

# THE MOVE OF THE SPIRIT IN THE EXPRESSION, FUNCTION, AND INCREASE OF THE BODY IN ACTS

BY JOHN PESTER

In *The Normal Christian Church Life*, considered by many as a scriptural blueprint for the administrative arrangement of the church in both its universal and local aspects, Watchman Nee delineates, in the final section of the final chapter, his understanding of the church in the context of its identification in Ephesians as the Body of Christ (1:23; 4:12): “the church, which is His Body,’ includes the churches, the ministry, and the work. The churches are the Body expressed locally, the ministry is the Body in function, and the work is the Body seeking increase” (187). The Body that Nee associates with local expressions of the church, with organic function, and with work related to increase and spread is vividly portrayed in the book of Acts. The Body and the Spirit are linked in Ephesians 4:4, which speaks of one Body and one Spirit; the Spirit is the enlivening essence of the move of the Body that is revealed in the book of Acts. Throughout the book all the details and events related to the churches, the ministry, and the work reveal a coinhering move of the Body with the consummated Spirit for the organic enlargement and corporate propagation of the resurrected Christ.<sup>1</sup>

## The Organic Body and the Consummated Spirit in Acts

The Body revealed in Acts is an organic Body, the Body of Christ enlivened with the divine life of the Triune God in Christ; it is not merely a doctrinal metaphor. It is the organic enlargement of the resurrected Christ. The believers, who received the ministry of the propagating witnesses in Acts, were added to the church daily (2:41, 47), but this addition was an addition to the Lord Himself, not to membership rolls of organizational, religious entities: “Believers were all the more being added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women” (5:14), and “a considerable number was added to the Lord” (11:24). Saul realized the organic reality of the Body during his conversion experience when the Lord revealed Himself as a corporate “Me.” When the Lord questioned Saul about his persecuting, He asked, “Why are you persecuting Me?” Saul, in response, asked, “Who are You, Lord?” (9:4-5). Then the Lord identified Himself as being one with the believers who had been added to Him and who were being persecuted by Saul, saying, “I am Jesus, whom you persecute” (v. 5). The persecution of the believers was the persecution of Jesus because they were organically joined to Him through the impartation of the divine life in Christ through the Spirit: “He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor. 6:17). The vision of the organic, corporate Christ that Saul received became the content of his ministry, a ministry that bore witness to the things he had seen and heard at the moment of his conversion and throughout his subsequent ministry (Acts 22:15).<sup>2</sup>

The Body revealed in Acts was created on the cross through the reconciling death of Christ, and it was regenerated and enlivened through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (Eph. 2:16; 1 Pet. 1:3). The Body is the fulfillment of the economic process of Jesus Christ, which process includes incarnation, human living, death, resurrection,

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ascension, and His coming as the Spirit following His glorification. This process was initiated by the Word becoming flesh in incarnation, and it was consummated by the last Adam becoming the life-giving Spirit in resurrection (John 1:14; 1 Cor. 15:45). In this consummation the Spirit, who was not yet because Jesus had not yet been glorified, was made economically available to all those who believe into Christ (John 7:39; Acts 10:43; 11:17; 14:23; 19:2). The consummated Spirit's availability was realized by the Body through the Lord's essential infilling when He breathed Himself into the disciples on the evening of His resurrection (John 20:22), and the consummated Spirit's availability was realized further by the Body through the Spirit's economic outpouring on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:8; 2:4). All the elements, attainments, and obtainments of Christ have been compounded into the Spirit, including the divinity associated with His incarnation, the perfection of His human living, the effectiveness of His redemptive death on the cross, the divinization of His humanity in the power of His resurrection, and the authority given to Him in His ascension. In Christ's glorification the Spirit was consummated through the compounding of these experiential elements into the Holy Spirit.

**I**t is this consummated Spirit who moved coinherently with the Body in Acts, mirroring the coinherent reality that defines the essential being and economic operations of the Triune God. The Spirit of reality in the disciples made known to them that the Son was in the Father, that they were in the Son, and that the Son was in them. He was in them to be organically expressed as churches, He was in them to function in their ministry, and He was in them to seek increase through their work. Furthermore, they were in Him expressing the oneness of the Spirit in the churches, they were in Him manifesting the distinctiveness of the Spirit's gifts and ministries (1 Cor. 12:4-5), and they were in Him in the Spirit's directed move to enlarge the resurrected Christ through their witnessing. In the major events and seemingly minor matters referenced in the book of Acts, a coinherent existence and move of the Body and the Spirit is evident. It is a move for increase through function for expression.

### **The Body Seeking Increase through the Spirit's Function for Expression**

After speaking of the significance of the churches, the ministry, and the work in relation to the expression, function, and increase of the Body, Watchman Nee speaks of the interrelatedness of these aspects:

All three are different manifestations of the one Body, so they are all interdependent and interrelated. None can move, or even exist, by itself. In fact, their relationship is so intimate and vital that none can be right itself without being rightly adjusted to the others. The church cannot go on without receiving the help of the ministry and without giving help to the work; the work cannot exist without the sympathy of the ministry and the backing of the church; and the ministry can only function when there is the church and the work. (187)

The interrelatedness of these three aspects is variously depicted in the book of Acts as a coinhering move of the Body and the Spirit. In the Spirit's outpouring on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1—2), in the testimony of the apostles before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin (chs. 4—7), in the spread of the Body to Samaria and Ethiopia (ch. 8), in the conversion of Saul (ch. 9), in the coming of the Spirit to the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius (chs. 10—11), and in the Spirit's forbidding of the apostles to speak the word in Asia (ch. 16), there is a primary emphasis on the Body seeking increase through function for expression.

