

The Body

Acts 2.

Reading with G. Davison

Our subject for this series of readings is THE BODY, one of the aspects in which the Assembly is viewed as the result of the work of Christ upon the cross, and His present session at the right hand of God in glory. We know that the Spirit has come down from Christ in glory to form the Body in this world, hence we are beginning our readings in this chapter. In Acts 1, we have the record of Christ ascending to heaven, and in Acts 2 the descent of the Spirit to form a company in relation to Christ in glory. In this chapter, we have suggestions of the Kingdom, then the Assembly and the House, as well as the Body, which is the subject we are dealing with at the moment. All that the Spirit is forming here stands in relation and attachment to Christ in glory. In the beginning of the chapter we see the work of the Spirit in bringing it all into being and in the verses we read at the end we see how, from our side, we enter into it. So we have the descent of the Spirit from God's side and the reception of the gospel from our side, resulting in our being brought into the Body where we find ourselves today.

A distinctive point is reached in the time ways of God in the record; it was on the day of Pentecost that this event took place.

We can trace all the feasts of Lev. 23 in the first and second chapters of this book. In Acts 1: 3 we have mentioned His "passion", or His suffering, which is the answer to the feast of the Passover. The feast of Unleavened Bread is taking shape in the disciples in their separation from the nation and in the exclusion of Judas from the company. This is followed by the answer to the Feast of Firstfruits, in Christ risen and ascending to heaven as recorded in v. 9. In Acts 2 we have the answer to the Feast of Pentecost in the formation of the New Meat Offering, of which we all form part. In Peter standing up with the eleven to preach the gospel, we have a suggestion of the Feast of Trumpets to arouse the nation; and in those who were aroused and turned to repentance we have a suggestion of the feast of Tabernacles in their rejoicing in the knowledge of the forgiveness of their sins. Rejoicing forms a great part of the Feast of Tabernacles and here we see a foretaste of it in those of the nation who now stood in acceptance with God. We see then how, in the time ways of God, the Body has been formed here in this world in association with Christ in glory.

Will you tell us why this Body was formed?

There are so many reasons as to why it was formed that one statement would not fully cover them. We hope as the readings proceed to see the many reasons for its formation. It is its spiritual formation that we have in view tonight.

The first feature as seen in this first verse is **unity** — "one accord in one place". This is one of the outstanding features of the Body at all times — unity.

I suppose this unity is brought about because they all have their thoughts centred on Christ? This was the preparation for the Spirit to form this mystical Body.

No doubt, and they form the nucleus of the Body into which now we have all been brought by the Spirit.

Have you in mind that the full thought of the Body will not be seen till the Gentiles are brought in?

That is so in view of the truth of the mystery connected with it, but it is brought into being here by the

Spirit.

Are these people joined to the Lord by one Spirit as we read in 1 Cor. 6: 17? This would be union as well as unity.

Yes! There is a distinction between **unity** and **union**. Unity is one, but union involves two, and both are true. The Body is one living entity, and as a living entity is united to Christ in glory.

In this chapter we have the formation of the Body before the teaching regarding it. If we attempt to trace the teaching of the Body in this chapter we shall not find it, but the formation of it is here.

No doubt we have everything which the Spirit formed in this world coming into being in this chapter, as we have already pointed out; but their confession of Christ as Lord brought them into the Kingdom, as we are taught in Romans 10: 13. Then in this chapter in v. 42, Fellowship, I judge, is connected with the House, as also the prayers; while the breaking of bread is more connected with the Body, as 1 Cor. 10: 17 teaches. The apostles' doctrine would be connected with the Assembly, "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Eph. 2: 20).

The formation of these things is one matter, the teaching of them is quite another.

I was interested in the remark that we have in this chapter a new beginning in the ways of God. I have noticed that the word for "firstfruits" in Lev. 23: 10, is the same word as "beginning" in Gen. 1: 1. Genesis would give us the beginning in creation but this time we have a new beginning in redemption. That would be why we read in John 7: 39, that the Spirit was not yet, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Verse 2 would assure us that it is something new which is coming in, not something emerging from something else.

You are referring to the word "suddenly". It was not something arising out of Judaism, nor something into which they grew, but suddenly, a completely new thing came into being in the power of the Spirit of God.

Would it be the Spirit's working which brought them together in the first place?

Surely, and they were already unified in this fact — Christ was before every one of their hearts.

This sound comes from heaven because Christ was there. It did not come from the temple but from heaven, stamping the mark of what is heavenly on this company.

That is very important. Indeed it is one of the marks of the Acts — "from heaven". In Acts 9, we read of "a light from heaven"; in Acts 10 we read of a vessel let down from heaven to earth, all because of that Man glorified in heaven.

What is the difference between the Body and the Assembly?

