

1 Corinthians 15:46

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual.

Analysis

Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural (ἀλλ' οὐ πρῶτον τὸ πνευματικὸν ἀλλὰ τὸ ψυχικόν)—Paul establishes God's temporal order: psychikon ("natural") precedes pneumatikon ("spiritual"). This refutes any view that spiritual realm is inherently superior or prior to material creation. Creation begins with physical/natural realm (Genesis 1-2), not Platonic eternal forms. God's plan unfolds in stages: natural first, spiritual afterward.

And afterward that which is spiritual (ἔπειτα τὸ πνευματικόν)—The adverb *epēita* (ἔπειτα, "then, afterward") indicates sequence, not replacement. The spiritual doesn't negate the natural but perfects it. Resurrection is not escape from embodiment but transformation of embodiment. This is anti-Gnostic: matter is not evil to be transcended but good creation to be redeemed.

Historical Context

Gnostic and proto-Gnostic movements taught matter was inferior or evil, created by a lesser deity, and salvation meant escaping materiality for purely spiritual existence. Paul's sequence (natural then spiritual) affirms matter's goodness and God's intentional creative order. The spiritual age perfects, not negates, the natural.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does the natural-then-spiritual order refute Greek dualism and Gnosticism?
2. What does this teach about God's valuation of material creation and embodiment?
3. How does understanding redemption as transformation (not escape) from natural to spiritual shape Christian earthly life?

Interlinear Text

ἀλλὰ	οὐ	πρῶτον	τὸ	πνευματικόν	ἀλλὰ	τὸ
Howbeit	that was not	first	G3588	that which is spiritual	Howbeit	G3588
G235	G3756	G4412		G4152		G235

ψυχικόν	ἔπειτα	τὸ	πνευματικόν
that which is natural	and afterward	G3588	that which is spiritual
G5591	G1899		G4152