*they listen to me: even this sign* will be  
for them ineffectual.

**22.**] **So then,** viz.  
according to the words of the foregoing  
prophetic passage.

**the tongues**, in  
the *then* acceptation of the term. He is  
not interpreting the prophecy, nor alluding  
to the tongues *there* spoken of, but returns  
back to the subject in hand—*the tongues*  
about which his argument was concerned:

**are for a sign:** but there is no  
emphasis on the words,—the meaning being  
much the same as if “*for a sign*” were  
omitted, and it stood “*so then the tongues  
are not for,” &c.* Not seeing this, Commentators   
have differed widely about the  
meaning of the word **sign**. But all dwelling  
on this word would introduce an element  
foreign to the argument, which is, *that  
tongues are* (sign) *for the unbelieving,  
not for the believing.*

**not to them  
that believe, but to unbelievers,** i.e. ‘men  
who do not believe;’ not, as Neander,  
and others, ‘men who *will* not believe ;’  
the word “*unbelievers*” must be kept to  
the same sense through this whole passage,  
and plainly by ver. 23, it is *not one who*  
will *not believe*, but *an unbeliever*, *open to  
conviction.* The mistake has been occasioned   
by regarding *those to whom the  
prophecy was directed*, and interpreting  
Paul by Isaiah, instead of by himself.

Prophecy, i.e, *inspired and intelligent  
exposition of the word and doctrine,* waseminently *for* believers, but, as below,  
would be also profitable *to* unbelievers,  
furnishing a token that God was truly  
among his assembled servants.

**23–25.**] *Instances given of the opera-  
tion of both on the ungifted or the un-  
believer.*

**23.**] **therefore** following up  
the axiom just laid down, by supposing a  
case =**if then....** —The first case put  
answers to the former half of ver. 22: the  
second, to the latter.—The supposition is  
this: that all the (Corinthian) church is  
assembled, and all its members speak with  
tongues (not in a *tumultuary* manner—  
that is not part of the present hypothesis,  
for if it were, it must apply equally to  
ver. 24, which it clearly cannot: but that  
all have the gift, and are *in turn* exercising  
it):—then **private persons**, ‘*plain* believers,’   
persons unacquainted with the gift  
and its exercise, come in. It is obvious  
that the hypothesis of *all* being assembled,  
and *all* having the gift, must not be pressed.  
to infer that no such *private person* could  
be found: no one hypothesizes thus rigidly.  
If any will have it so, then, as Meyer,  
we may suppose the *private persons* to  
come *from another congregation:* but the  
whole difficulty seems to me mere trifling.  
The *private person* plainly cannot be an  
*unbeliever,* for *his* case is separately mentioned.   
Such **plain men**, or perhaps a  
company of unbelievers, have come in:—  
they have no understanding of what is  
going on: the ‘*tongues*’ sound to them an  
unmeaning jargon; and they come to the  
conclusion, ‘These men are mad;’ just as  
men *did infer*, on the day of Pentecost,  
that the speakers were *drunken*.

**24.**] **But if all** (see above) **prophesy** (i.e.  
intelligibly lay forth, in the power of the  
Spirit, the Christian word and doctrine),  
**and there enter any** (singular now, setting  
forth that this would be the effect *in any  
case:* plural *before*, to shew that however  
many there might be, *not one could appreciate   
the gift*) **unbeliever or plain man** (the  
*unbeliever* is mentioned *first now,* because  
the great stress is on the power of prophecy