45 Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. 46 But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. 47 The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. 48 As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. 49 Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.
 Throughout the argument of chapter 15, Paul has utilized logic and imagery in order to make his point that at least some of the Corinthians err in regards to their beliefs about their spirituality. In particular, those who would believe that they had already made it, that this present life was the fulfillment of all the promises, and those who would then surmise that there is no resurrection of the dead. As we have seen, Paul has argued that if there is no resurrection then there is no hope, meanwhile showing the infinite hope in the knowledge that Jesus has been raised and so too will those who believe.
 Now he comes from the perspective of the Scriptures in order to make his point even stronger. In verse 45 he quotes from Genesis 2:7. We will notice that this is not a direct quotation as Paul adds two words, that being “first” and the second being “Adam.”
 The addition of these words is for the purpose of his argument. He continues that the last Adam became a life giving spirit. In context the first Adam is Adam in the garden, the first human. From him has come the rest of us, and as such he is the representative of the human race. Conversely, the last Adam is Jesus. Just as we all fall under the first Adam, for those who belong to Jesus they fall under the last Adam as well. While we are given life in our personhood through the first Adam, we are given eternal life through Jesus.
 Paul then goes to show in verse 46 that there is a progression, or to use a word Paul has used, an order to the way things. Indeed, verses 46-48 may in fact be a rebuttal to a Hellenistic idea found in such Jewish writers as Philo who augmented certain thoughts of Plato into his Jewish thought. In that, the idea in the past was that there was the ideal, the heavenly form, of the first human after which Adam was made a copy.
 Paul distances himself from this thought by arguing that the first human, Adam, was created in the natural order. He was not a copy of something, but created as such from the beginning as the first human. There was no first human before Adam. Thus Paul’s argument that the first Adam is not spiritual but natural does not mean a physical vs spiritual understanding.
 Paul further shows this through the way in which the first Adam was from the earth, that is, the dust. We saw this in Genesis how God formed the first Adam from the dust of the earth. He then contrasts this with the second man from heaven. The purpose here is not to say that the new body will be immaterial, or to make a contrast between physical vs spiritual. Instead, it is to recognize that whereas first Adam and therefore the first body is corrupted by sin in this world and therefore perishable, the new body will be imperishable uncorrupted by this world.
 Thus Paul continues the point in verse 48 by recognizing that the man of dust has repercussions for those who bear his image. In this sense, because Adam fell into sin, through him came death for all humanity. Thus we all experience death precisely because we bear the image of the first Adam in this world, and as such just as he returned to the dust so we too will return to the dust.
 Yet, if it is the case that those who are born into the likeness of the man of dust which includes sin and death, then so too is the reality of those who are born in the likeness of the man of heaven. The same kind of substance which imbues the man of the dust inhabits those of the dust, the same kind of substance which imbues the man of heaven inhabit those who are of heaven. Whatever he is then like so are we. If we are of the dust then we are in unrighteousness. If we are of the man of heaven, then we inherit righteousness, holiness, and knowledge of God.
 This is the final point Paul makes. Just as we bear one image, the image of the man of dust, so if we belong to Christ we shall bear His image. This encapsulates Paul’s eschatology well. Paul has consistently shown a now but not yet understanding when it comes to the kingdom of God. We have seen the light of it coming, but it has not fully dawned. Thus not only will we be utterly transformed when Christ comes, but we are being transformed even now in our character and the way we live.
 Thus to bear the image of the man of dust and as such pass away into the dust. Whereas if we bear the image of the man of heaven then we too will experience eternity. This is the concluding eschatological thought for each individual depending on whose image they bear. However, it does have an effect for the present. For if we bear the image of the man of dust then we walk in sinfulness. If we bear the image of the man of heaven then we will walk according to His ways in righteousness.

Main Point: The main point is for Paul to begin the conclusion of the argument against certain Corinthians who have a belief that there is no resurrection of the dead, that they have already made it, so to speak, spiritually, that this life is all that there is. Against this Paul has shown that without the resurrection of the dead all of our belief is in vain, for then not even Jesus has been raised. In this concluding part of the argument Paul shows that first came the man of dust, and now the man of heaven. Just as we bear the image of the man of dust, so too can we bear the image of the Man of heaven by faith in Jesus Christ.

Application Points

1). In what image: One of the realities that we face in living this life is that in our original creation we were made in the image of God. This, in itself, shows us that humanity was at least meant for great things, indeed greater things, than we could ever dream. Yet, that dream is shattered into the never-ending nightmare that is reality. For in our hubris humanity chose to be God rather than to trust God, and since that time sinfulness entered into the world and we have dealt with the effects of being made in the image of God, and yet broken images. Like statues once created who come to life and start chiseling away at their features, so are we in our sinfulness.
