

1 Corinthians 15:44b-49

PREFACE

Before we get into the next passage I would like to add just one more thought about Paul's use of the word "sown" in vv42-44. In our last session I said that instead of interpreting the word to mean "being buried," I favored the interpretation stated by Jonathan Edwards (for one): "the present state from birth to death"—that is taking "sown" to mean something like "sown into this world at birth."

As I have thought about our discussion on this in class last week, I concluded that there is no appreciable difference between the two. One position looks at the moment a body is buried; the other looks at the moment of birth inaugurating the life that follows. In both cases, however, the object under consideration is fallen flesh ("natural body" = *soma psychikon*)—in any state—in contrast to the glorified flesh that comes *after* the grave. Thus I conclude that this is a rather minor point of disagreement. That being said, the "birth to death" position remains the better interpretation, and one that will serve us best in digesting the verses before us.

Correction/Clarification

Finally, let me offer a possible correction, or clarification. I say "possible" because I cannot recall every word I have said in class—especially in those times I veer off my printed notes. In some of my comments I may have stated or implied that the resurrected believer will be (in opposition to the previous fleshly existence) now a completely, 100%, Spirit-being. If I said or implied that, it is not true, as we will see in this session.

We learn from Jesus Himself the nature of our glorified body: It was material and could consume food (Luke 24:39-43), yet it was not bound by the laws of nature (Luke 24:31, 36-37). It was not "pure spirit," but still possessed a level of physicality.

M. R. Vincent: The expression natural body signifies an organism animated by a ψυχή soul; that phase of the immaterial principle in man which is more nearly allied to the σάρξ flesh, and which characterizes the man as a mortal creature; while πνεῦμα spirit is that phase which looks Godward, and characterizes him as related to God.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:42-49.

v44

it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

Let's begin by more precisely defining the two terms the apostle employs to express the difference between the corporeal, earthly body and the body fit for an eternity with Christ.

it is sown a natural body... If there is a natural body,

This is a challenging term in the Greek (*soma psychikon*) because of how we typically might think of the word “soul.” Literally, the word *psychikos* means “belonging to the soul,” which, to us, we may relate to the spirit. We very often confuse the two terms: soul and spirit. But in the Greek this word, which comes from the Greek *psyche* (soo-kay), refers to that which motivates the physical. In secular Greek “the soul can be equivalent to the person. The soul, bound as it is to the body, is so much a personal force, that *psyche* can be used instead of the personal pronoun, so that ‘my soul’ is equivalent to ‘I’” (Brown).

Thus Paul uses *soma psychikon* to contrast the natural, *physical* body with the resurrected *spiritual* body. Remember, his purpose here is to dissuade the Corinthians from their position that resurrection means just a reanimated, *soma psychikon*. No, Paul says, *it is something entirely different; it is not psychikon but pneumatikon*. I like the way the *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary* explains the difference:

JFB: ...a natural body—literally, “an animal body,” a body molded in its organism of “flesh and blood” to suit the animal soul which predominates in it. The Holy Spirit in the spirit of believers, indeed, is an earnest of a superior state (Romans 8:11), but meanwhile in the body the animal soul preponderates; hereafter [after resurrection] the Spirit shall predominate, and the animal soul be duly subordinate.

In his second (extant) letter to the Corinth church, Paul revisits this idea of our natural body—this time comparing it to an impermanent tent or hut yearning to be replaced by “our dwelling from heaven.”

Read 2 Corinthians 5:1-5.

Whether, as the JFB puts it, our heavenly body will be little more than a reversal of influence or animation from soul to spirit, or the entirety of the “animal nature” will be forever expunged, the fact is that we will be raised in a body compatible with the holiness of heaven.

it is raised a spiritual body ...there is also a spiritual body.

Soma pneumatikon is how the apostle describes our resurrection physicality. Gordon Fee makes a salient point regarding the resurrected body:

Fee: These terms do not describe the “stuff” or composition of the body... Rather, they describe the present body in terms of its essential characteristics as earthly, on the one hand, and therefore belonging to the life of the present age, and as heavenly, on the other, and therefore belonging to the life of the Spirit in the age to come. It is “spiritual,” not in the sense of “immaterial” but of “supernatural” ...because it will have been re-created by Christ.

Fee concludes,

The transformed body, therefore, is not composed of “spirit”; it is a *body* adapted to the eschatological existence that is under the ultimate domination of, and animated by, the [Holy] Spirit. Thus for Paul, to be truly *pneumatikos* is to bear the likeness of Christ (v49) in a transformed body, fitted for the new age.

v45

So also it is written, “The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL.” The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

For some, this verse represents a jarring break in the apostle’s flow of thought, but it does not if one subscribes to our interpretation (after Edwards, Garland, and Fee) of his concept of “sowing” in vv42-44. If we think of that as referring to the human being’s life, as born into fallen, corrupted flesh as a result of Adam’s rebellion against a holy God, then v45 and what follows flows logically.

In v44b Paul established his foundational principle: “If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.” This will form an *inclusio* ending with v49: “Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.” Paul’s purpose is for the Corinthians to accept—and thus believe—his “if...then” principle: *If there is a natural body (and, of course, we know there is), then there must be a concomitant spiritual body at the resurrection.* And in this passage (vv45-47) Paul illustrates this principle by means of a comparison between the “first man, Adam” and the “last Adam” (i.e., Christ).

it is written, “The first MAN, Adam, BECAME A LIVING SOUL.”

Paul cites the Septuagint version of Genesis 2:7:

And God formed the man of dust of the earth, and breathed upon his face the breath of life, and the man became a living soul.

He quotes literally from Genesis only “man” and “became a living soul,” which is how, in our common versions, only the NASB shows the distinction. Here Paul combines citation with interpretation (referred to as a “midrash peshet”). Paul draws from the creation account to tie the use of “soul” (or “being”) to the contrast between soul and spirit in his letter. “Soul” is the cognate noun for the adjective *psychikos*.

The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

If it sounds odd to you to hear Paul refer to Christ as the “last Adam,” remember that “Adam” is simply the personalized form of the Hebrew *adam* (aw-dawm’), the word for human being, or mankind. “Last,” here, has the sense of being the *ultimate* (man). [Look at v49.](#)

Read 1 Corinthians 15:49.

The word translated “have borne” here, *ephoresamen*, means to carry a burden or to constantly wear something as clothing—both make sense from our viewpoint: we, as humans, “wear” the image of the earthly, and, at times, it can indeed be a considerable burden.

But Paul’s point in v45 is to show that both the first Adam and the last Adam were each the progenitors of their respective “clothing.” Adam in the Garden was the first to wear earthly and earthly human flesh (later, *fallen* flesh); Christ Jesus was the first to wear the *spiritual* “flesh” of the resurrection. This all ties back to the earlier passage.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:20-22.

That last statement on v22 brings something to mind. I don’t mean to make too much of this; take it for the little it is worth. But note that “in Adam” (*because of* Adam), “all die.” Adam himself became a “living soul” (v45), but for others, he only *took* life. By contrast, because of Christ “all will be made alive.” The first Adam *took* away life; the last Adam *gives* life—and because of His resurrection, every believer has eternal, perfect, spirit-life. The first Adam spoiled earthly life for the rest of us, but the last Adam will restore what might have been ours from the beginning, had the first Adam not rebelled.

In this is revealed the selfishness of man, and the sacrificial *unselfishness* of the Savior.