

The word unknown which appears in the KJV does not occur in the Greek text, nor in any of the better translations. The New Testament knows nothing of an unknown tongue. Thus the kinds of tongues refer to a special gift of languages divinely bestowed upon some individuals to facilitate the preaching and teaching of the gospel where it was linguistically necessary.

J. Oswald Sanders (pp. 124-126) writes:

It is important to discover whether the "other tongues" of Pentecost and the "unknown tongues" at Corinth are identical. Incidentally the word "unknown" does not occur in the Greek. . . .

While there may be some correspondences, there are strong contrasts between the tongue-speaking at Pentecost and that at Corinth. . . .

Since there is such a marked difference between these two manifestations of the gift of tongues, it would not be sound exegesis to build a system of doctrine on the identity of the two occurrences.

If the tongues of 1 Corinthians 14 are not identical with those of Acts 2, what were they? The "other tongues" of Pentecost were other than their native tongues. They spoke in languages they had not acquired, yet they were real languages which were understood by strangers from other lands who knew them. It was not jargon, but intelligible language. Without dogmatism, it would seem that the tongues of 1 Cor. 14 were ecstatic, vocal utterances, fervent and rapturous religious expressions, not necessarily intelligible to speaker or hearer except through the gift of interpretation. This interpretation of the relevant passages appears to be in harmony with the whole teaching of the chapter.

Ryrie (p. 88) states:

Tongues are the God given ability to speak in another language. In the recorded instances in the book of Acts the languages of tongues seemed clearly to be foreign languages. There is no doubt that this was true at Pentecost, for the people heard in their native tongues; and it seemed to be the same kind of foreign languages that were spoken in the house of Cornelius (for Peter says that this was the same thing that occurred at Pentecost, Acts 10:46; 11:15).

The addition of the word "unknown" in I Corinthians 14 has led many to suppose that the tongues displayed in the church at Corinth were an unknown, heavenly language. If the word is omitted, then one would normally think of the tongues in Corinthians as the same as those in Acts; i.e., foreign languages. This is the natural conclusion. Against this view stand I Corinthians 14:2 and 14, which seem to indicate that the Corinthian tongues were an unknown language. In any case, the gift of tongues was being abused by the Corinthians, and Paul was