

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

SOTERIOLOGY

The Doctrine of Salvation

By Grace Alone, Through Faith Alone, In Christ Alone, To the Glory of God Alone

UNIT 11: GLORIFICATION — THE COMPLETION OF SALVATION

The Completion of What God Began

Lesson 33

The Resurrection of the Body

The Christian Hope Is Not a Disembodied Eternity but Bodily Resurrection

Christianity Is the Most Material of All Faiths — the Body Will Rise

“But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep”

Key Texts: 1 Corinthians 15:12–28, 35–58; Philippians 3:20–21; Romans 8:11, 23; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18;

John 5:28–29

“But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.”

1 Corinthians 15:20–22, NASB 1995

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Introduction

Lesson 32 established glorification in its broadest scope: the final, eschatological, whole-person conformity to Christ, certain in the divine purpose (Romans 8:30's past-tense guarantee), accomplished through the beatific vision (1 John 3:2), and encompassing both the removal of sin's presence and the bodily resurrection. Lesson 33 focuses on the specific bodily dimension of the glorification in greater depth: the resurrection of the body. This lesson addresses a truth that is among the most distinctive, the most historically-contested, and the most practically-significant in the whole of the Christian faith, the truth that the Christian hope is not the escape of the immortal soul from the mortal body into a disembodied spiritual eternity, but the resurrection of the specific, individual, physical body in a glorified and imperishable form.

The bodily resurrection of the dead is the truth that most sharply distinguishes the Christian eschatological hope from every other form of religious hope available in the ancient world and the contemporary world alike. The Greek philosophical tradition, particularly the Platonic tradition that dominated the intellectual culture of the New Testament period, held a thoroughly dualistic anthropology: the body is the prison of the soul, the material world is a degraded shadow of the ideal spiritual world, and the goal of the philosophical life is the purification of the soul from its bodily entanglement so that it can ascend, at death, to the purely spiritual existence for which it was always meant. This is not the Christian hope. The Christian hope is not the soul's escape from the body but the body's transformation into the imperishable, glorious, powerful embodiment of the eschatological new creation. Christianity is, in this sense, the most material of all faiths: its God became flesh (John 1:14), rose bodily from the dead (Luke 24:39–40), and is now permanently and irreversibly embodied in the glorified humanity of the ascended Lord (Acts 1:9–11).

The lesson will proceed through seven major sections: the centrality of the bodily resurrection to the entire Christian gospel; Christ's resurrection as the paradigm and the guarantee of the believers' own; 1 Corinthians 15's account of the nature of the resurrection body; the Pauline connection between Christ's glorified body and the believer's transformed embodiment; the continuity of the resurrection body with the present body; the present-age implications of the resurrection body's eschatological significance; and the groaning and the hope of Romans 8:23. Throughout, the governing text is 1 Corinthians 15:20: "But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep" (NASB 1995). The "first fruits" is the key metaphor: Christ's resurrection is not merely the demonstration that resurrection is possible; it is the binding pledge of the full harvest of the resurrection of those who are in Him.

I. The Centrality of Bodily Resurrection

The Article by Which the Christian Hope Stands or Falls

A. 1 Corinthians 15:12–19 and the Consequences of Denial

Paul’s argument in 1 Corinthians 15:12–19 establishes the bodily resurrection not merely as one doctrine among many in the Christian theological system but as the load-bearing article on whose truth or falsity the entire gospel stands or falls. “Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain” (vv. 12–14, NASB 1995). The argument is the *reductio ad absurdum* of the denial of the resurrection: if there is no resurrection of the dead (which some in Corinth were apparently claiming), then Christ Himself has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then the entire apostolic preaching is empty (*kenos*, vain, without content or effect), the Corinthians’ faith is empty (*kenos*), and they are still in their sins (v. 17).

The logical structure of Paul’s argument establishes the specific, comprehensive character of the resurrection doctrine’s centrality: the resurrection is not a peripheral eschatological detail that can be spiritualized or allegorized without affecting the gospel’s substance; it is the specific, historically-verified, bodily event on which the entire structure of Christian salvation rests. If the resurrection is not a real, physical, historical event involving the transformation of a real, physical, historical body, then the cross is merely a tragic death rather than the atoning sacrifice whose vindication by the resurrection the justification requires (Romans 4:25: “He was raised because of our justification”); the promises of eternal life are empty because the One who promised them is still in the tomb; and the groaning for “the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:23) is the groaning for something that will never arrive. The Christian hope is irreducibly bodily or it is nothing.

The positive declaration of verse 20, “But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep”, is the specific, historically-grounded, apostolically-testified counter to the denial: not merely as a doctrinal assertion but as the claim that stands or falls on the specific, historically-verifiable testimony of the hundreds of witnesses who saw the risen Christ, including Paul himself (vv. 5–8). The “but now” (*nuni de*) is the adversative that turns from the hypothetical consequences of the denial to the actual reality of the resurrection: whatever the philosophical difficulties, whatever the Corinthian skeptics have argued, the fact is that Christ has been raised. The first fruits have been offered; the harvest is guaranteed.

B. The Resurrection as the Vindication of Creation

The doctrine of the bodily resurrection is also the specific, eschatological vindication of the material creation against the implicit or explicit dualism that would treat matter as inherently inferior to spirit, the body as the soul’s prison, and the eschatological destination as the soul’s liberation from the material order. Genesis 1:31’s “God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good” is the creation’s theological foundation: the material world, including the human body, was created good, was declared very good by the Creator, and reflects the goodness of the God who made it. The fall corrupted the creation but did not reverse its fundamental goodness; the redemption does not bypass the creation but restores and glorifies it; and the eschatological new creation is

not the replacement of the material world by a purely spiritual existence but the renewal, purification, and glorification of the very creation that God declared very good in the beginning. The bodily resurrection is the specific, eschatological expression of this creational vindication: the body that God made good, that sin corrupted, that death claimed, will be raised and glorified, not discarded but redeemed.

II. Christ's Resurrection as Paradigm and Guarantee

The First Fruits of the Full Harvest

A. The First-Fruits Metaphor and Its Force

The first-fruits metaphor of 1 Corinthians 15:20 is among the most theologically precise and the most pastorally rich in the entire New Testament. The first fruits (Greek: *aparchē*, the same word used for the Spirit as the first fruits in Romans 8:23) in the Old Testament context (Leviticus 23:9–11; Deuteronomy 26:1–11) were the first portion of the harvest offered to God as the representative beginning of the full harvest, the first sheaf of the grain that consecrated and guaranteed the whole harvest that would follow. The offering of the first fruits was not merely the acknowledgment of God's provision; it was the covenantal pledge that the full harvest would be received, because the first fruits and the full harvest were of the same kind and the offering of the first portion was the divinely-established signal that the rest would follow.