### **The Baptism of the Body in the Spirit**

In chapter 1 the Lord spoke of the baptism in the Holy Spirit,<sup>3</sup> saying, "John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days from now" (v. 5), and then He spoke about the application of the consummated Spirit through baptism

upon an organic, functioning Body on the day of Pentecost, saying, “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit<sup>4</sup> comes upon you, and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (v. 8). In contrast to common considerations concerning the events on the day of Pentecost, which often focus on an individual experience of speaking in tongues as a proof of salvation, the coming of the Spirit with signs and wonders was to initiate an economically coinherent move of the Body and the Spirit. The baptism in the Spirit was an outward filling of the Body for the purpose of empowering the Body to witness corporately, both to those present in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost and to those who would be reached and gained in the uttermost part of the earth.

When tongues as of fire were distributed and sat on the members of the Body (2:3), the Body was “filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, even as the Spirit gave to them to speak forth” (v. 4). This speaking was in understandable words, because the speaking was not just for the purpose of engendering awe and excitement but for the purpose of witnessing concerning the magnificent works of God in Christ (v. 11). The speakings were in the dialects and languages of Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Cretans and Arabians, and of those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, and Rome (vv. 9-11). The disciples’ speaking with understandable words was a fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy in Joel 2:28-29, his foretelling of God’s actions in relation to prophesying, the telling forth of God’s action, for the sake of increase. Peter quotes Joel in Acts 2:17-18: “It shall be in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream things in dreams; and indeed upon My slaves, both men and women, I will pour out of My Spirit in those days, and they shall prophesy.” The Spirit who was poured out on the day of Pentecost was not for validating the experience of salvation with a miraculous sign but for witnessing in order to increase and enlarge the Body of Christ—a witnessing that was accomplished in and through the consummated Spirit. When Peter stood with the eleven, representing the Body (v. 14), he alluded to all the elements of Christ’s economical process that were consummated and compounded into the Spirit. Peter spoke of Christ’s incarnation, calling Him “Jesus the Nazarene, a man” (v. 22); he spoke of Christ’s human living, a human living approved “by works of power and wonders and signs, which God did through Him” (v. 22); he spoke of Christ dying by being “nailed to a cross and killed” (v. 23); he spoke of Christ’s resurrection by being “raised up” by God from the “pangs of death” (v. 24); and he spoke of Christ’s ascension by being “exalted to the right hand of God” (v. 33). In His ascension all the experiences of Christ in His economy were consummately compounded into the Spirit, who was then poured out on the Body to bring the Body into a coinherent participation in Christ’s accomplishments: “Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God and having received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father, He has poured out this which you both see and hear” (v. 33). The Spirit who was poured out in ascension on the Body had to be in a state of consummation because all the elements of Christ’s economical process had to be applied to fallen humanity in order for there to be union and fellowship between God and redeemed humanity.

The consummation of the Spirit in Christ’s exaltation depended on the preparation of a sinless body through Christ’s incarnation, His sinless human living, His fulfillment of God’s righteous requirement for the sins of the world through death, and His sin-and-death-overcoming resurrection. Without these elements being consummated and compounded into the Spirit and then applied essentially and economically to sinful but believing humanity, there could be no reconciliation between God and sinful humanity, and there could be no cooperation between God and redeemed humanity to further God’s desire for increase. The consummated Spirit was poured out upon the Body so that the Body could participate coinherently in Christ’s economical process in order to increase and enlarge the expression of Christ through the church in Jerusalem initially and through the churches in other localities subsequently. In the ministry of the believers in Acts, this

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Body was a corporate God-man. In their human living, they were witnesses in deed and word of the balanced human living of Christ. They lived in the reality of His death and resurrection, and they functioned from an ascended position, being above the constraints and power of the world, especially the religious world. As a consequence, those who received their report believed and were added to Christ (vv. 41, 47; cf. 5:14; 11:24).

