

## XXVIII.

**The Miracle of Tongues.**

“If any man speak in an (*unknown*) tongue, . . . let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, let him speak to himself, and to God.”— *1 Cor. xiv. 27, 28.*

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The third sign following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit consisted in extraordinary sounds that proceeded from the lips of the apostles—sounds foreign to the Aramaic tongue, never before heard from their lips.

These sounds affected the multitude in different ways: some called them babblings of inebriated men; others heard in them the great works of God proclaimed. To the latter, it seemed as tho they heard them speaking in their own tongues. To the Parthian it sounded like the Parthian, to the Arabian like the Arabic, etc.; while St. Peter declared that this sign belonged to the realm of revelation, for it was the fulfilment of the prophecy of Joel that all the people should become partakers of the operation of the Holy Spirit.

The question how to interpret this wonderful sign has occupied the thinking minds of all times. Allow us to offer a solution, which we present in the following observations:

In the first place—This phenomenon of spiritual speaking in extraordinary sounds is not confined to Pentecost nor to the second chapter of the Acts.

On the contrary, the Lord told His disciples, even before the ascension, that they should speak with new tongues—*Mark xvi. 8.* And from the epistles of St. Paul it is evident that this prophecy did not refer to Pentecost alone; for we read in *1 Cor. xii. 10* that in the apostolic Church, spiritual gifts included that of tongues; that some spoke in *γενη γλωττώυ, i.e.,* in kinds of tongues or sounds. In *ver. 28* the apostle declares that God has set this spiritual phenomenon in the Church. It is noteworthy that in *1 Cor. xiv. 1-33* the apostle gives special attention to this extraordinary sign, showing that then it was quite ordinary. That the gift of tongues mentioned by St. Paul and the sign of which St. Luke speaks in *Acts ii.,* are substantially one and the same can not be doubted. In the first place; Christ’s prophecy is general: “They shall speak with new tongues.” Secondly, both phenomena are said to have made irresistible impressions upon unbelievers. Thirdly, both are treated as spiritual gifts. And lastly, to both is applied the same name.

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Yet there was a very *perceptible difference* between the two: the miracle of tongues on the day of Pentecost was intelligible to a large number of hearers of different nationalities; while in the apostolic churches it was understood only by a few who were called interpreters. Connected with this is the fact that the miracle on Pentecost made the impression of speaking at once to different hearers in different tongues so that they were edified. However, this is no fundamental difference. Altho in the apostolic churches there were but few interpreters, yet there were some who understood the wonderful speech.

There was, moreover, a marked difference between the men thus endowed: some understood what they were saying; others did not. For St. Paul admonishes them, saying: "Let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue, pray that he may interpret" (1 Cor. xiv. 13). Yet even without this ability, the speaking with tongues had an edifying effect upon the speaker himself; but it was an edification not understood, the effect of an unknown operation in the soul.

From this we gather that the miracle of tongues consisted in the uttering of extraordinary sounds which from existing data could be explained neither by the speaker nor by the hearer; and to which another grace was sometimes added, viz., that of interpretation. Hence three things were possible: that the speaker alone understood what he said; or, that others understood it and not himself; or, that both speaker and hearers understood it. This understanding has reference to one or more persons.

On the ground of this we comprise these miracles of tongues in one class; with this distinction, however, that on the day of Pentecost the miracle appeared *perfect*, but later on *incomplete*. As there is in the miracles of Christ in raising the dead a perceptible increase of power: first, the raising up of one just dead (the daughter of Jairus), then, of one about to be buried (the young man of Nam), and lastly, of one already decomposing (Lazarus); so there is also in the miracle of tongues a difference of power—not *increasing*, but *decreasing*. The mightiest operation of the Holy Spirit is seen first, then those less powerful. It is precisely the same as in our own heart: first, the mighty fact of regeneration; after that, the less marked manifestations of spiritual power. Hence on Pentecost there was the miracle of tongues in its perfection; later on in the churches, in weaker measure.

Secondly—There is no evidence that the miracle of tongues consisted in the speaking of one of the known languages not previously acquired.

If this had been the case, St. Paul could not have said: "If I pray in an *unknown* tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful" (1 Cor. xiv. 14). The word "unknown" appears in italics, not being found in the Greek. Moreover, he says that tongues are for a sign not to them that believe, but to them that believe not—*ver. 22*. If it had been a question of foreign but ordinary languages, the matter of understanding them could not depend upon faith, but simply upon the fact whether the language was acquired by study or was one's native tongue.

Finally, the notion that these tongues refer to foreign languages not acquired by study is contradicted by St. Paul: "I thank my God that I speak with tongues more than ye all." By which he can not mean that he had mastered more languages than others, but that he possessed the gift of tongues in greater degree than other men. The following verse is evidence: "Yet in the Church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in an (unknown) tongue." According to the other



view, this ought to have been: “I wish to speak in one language, so that the Church may understand me, rather than in ten or twenty languages which the Church understands not.” But the apostle does not say this. He speaks not of *many* languages in opposition to *one*, but of five *sounds or words* against ten thousand *words*. From this it follows that St. Paul’s “I speak with *glottai* (languages or sounds) more than ye all,” must refer to the miracle of sounds.