Applied to the resurrection, the first-fruits metaphor establishes Christ's resurrection as both the representative beginning and the covenantal guarantee of the believers' own resurrection. Christ's resurrection is the same kind of event as the believers' future resurrection, not a spiritual awakening or a metaphorical new life but a genuine, physical, bodily transformation of the same kind (though glorified beyond present comprehension) that the believers' resurrection will be. And the offering of the first fruits covenantally guarantees the harvest: the God who raised Christ has, in that raising, covenantally committed Himself to raising all those who are in Christ at the day of His appearing. The resurrection of Christ is the divine down payment on the resurrection of His people, the *arrabōn* of the body that parallels the Spirit as the *arrabōn* of the inheritance (Ephesians 1:14). The harvest is coming because the first fruits have already been offered.

B. The Two Adams of 1 Corinthians 15:21–22

First Corinthians 15:21–22 grounds the first-fruits guarantee in the specific theological framework of the two Adams that Paul develops here and in Romans 5:12–21: "For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive" (NASB 1995). The Adam-Christ typology establishes the resurrection not as an isolated miracle but as the eschatological act of the second Adam who reverses the consequences of the first Adam's disobedience. The first Adam introduced death into the human race; the second Adam has introduced the resurrection. The first Adam's representative action brought the whole human race under the reign of death; the second Adam's representative action brings the whole covenant community under the promise of the resurrection. The symmetry is perfect and the logic is inexorable: as certainly as Adam's death spread to all who are in him, so certainly the resurrection spreads to all who are in Christ.

The “order” of the resurrection that verses 23–24 describe, “Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His coming, then comes the end”, establishes the sequential character of the full harvest: the first fruits have been offered (Christ’s resurrection), the full harvest will follow at the appointed time (the resurrection of those who are Christ’s at His coming), and then the eschatological consummation of the age will arrive (the end). The sequence is not a matter of doubt or of conditional fulfillment; it is the divinely-ordered sequence of the eschatological plan whose first stage has already been irreversibly accomplished in the resurrection of the firstborn Son. The believers’ resurrection is not the first event in the sequence; it is the second, guaranteed by the first, and as certain as the God who ordered the sequence and accomplished its opening act.

C. The Empty Tomb and the Bodily Character of the Guarantee

The bodily character of Christ’s resurrection, and therefore the bodily character of the resurrection it guarantees, is established by the specific, historically-documented character of the resurrection accounts: the empty tomb (Matthew 28:6; Luke 24:3; John 20:1–8), the physical appearance of the risen Christ to the disciples (Luke 24:36–43), and the specific, deliberate, evidentially-directed demonstration that Jesus provided when the disciples were frightened and supposed they were seeing a spirit: “See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have” (Luke 24:39, NASB 1995). The risen Christ ate food in their presence (v. 43); He showed the disciples the specific marks of the crucifixion (John 20:27); and He was on the third day in a body that was genuinely physical, genuinely the body that had been crucified and buried, yet transformed in ways that transcended the normal constraints of the pre-resurrection body.

The physical reality of Christ’s resurrection is the non-negotiable anchor of the Christian hope for the believers’ own bodily resurrection. A merely spiritual resurrection, the survival of the soul without the transformation of the body, would not be the fulfillment of the redemptive promise but a capitulation to the dualism that the incarnation, the cross, and the resurrection together repudiate. The God who created the body good, who took a body in the incarnation, who raised that body from the dead in physical transformation, and who is now permanently and irreversibly embodied in the glorified humanity of the ascended Lord has committed Himself to the physical redemption of the bodies of those who are in Christ. The empty tomb is the guarantee: the body that was placed in the tomb did not remain there, and the bodies of those who are in Christ will not remain in their graves.

III. The Nature of the Resurrection Body

1 Corinthians 15:35–49

A. The Question and the Analogy

First Corinthians 15:35 raises the specific question that the doctrine of the resurrection must address if it is to be both credible and comprehensible: “How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?” (NASB 1995). Paul’s response begins with the characteristically Pauline rhetorical edge (“You fool!”, v. 36) and proceeds to the seed-and-plant analogy that provides the most helpful single image for understanding the nature of the resurrection body in the entire New Testament. “That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; and that

which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own” (vv. 36–38, NASB 1995).

The seed-and-plant analogy illuminates the resurrection body’s relationship to the present body in three specific ways. First, the continuity: the plant that grows from the seed is genuinely the seed’s expression; the resurrection body will be genuinely the present body’s glorified expression, not a completely different entity with no connection to the body that was buried. The personal identity that the present body partially constitutes and expresses is the same personal identity that the resurrection body will fully and permanently express. Second, the transformation: the plant is not identical to the seed; the full-grown plant transcends the seed’s capacities in every direction, and the seed’s structure gives no adequate prediction of the plant’s full development. The resurrection body will transcend the present body’s capacities in every direction, and the present body’s character gives no adequate prediction of the resurrection body’s eschatological fullness. Third, the divine agency: “God gives it a body just as He wished”, the specific character of the resurrection body is the divine gift rather than the product of the natural process.

B. The Fourfold Contrast

First Corinthians 15:42–44 develops the specific character of the resurrection body through the fourfold contrast with the present body that Lesson 32 introduced. “It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body” (NASB 1995). Each contrast deserves its own sustained attention in this lesson, since the resurrection of the body is the specific subject here rather than the glorification in its broader scope.

Perishable/Imperishable (phthartōn/aptharton): The present body is subject to decay, corruption, aging, illness, and death, the specific, inevitable, inexorable movement toward the dissolution that the fall introduced. The word phthartōn captures the fundamental instability of the present body: it is perishing, in a continuous process of deterioration that nothing in the present age can permanently arrest. The resurrection body is imperishable (aptharton), not merely resistant to decay but genuinely beyond the reach of the corruption that characterizes the present body. The word aptharton is the same word used for the divine nature in 1 Timothy 1:17 (“now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible”, NASB), the imperishable character of the resurrection body reflects the imperishable character of the eternal life of the God who gives it. Death will have no claim on the resurrection body, because the mortal will have been swallowed up by life (2 Corinthians 5:4).