### *The Testimony of the Body in the Spirit for the Increase of the Body of Christ*

Those who were saved were added to the Body of Christ through the faithful functioning and testimony of the members of the Body in the person of Jesus and in the power of the Spirit who was given to them. In chapter 4 the apostles “were teaching the people and announcing in Jesus the resurrection from the dead” (v. 2). They were not speaking merely about the truth of Jesus’ resurrection; they were announcing the resurrection of Jesus in their coinherent move with Him as the resurrected God-man. The resurrected Christ, through His being in them, was announcing His resurrection through them. This faithful functioning of the members of His Body raised the ire of those who crucified Him, including the rulers, elders, and scribes who “were gathered together in Jerusalem, as well as Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander and as many as were of high-priestly descent” (vv. 5-6). In response to their inquiries as to the name in which the apostles were working, Peter was “filled with the Holy Spirit” (v. 8), and he spoke an exposing word in verses 9 through 11, concerning the Jewish leaders’ failure as builders and concerning Christ’s becoming the head of the corner, a word that all those present recognized as being beyond the capacity of the uneducated men from Galilee (v. 13). In *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* R. C. H. Lenski notes, “It is the Holy Spirit who puts this telling defense into Peter’s mouth” (161). The words of Peter were the words of the Holy Spirit; it is impossible to separate them, because Peter and the Spirit were joined as one, and at this point in his experience Peter was living and moving practically in his spirit, which was mingled with the divine Spirit.<sup>5</sup>

When Peter later reported to his own people all that the chief priests and elders had said to them, the response in the Body was to pray to be all the more empowered to speak: “Lord, look upon their threatenings and grant Your slaves to speak Your word with all boldness, while stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may take place through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus” (vv. 29-30). This was a prayer for a continuing move of the Spirit to manifest the Lord through His words and actions in the Body. In response to the believers’ prayer, the Lord acted immediately, confirming that their prayer was one with Him: “The place in which they were gathered was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness” (v. 31). Furthermore, the healing hand of the Lord was manifested coinherently through the apostles to such an extent that the sick were carried out into the streets where the apostles were known to walk, and multitudes from surrounding cities came to be healed (5:15-16).

The impact of the apostles’ speaking and healing in the name of Jesus caused the Sadducees to lay their hands on them and put them into public custody (vv. 17-18). This, however, was not enough to keep an angel of the Lord from operating to free them so that they could “go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life” (v. 20). When it was learned that the apostles were again seeking increase by teaching the people (v. 25), they were again detained and brought before the Sanhedrin. In their testimony before the Sanhedrin, they affirmed their commission to speak concerning the crucified and resurrected Christ, acknowledging that they were “witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him” (v. 32). Both the Body in the Spirit and the Spirit in the Body were witnessing for the sake of increase. The Body was clearly witnessing, but the Spirit who was witnessing as well was the Spirit who had been given and who was moving experientially in those who obeyed Him. It is significant, therefore, that the apostles prefaced their comments with

the statement that it is “necessary to obey God rather than men” (v. 29), indicating that the Spirit who was witnessing was the Spirit in them, whose witnessing was made possible through their obedience. In regard to what Peter spoke in verse 32, R. C. H. Lenski states, “When Peter adduces the Holy Spirit as another witness in the relative clause, ‘whom God gave to those obeying him,’ he intends to state that the testimony of the Spirit is mediate, he using the believers as his media” (228).

The testimony of Stephen in chapter 7 before the Sanhedrin displays the same coinherent speaking of the Spirit through a member of the Body. This long narrative of fifty-two verses, covering the Old Testament experience of God’s people, culminates in the matter of building a dwelling place for God (vv. 46-47), which is a type of a dwelling place made not by hands (v. 48), the Body of Christ. The Body is alluded to when Stephen quotes Isaiah 66:1-2, which speaks of a human house, in Acts 7:49-50: “Heaven is My throne, and the earth is a footstool for My feet. What kind of house will you build for Me, says the Lord, or what is the place of My rest? Has not My hand made all these things?” Witness Lee says, “This quotation from Isa. 66:1-2 indicates that the Lord was seeking a spiritual habitation in man’s spirit. This is proved by the unquoted part of Isa. 66:2 that says, ‘But to this kind of man will I look, to him who is poor and of a contrite spirit’” (Recovery Version, Acts 7:49, note 1). The response to Stephen’s testimony of the Body and in the Body was that those who disputed with him and slandered him through false witnesses were “not able to withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke” (6:10). In his testimony of the Body, Stephen was “full of the Holy Spirit” (v. 55). In his speaking, the Spirit was speaking because he was full of the Holy Spirit.

### *The Confirmation of the Body’s Increase through the Spirit and the Body*

The speaking and actions of the Spirit through the Body confirmed the work of the Body in its seeking of increase in numerous accounts in Acts. The Spirit’s confirmation of the work of the Body was evident in the spread of the word of God to Samaria (8:14-17). There is no indication in chapter 8 of how the word of God came to Samaria. Acts simply records that “the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God” and, subsequently, “sent to them Peter and John” (vv. 14-15). The word of God did not initially come through the apostles but through unnamed and hidden members of the Body; however, when the Body heard of this move, the Body responded to this economic development by sending the apostles as representatives of the Body to go, pray, and lay their hands on the Samaritan believers. These actions by the Body were then confirmed by the Spirit when the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit (v. 17).

