

*1 Corinthians 15:42-44a*

## PREFACE

Since v36 Paul has been easing into his response to the rhetorical questions he posed in v35: “How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?” He has employed a series of metaphors, beginning with the sown seed (vv36-38); earthly, multi-species flesh (v39); and heavenly “bodies” (vv40-41). Now, in v42, the apostle sets aside metaphors and launches into one of the most eloquent and dynamic descriptions of believers’ resurrection in all of God’s word. Were the rest of this chapter written as a musical score it would be one long, extended crescendo, culminating in the climactic *fortissimo* of vv55-57, followed by the *pianissimo denouement* of v58. So let us begin this symphony by examining its opening bars. Let’s begin with v40, to give us the context.

**Read 1 Corinthians 15:40-44.**

## v42A

*So also is the resurrection of the dead.*

This verse begins with *houto kai*—“So also”—which explicitly ties it back to the metaphors Paul has been using to set the stage for this pronouncement.

Lately it would seem that I have been inordinately kind to the NIV translations, but for the moment I would like to counter-balance that. There is no verb in the opening sentence, which is not really required: *So also the resurrection of the dead* would be more poetic. Nonetheless, all of our English translations insert the verb “is,” except for the NIVs, which insert “will it be.”

*Gordon Fee:* Since the verbs that follow are expressed in the present, that seems preferable here as well. These are gnomic presents, and therefore timeless.

The NIV throws it into the future—which doesn’t really fit in the verbal context of this passage. Fee sloughs off the NIV version as “understandable, but slightly off-center”; it is true that the resurrection of believers does take place in the future, but I believe the difference between “is” and “will be” is a little more important in this context, as we may see as we proceed with our examination of this passage.

Right off we see that the first few sentences of this passage contain a series of comparisons: something is “sown” and then it is “raised.”

- That which is sown perishable, is raised imperishable.
- That which is sown in dishonor, is raised in glory.
- That which is sown in weakness, is raised in power.
- That which is sown natural, is raised spiritual.

Except for the last, in v44a, there is no expressed subject; in v42b the NASB, NIVs, and NKJV insert “body,” but it is not in the Greek text. It is a natural assumption that Paul uses the word “sown” (*speiro*) as he did earlier in the example of the seed (vv36-37), and that he refers here to the deceased being “sown” to the ground for burial. But that interpretation breaks down when we get to v43: “it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.” Briefly, “dishonor” (or “humiliation” [Fee] or “disgrace”) does not seem appropriate for the burial of a believer; nor does “weakness” (*astheneia*), a word which does not refer to an absence of power, but just *diminished* power. That does not seem right for a corpse.

There are a number of options from which we could choose to determine the use of “sown,” but the one that tracks best for me is that instead of referring explicitly to the buried corpse, it refers to “human existence in general (‘the present state from birth to death’ [Edwards])” (Garland). This also tracks best with Paul’s statement in v51: “...we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed.” Being “sown” into a grave is not necessary for the believer to receive the benefit of the right-hand side of these clauses: imperishable, glory, power, and a spiritual body. Not all believers will die before they get that.

In the Greco-Roman world in which the Corinthians lived, “sowing” was a common metaphor for human origins, and this is surely how the Corinthians would have understood it (Garland). We each have our origin in Adam, and from birth we each dwell in fallen, perishable, dishonorable, weak, and natural flesh. Thus we were “sown” into this earthly existence. So now let’s read an earlier portion of Chapter Fifteen in this light.

### **Read 1 Corinthians 15:20-22.**

“In Adam” there is only death—and we understand that to mean something more than just being lowered into a grave—the cessation of physical life. In contrast, “in Christ” there is life—“all will be made alive”—and we understand that to mean something more than just being raised *from* a grave. We have life in the here and now because of Christ.

#### **42b**

*It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body;*

I favor the KJVs (also the far newer *Christian Standard Bible*) that translate this “sown in corruption.”

### **Read Romans 8:19-23. (go back to v21)**

I am reminded of something I read just this week—especially important if you are uncomfortable with this interpretation.