Dishonor/Glory (atimīia/doxa): The present body’s burial is an act that marks it as dishonored in the death that sin has brought upon it, the return to the dust of a body that was made from dust, the humbling of the dust to which the dust must return (Genesis 3:19). The resurrection body is raised in glory (doxa), the specific, eschatological, divine-radiance-expressing glory of the new creation. The resurrection body will reflect the divine glory in the way that Moses’s face reflected the divine radiance after his encounter with God, but permanently, completely, and without the fading that 2 Corinthians 3:13 describes as the character of the old covenant’s glory. Weakness/Power (asthenia/dynamis): The present body’s weakness is comprehensive, it tires, breaks down, becomes ill, and is ultimately unable to resist the forces that lead to its death. The resurrection body is raised in power, the specific, inexhaustible, Spirit-endued power of the body that is fully animated by the Spirit of the One who raised Christ from the dead (Romans 8:11). Natural/Spiritual (psuchikon/pneumatikon): The present body is natural (psuchikon, from psuchē, the natural life-principle), animated by the natural biological life that the creation originally provided. The resurrection body is spiritual (pneumatikon), not immaterial but fully and

permanently animated by the Holy Spirit. The spiritual body is more intensely physical than the present body, not less, in the sense that the divine Spirit's full inhabitation of the transformed body will express the physical existence's fullest eschatological capacity rather than diminish it.

C. The Second Adam and the Spiritual Body

First Corinthians 15:45–49 develops the two-Adams framework to illuminate the specific character of the resurrection body. The first Adam became a living soul (psuchēn zōsan, Genesis 2:7, LXX); the last Adam became a life-giving spirit (pneuma zōopoion, v. 45). The present body's natural (psuchikon) character is the character of the body that bears the image of the first Adam; the resurrection body's spiritual (pneumatikon) character is the character of the body that will bear the image of the last Adam (v. 49: "as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly", NASB 1995). The resurrection body is not the absence of the physical but the fullest expression of the physical under the Spirit's complete and unhindered animating power, the body of the last Adam who is the life-giving Spirit, in whom the Spirit's relationship to the physical creation reaches its eschatological fullness.

IV. Philippians 3:20–21 and the Christological Pattern

Transformed into Conformity with the Body of His Glory

A. The Citizenship That Shapes the Present

Philippians 3:20–21 provides the most Christologically-explicit account of the resurrection body's eschatological transformation and grounds it in both the citizenship that the believers already possess and the Savior whose return will accomplish the transformation: "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself" (NASB 1995). The passage is set in the context of Paul's warning against those "whose god is their appetite... who set their minds on earthly things" (v. 19), and the contrast is deliberate: the citizenship-in-heaven of those who await the Savior is the specific identity-establishing, present-life-shaping reality that the anticipation of the bodily resurrection produces.

The "eagerly wait" (apekdechometha, the same strong compound verb as Romans 8:23's "waiting eagerly for" and Romans 8:25's "with perseverance we wait") is the specific posture of the heaven-citizen in the present age: the active, forward-leaning, expectant, sustained waiting for the Savior whose return will accomplish the bodily transformation that the waiting anticipates. It is the posture of soldiers in a distant colony waiting for their King to come and transform the present assignment into the permanent homeland, loyal to the King, shaped by the citizenship, expectant for the return, and not seduced by the earthly-mindedness that treats the present posting as the permanent reality.

B. The Body of His Glory as the Pattern

"Who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory": the specific, Christologically-defined pattern for the resurrection body is the glorified body of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the body in which He ascended (Acts 1:9), in which He presently reigns at the Father's right hand (Hebrews 1:3; 8:1),

and in which He will appear at the day of His coming (Acts 1:11; Revelation 1:13–16). The resurrection body of the believer is not an independent creation designed along its own eschatological lines but the specific transformation of the present body into conformity with (summorphon, the same root as the summorphous of Romans 8:29: “conformed to the image of His Son”) the body in which the Son of God currently exists.

The specific pastoral and theological significance of the Christological pattern is the ground it provides for the resurrection hope: the body that the believer will receive is not an unprecedented eschatological novelty whose character is entirely unknown, but the body whose pattern is already visible in the glorified Christ who appeared to Paul on the Damascus road (“I am Jesus whom you are persecuting”, the glorified Christ visible, audible, personally known), in the vision of Revelation 1:13–16, and in the resurrection appearances described in the Gospels and 1 Corinthians 15:5–8. The first fruits are visible; the harvest will be of the same kind. The glorified body that the Savior currently inhabits is the eschatological pattern of the glorified body that the transformation will produce in those who are His at His coming.

“By the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself”: the mechanism of the resurrection body’s transformation is the specific, omnipotent, cosmos-governing power of the ascended Lord. The same power that sustains the creation, that governs the course of history, and that will ultimately subject all things to the Father’s sovereign rule is the power that will accomplish the specific, individual, bodily transformation of every person who is Christ’s at His coming. The resurrection is not a biological process operating on natural principles; it is the direct exercise of the omnipotent power of the God who made the body from dust and who will raise it from dust in the eschatological fullness of what the creation always had the potential to become under His transforming power.

V. The Continuity of the Resurrection Body

The Same Body Transformed, Not a Different Body

A. The Theological Necessity of Continuity

The question of the continuity between the present body and the resurrection body, whether the resurrection body is the same body transformed or a completely new body created to replace the original, is not merely a speculative philosophical question; it is a question with specific theological and pastoral implications. If the resurrection body has no genuine continuity with the present body, then the resurrection is not the redemption of the body but its replacement, a new creation that leaves the original body permanently abandoned in the grave. But the redemption that the New Testament promises is not the discarding of what was created good and corrupted by sin; it is the transformation of the corrupted into the glorified, the redemption, not the replacement, of the original.

Several specific theological convictions require the continuity of the resurrection body with the present body. First, the pattern of Christ’s resurrection: the same body that was crucified was raised (the tomb was empty; the risen Christ bore the crucifixion marks; the disciples recognized Him). If Christ’s resurrection required the continuity of the crucified body with the resurrection body, the resurrection of the believers, which is specifically patterned on and guaranteed by Christ’s, requires the same continuity. Second, the accountability of the resurrection body for the deeds done in the present body: 2 Corinthians 5:10 (“for we must all appear before the

judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body”, NASB 1995) presupposes that the body standing at the judgment is the body that did the deeds being judged. Third, the redemption of the creation: the resurrection is the specific, eschatological expression of the creator’s redemption of His creation, not its abandonment, the same created matter that was declared very good will be redeemed and glorified, not discarded.

B. Addressing the Philosophical Objection

The philosophical objection to the bodily resurrection, raised already in the Corinthian context (1 Corinthians 15:35’s “How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?”) and repeated in every generation since, typically takes the form of the question about material continuity: what happens to bodies destroyed by fire, dissolved in the ocean, devoured by animals, or reduced to their constituent molecules by the processes of decomposition? How can the same body be raised if its matter has been dispersed, absorbed, or transformed into other forms of matter?