The Spirit’s confirmation of the work of the Body was evident in the spread of the word of God to Africa through Philip’s preaching to the Ethiopian eunuch (vv. 26-39). In this act a member of the Body was directed by an angel of the Lord to rise up and go south on the road that went down from Jerusalem to Gaza (v. 26). As he neared the chariot of the eunuch, the Spirit within him revealed the specific person to whom he should speak: “Approach and join this chariot” (v. 29). Following Philip’s unveiling of the Christ-centered content of Isaiah and the eunuch’s response to this hearing of faith by believing and being baptized, “the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away; and the eunuch did not see him anymore, for he went on his way rejoicing” (v. 39). Philip’s preaching could be viewed as an individualistic act. However, it was, given the Lord’s initiation, the Spirit’s direction to speak to a person of influence who was returning to his home in Africa, and the Spirit’s catching away of Philip to preserve the eunuch’s focus on the person of Christ rather than on the person who presented Christ to him, actually the work of the Body, which was enlarged and increased in Africa through this preaching.

The Spirit’s confirmation of the work of the Body was also evident in the spread of the word of God to the Gentiles following Saul’s conversion and subsequent ministry as foretold by the Lord (9:1-19). Saul’s conversion experience involved his direct interaction

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with the Lord on the road to Damascus and his direct interaction with a simple but responsive member of the Body, Ananias. The speaking of the Lord to Saul unveiled the reality of the Body of Christ to Saul, showing him that Christ had been enlarged to be a corporate "Me." The Lord then emphasized this enlargement practically by sending him to Ananias to be told what he must do; after the Lord's direct speaking on the road to Damascus about the Body, His further speaking came indirectly through the Body. Even Paul's commission to be a chosen vessel in order to bear the Lord's name before both the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel (v. 15) is associated in this account with the Body, because the content of the commission, as conveyed in 9:15, was spoken first to Ananias, not Saul. In Paul's account of his conversion experience in 26:12-18, he spoke in greater detail concerning his commission, but in chapter 9 Luke records only the details that were revealed to the Body, reinforcing the crucial focus of the vision that Saul had received—the Body of Christ. The vision and the reality of the Body were confirmed by the Spirit filling Saul through Ananias's laying on of his hands, indicating their mutual identification as members of the Body: "Laying his hands on him, he said, Saul, brother, the Lord has sent me—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road on which you were coming—so that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit" (v. 17). Following Paul's identification with the Body, he was protected by the Body: "His disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall, lowering him in a basket" (v. 25). And he was led and introduced into the larger fellowship of the Body by a member of the Body: "Barnabas took hold of him and led him to the apostles, and he related to them how Saul had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus" (v. 27). All the actions of the Body confirmed the enlargement and increase of Christ in Paul, and the issue was manifested in the comforting expression of the Holy Spirit in the churches: "So then the church throughout the whole of Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace, being built up; and going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it was multiplied" (v. 31).

The Spirit's confirmation of the work of the Body was also evident in the spread of the word of God to the Gentiles through Peter's witnessing to the house of Cornelius (chs. 10—11). In all the events related to the enlargement and increase of the Body of Christ through the inclusion of the Gentiles, the confirming word and operation of the Spirit and the cooperating move and confirming testimony of the Body to the Body was evident. The initiation of the Spirit's move to join the Jews and Gentiles into one Body began with a spiritual speaking to Cornelius, the representative of the Gentiles, not to Peter, the representative of the Jews (10:1-8), indicating that from the beginning of Christ's economical process, the gospel of peace was intended for everyone who believes in the Lord (vv. 36, 43), whether Jew or Gentile and without preference for one group over another.<sup>6</sup> Following the appearing of an angel of God to Cornelius, Peter received a related spiritual vision (vv. 9-16) that was confirmed by the Spirit: "While Peter was pondering over the vision, the Spirit said to him, Behold, there are three men seeking you" (v. 19). Without questioning, Peter responded and went with the men to the house of Cornelius and spoke to them of "Jesus, the One from Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power" (v. 38). During Peter's spiritual speaking concerning the One anointed by the Spirit, "the Holy Spirit fell upon all those hearing the word" (v. 44). Even though those of the circumcision "were amazed, because on the Gentiles also the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out," they did not forbid them from being baptized, because they had received the Holy Spirit (vv. 45, 47). While those who were with Peter accepted this unfolding economical development, the Jewish believers in Jerusalem were not so readily convinced, and thus, Peter recounted his testimony and experience to them, witnessing to the Body of the inclusion of the Gentiles into the Body. He referred to both the Spirit's direct word to him to go—"doubting nothing" (11:12)—and the Spirit's direct action: "As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as also on us in the beginning" (v. 15). Through the Spirit's confirmation of the apostles' work, the increase and enlargement of the Body of Christ became an ongoing economic development as the

gospel of peace was announced by the Spirit through the Body to the Gentiles (Eph. 2:17), applying Christ's work of peace on the cross (vv. 13-16).