For altho it is objected very naturally that on Pentecost the apostles spoke the Arabic, Hebrew, and Parthian tongues besides many others, yet the fact appealed to is not proven to be a fact. Surely we learn from [Acts ii.](#) that these Parthians, Elamites, etc., received the impression that they were addressed each in his own tongue; yet the narrative itself proves rather the contrary. Let the experiment be tried. Let fifteen men (the number of languages mentioned in [Acts ii.](#)) speak in fifteen different languages at once and together, and the result will be not that every one hears his own language, but that no one can hear anything. But the narrative of [Acts ii.](#) is fully explained in that the apostles uttered sounds intelligible to Parthians, Medes, Cretans, etc., because they understood them, receiving the impression that these sounds agreed with their own mother-tongues. As a Dutch child seeing a problem on the blackboard worked out by an English or German child naturally receives the impression that it was done by a Dutch child, simply because figures are signs not affected by the difference of language, so must the Elamite have received the impression that he heard the Elamitian, and the Egyptian that he was addressed in the Egyptian tongue, when on Pentecost they heard sounds uttered by a miracle, which, being independent from the difference of language, were intelligible to man as *man*.

We must not forget that speaking is nothing else than to produce impressions upon the soul of the hearer by means of vibrations in the air. But if the same impressions can be produced without the aid of air-vibrations, the effect upon the hearer must be the same. Try the experiment upon the eye. The sight of twinkling stars or dissolving figures excites the retina. The same effect can be produced by rubbing the eye with the finger when reclining on a couch in a dark room. And this applies here. The air vibrations are not the principal thing, but the emotion produced in the mind by the speaking. The Pamphylian, accustomed to receive emotions by hearing his mother-tongue, and receiving the same impression in *another way*, must think that he is addressed in the Pamphylian tongue.

Thirdly—According to St. Paul’s interesting information, the miracle of tongues consisted in this, that the vocal organs produced sounds not by a working of the mind, but by an operation of the Holy Spirit upon those organs.

St. Luke writes: “They began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” ([Acts ii. 4](#)); and St. Paul proves exhaustively that the person speaking with tongues spoke not with his understanding, *i.e.*, as a result of his own thinking, but in consequence

of an entirely different operation. That this is possible, we see, first, in delirious persons, who say things outside of their own personal thinking; second, in the insane, whose incoherent talk has no sense; third, in persons possessed, whose vocal organs are used by demons; fourth, in Balaam, whose vocal organs uttered words of blessing upon Israel against his will.

Hence it must be conceded that in man three things are possible:

First, that for a time he maybe deprived of the use of his vocal organs.

Second, that the use of these organs may be appropriated by a spirit who has overcome him.

Third, that the Holy Spirit, appropriating his vocal organs, can produce sounds from his lips which are “new,” and “other” than the language which ordinarily he speaks.

Fourthly—In the Greek these sounds invariably are designated by the word *ἄλλόδοξαι*, *i.e.*, tongues, hence language. In the Greek world, from which this word is taken, the word “glotta” always stands in strong opposition to the “logos,” reason.

A man’s thinking is the hidden, invisible, imperceptible process of his mind. Thought has a soul, but no body. But when the thought manifests itself and adopts a body, then there is a word. And the tongue being the movable organ of speech, it was said that the tongue gives a body to the thought. Hence the contrast between the logos, *i.e.*, that which a man thinks with the mind, and the glotta, *i.e.*, that which he utters with the vocal organs.

Ordinarily the glotta comes only through and after the logos. But in the miracle of tongues we discover the extraordinary phenomenon that while the logos remained inactive, the glotta uttered sounds. And since it was a phenomenon of *sounds* which proceeded not from the thinking mind, but from the tongue, the Holy Scripture calls it very appropriately a gift of the glottai, *i.e.*, a gift of tongue or sound-phenomena.

Lastly—In answer to the question, How must this be understood? we offer the following representation: Speech in man is the result of his thinking; and this thinking in a sinless state is an in-shining of the Holy Spirit. Speech in a sinless state is therefore the result of inspiration, in-breathing of the Holy Spirit.

Hence in a sinless state man’s language would have been the pure and perfect product of an operation of the Holy Spirit. He is the Creator of human language; and without the injury and debasing influence of sin the connection between the Holy Ghost and our speech would have been complete. But sin has broken the connection. Human language is damaged: damaged by the weakening of the organs of speech; by the separation of tribes and nations; by the passions of the soul; by the darkening of the understanding; and principally by the lie which has entered in. Hence that infinite distance between this pure and genuine human language which, as the direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the human mind, should have manifested itself, and the empirically existing languages that now separate the nations—a difference like unto that between the glorious Adam and the deformed Hottentot.

But the difference is not intended to remain. Sin will disappear. What sin destroyed will be restored. In the day of the Lord, at the wedding-feast of the Lamb, all the redeemed will understand one another. In what way? By the restoration of the pure and original language upon the lips of the redeemed, which is born from the operation of the Holy Spirit upon the human mind. And of that great, still-tarrying event the Pentecost miracle is the germ and the beginning; hence it bore its distinctive marks. In the midst of the Babeldom of the nations, on the day of Pentecost, the one pure and mighty human language was revealed which one day all will speak, and all the brethren and sisters from all nations and tongues will understand.

And this was wrought by the Holy Spirit. They spake as the Holy Spirit gave them utterance. They spoke a heavenly language to praise God—not of angels, but a language above the influence of sin.

Hence the understanding of this language was also a work of the Holy Spirit. At Jerusalem, only they understood it who were specially wrought upon by the Holy Spirit. The others understood it not. And at Corinth it was not comprehended by the masses, but by him alone to whom it was given of the Holy Ghost.

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**Eighth Chapter.**

**THE APOSTOLATE.**

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