The Reformed theological tradition has consistently addressed this objection by distinguishing between material continuity (the resurrection body will contain the same matter as the present body) and the continuity of personal identity (the resurrection body will be the glorified expression of the same personal identity that the present body partially constitutes and expresses). The continuity that the resurrection requires is the continuity of personal identity, not the reassembly of precisely the same molecules. Just as the plant that grows from a seed is genuinely the seed’s expression without being materially identical to the seed (the plant’s matter is absorbed from the soil, the air, and the water around it, not merely the seed’s original matter), so the resurrection body will be genuinely the present body’s glorified expression without necessarily requiring the reassembly of the precise atomic matter of the present body. The God who created the body from dust will raise the body from dust, His power is not limited by the physical location or condition of the matter He created.

The practical pastoral significance of the continuity conviction is the specific comfort it provides for those who mourn the bodies of those who have died, particularly in circumstances of violent death or bodily dissolution. The specific, individual, personally-known body of the person who has died is not permanently and irreversibly lost; it is held in the care of the God who created it, who will raise it at the appointed time in the glorified form that the resurrection promises, and who knows every hair of the head that numbered the hairs in life. The resurrection is not the creation of a replacement; it is the redemption of the original.

VI. The Present-Age Implications

Because the Body Will Be Raised, the Body Matters Now

A. 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 and the Temple of the Spirit

The eschatological significance of the body has immediate and practical implications for the present-age use, care, and stewardship of the body. If the body is ultimately irrelevant to the eschatological destination, if the soul escapes into a purely spiritual existence and the body is left behind forever, then the body’s present use is ultimately indifferent. But if the body will be raised and glorified in the pattern of Christ’s own resurrection body, then the body matters now in a way that the dualistic dismissal of the physical has never adequately understood.

Paul makes the present-age implications explicit in 1 Corinthians 6:19–20, in the context of his argument against sexual immorality: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body” (NASB 1995).

The argument is specifically eschatological: “God has both raised the Lord and will raise us up through His power” (v. 14, NASB 1995). Because God will raise the body, the body is not merely a temporary, disposable container for the soul but the specific, Spirit-indwelt, eschatologically-destined person that the body is part of constituting. The “glorify God in your body” is the specific, present-age, bodily expression of the eschatological significance that the resurrection hope establishes: the body that will be glorified is the body that is now to be used for the glory of God who made it, redeemed it through the purchase of the Son’s death, and will raise it in the pattern of the Son’s own resurrection.

B. Romans 12:1 and the Living Sacrifice

Romans 12:1 provides the most explicit statement of the bodily dimension of the Christian’s present-age service and worship: “I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship” (NASB 1995). The “bodies” is the specific, physical, embodied self of the believer, not merely the spiritual intention or the mental assent but the specific, physical, bodily person who is called to the specific, physical, bodily service of a living sacrifice. And the ground of the call is the “mercies of God” (the entire saving work of Romans 1–11), which includes the redemption of the body’s eschatological transformation.

The bodily resurrection is therefore not merely a future hope but a present motivation: the body that will be raised in the pattern of Christ’s glorified body is the body that is now to be presented as a living sacrifice to the God who created it, redeemed it, and will raise it. The stewardship of the physical body, the use of the body in the service of God and neighbor, the care of the body as the Spirit’s temple, the mortification of the body’s sinful appetites, and the discipline of the body’s capacities in the service of the sanctified life, is the specific, present-age, eschatologically-motivated expression of the conviction that the body matters eternally because the body will rise.

C. 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 and the Comfort of the Resurrection Hope

First Thessalonians 4:13–18 provides the most pastorally direct account of the bodily resurrection’s present-age comfort for those who are mourning the death of those who have died in Christ: “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus” (vv. 13–14, NASB 1995). The grief is not denied (Paul addresses those who are grieving); but it is distinguished from the grief of those who have no hope: the grief of the Christian is the grief of those who will be reunited with those who have died in Christ at the resurrection.

The specific comfort of the resurrection hope for those who mourn is not merely the abstract assurance that the dead will be raised but the specific, bodily, personally-recognizable character of the resurrection: the same person, recognized as the same person, received again in the bodily presence that the present grief has lost. The reunion that the resurrection promises is not the spiritual awareness of the continued existence of the departed soul; it is

the specific, bodily, face-to-face, personally-present reunion of the same person who was loved and lost with the same person who loved and mourned, both now in the glorified, imperishable, power-filled embodiment of the resurrection bodies that 1 Corinthians 15's fourfold contrast describes. The comfort is therefore as specific and as bodily as the grief: what was lost in the grief will be restored in the resurrection, and what will be restored will exceed what was lost in the same proportion that the resurrection body exceeds the present body.

VII. The Groaning and the Hope

Romans 8:23 and the Embodied Eschatological Longing

A. The Specific Character of the Groaning

Romans 8:23's "we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body" (NASB 1995) provides the most direct expression in the entire New Testament of the specific, embodied, eschatologically-oriented longing that the doctrine of the resurrection of the body should produce in every genuinely regenerate believer. The "we ourselves... groan" is the first-person emphatic: this is not the groaning of an abstract theological concept but the specific, personally-experienced, inner longing of those who have received the Spirit's first fruits and know what they are a guarantee of. The groaning is the present-tense experience of the genuine tension between the already (the Spirit's first fruits received, the adopted standing established, the beginning of the conformity to Christ accomplished) and the not-yet (the bodily redemption still awaited, the resurrection body still unreceived, the adoption's full expression still future).

The specific content of the groaning is "the redemption of our body", the specific, physical, eschatologically-appointed transformation of the present body into the resurrection body that the first fruits of the Spirit are the covenantal pledge of. The groaning is not for the escape of the soul from the body (which would be the Platonic hope) but for the redemption of the body, the specific, bodily, physical transformation that the resurrection promises. The person whose groaning is shaped by this doctrine is the person who understands that the present body is not the final body, that the present age is not the final age, and that the specific, physical, bodily resurrection that the Spirit's first fruits guarantee is the specific destination toward which the present groaning is directed.

B. John 5:28–29 and the Two Resurrections

John 5:28–29 places the bodily resurrection in its widest eschatological context by establishing the universal character of the resurrection and the specific differentiation that the resurrection will produce: "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment" (NASB 1995). The universal resurrection, "all who are in the tombs", is the specific, inclusive, eschatological assertion that the resurrection is not the exclusive privilege of the righteous but the universal event that will bring both the righteous and the unrighteous to the final eschatological disclosure: some to a resurrection of life, some to a resurrection of judgment.

The two-resurrection distinction is not the invention of a narrow eschatological system; it is the teaching of the One who is both the Son of Man who will return in glory and the Son of God who has already given eternal life to those who believe (vv. 24–26). The resurrection of life is the specific, eschatological, full-harvest expression of the life that the genuine believers already possess in the present age (“has eternal life”, present tense, John 5:24). The resurrection of judgment is the specific, eschatological, full-disclosure expression of the judgment that the unbelieving have already passed over themselves in the present age (“has not believed... has been judged already”, John 3:18). The pastoral significance: the resurrection hope of the genuine believer is the resurrection of life, not the resurrection of judgment, the full, bodily, eschatological expression of the life that the faith in the Son of God has already secured in the present age.