### *The Direction of the Body through the Spirit*

The spread of the gospel of peace, however, was not without the Spirit's limitation in His direction. When the apostles "passed through the region of Phrygia and Galatia," they were "forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia" (Acts 16:6). Furthermore, when they came to Mysia, "they tried to go into Bithynia, yet the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them" (v. 7). The Spirit testifies of the things concerning Christ (John 15:26), and the Spirit's limitation of the members of the Body and forbidding in Acts were at the direction of the ascended Lord. The economic unfolding of the Lord's work through the apostles to increase the Body of Christ was according to the Lord's timing, arrangement, and measure. Although no reason is given for the Spirit's forbidding, it is clear that the apostles heeded the Spirit's direction.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the early spread of the gospel was toward the west rather than the east. In bypassing Bithynia, the gospel came to Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, and Ephesus (Acts 16:12; 17:1; 18:1, 19). In each of these localities, local churches were established, and the believers in these localities, who became precious to Paul, would subsequently receive letters from Paul, which ultimately would comprise six of his fourteen Epistles in the New Testament. In these cities the Spirit confirmed the coinherent move of Himself and the Body in the following ways: by freeing Paul and Silas from prison in Philippi, while adding the Philippian jailer and his family to the Lord (16:26, 32-34); by joining some Jews, a great multitude of devout Greeks, and chief women in Thessalonica to Paul and Silas in the Body (17:4); by introducing Paul to Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth, who would later become his fellow workers and vital members of the Body (18:2; Rom. 16:3); and by establishing the believers in Ephesus in a proper understanding of the faith, bringing them into a firm identification with the Body (Acts 19:1-6). The work of the Body to seek increase through the apostles as the members of the Body produced local expressions of the Body of Christ through the Spirit's directing and limiting operations. Beginning with the baptizing of the Jewish believers on the day of Pentecost and continuing with the receiving of the Spirit by the Samaritans, with the joining of the Gentile believers to the Body at the house of Cornelius, and with the gaining of others from Africa and cities in Europe, the end result was local expressions that manifested the Body of Christ.

### *The Body Manifesting the Spirit's Function for Increase*

In addition to the Spirit manifesting the Body through local expressions, these local churches, in turn, manifested, reciprocally, the Spirit's function for the sake of increase. This can be most clearly seen in the account of the deception of Ananias and Sapphira (ch. 5), in the account related to the selection of well-attested brothers for the practical service in the church in Jerusalem (ch. 6), in the account of the church in Antioch setting apart Barnabas and Saul for the work (ch. 13), in the account of the churches' fellowship with the apostles in Jerusalem (ch. 15), and in the account of the warnings given to Paul on his final journey to Jerusalem (chs. 20—21). The primary emphasis in these accounts is on the Body being manifested through its function for its increase.

**W**hile the Body was working to increase and enlarge itself, it was manifesting and expressing the spiritual essence of the Body in the local church in Jerusalem. This can be seen in the account of Ananias and Sapphira. This couple contrived to gain prestige by appearing to give all their property to the church, all the while secretly retaining some of it for their own benefit; their deceit was spiritually discerned and publicly exposed by the apostles, who in their censure expressed the sense of the Spirit: "Peter said, Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to deceive the Holy Spirit and to put aside for yourself some of the proceeds of the land?" (5:3). The attempt by Ananias and Sapphira to deceive the Body was in actuality an effort to deceive and test the Spirit.

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In speaking to Sapphira, Peter asked, "Why is it that it was agreed between you two to test the Spirit of the Lord?" (v. 9). Peter's discernment, without any evident prompting by the Spirit, manifested the Spirit's coinherent operation in the church in Jerusalem. In *The Acts of the Apostles*, G. Campbell Morgan says,

The discerning Spirit was at work, and the atmosphere was such that it was impossible for a man with a lie in his heart to come in, without the lie being known and detected...That little company of believing souls, a growing company all the time, but still comparatively a small company, was the Body of Christ, His instrument for the revealing of His will, and the carrying out of His will. It was dominated by the Spirit, and so was mastered by His love, walked in His light, and was energized by His life. There came into that assembly a man with a lie upon his lips; and in a moment one spokesman of the fellowship addressed him with a faithfulness that could only be the outcome of the Spirit's indwelling, inspiration, and interpretation. (151-152)

When Ananias heard Peter's word, "he fell down and expired; and great fear came upon all those who heard this" (v. 5). Furthermore, when reports of Sapphira's subsequent death spread, "great fear came upon the whole church and upon all those who heard these things" (v. 11); the fear that was initially only in the church extended to all those who heard these things, indicating that the expression of the Spirit's move in the Body was manifested not only to the members of the Body but also to some who did not dare "to join themselves to them." (v. 13). Even though these unbelievers did not join themselves to the Body, they nonetheless magnified the members of the Body: "The people magnified them" (v. 13). This indicates that there was a visible expression of the move of the Spirit in the Body in the church in Jerusalem. G. Campbell Morgan interestingly notes that the use of the word *church* in verse 11 is the "first occurrence of the word Church in the Acts of the Apostles" (153). This shows that the church was identified, revealed, expressed, and enlarged through a sobering and practical experience involving the Body's expression of the Spirit's intention and judgment. In response to the fear and reverence of the Lord instilled by the church's manifestation of the Spirit's exposure of a negative situation in the church in Jerusalem, "believers were all the more being added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women" (v. 14).