*Breitbart.com*: The *New York Post* reports that Facebook employees are criticizing CEO Mark Zuckerberg [for not censoring conservative content more vigorously.] One staffer reportedly wrote on the day of the January 6th Capitol riots, which were partly organized via Facebook: “History will not judge us kindly.” The consistent message throughout the messages is that the company’s overwhelmingly leftist staff feel the company hasn’t done enough to suppress and censor conservative voices.

Perception is all. From a conservative perspective, social media has been *brutally* censoring conservative viewpoints, but from the perspective of the left, they have not done *nearly* enough—and shame on them. From an earthly perspective the joyful parents of their newborn see only a perfectly beautiful, innocent baby—and rightly so. What could possibly be “corrupt” about such newborn innocence? From God’s perspective of holiness, however, we are—from conception to the grave—born into ruin, decay, corruption. The one who trusts in Christ becomes a child of the Father in heaven, and is granted His Spirit as an earnest for his future with Him. But physically, even the believer’s flesh cannot dwell with God the Father, and *must* be transformed by Him into “incorruption”—that is, imperishable, eternal, and suitable for dwelling with a holy God. We can see in our minds the Corinthians nodding their head in agreement with the statement that this present, fleshly body is corrupt; what they are denying—and what Paul is endeavoring to convince them—is that we are raised into an incorruptible state. This first comparison lies at the heart of Paul’s argument; thus he will employ it several more times in the orchestral climax of this chapter.

v43A

*it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory;*

Again, from a heavenly perspective, the lives of human beings are ones of dishonor, shame, disgrace, ignominy. It is God’s indwelling Spirit who reveals this to us; even now, as believers, our flesh wants to deny this truth.

**Read 1 Corinthians 2:14.**

In the resurrection, however, we will become beings of “glory”—not shame. And this time the apostle uses the Greek *doxa* not to describe a level of radiance, but to express the “Jewish eschatological language for the future state of the righteous” (Fee)—a state so marvelous we cannot even imagine it.

**Read 1 Corinthians 2:9. (quoting Isaiah)**

v43B

*it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power;*

No one in his right mind would dispute the fact that, from birth to death, the flesh is weak (*astheneia* = frailty, feeble, pain, worry, sickness). There is strength of a sort, but it is a fragile, undependable strength. This is our nature; it is built-in.

Coming forth from the grave, or at the Rapture, however, we are given a power heretofore unknown by us. The word is *dynamei*, meaning pretty much how we understand the word “power.” But we must also understand what it does *not* mean.

*Albert Barnes:* This does not denote power like that of God, nor like the angels. It does not affirm that it shall be endued with remarkable and enormous physical strength, or that it shall have the power of performing what would now be regarded as miraculous. It is to be regarded as the opposite of the word “weakness,” and means that it shall be no longer liable to disease; no more overcome by the attacks of sickness; no more subject to the infirmities and weaknesses which it here experiences. It shall not be prostrate by sickness, nor overcome by fatigue. It shall be capable of the service of God without weariness and languor; it shall need no rest as it does here (see Revelation 7:15; compare Revelation 22:5); but it shall be in a world where there shall be no fatigue, lassitude, disease; but where there shall be ample power to engage in the service of God forever.

v44A

*it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.*

We will just touch on this now, but develop it further in our next session when we develop the remainder of this verse and the rest of the paragraph (to v49).

With this first part of v44 Paul concludes his list of comparisons, but also supplies a segue into the next passage. There is more here beneath the English words, but for now let us understand that a member of the Corinth church hearing this clause would have stiffened in his seat; it would have been a shocking statement to them.

We today, with benefit of a completed canon and the myriad resources available to us two thousand years later, can comfortably grasp this. We are born *into* this world in a condition *for* this temporal world: natural, sensual, of flesh. At the resurrection (or Rapture), we will become something else: *pneumatikon* = of the s/Spirit.

The problem for many in the Corinth church was that they considered themselves *already* to be *pneumatikon*—not just as we might understand it, as beings now in possession of the Holy Spirit, living a life under His influence and support, but in their eyes as truly, completely spirit-beings—even (again, in their eyes) superior to the apostle Paul in this regard. More on this next week. For now, let us close with the encouraging words Paul wrote to the church in Philippi, in which the apostle makes clear that this earth—and this body—is not our real home.

**Read Philippians 3:20-21.** (“citizenship”= community, commonwealth, our country)