The lesson closes with the specific, doxological, forward-looking declaration that the resurrection of the body is not a peripheral doctrine but the heartbeat of the Christian hope. The gospel that Paul preached was not the immortality of the soul in the Platonic sense; it was the resurrection of the body in the Christological sense. The God who became flesh, who rose bodily from the dead, who ascended in the same body He took in the incarnation, who reigns at the Father’s right hand in that same glorified body, who will return in that same body (Acts 1:11), and who will transform the bodies of His people into conformity with that same body, this God is the God who has declared the body’s redemption as the specific, eschatological, certain expression of the gospel’s full scope. The body will rise. The first fruits have been offered. The harvest is coming. And the groaning of the present age is the groaning of those who have tasted the first fruits and cannot be satisfied with anything less than the full harvest of the resurrection.

“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus... For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout... and the dead in Christ will rise first.”

1 Thessalonians 4:14, 16, NASB 1995

Theological Terms and Definitions

Bodily Resurrection	The specific, physical, eschatological raising of the same body that was buried in a glorified and imperishable form at the day of Christ's return, not the survival of the soul in a disembodied state but the transformation of the specific, individual, physical body in the pattern of Christ's own resurrection body (Philippians 3:21). Distinguished from: resuscitation (the restoration of the present mortal body to its previous mortal life, as with Lazarus); the immortality of the soul (the Platonic doctrine of the soul's natural imperishability, independent of the body); and spiritualization (the interpretation of the resurrection as the soul's spiritual awakening rather than the body's physical transformation). The bodily resurrection is the load-bearing article of the Christian faith: 1 Corinthians 15:14–19 establishes that if Christ has not been raised bodily, the entire gospel collapses.
First Fruits (Aparchē)	Greek: "first fruits," the first portion of the harvest offered to God as the representative beginning and covenantal guarantee of the full harvest to follow (Leviticus 23:9–11). Applied in 1 Corinthians 15:20 to Christ's resurrection ("But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep") to establish His resurrection as both the first instance of the eschatological resurrection harvest and the covenantal guarantee that the full harvest, the resurrection of all who are in Christ, will follow at the appointed time. The first-fruits metaphor establishes the believers' resurrection as the same kind of event as Christ's resurrection (genuine, physical, bodily), guaranteed by the same divine commitment that the offering of the first fruits represents. Also applied to the Spirit in Romans 8:23 as the first fruits of the full eschatological inheritance.
Spiritual Body (Sōma Pneumatikon)	Paul's description in 1 Corinthians 15:44 of the resurrection body: "It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body." The spiritual body is not an immaterial body (not a spirit rather than a body) but a body that is fully and permanently animated and empowered by the Holy Spirit, as opposed to the natural body (sōma psuchikon) that is animated by the natural biological life-principle. The spiritual body is more intensely physical than the present body, not less, in the sense that the Spirit's full and unhindered inhabitation of the transformed body will express the physical existence's fullest eschatological capacity. The pattern is Christ's own resurrection body: genuinely physical (the disciples touched Him; He ate; the tomb was empty) yet transformed beyond the constraints of the present-age body (capable of appearing and disappearing; no longer subject to death and decay).
Aphthartos	Greek: "imperishable," "incorruptible," "undying", the specific descriptor of the resurrection body in 1 Corinthians 15:42, 52–54, the divine nature in 1 Timothy 1:17, and the crown the believer will receive in 1 Corinthians 9:25. Distinguished from the present body's phtharton (perishable, subject to decay and death). The imperishable character of the resurrection body means that it will never age, never decay, never be subject to illness or death, and never move in the direction of dissolution that the present body's fundamental instability makes inevitable. The aphthartos character of the resurrection body reflects the aphthartos character of the eternal life of the God who gives it: the resurrection body participates in the permanence and the immortality of the divine life in a way that the present body cannot.
Summophon	Greek: "conformed to," "having the same form as", the adjective in Philippians 3:21 ("transform the body of our humble state into conformity with [summophon] the body of His glory") and the verbal form in Romans 8:29 (summorphous, "predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son"). The summophon of Philippians 3:21 establishes that the resurrection body's pattern is specifically the glorified body of Jesus Christ, not an independently designed eschatological form but the specific transformation of the present body into the same form as the body of the ascended, glorified Son of God. The eschatological body will be recognizably human (the same personal identity expressed in bodily form) and recognizably like Christ (the same glorified embodiment that the Son currently inhabits).

Two Resurrections	The distinction established in John 5:28–29 and Revelation 20:4–6 between the resurrection of life (the resurrection of the righteous to the eschatological fullness of the eternal life they already possess) and the resurrection of judgment (the resurrection of the unrighteous to the eschatological fullness of the judgment they have already passed over themselves). Both resurrections are bodily, universal, and eschatological; they are distinguished not by the physical character of the event but by its destination: for those who are in Christ, the resurrection of the body is the glorious expression of the eternal life that faith has already received; for those who are not in Christ, the resurrection of the body is the solemn expression of the judgment that unbelief has already incurred.
Continuity of the Resurrection Body	The theological conviction that the resurrection body is the same body transformed rather than a completely new body created to replace the original, grounded in: (1) the pattern of Christ’s resurrection (the same body that was crucified was raised, the tomb was empty, the disciples recognized Him, He bore the crucifixion marks); (2) the accountability of the resurrection body for the deeds done in the present body (2 Corinthians 5:10); and (3) the redemptive rather than replacement character of the resurrection (the creator redeems and glorifies what He created, not discards it). The continuity is understood as the continuity of personal identity rather than the material reassembly of the precise molecules of the present body, the same personal identity expressed in the glorified embodiment of the resurrection body.
Temple of the Holy Spirit	Paul’s description in 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 of the present body as the Spirit’s dwelling place, which grounds the present-age obligation to “glorify God in your body.” The temple image draws on the Old Testament’s account of the tabernacle and temple as the specific, designated, holy location of the divine presence, and applies it to the specific, individual, physical body of the believer in whom the Spirit permanently dwells. The eschatological connection (v. 14: “God has both raised the Lord and will raise us up through His power”) establishes the present temple’s eschatological significance: the body that is now the Spirit’s temple is the body that will be raised and glorified in the eschatological fullness that the Spirit’s present indwelling guarantees.