The number of the disciples in Jerusalem also multiplied greatly in response to the Spirit's maintenance of a positive situation in the church in Jerusalem related to the practical service (6:7). As the disciples in the church in Jerusalem were multiplying in number, including an increase of both Hellenist Jews and Hebrews, the practice of having all things in common seemingly opened a door for disunity: "A murmuring of the Hellenists against the Hebrews occurred, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily dispensing" (v. 1). G. Campbell Morgan, however, points out that this murmuring was positive rather than negative because it was based on an underlying sense that the unity of the Body was being affected by this disparity:

These people complained because they recognized the unity, the inter-relationship, the mutual responsibility, and felt that it was not being realized...Those Hellenists who imagined that the Hellenist widows were being neglected, felt the neglect was a violation of that great fellowship...and so the complaint was the manifestation of the underlying sense of unity. (170)

In order to maintain the oneness, the apostles arrived at a practical resolution by charging the disciples to "look for seven well-attested men from among you, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint over this need" (v. 3). Verse 5 then records the names of the seven brothers who were selected: the word of the apostles "pleased all the multitude; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip and Prochorus and Nicanor and Timon and Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch." The scriptural acknowledgment of the names of the seven men who were



“full of the Spirit” is a testimony that the Spirit’s manifestation of the Body was expressed through the functioning of specific members of the Body in the church in Jerusalem. The names of the seven suggest that there were Hellenist and Hebrew believers and even a non-Jewish proselyte among those chosen by the Body. The one expression of the Body of Christ in Jerusalem was maintained by the Hellenists who brought the disparity in the daily dispensing to the attention of the apostles, by the apostles who acknowledged the disparity and proposed a spiritual resolution, and by the Spirit who confirmed the choosing by filling the ones who were chosen. Such a seemingly small matter in the church in Jerusalem provided an opportunity to express the concern for and response of the Body to maintain the oneness of the Body.

In more consequential matters involving the church giving help to the work, the coinherent move of the Spirit and the Body can be seen in the setting apart of Barnabas and Saul for the work in Acts 13. As the brothers in the church in Antioch “were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, Set apart for Me now Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (v. 2). Upon receiving and acting upon this direction from the Spirit, the brothers fasted, prayed, laid their hands on Barnabas and Saul, and “sent them away” (v. 3). The Spirit initiated the setting apart of Barnabas and Saul, but the Body sent them after setting them apart. The sending of the church then became the sending of the Spirit: “They then, having been sent out by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia; and from there they sailed away to Cyprus” (v. 4). The fellowship of the brothers was an organic expression of the church in their ministry to the Lord, who was given the ground to direct the church through the Spirit for the furtherance of the work. In *The Spirit as Seen Objectively in the Book of Acts*, J. Taylor simply notes that the ministry to the Lord by the brothers in Antioch was “not a special meeting called for the purpose of separating these two brothers, or a fellowship meeting for them, but the assembly is functioning and the Spirit is calling attention to it. How pleased He is with it!” (95).

The fellowship of the Body in the Spirit is also displayed in Acts 15 in the efforts of the church in Antioch to resolve the dissension that arose when some from Judea came and insisted that the Gentile believers in the church in Antioch be circumcised (vv. 1-2). Sensing the need for fellowship with those at the center of the source of this matter, “the brothers directed Paul and Barnabas and certain others among them to go up to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem concerning this question” (v. 2). Paul and Barnabas were “sent forward by the church” in Antioch (v. 3), and they were “received by the church and the apostles and the elders” in Jerusalem (v. 4). Based on the testimony of Peter in verses 7 through 11, the confirming accounts by Barnabas and Paul of salvation coming to the Gentiles in verse 12, and James’s application of Scripture in verses 13 through 18, the determination was made to “not harass those from the Gentiles who are turning to God” (v. 19); following this, it “seemed good to the apostles and the elders with the whole church to choose men from among them to send to Antioch together with Paul and Barnabas” (v. 22). In the determination related to the practice of circumcision as it relates to the Body, the whole Body was involved—the apostles, the elders, and the whole church. Their determination also “seemed good to the Holy Spirit” (v. 28). Thus, the Spirit confirmed the decision and the expression of the Body in the Body’s response to an issue causing dissension. The determination, when it was conveyed to the church in Antioch, was received with joy (v. 31), and it further opened the door for Paul, Barnabas, and many others to teach and announce the word of the Lord as the gospel in Antioch (v. 35). In its response to a troubling matter and in its resolution of this matter, the church manifested practically the reality of the Body of Christ, and the issue of this expression was a further increase and enlargement of the Body of Christ.

In the account of Paul’s journey to Jerusalem in chapters 19 through 21, the churches manifested the warnings of the Holy Spirit in their practical expression of the Body. After spending time in Ephesus, “Paul purposed in his spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome”

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(19:21). This is the first mention of his burden to go to Jerusalem. Despite this burden, he did not act immediately; rather, he stayed in Asia for a time (v. 22) and traveled to Macedonia, Greece, and Troas. His burden to go to Jerusalem, however, did not abate with these intervening travels: "For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so that he might not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying so that if possible he might be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost" (20:16). On his way to Jerusalem, when Paul met with the elders of the church in Ephesus at Miletus, the Spirit's warning was manifested through the Body. It also reveals Paul's response, as a member of the Body, to the Spirit's warnings.


