

An Enduring Life

1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50 (February 20, 2022)

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³⁵But someone will ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?”

³⁶Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. ³⁸But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.

⁴²So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. ⁴⁴It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. ⁴⁵Thus it is written, “The first man, Adam, became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. ⁴⁶But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. ⁴⁷The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. ⁴⁸As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. ⁴⁹Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven. ⁵⁰What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

Historical Context

References to seeds and their value lie scattered throughout scripture. In creation, they are named as signifiers and sources of the renewal of life (Genesis 1:11-12, 29). Isaiah describes the capacity of God’s word “to accomplish what [God] purposes” with the analogy of a seed’s capacity to produce food for your table (Isaiah 55:10-11). In a parable, Jesus likens the sowing of seed to the proclamation of the Word, which finds root inside us and then might either wither, be crowded out, or come to life and produce abundance (Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:1-15). In using this image, Paul draws on a common, rich, agricultural image of new life that would be immediately accessible to many first century and later audiences.

Theme: An Enduring Life

Paul’s statement that “What you sow does not come to life unless it dies” (15:36) speaks of movement, figuratively and literally, out of a state of death into an enduring life. He implicitly connects a truth of the agricultural world - the natural growth from seed to plant, to food and shelter - to what the reign of God both promises us and asks of us. Paul describes what the world offers us—the world that humans have created, with its structures, systems, and powers. It is, at best, impermanent, inevitably moving toward its ending. It is dishonorably disconnected from the ways of God. It cannot begin to offer the life energy and strength that God abundantly provides.

On the other hand, God promises an enduring, imperishable life. In contrast to what the world offers, this life intimately connects us to God’s gifts and glory. Because of the gifts and vitality of this life, it satisfies not only for an earthly lifetime but also into eternal life (15:42, 49). Eternal life is not mainly about never-ending-ness, but about strength and fullness. The ultimate point is not the eternal part but the life part, an everlasting fullness and completeness that transcends life in this world and death.