 To bear the image of the man of dust is to experience the ramifications of that image. It begins with the sin of this dark world. It affects us, transforms us, changes us. It breaks down all of who we are. Oftentimes we consider the great commandment which is to love God with all of our hearts, minds, souls, and strength. What is it to love sin with these things instead?
 Jesus tells us the results of loving sin with our hearts. He tells us in Matthew 15 the following, “10 And he called the people to him and said to them, “Hear and understand: 11 it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person.” 12 Then the disciples came and said to him, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?” 13 He answered, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. 14 Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.” 15 But Peter said to him, “Explain the parable to us.” 16 And he said, “Are you also still without understanding? 17 Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? 18 But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. 19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. 20 These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.”

 In this Jesus is criticizing the Pharisees who hold the belief that the way one eats leads to one becoming defiled. Jesus, however, reminds all that defilement comes from the broken human heart. For in our affections, in our desires, we show we are bent and skewed toward evil. We take what is good and distort it. The ability to think, feel, utilize our strengths, our passions, these are all morally neutral. It requires us, as moral agents, to distort them for our own selves, leading to wickedness through evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, and slander.
 In these ways we defile ourselves because of our ways and actions. It all begins, however, with our hearts which are bent toward such ways and actions. Within the Law we understand these actions to be against the will of God and what He has called us to be and to do. In acting in these ways we show ourselves to be against God, not loving Him, but loving the sin and this world.
 Not only in the actions such as these, but we also know that in condoning such actions we defile ourselves as well. Indeed, in Proverbs 17:15 we read, “He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the LORD.” In our justification for sinfulness we are no different than those who would condemn the righteous.
 Unfortunately within our Christian culture and context such things are not far from reality. We have continually seen the Church in this time bow down to the beliefs and systems of the world rather than standing firm on the historic Christian faith which is grounded on the character of God as revealed through the Scriptures. Thus defilement has come not only through the act themselves, but through the those who justify such acts though never performing them.
 Let me give an example of how this has been done. There has been a rise of those who argue that homosexuality is not condemned in the Scripture, and that the word “homosexual” is an English word but not one which is in the original languages. Indeed, there is a truth to this. The word “homosexual” is not a Greek or Hebrew word. As such they will make arguments such as the real problem in the Scripture is not homosexuality as we know it, but pedophilia, men sleeping with boys, or unwanted sexual interactions.
 Let me show why this doesn’t actually work. When the New Testament is written it is written on the understanding found in the Law, and as such when things are condemned or rejected we must understand it in light of the Law which was written. Thus, Jesus in the above quotation differentiates between adultery and sexual immorality, they are not the same thing. Adultery is when one who is married sleeps with someone outside of the marriage. Sexual immorality to every Jew in the first century meant Leviticus 18-20.
 In Leviticus 18-20 we see all forms of sexual immorality, from incest to bestiality, considered unacceptable acts and utterly unlawful. Thus at the end of describing these things the Law states in Leviticus 20:22-26, “22 “You shall therefore keep all my statutes and all my rules and do them, that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out. 23 And you shall not walk in the customs of the nation that I am driving out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I detested them. 24 But I have said to you, ‘You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey.’ I am the LORD your God, who has separated you from the peoples. 25 You shall therefore separate the clean beast from the unclean, and the unclean bird from the clean. You shall not make yourselves detestable by beast or by bird or by anything with which the ground crawls, which I have set apart for you to hold unclean. 26 You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.”
 Thus, after describing these sexual immoralities, as well as other immoralities, it ends with do not do these things because you belong to me, that is God. God has rejected them, therefore we must reject them as well. To go against God’s Law is to go against His very character.
 But the skeptic will still say that in the Hebrew there is still no word, “homosexual.” Fair enough. Let’s see, however, where we would equate the word homosexual with what Leviticus says. The two places where it discusses this kind of sexual immorality is 18:22 and 20:13. This is what they say. “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.” Leviticus 18:22
 “If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them.” Leviticus 20:13.
 Clearly, what is being described is what we would call homosexual acts. The question we want to ask is, is this speaking of pedophelia or unwanted sexual contact? The answer is you would never get either of these things from the text itself. Instead, it is the act of a male having sexual relations with another male as they would a woman. It is the action itself which is rejected and considered תּוֹעֵבָה tôʿēḇâ, (Tow-Ey-Bvah) an abomination.