While meeting with the elders of the church in Ephesus, Paul testified of his spiritual sense related to what would be the outcome of his journey to Jerusalem: "Behold, I am going bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing what will meet me there" (v. 22). Paul was bound in the spirit, that is, in his "regenerated spirit, in which he served God...In his spirit, a spirit joined to the Lord the Spirit (1 Cor. 6:17), Paul sensed beforehand that something would happen to him in Jerusalem, and the Holy Spirit testified this to him" (Lee, Recovery Version, Acts 20:22, note 2). The testifying of the Spirit was testified, in turn, by the Body in city after city along his way: "The Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in city after city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me" (v. 23). The testifying of the Spirit in city after city was the testifying of the members of the Body in the local churches along Paul's way. Thus, *in city after city* is equal to *in church after church*. In his journey to Jerusalem, "Paul did not know what he would encounter in Jerusalem (v. 22), but he did know one thing: the Holy Spirit was solemnly testifying to him that bonds and afflictions awaited him. The Holy Spirit's testifying was only a prophecy, a foretelling, not a charge. Hence, he must not have taken it as a command but as a warning" (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 23, note 1).

The warning of the Spirit was reiterated by the Body. When the apostles came to Tyre, they sought out the disciples who "told Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem" (21:4). It is hard to reconcile the warnings of the Spirit and Body with Paul's seeming unwillingness to follow this leading. In commenting on verse 4 in the Recovery Version, Witness Lee writes, "In 20:23 the Holy Spirit made known to Paul that bonds and afflictions awaited him in Jerusalem...Now the Spirit took a further step to tell him, through some members of the Body of Christ, not to go to Jerusalem. Since Paul practiced the Body life, he should have taken this word and obeyed it as a word from the Head" (Note 1).

Witness Lee reiterates this point in a note related to Acts 21:11, which speaks of Agabus taking Paul's belt, binding his own feet and hands, and saying, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, In this way will the Jews in Jerusalem bind the man whose belt this is and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles." Note 1 on this verse in the Recovery Version says, "Again, the Holy Spirit told Paul beforehand, indirectly through a member of the Body of Christ, what would befall Paul in Jerusalem...This was again a warning in the nature of a prophecy, not a charge. It was again the Head speaking through His Body...Since Paul practiced the Body life, he should have listened to this speaking." There is a scriptural and experiential basis for understanding Paul's response. First, the Spirit testified that bonds and afflictions awaited him in Jerusalem, indicating that his journey would take him to Jerusalem, despite the pleas of the Body. This clearly puts the Spirit's words to him in the context of a warning, a foreshadowing of dangerous developments, rather than a prohibition. Knowing that Paul had such a warning (and not a prohibition that he intended to ignore) present in his mind and spirit, Paul's word to the Ephesian elders that he held his life of no account as if precious to himself is understandable and reasonable (20:24). Second, Agabus's prophecy contains an implicit acknowledgement that Paul would not be harmed by the Jews, but would, instead, be delivered into the hands of the Gentiles, indicating that the disposition of his circumstances would eventually be decided by the Roman government then in place in Jerusalem. Thus, the Spirit was indicating that, despite the danger, a way of deliverance had been prepared. This word

through Agabus could have been the basis for Paul's calling his Roman citizenship to the attention of the Roman centurion, saying, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?" (22:25). The centurion was prepared to scourge Paul at the behest of an angry mob that was "crying out and casting off their garments and throwing dust in the air" (v. 23), but he acted protectively of Paul upon hearing of his Roman citizenship. Third, Paul's response can be understood experientially. To members of the Body, the leading of the Body is precious, and no doubt the warnings of the believers in the churches were sincere, even affectionate. Most Christians do not have an experiential realization of the covering and protection that comes from being a measured member in the Body and, hence, cannot even receive such a word from the Body. Paul, however, knew both the Body and the Head of the Body, and without a clear charge from the Head to not go to Jerusalem, he had to stand or fall before his own Master (Rom. 14:4), and all indications in his spirit pointed toward a journey to Jerusalem. The members of the Body manifested a sense and warning from the Spirit, and Paul, also as a member of the Body under the Head, manifested a countervailing move of the Spirit. Although Paul ultimately chose to follow the latter leading in his spirit, the warning of the Body through Agabus was instrumental to his deliverance in Jerusalem and his subsequent imprisonment in Rome, where he wrote crucial letters that are now part of the New Testament, notably the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians, which speak of the Body of Christ. Through these Epistles, the Body spread and grew.

## Conclusion

In Acts the move of the Body in the Spirit is evident: the Body was expressed locally through the churches, the Body functioned through the ministry, and the Body sought increase through the work. In its expression, function, and seeking of increase, the Spirit moved and acted coinherently in oneness with the Body. The events on the day of Pentecost, the apostles' testimony before the Sanhedrin, the spread of the Body to Samaria and Ethiopia, the conversion of Saul, the coming of the Spirit to the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius, and the Spirit's forbidding of the apostles to speak the word in Asia show that there is in Acts a primary emphasis on the Body seeking increase through function for the sake of expression. In its expression, function, and seeking of increase, the Body moved and acted coinherently in oneness with the Spirit, manifesting the Spirit's functions in the Body through local expressions in the accounts of the deception of Ananias and Sapphira, the selection of well-attested brothers for the practical service, the setting apart of Barnabas and Saul for the work, the fellowship with the apostles in Jerusalem, and the warnings that were given to Paul. In these events there was a primary emphasis on the Body being manifested in its expression through function for increase. The Body is central to the book of Acts, and the consummated Spirit in whom the Body lives and moves is central to the realization of the reality of the Body of Christ. In our unfolding acts as believers, may the principles associated with the Body and the Spirit, as portrayed in the book of Acts, be our experience in an unhindered and ongoing way (28:31). 