Practical Application

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that the Christian hope is specifically, irreducibly, and joyfully bodily, not the soul's escape from the body but the body's transformation in the pattern of Christ's own resurrection body. The popular evangelical picture of the afterlife as disembodied souls floating in a purely spiritual heaven is not the Christian hope; it is a Platonic intrusion that the resurrection doctrine consistently and urgently corrects. The Christian hope is the resurrection of this body, glorified and imperishable, in the specific, Christologically-defined, Spirit-animated form that 1 Corinthians 15's fourfold contrast describes. The body matters. The resurrection is physical. And the God who will raise the body is the God who declared it very good, who took it in the incarnation, who raised it from the dead in Christ, and who has committed Himself to its eschatological redemption in every person who is in Christ.

We must believe that Christ's resurrection is not merely the demonstration that resurrection is possible but the covenantal first-fruits guarantee that the full harvest will follow. The binding character of the first-fruits metaphor is the specific, irreversible, covenantally-committed character of the guarantee: the God who offered the first fruits has committed Himself to delivering the full harvest. The believers' resurrection is not a conditional future possibility dependent on the quality of the present-age faith and holiness; it is the guaranteed, ordained, divinely-committed second stage of the eschatological plan whose first stage, the resurrection of the firstborn Son, has already been irreversibly accomplished.

We must believe that the body matters now because it will be raised then. The present body's eschatological significance is not a reason for the anxious monitoring of its performance or the perfectionist demanding of more from it than the present age's *posse non peccare* can provide; it is a reason for the specific, eschatologically-motivated, Spirit-trusting stewardship of the body as the Spirit's temple, the living sacrifice of Romans 12:1, and the specific, embodied instrument through which the adopted child's service, love, and worship are expressed in the present age on the way to the resurrection that will complete the body's full eschatological expression.

B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

Desire the specific, Romans-8:23 groaning-for-the-redemption-of-the-body that the doctrine of the resurrection should produce in the genuinely regenerate believer: not the gnostic desire to be free of the body but the Christian desire for the body's redemption, the eschatological longing of those who know what the Spirit's first fruits are the pledge of and who groan with the specific, bodily, forward-directed longing of those who await the full harvest. This is not the morbid desire for death but the eschatological desire for the resurrection, the completion of what the new birth began, the redemption of the specific, individual, personally-known and personally-inhabited body that the present age has been using and wearing and suffering in on the way to the day when it will be raised and glorified.

Desire the specific, 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 comfort for those in your congregation who are mourning the death of those who have died in Christ: the comfort that grieves genuinely (the grief is real, the loss is real, the present absence of the bodily presence is real) while grieving differently from those who have no hope (the reunion is coming, the same person will be received again in the glorified bodily presence that the resurrection promises, and the reunion will be in the eschatological context of the new creation in which the specific, bodily, face-to-face

presence of those who have died in Christ will be permanently restored). Desire to preach and pastorally communicate this comfort with the specific bodily, personal, recognizable character of the resurrection hope that the New Testament actually promises, not the vague “they are in a better place” of the generic religious comfort but the specific, bodily, reunion-promising, Christ-centered hope of the resurrection.

Desire the pastoral courage to correct the implicit dualism, the body-dismissing, soul-only eschatology, that pervades popular evangelical culture with the specific, theologically-precise, biblically-grounded account of the bodily resurrection that Paul provides in 1 Corinthians 15. The doctrinal correction is not academic pedantry; it has practical pastoral consequences: the body’s present use, the grief and the comfort of those who mourn, the character of the resurrection hope that sustains the believer through the specific, bodily, physical sufferings of the present age, and the specific, doxological response to the God who declared the body very good, redeemed it through the cross, raised it in Christ, and will raise it in every person who is in Christ.

C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?

- Read 1 Corinthians 15:1–58 in its entirety in a single sitting, attending to the structure of Paul’s argument. Note the movement: (1) the tradition received (vv. 1–8), (2) the consequences of denying the resurrection (vv. 12–19), (3) the certain reality of the resurrection and its eschatological order (vv. 20–28), (4) the practical consequences of the resurrection for present-age behavior (vv. 29–34), (5) the nature of the resurrection body (vv. 35–49), (6) the mystery and the transformation (vv. 50–53), and (7) the doxological conclusion (vv. 54–58). For each section: what specific aspect of the resurrection does it address, and what specific pastoral or theological implication does Paul draw from it? And what specific application does the final doxology of verses 54–58 (“Death is swallowed up in victory” ... “thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”) invite?
- Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 as Paul’s pastoral application of the resurrection doctrine to the specific grief of those who have lost loved ones to death. Note the specific structure: the description of the problem (v. 13: grief without hope), the Christological ground of the comfort (v. 14: if Jesus died and rose, so also those who have died in Him), the specific apocalyptic sequence (vv. 15–17: the descent of the Lord, the resurrection of the dead in Christ, the transformation of the living, the corporate meeting with the Lord in the air), and the pastoral conclusion (v. 18: “therefore comfort one another with these words”). Ask: what specific aspect of the resurrection hope is most comforting in the context of grief? And what specific pastoral conversation would most effectively bring the specific, bodily, reunion-promising character of the resurrection hope to the specific person in your congregation who is currently mourning?
- Meditate on John 20:19–29, the resurrection appearances to the disciples, as the specific, historically-documented account of the bodily character of Christ’s resurrection. Note the physical details: the disciples were in a locked room; Jesus stood among them; He showed them His hands and His side; the disciples rejoiced; He breathed on them and gave them the Spirit; He ate food (Luke 24:41–43); Thomas put his finger into the nail marks and his hand into the side. Ask: what specific theological implications does the physical character of the resurrection appearances establish about the nature of the resurrection body? And how does the continuity between the crucified body (the nail marks, the wound in the side) and the resurrection body (glorified, transcending physical constraints) illuminate the specific character of the continuity-in-transformation that the believers’ own resurrection will produce?
- Evaluate the specific, implicit anthropology of your current congregation’s understanding of death and afterlife. Do the ways your congregation speaks about the deaths of those who have died in Christ, the funeral language, the sympathy language, the prayerful language, reflect the specifically bodily,

resurrection-oriented, reunion-expecting hope of the New Testament? Or do they reflect the Platonic soul-escape-from-body language of the popular culture (“they are free now”, “their spirit is still with us”, “they are in a better place as pure spirit”)? What specific changes in the congregation’s language, preaching, and pastoral care would most effectively communicate the specifically bodily, specifically reunifying, specifically Christ-patterned resurrection hope of the New Testament?

