ellicott). All this confirms the impression gained throughout a study of these

chapters that speaking in tongues was a legitimate gift of the Spirit, both to the Church and to the individual Christian.

6. *Speaking in tongues is a gift available to the Church and to individuals today.*

13 : 8-10. " Love never ends ; as for prophecies, they will pass away ; as for tongues, they will cease ; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect, and our prophecy is imperfect, but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away ".

Paul states that prophecy, tongues, knowledge, and by implication the rest of the spiritual gifts, shall all pass away in the future. The omission of tongues in verse 9 is not considered significant by any of the commentators. As to the time of the disappearance of the charismata, three suggestions have been put forward. The first holds that, though the termination of the gifts will take place ideally at the second coming of Christ, in these verses we can detect Paul's indifference as to whether they continued in existence or not. On this view Paul envisaged that tongues and other extraordinary gifts would cease from the early Church due to their inferior nature. A second approach, while again allowing that in verse 10 it is the return of Christ which brings the gifts to an end, feels that Paul looked forward to a gradual metamorphosis of the gifts ; prophecy into preaching, tongues into poetry and music ; knowledge into theology. Sometimes, the illustration in verse 11 has been pressed into service in an attempt to support this view. To do so, however, is to place a false interpretation upon it. The view which commends itself to the majority of commentators is that spiritual gifts are of temporary duration only, nevertheless they will continue till Christ comes again. So Grosheide, Stanley, Morris, and many others. It is true that some of these go on to add that, as an historical fact, some of these gifts ceased to exist after the apostolic age, but they do not try to read a prediction of that from these verses.

In dealing with this passage there is the need for the greatest honesty. For the text states quite plainly, and without any qualification, that Paul expected spiritual gifts to remain active in the church until " that which is perfect is come ". After that there would be no more need for them, but until it took place he envisaged every reason for their exercise in the Church. The first two views are not willing to read the verse as it stands, but insist on reading back into it the historical disappearance of gifts. This is not only poor exegesis but also poor history, for there is evidence that for quite some time the gifts continued in the post-apostolic Church. There is also further evidence for their re-appearance throughout the history of the Church, whenever the promise of their availability was taken seriously. In any case, there is no hint anywhere else in these chapters that any of the gifts of the Spirit were to depart from the Church, any more than any of the fruits of the Spirit were expected to cease. The differentiation sometimes made between ordinary and extraordinary gifts (that is, those that are permanent and those that are temporary) would not have been countenanced by Paul. This means that his directions to the Corinthians to desire and exercise all the gifts are, as far as we are concerned, as relevant and applicable a

part of Scripture as any of the other directions to Christians made in his letters.

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The Rest of the New Testament

The commentaries suggest a number of other probable references to speaking in tongues in other books of the New Testament. In 2 Corinthians 12 : 4 some have detected an allusion to it but it can hardly be as the verse refers to hearing things that cannot be told by " speaking ". Galatians 3 : 5 makes it clear that spiritual gifts were in evidence in the churches in that region, but there is no explicit reference to tongues. The same is true of Hebrews 2 : 4. There are, however, three passages which the majority of commentators do directly refer to speaking in tongues—Romans 8 : 26f., Ephesians 5 : 19, and 1 Thessalonians 5 : 19.

Romans 8 : 26f.

Bultmann sees a charismatic reference here, and also at 8 : 15 (cf. Gal. 4 : 6) which he describes as " an ecstatic cry of Abba ". So also Beet, Godet, Ewald, Goudge for verses 26f., and Beet, Van Hengel, Ewald, Godet for verse 15. F. F. Bruce suggests that " speaking to God in the Spirit with tongues may be included in the expression ", though he goes on to give it a wider reference, as do C. K. Barrett and W. D. Stacey. Sanday and Headlam, though they do not mention tongues, exegete the text in a way which is perfectly descriptive of the experience in 1 Corinthians 14 that is, that the Spirit groans within us, putting a meaning into our aspirations which they would not have of themselves (1 Cor. 14 : 2) ; that the Spirit operates within us in a way which is not definable to the consciousness (1 Cor. 14 : 14). They point out that the phrase " we do not know how to pray as we ought " means " how we are to word our prayers " rather than " what we ought to pray for ", which is again applicable to speaking in tongues. Also that the meaning of the Greek term translated " helps us " means to " take hold of at the side of so as to support ", again fitting in well with the Pauline idea of tongues. The meaning would then be that there are deep thoughts and longings inexpressible in words which the Spirit who " searches the heart " takes up and expresses to God through us in an inarticulate, though nevertheless vocal, manner. It is neither the Spirit alone, nor the individual alone, that is involved, but rather the co-operation of both. This is more descriptive of tongues than anything else in the New Testament, and even if Paul has a wider reference in mind in this passage, it would include the experience.

Ephesians 5 : 18f.

This is a more doubtful allusion and may have a stronger reference to general worship. Foulkes, Abbott, and Ellicott all translate " speaking to one another " which would hardly be tongues. On the other hand, Bultmann sees the verse in a charismatic context that is, that they are prayers and songs spoken and sung in the Spirit. Stanley takes it in support of speaking in tongues and singing in the Spirit and draws attention to the reflexive pronoun " in yourselves " (rather than " to one another "). If this is the correct translation (and one can compare

the phrase "in your hearts" both here and in Col. 3 : 16) then it corresponds exactly to Paul's description of the man speaking in tongues in 2 Cor. 14 : 27.

1 *Thessalonians* 5 : 19.

Leon Morris says of this verse that "most commentators take the injunction as referring to ecstatic gifts of the Spirit such as speaking in tongues", though he himself goes on to give it a wider sphere of application. Bultmann and Behm refer it to tongues. Stanley, Plummer, Andrews, Milligan, Hendriksen, and others all refer the verse to the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit which the Thessalonians were in some danger of quenching. They make cross-reference to the list of charismata in 1 Cor. 8-10, and some mention specifically speaking in tongues. The strongest argument for taking the verse as an explicit reference to tongues to the exclusion of other spiritual gifts is the close connection with prophecy (5 : 20). Throughout Acts (e.g., 19 : 6), and 1 Corinthians (12 : 9f., 14 : 1f., 5, 18, 27f., etc.) these two are very closely joined together, making possible the same conjunction here. Against this is the general nature of Paul's injunction in 5 : 19, and for this reason it may be best to understand it as applying to all the spiritual gifts rather than specifically to speaking in tongues. It remains then an indirect rather than direct reference to the phenomenon.

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Conclusion

It is clear, then, that the New Testament has a good deal more to say about speaking in tongues than many people will allow. References are spread throughout a number of the books, and the legitimacy and value of the gift are nowhere in question. The accounts in Acts suggest that it was an invariable accompaniment of conversion, baptism, and the reception of the Spirit. The teaching in 1 Corinthians shows that it is a valid gift to the Church and is to be rightly exercised, a valuable gift to the individual that is to be used for his edification, a spiritual gift that remains available till the return of Christ in person. The references in Romans, Ephesians, Thessalonians, and elsewhere in the New Testament to spiritual gifts (and in some cases more specifically to tongues) indicate the widespread character of the charismata in the early Church. From all this it is clear that the common Reformed assumption that the Old Testament and New Testament have replaced the non-extraordinary gifts, and that baptism and the Lord's supper have replaced the miraculous occurrences that took place in the early Church, is one that has no foundation in Scripture whatsoever, and is to be reckoned a tradition of men.