### “Bear the Image” Steve Finlan for The First Church, February 16, 2025

**1 Cor 15:35–36, 42–50**

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. . . 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. . . 49Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.

50 What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

This is the passage where the Apostle Paul makes clear the difference between earthly bodies (perishable, weak, physical) and heavenly bodies (imperishable, powerful, spiritual). The physical body does not inherit the kingdom of God, but only the spiritual body lives on. This is one of the few times that Paul even uses the phrase “kingdom of God,” which is so common in the gospels. For Paul, the phrase refers to the future life, while Jesus used it for realities in this life *and* the future life.

And this passage from Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians is entirely about the future life, when we will bear the image of the man of heaven, having a spiritual body like the resurrected Jesus, rather than a physical body like the men of dust that we are in this lifetime. This lengthy passage goes on for 23 verses, where he makes it clear that there are different kinds of bodies. The body we will have in the afterlife is of an entirely different kind than the one we had on earth. It will be suited to the spiritual level, as a physical body is not.

Let’s look at this matter of the “image.” First we have the image of the first man, who was a living being. Then we will have the image of the second Adam, Jesus, who “became a life-giving spirit” (15:45). Jesus not only lived, but he *gave* life. Somehow, we will reflect this more active and thoroughly spiritual reality. In Romans, Paul makes the intriguing statement that we will be “conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family” (Rom 8:29). Jesus is leading a large company of people from the earth life into the heavenly family, where they will be spiritualized, will be “transformed into the same image from one degree of glory into another” (2 Cor 3:18), to quote a passage from Paul’s other Corinthian letter.

To be saved is to be transformed, enabled for the future life, empowered even to “become participants in the divine nature” as Second Peter says (1:4). We are being prepared for life on a higher level. It will not be idleness or passivity, but activity, learning, socializing, and being changed.

I could paraphrase First Corinthians by saying this: if there is a physical life, there is also a spiritual life. Our bodies will be spiritual and strong, not physical and weak. We will become imitators of Jesus, our creator; we will bear his image, and become active doers of God’s will. There is not much that we know of this future life, but we can be assured that it involves real learning and living, meeting people and interacting with them, finding opportunities to do good and to absorb truth. As the letter to the Colossians says, we will be clothed with “compassion, kindness, humility,” will be forgiving, and will learn harmony (Col 3:12–14). If we are to live with millions of others who have passed on from this life, as well as living with angels and ministers of God, harmonious living is a big part of what we will need to learn. There’s no place for disharmony in heaven.

So use this lifetime to prepare for the next. “Set your minds on things that are above . . . your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col 3:2–3). Study the spiritual life as well as living it. And so when I say, “Go with God,” I mean be transformed, be readied for the spiritual life, learn harmony and love. Yes—“Go with God.”