 Indeed this is further spelled out in the text itself. If, let’s say, pedophilia was the main culprit here, then we would expect the word for “male” to be young male. In the Hebrew however the word is זָכָר zāḵār which is a generic term for male the same way we have the word male today which can imply everything from a baby boy to an old man, in both they are males. So it is with this Hebrew word zāḵār, it simply means male end stop.
 So, despite the fact that the Scripture, the Law itself even, condemns any sexual act that we would call homosexual we find Church after Church denying what is written in the Scriptures for the sake of the culture. We find congregation after congregation willingly accepting a new doctrine of acceptance and love instead of standing firm on the tradition of the Church which is to reject such sexual understandings.
 Why is this? Because even the visible Church can be duped into thinking the man of dust is the man of heaven. Even pastors, even laymen, even we, can be duped into thinking the man of dust is all there is. Even we can be as deceived as the Corinthians into thinking that all is free, all is available, all is allowed without repercussions. Even we can believe that there is no real right or wrong anymore, just liberty.
 In the Corinthians defense, they did not have all the information we have when it comes to the Scripture. In their defense they did not have all the teachings we have concerning all these topics. One can see why they would err, but one cannot understand why, after 2000 years, we would begin to err in the most basic of teachings which deals with part of the nature of human existence which is sexuality and how we use our physical bodies.
 But there is plenty of erring despite. There is plenty of justification for the man of dust. There is plenty of acceptance in the Church. One could understand loving such people outside of the Church. One can understand being mercifiul and gracious to those outside of the congregation, one cannot understand why a congregation would willfully accept such practice as legitimate when the testimony is so strong. Indeed, we err on the side of the man of dust rather than the man of heaven, we side, in this cosmic conflict, with the man of dust.
 Right now there are major conflicts happening in the world. We see the conflict in Israel. We see the conflict in Ukraine. We hear rumors of conflict with Taiwan and conflict in Armenia. These things happen because we live in a fallen world where sin is still dominant. We live in these times because the nature of the man of dust is still prevalent, it is still strong, it is still around us, and it is still within us.
 Must it always be so? The answer, according to today’s text in I Corinthians is no. Instead, we can belong to the man of heaven just as we have belonged to the man of dust. Yet the struggle is ever with us as we live this life. The struggle of sinner and saint is in our very bones. We look at the wars around and we see it for what it is, but we must remember the war within as well.
 One of my favorite bands is Downhere. They were a Christian group who did disband awhile ago. However, one of my favorite songs of theirs is called “All at War.” Consider the lyrics, “I’m learning to stand the more that I fall down, It’s the law of inversion and it’s all turned around. I’m staggered by the clash inside my soul, so purposed for good but inclined for evil. It’s justice and mercy the old dichotomies all along the front lines of my heart in both doubt and belief. The sinner and saint, the old arch enemies all at war in me. I was born depraved but created for the divine, with death in my bones, in my heart eternal life. I’d love for Eden, but I’d kill for Rome, I’m native in a land that is not my home. It’s justice and mercy the old dichotomies all along the front lines of my heart in both doubt and belief. The sinner and saint, the old arch enemies all at war in me. You are the beginning and you are the end into your great reversal I am born again. A beautiful redemption you leverage even sin, in me your final victory I know you’ll win. Into light, from the shadows. Into life, from the grave. Into love, into love. It’s justice and mercy the old dichotomies all along the front lines of my heart in both doubt and belief. The sinner and saint, the old arch enemies all at war in me.”
 This describes the situation we are seeing in Corinth and in ourselves perfectly. We have this man of the dust, destined to return to the dust. We have the man of heaven, destined for eternal life. We have enough of a responsibility given to us to live for one or the other, to reject one and embrace the other, to put on one and displace the other.
 An analogy might be helpful here. Imagine wearing a suit, but the suit is full of holes, it has been ripped and torn, it has become dirty from various forms of filth. This is like belonging to the man of dust. As time continues it only ever deteriorates. In contrast imagine a robe which is pure white. It has no stains, it has no tears, no rips, no filth. The difference is that it is not just a matter of wearing clothes, but our very existence being transformed, by the power of Christ beginning now, trusting in forever.
 As we continue forward let us seek to bear the image of the man of heaven. Let us bear the image of the second Adam who has come to redeem and conquer. Let us live for Him now and forever trusting in Him, and let us not err into or side with sinfulness, but let us continue to side with the man of heaven, knowing in Christ we will find righteousness and eternal life forevermore.