I think the Assembly is a parent thought, for we read of "the church, which is His body" (Eph. 1: 22, 23). We are using the better term "Assembly" as being the real meaning of the word "church". Then we also read of the "church" being the house in 1 Tim. 3: 15. We believe the church is His Bride as seen in Rev. 21. The Assembly would be the widest thought of the Christian company, as it embraces all three.

You may remember the Lord speaking of the Assembly first of all in Matt. 16, where it is obviously **living**, for it is linked with "the Son of the living God". In this chapter we have two other marks coming to light, it is **spiritual**, and it is **heavenly**. Peter groups these three things together in his first epistle.

We read here that the sound heard was like "a rushing mighty wind", and the New Trans. says it was "a

violent impetuous blowing". That word "blowing" suggests "it kept on blowing", and this would teach us that the Spirit was beginning something here which was to continue. Violent would suggest irresistible power. Again, the word "blowing" means a breathing, though it is not the word translated "breathed" in John 20: 22. There it was inbreathing **life**; here it is inbreathing **power**.

Would this be the same character in which the Lord spoke of the Spirit in John 3? Surely!

As wind I suppose the Spirit was not seen, but in the next verse we have something which was seen, the tongues of fire; not that the Spirit was seen but an effect was seen. I do not doubt the first character shows that the saints are held together by a power unseen to the natural eyes. No wonder the people of the world cannot understand how we are held together.

Is not the thought here that God initiates all this?

Very good! for whatever comes into display in the world to come will be seen as proceeding from God initially. This is all the result of redemption having been completed and Christ taking His place at the right hand of God. The body could not have been formed otherwise. Christ must be there in glorified Manhood first.

We usually contrast the Spirit here seen as fire with the Spirit seen as a dove when it descended upon our Lord. There it signified **purity**; here it signifies **judgment**, not of course penal judgment, but in a judicial way. There was that in them which must come under judgment in order that what was of God might take precedence in their service for God. The Spirit taking a subjective place in them, must maintain what was holy in view of their being used to establish the truth of the Assembly in this world.

This would be the answer to the New Meat Offering being baken with leaven in it, yet nullified by the fire.

One has noticed in that connection that a Sin Offering was presented with the New Meat Offering. Only Burnt and Meat Offerings were offered with the Wave Sheaf, for it speaks of Christ, and in Christ raised from among the dead there cannot be any more a question of sin. With the New Meat Offering this is not so, hence the mention of leaven and the baking, for the saints are in view there.

What is the thought of filling the house?

The word translated here "filled" is "pleroo", and really means "plenitude". We thought it suggested plenitude in a collective way, and in v. 4 in an individual way. I do not think it means the Spirit takes an objective place in the Christian company. How can the Spirit be objective when He dwells in the hearts of the saints? Some persist in giving the Spirit an objective place today and so actually pray to Him, but I am not aware of any Scripture which refers to the Spirit in an objective way. Men are thus arrogating to the Spirit a place which the Spirit Himself does not take according to the record of Scripture. I remember being at some readings a few years ago on the coming of the Spirit as recorded in John 14. A brother pointed out that there we have two verbs used, one in the present tense and one in the future. "He **dwelleth** with you, and **shall** be in you". He suggested that the Spirit dwelling with them — present tense — was at that moment with them in the Lord, that is, objectively, but the day was coming when the Spirit would dwell in them subjectively. I thought over this for long and have come to the conclusion that it is right. All may not agree with this, I know it is not the general interpretation of the verse, but I never could understand how the Spirit could be objective to them. I only mention this to cause exercise about the tenses, as I have wondered, in view of recent developments, if this brother had not a prophetic word from the Lord.

What about the statement in v. 3, "it sat upon each of them"?

An old brother once explained this to me regarding the House of Lords. He said, "When the Lord Chancellor sits upon the woolsack, he takes possession of the House. So the Spirit, sitting upon them, took possession of them".

The fact that they were filled would mean that in the Spirit they had all they needed for service. Then it must be noticed they were "all" filled, which justifies the thought. It also means that the Spirit of God does not need our little minds to keep the thing going; He brought with Him and still has with Him all we need to move here in every sphere for the pleasure of God.

We add nothing to this as from ourselves, the Spirit adds everything to us, coming from a glorified Christ. We read in the first chapter of Ephesians that the body is the complement of Christ. This could only be produced by the Spirit. Hence, it is not the church and Christ but Christ and the church.

Now in between the verses we read at the beginning of this chapter and those we read at the end, we have the going forth of the gospel in the power of the Spirit. This is what God is using to bring to light these members of the body, as we read in Eph. 6: 19, "the mystery of the gospel".

Is the filling here in line with that word in Eph. 5: 18, "be filled with the Spirit"? What is the difference between that and being indwelt by the Spirit?