- Read Romans 8:11 alongside 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 and Romans 12:1 as the three key present-age, body-relevant texts that the resurrection doctrine grounds. For each: what is the specific eschatological ground of the present-age body-claim (Romans 8:11: the Spirit who raised Christ will raise your mortal body; 1 Corinthians 6:14: God who raised the Lord will raise us; Romans 12:1: by the mercies of God, the whole saving work including the resurrection promise)? And for each: what specific, practical, present-age obligation toward the body does the eschatological ground establish? Write down three specific, concrete, personally-applicable changes in your own stewardship of your body that the resurrection hope grounds and motivates, and bring them to your study group for accountability and prayer.

Key Texts: 1 Corinthians 15:12–28, 35–58; Philippians 3:20–21; Romans 8:11, 23; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; John 5:28–29; 1 Corinthians 6:14, 19–20; Romans 12:1; John 20:19–29

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

- The lesson opens with the claim that the Christian hope is not the escape of the soul from the body but the resurrection of the body in glory. Before engaging the lesson's specific content, evaluate your own instinctive picture of what happens to believers after death. Is it primarily the survival of the soul in a disembodied state (implicitly Platonic), or is it specifically the bodily resurrection as the New Testament describes it? And what specific pastoral, devotional, or cultural influences have most shaped the picture you currently hold? What would change in your understanding of the Christian hope, your comfort in grief, and your present-age view of the body if the specifically bodily, resurrection-oriented hope of the New Testament were to replace or correct the implicit dualism of your current picture?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

- Read 1 Corinthians 15:12–22. In verse 12, what is the specific claim that “some among you” are making, and why is it inconsistent with the preaching of Christ’s resurrection? In verses 13–19, what are the six specific consequences Paul lists of denying the resurrection (if there is no resurrection, then...)? In verse 20, what is the “but now” declaration that reverses all six consequences? In verses 21–22, what is the specific typological framework Paul uses to ground the resurrection of the believers (“for since by a man came... by a man also came...”) And in the light of the six consequences of verses 13–19, why does the bodily resurrection deserve the title “the article by which the Christian hope stands or falls”?
- Read 1 Corinthians 15:35–49. In verse 35, what are the two specific questions raised? In verses 36–38, what is the analogy Paul uses, and what three specific points of the analogy does he develop (the necessity of the seed’s death; the difference between the seed sown and the body raised; God’s sovereign determination of the body given)? In verses 39–41, what additional analogies does Paul use from nature to establish that different kinds of bodies have different characters? In verses 42–44, what are the four contrasts between the present body and the resurrection body? In verses 45–49, what is the specific comparison between the two Adams, and what does the bearing of the image of the heavenly (v. 49) establish about the resurrection body’s relationship to the glorified Christ?
- Read Philippians 3:17–21. In verse 18–19, what is the description of those whose “god is their appetite” and who “set their minds on earthly things”? In verse 20, what is the specific contrast to the earthly-mindedness (“our citizenship is in... from which also we eagerly wait...”) In verse 21, what is the specific transformation that the Savior will accomplish, what is the pattern of the transformation (“into conformity with the body of...”), and what is the mechanism (“by the exertion of the power that He has...”) How does the eschatological hope of verse 21 function as the motivation for the present-age posture of verse 20 (“eagerly wait”) rather than the earthly-mindedness of verses 18–19?
- Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. In verse 13, what is the pastoral problem Paul is addressing (“you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope”, the Thessalonians are grieving; the question is the quality of the grief, not its presence)? In verse 14, what is the Christological ground of the comfort (the parallel between Christ’s dying-and-rising and the dying-and-raising of those who have fallen asleep in Him)? In verses 15–17, what is the specific eschatological sequence Paul describes, and what specific assurance does verse 15 provide for those who are alive at the Lord’s coming (they will not precede those who have died)? In verse 16, what are the three specific auditory signals of the resurrection (“a shout... the voice of the archangel...

the trumpet of God”)? And how does the word “therefore” in verse 18 establish the pastoral purpose of the entire eschatological account?

- Read John 5:24–29. In verse 24, what are the two present-tense realities of the person who hears and believes (has eternal life; does not come into judgment; has passed out of death into life)? In verse 25, what is the present-tense dimension of the resurrection (“an hour is coming and now is... the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live”)? In verse 26, what is the ground of the Son’s life-giving authority (“Just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself”)? In verses 28–29, what is the universal, bodily, future resurrection described, and what are the two specific destinations? How do the two dimensions of the resurrection (the present spiritual life of vv. 24–26 and the future bodily resurrection of vv. 28–29) together establish the comprehensive character of the life that belief in the Son of God secures?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

- The lesson argues that the Christian hope is specifically and irreducibly bodily, in contrast to the Platonic soul-escape tradition. Evaluate the adequacy of this contrast for the specific situation of the believer between death and the resurrection, the intermediate state. What does the New Testament teach about the condition of the believer between death and the resurrection (2 Corinthians 5:8: “absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord”; Philippians 1:23: “to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better”; Luke 23:43: “today you shall be with Me in Paradise”)? And how does the intermediate state, the soul’s presence with Christ before the resurrection of the body, relate to the lesson’s emphasis on the bodily resurrection as the ultimate eschatological hope without implying that the intermediate state is inferior in the sense of less important?
- The lesson presents the first-fruits metaphor of 1 Corinthians 15:20 as the covenantal guarantee of the believers’ resurrection: the offering of the first fruits covenantally commits the God who offered them to delivering the full harvest. Evaluate the force of this metaphor as a ground for the resurrection hope. Does the metaphor establish the resurrection of the believers as absolutely certain (the same kind of divine commitment as the offering of first fruits represents) or merely as highly probable (the God who raised Christ is the God who will likely raise those who are in Him)? And what specific aspects of the New Testament’s account of the resurrection, the two-Adam typology, the “those who are Christ’s at His coming” of verse 23, the imperative of verse 58 (“be steadfast... knowing that your toil is not in vain”), reinforce the certainty that the first-fruits metaphor establishes?
- The lesson presents the spiritual body (*sōma pneumatikon*) of 1 Corinthians 15:44 as more intensely physical than the present body, not less, because it is fully and permanently animated by the Spirit rather than by the natural biological life-principle. Evaluate the theological adequacy of this account. Does the distinction between “natural” (*psuchikon*, animated by the *psuchē*) and “spiritual” (*pneumatikon*, animated by the Spirit) adequately guard against both the materialist misreading (the resurrection body is identical to the present body in every physical respect) and the spiritualist misreading (the resurrection body is not physical at all but purely spiritual)? And what evidence from the resurrection appearances of Christ most directly supports the “more intensely physical, not less” reading of the spiritual body?
- The lesson presents the theological case for the continuity of the resurrection body with the present body as based on personal identity (the same personal identity expressed in the glorified embodiment) rather than material continuity (the same atoms reassembled). Evaluate the adequacy of this distinction for both the philosophical objection (what happens to bodies that have been completely dissolved?) and the

theological conviction (God will raise the same body, not a replacement). Does the personal-identity account adequately capture what the New Testament's resurrection language means by "same body"? And what specific difficulties, philosophical, scientific, or pastoral, does the personal-identity account leave unresolved, and how would you address them?