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>In the outline for the book of Acts in the Recovery Version of the Bible, Witness Lee characterizes the subject of the book as "The Propagation of the Resurrected Christ in His Ascension, by the Spirit, through the Disciples, for the Producing of the Churches—the Kingdom of God." In this précis the expression of the Body is referenced in the phrase *for the producing of the churches*, the function of the Body is referenced in the phrase *through the disciples*, the increase of the Body is referenced in the phrase *the propagation of the resurrected Christ*, and the coinhering and consummated Spirit is referenced in the phrase *by the Spirit*.

<sup>2</sup>Among all the writers of the New Testament, only Paul speaks of the Body of Christ. In Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians, he speaks of the organic aspect of the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:23; 3:6; 4:16; 5:29-30; Col. 2:19) and also of the corporate aspect of the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 10:17; 12:12-13, 27; Eph. 2:16; Col. 3:15).

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<sup>3</sup>Luke begins in Acts 1 by first indicating that the Lord spoke “the things concerning the kingdom of God” (v. 3). Luke does this without directly relaying any specific words spoken by the Lord about the kingdom, but then he follows this general reference with the Lord’s words concerning the baptism in the Spirit. The general reference to the kingdom and the Lord’s direct words concerning the baptism in the Holy Spirit are connected; they are not separate topics. In the New Testament the kingdom is manifested through and as the church as the Body of Christ. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, which contains the first speaking in the New Testament concerning the Body of Christ, speaks of the kingdom of God as being righteousness, which manifests the holy standing of the church; as being peace, which manifests the oneness of the church; and as being joy, which manifests the expression of the church, in the Holy Spirit (14:17). The church as the Body of Christ is the kingdom; it is the enlarged expression of Christ that is coinherently in the Holy Spirit. This essential reality was confirmed on the day of Pentecost through the outward filling of the Spirit.

<sup>4</sup>The New Testament refers to the third of the Trinity, the Spirit, using many different designations, often in close proximity to one another. In Romans 8 alone there are references to the Spirit of life (v. 2), the Spirit (vv. 5, 13, 16, 26-27), the Spirit of Christ (v. 9), the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead (v. 11), and the Spirit of God (vv. 9, 14). In 1 Corinthians there are references to the Spirit (2:4, 10, 13), the Spirit of God (vv. 11, 14; 3:16; 7:40; 12:3), the Holy Spirit (6:19; 12:3), and the life-giving Spirit (15:45). In Philippians there are references to the Spirit of Jesus Christ (1:19) and the Spirit of God (3:3). And in Acts there are references to the Holy Spirit (1:2, 5, 8, 16; 2:4, 33, 38; 4:8, 25, 31; 5:3, 32; 7:51, 55; 8:15, 17), the Spirit (6:3), the Spirit of the Lord (5:9; 8:39), and the Spirit of Jesus (16:7). These are references not to different Spirits but to different aspects of the one and same Spirit (1 Cor. 12:9, 11, 13). The Spirit, the consummated Spirit, is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of Jesus, and the life-giving Spirit. And just as these various appellations of the Spirit cannot be separated from the economic operations associated with them, the Spirit’s appellations should not be considered as references to different Spirits.

<sup>5</sup>All believers are joined as one with the Lord, but this is not to suggest that all our living is practically in the one spirit. There is still a need for an exercise of our spirit unto godliness, and there is still a need to be strengthened with power through the Spirit into our inner man, our regenerated human spirit, so that Christ can make His home in our heart. When Christ is making His home in our heart, our purified conscience is attuned to His mind, our emotion is calibrated to His inner feelings, and our will is accepting of His leading. Peter was filled with the Spirit, and at that point his utterance was the utterance of the Spirit in its coinherent manifestation.

<sup>6</sup>In the organic Body of Christ, there is no intrinsic preferential priority of Jew over Gentile, because in the Body of Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile; there is only Christ (Col. 3:11). In the producing of the Body of Christ in time, however, there was a sequential enactment of the baptism of the Body by the Spirit—first with the Jews on the day of Pentecost and then with the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius. Nonetheless, the appearing of an angel of God to Cornelius prior to the Lord’s speaking to Peter is most telling, showing that the Spirit first initiated some practical details with the chosen Gentiles and then confirmed them to the Jewish believers. At a minimum this indicates that all the actions of God for the producing of the Body originate in God, in whom there is no limitation of time.

<sup>7</sup>Sometimes to not work is to cooperate with the real work of the Lord.

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