We are not told to be indwelt by the Spirit or to be sealed by the Spirit, we are this sovereignly from the moment we believed the gospel; but being filled with the Spirit is practical. I am always indwelt by the Spirit, but I may not always be filled with the Spirit, hence the exhortation.

Perhaps the fact that they had been together for ten days praying, resulting in their being filled with the Spirit, may have a voice to us today in view of being filled with the Spirit.

I quite agree with the need on our side today but we must remember it came sovereignly here. We get the sealing as well involved here, though it is not taught.

Then we should note their speaking. When they did this, it was only as the Spirit gave them utterance. We might take notice of this today when so many come to meetings hoping to get an opening to say something. Open meetings are not arranged to give brothers an opportunity to speak, but to wait upon the Lord to give a word through one and another.

If we, like them, were marked by obedience, it would mean we were divested of our own thoughts and giving only what the Lord has given to us.

The result of the going forth of the gospel was that many were pricked in their hearts; not like some in Acts 7: 54 who were "cut to the heart", that is the flesh was cut and they stoned Stephen. Here they were pricked in their heart, in their affections, and were brought down in repentance. They ask at once, "what shall we do?" The result is, they become material for the body.

It is then through the gospel that the potential material for the body is brought to light. By our reception of the gospel, we are brought into line with the purpose of God.

When you speak of the work on our side, you mean the work in the souls of those who are to form the body of Christ? In this way God brings us into line with His purpose.

Yes! the people do not say, "What is God going to do?" but, "What shall we do?" The simple answer to that is, Believe the gospel. It is no new statement that the gospel brings to light God's elect, but on our side we are responsible to believe it. We read "they gladly received his word"

Being baptised dissociated them from the nation and associated them with the Christian company which had just been formed.

For them to continue in the apostles' doctrine meant a great change, for they would abandon the old service of the synagogue and all they had formerly observed. Thus they were saved from that untoward nation.

Is the forgiveness of sins here national?

No. It was individual, though they had a place nationally before God which we Gentiles never had. It meant a great deal to them to give this up.

Would this salvation have an immediate effect for them?

It would. Salvation is a wide term and means not only an escape from the judgment of God in the future, but also an escape from many things now. Present salvation is a real thing though many saints seem to know little of it. Ask the average saint what he is saved from **now**, and how many could give you an answer? Our hymn expresses it, "From sin, the world, and Satan".

It was a present thing to them to escape from the judgment of that untoward generation, and their baptism severed them from that nation in the sight of God. While this truth we have been looking at involves a heavenly company, baptism is not for heaven but for earth.

You have stated that God in His purpose marked us out for blessing. Is it possible for us in our responsibility to miss that blessing?

No! The point is, God tells us we are responsible to believe the gospel, though He gives us the faith to do it. We go on with the gospel because we know it is the means God is using today to effect His purpose for men.

This does not lessen the responsibility of all to believe, for "God . . . commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17: 30).

It has often been pointed out that on the day the law was given three thousand souls were destroyed, but on the day the Spirit was given three thousand souls were saved. What characterizes the day in which we live is God working in grace.

"They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine". A new divine order had been brought in and had superseded the old order of Judaism which, as a consequence, was now disowned. They went on with the new thing which had been formed by the Holy Spirit come down from heaven. In the future, power and blessing will come for Israel from Zion but today it is coming from heaven. It meant for them leaving what was earthly and material for a new order which was heavenly and spiritual.

It was the teaching of the apostles that formed this new fellowship. The fact that they all gave heed to that doctrine formed them into this fellowship, for it was fellowship in what the apostles taught. This is what is in view in Heb. 13: 10, "We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle". We have a new circle of fellowship and these saints were formed in it at the outset. This fellowship was not now based upon the Peace Offering but upon Christ in glory and their association with Him. The breaking of bread was the formal bond of this fellowship, for it kept in view that they were associated with an absent Lord Who had died in this world.

The New Translation makes it quite clear that the fellowship was the complement of the doctrine.

Yes! and in this wonderful expression of the fellowship, the breaking of bread, we have the greatest privilege of the Christian company today. In 1 Cor. 10, it is what we do, and the fact that we all do it together forms us into one body. It has sometimes been said that the loaf there speaks of the saints, but I do not think this is what is meant; rather that the fact that we all do it together forms us into one body.

In the chapter in Hebrews which you have quoted, it is shown that those who ate of the sacrifices were in communion with the altar. Now we are in communion because we all eat of that one loaf.

Yes, I feel sure that is what is meant.

Then "in prayers" we have the expression of our dependence upon the Lord to guide us in all we do here for His glory. How wonderful that, at such a late date in the history of the church, we still have these privileges maintained to us! May the Lord give each of us grace to go on with them till He comes.