- The lesson presents the present-age implications of the bodily resurrection: the body matters now because it will be raised then. Evaluate the specific, practical scope of this implication. Does the eschatological significance of the body extend to every present-age use and stewardship of the body (diet, exercise, medical care, physical disciplines, bodily service of the neighbor), or only to those specifically addressed by the New Testament's own body-related texts (the mortification of bodily sin, the offering of the body as a living sacrifice, the care of the body as the Spirit's temple)? And does the eschatological significance of the body provide adequate theological grounding for a Christian ethic of the body that addresses contemporary questions about the body's use, care, and modification?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

- The lesson argues that the specifically bodily character of the resurrection hope provides a different kind of comfort in grief from the generic religious assurance that "they are in a better place." Think of the person in your congregation who has most recently lost someone to death. How would you communicate the specifically bodily, reunion-promising, Christ-patterned resurrection hope of 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 to that person in a way that is both theologically precise (the specific bodily resurrection, not a vague spiritual afterlife) and pastorally warm (the specific comfort for the specific grief)? And what specific aspects of the resurrection body's description in 1 Corinthians 15, the imperishable, the glorious, the powerful, the spiritual, would most directly address the specific quality of the loss and the specific character of the grief?
- The lesson identifies the implicit Platonic dualism of popular evangelical eschatology as the most common pastoral distortion of the resurrection hope. Evaluate your own preaching and pastoral care: do you communicate the resurrection hope in the specifically bodily, personally-continuous, Christologically-patterned form that the New Testament presents, or do you tend toward the soul-survival, disembodied-spirit, better-place language of the popular culture? What specific changes in your funeral preaching, your comfort language, and your eschatological teaching would most effectively communicate the specifically bodily resurrection hope of the New Testament to those in your care? And how would you handle the pastoral tension between the technically-precise doctrinal account and the emotionally-immediate pastoral need in the context of grief?
- The lesson presents the present-age implication of the bodily resurrection as the specific, eschatologically-motivated stewardship of the body as the Spirit's temple and the living sacrifice of Romans 12:1. Evaluate your own present-age stewardship of your body in the light of its eschatological significance. Are there specific areas of the body's use, care, or stewardship that the resurrection hope motivates but that your practice has not adequately reflected? What specific change in the way you use, care for, or offer your body would most directly express the conviction that this body matters eternally because this body will rise? And how would you communicate this eschatological ground for the present-age body-ethic to those in your congregation who may be motivated by the body's present performance but not by its eschatological destiny?
- The lesson closes with the doxological declaration that the gospel Paul preached was the resurrection of the body in the Christological sense, not the immortality of the soul in the Platonic sense. As you approach the remaining lessons of the series (Lesson 34 on the new heavens and new earth, and the final doxological

lesson), reflect on the cumulative theological vision that the glorification unit is producing: the resurrection of the body, the new creation, the face-to-face presence of God with His redeemed people. What specific dimension of this eschatological vision most powerfully motivates the present-age Christian life that the entire soteriology series has been describing? And how would you communicate this eschatological motivation, the destination that gives the entire journey its meaning, to those who are most discouraged, most suffering, and most in need of the specific hope that the glorification's completion of the saving work provides?

Prayer Focus

Open this lesson's prayer time by reading 1 Corinthians 15:51–58 aloud, slowly, as the doxological climax of Paul's most sustained argument for the bodily resurrection: "Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?'... but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Let the "Death is swallowed up in victory" be received not as a theological proposition but as the specific, personally-addressed, eschatologically-certain declaration of the God who raised His Son and will raise His people: death is not the final word; the body is not the final form; the imperishable is coming.

Pray the resurrection hope over the bodies of those in your congregation who are currently most afflicted by the present body's limitation and suffering. Name them. For each one, pray Romans 8:11 and Philippians 3:21 as the specific, personally-directed, bodily resurrection promise over the specific, afflicted body: "He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal body through His Spirit who dwells in you. The Lord Jesus Christ will transform this body of humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself. This body matters. It will rise. The God who made it very good will raise it imperishable. And the suffering it is currently enduring is the seed being sown that will be raised in glory."

Pray the specific, 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 comfort over those in your congregation who are currently mourning the death of someone who died in Christ. Name those who are grieving. For each one, pray the specific, bodily, reunion-promising, Christ-grounded comfort that Paul instructs the Thessalonians to speak to one another: "God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. The Lord Himself will descend from heaven; the dead in Christ will rise first; and they will be with the Lord forever. The reunion is coming. The same person you have loved and lost will be received again, the same person, recognized as the same person, in the imperishable, glorious, powerful, spiritual body of the resurrection, and you will be with the Lord, and with them, forever. Grieve, because the loss is real. But grieve differently, because the hope is specific, the guarantee is first-fruits-certain, and the harvest is coming."

Pray for the congregation's bodily stewardship in the light of the resurrection hope: for the specific, eschatologically-motivated offering of the body as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1), the care of the body as the Spirit's temple (1 Corinthians 6:19–20), and the specific, bodily expression of the sanctified life that the resurrection's eschatological significance grounds and motivates. Ask the Spirit to deepen in every member of the congregation the conviction that the body matters now because it will rise then, that the specific stewardship, care, discipline, and offering of the body in the present age is the specific, eschatologically-motivated, resurrection-grounded expression of the gospel's full scope. And ask for the pastoral wisdom to communicate the body's eschatological significance with both theological precision and pastoral warmth to those who most need to hear it.

Close with the doxological declaration that the resurrection of the body is the specific, eschatological, bodily expression of the gospel's full scope: the God who became flesh, who rose bodily from the dead, who ascended in the same body He took in the incarnation, who reigns at the Father's right hand in that same glorified body, and who will return in that same body has declared the body's redemption as the certain, covenantally-committed destination of every person who is in Christ. The first fruits have been offered. The harvest is coming. The body will rise. And the groaning of the present age, the groaning of every body that is aging, afflicted, suffering, or has already been laid in the grave, is the groaning of those who have tasted the first fruits and cannot be satisfied with anything less than the full harvest of the resurrection that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God who is the God of the living, not the dead, has guaranteed by raising Jesus from the dead on the third day. Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

"But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive."

1 Corinthians 15:20–22, NASB 1995

Key Texts: 1 Corinthians 15:12–28, 35–58; Philippians 3:20–21; Romans 8:11, 23; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; John 5:28–29; 1 Corinthians 6:14, 19–20; Romans 12:1

Soli Deo Gloria
To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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