



## Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

### Focus Article:

- 📖 Raised to Walk in Newness of Life  
(Easter, pp. 35-43)

### Suggested Articles:

- 📖 Charting the Christian Hope  
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- 📖 Anticipation  
(Easter, pp. 46-49)

### What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to [Christian\\_Reflection@baylor.edu](mailto:Christian_Reflection@baylor.edu).

### Christian Reflection

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# Raised to Walk in Newness of Life

Christ's resurrection guides us into "newness of life," which is life here and now, but with a new, eschatological dimension. It leads us to examine everything we feel, think, and do from a new perspective that takes our present bodies, our resurrectional bodies, and Christ's body (the Church) ever more seriously.

### Prayer

Scripture Reading: Philippians 3:10-14

### Meditation†

It is the purpose and intention of the Lord Jesus to make this world entirely new. You recollect how it was made at first—pure and perfect. It sang with its sister-spheres the song of joy and reverence. It was a fair world, full of everything that was lovely, beautiful, happy, holy. ... But there came a serpent, and his craft spoiled it all. He whispered into the ears of a mother Eve; she fell, and we fell with her, and what a world this now is! If people walk about in it with their eyes open, they will see it to be a horrible sphere. I do not mean that its rivers, its lakes, its valleys, its mountains are repulsive. Nay, it is a world fit for angels, naturally; but it is a horrible world morally. ...

Truly, truly, this seems to me to be a glorious purpose. To make a world is something wonderful, but to make a world new is something more wonderful still.

*Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892)*

### Reflection

As believers we can adopt a new stance toward sin, a stance that is grounded in Christ's resurrection and prefigured in our baptism. "We have been buried with him by baptism into death," Paul explains, "so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4). We are no longer enslaved partners to distorted desires and sinful habits, but can actively resist them. This new orientation toward sinfulness is not our accomplishment, but something so amazing that it reveals "the glory of the Father" in the same way Christ's resurrection does.

Paul identifies this line of causation, which runs from the event of Christ's bodily resurrection to the divinely empowered life of his disciples, as "the power of his resurrection" (Philippians 3:10). This power does not merely give us a jump start for discipleship by freeing us from sin and making it possible for us to resist our distorted practices and desires, it also enables and guides our growth into Christlike virtues throughout our lives.

Because God's power to enliven us spiritually is 'channeled' to us (so to speak) through the *bodily* resurrection of Jesus, it provides the following distinctive shape to our moral life.

- ▶ *We take our present bodies seriously.* Christ's resurrection signaled the importance of the human body in the economy of God's redemptive plan. Therefore, we should treat our own and other human bodies with the great respect and care they deserve as a prime locus of God's redemptive work. We should provide urgent or long-term care directly to particular human bodies in need, but also work to correct the broken social systems that endanger many human



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bodies. And, in a less corrective or defensive mode, we might employ the creative arts, literature, teaching, or counseling to encourage a rightly ordered appreciation of the human body.

- ▶ *We take our resurrectional bodies seriously.* From the teachings of Jesus and Paul and the descriptions of Jesus' resurrected body, we hope that in a mysterious way our present bodies will be involved in God's raising to life our resurrectional bodies. The latter will be wonderfully different – more glorified and powerful, and totally incorruptible – but informed in appearance, habits, and loving gestures by the embodied lives we are living now. As we take our resurrectional bodies seriously, we revalue our present bodies from a fresh, eschatological perspective. We are empowered to resist how culture sexualizes young bodies, denigrates aging ones, siphons off medical resources to preserve advantaged persons' lives with extreme measures, and so on. We may embrace courageous acts of service to others and even martyrdom.
- ▶ *We take the Body of Christ, which is the Church, seriously.* We have been raised from the waters of baptism to be "dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:11), the latter being Paul's favorite way to describe our membership together through the risen Christ in the Church. Given this new identity in Christ, we no longer allow identities of family heritage, nationality, race, and gender (cf. Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:11) – or things like wealth, social status, and political affiliations – to set ultimate norms for our behavior, but we examine these with a wary eye. We do not withdraw from involvement in the world, but learn to approach it through the Church's worship and practices that enable us to discern and embrace what God is doing in the world.

### Study Questions

1. Using the outline of taking your body, your resurrectional body, and the Body of Christ seriously, identify specific ways your discipleship has been shaped by Christ's resurrection.
2. Discuss Cameron Jorgenson's view: "The Christian hope is not that someday believers will 'fly away,'" for that hope is "firmly fixed on the promise of the risen Lord who comforts his people by saying, 'See, I am making all things new.'"
3. How are both the surprise and power of Christ's resurrection depicted in Eugène Burnand's painting *Les Disciples* (1898)?

### Departing Hymn: "The First Day of Creation" (verse 2a, 3b)

The day of resurrection  
God once again turned night  
to joyful adoration  
and anthems of delight.  
Rejoice in celebration,  
your voices all as one,  
to sing the new creation  
in Christ, God's risen Son

David W. Music (2013)  
Tune: AURELIA

† Adapted from Charles Haddon Spurgeon, "A New Creation," Sermon 3467, [www.spurgeon.org/sermons/3467.htm](http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/3467.htm).

# Raised to Walk in Newness of Life

## Lesson Plans

Abridged Plan	Standard Plan
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Meditation	Meditation
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Question 1	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

### Teaching Goals

1. To outline the distinctive shape that the event of Christ's bodily resurrection gives to the Christian moral life.
2. To discuss how this distinctive shape is prefigured in baptism.
3. To consider how the human impact of Christ's resurrection is depicted in Eugène Burnand's *Les Disciples*.

### Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 8-9 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Easter (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested articles before the group meeting.

### Begin with a Story

This is how I recall my baptism. "My dad asked quietly, 'Are you ready?' It was the signal for me to draw a deep breath and pinch my nostrils shut with my right hand. Then he intoned 'Buried with him by baptism into death' as he lowered me back and under the water's surface where I could not breathe. 'Raised to walk in newness of life' he announced in a louder voice as he pulled me, gasping for air, back out. Because being baptized as a believer into the body of Christ is the most publicly vulnerable thing I have ever done (and, I suspect, that anyone could ever do), I remember it well fifty years later." (*Easter*, p. 35)

The baptismal formula that my father used, drawing from Romans 6:3-4, portends that discipleship involves participating ever more fully in Christ's death and resurrection. In this study we will explore how Christ's bodily resurrection gives distinctive shape to the Christian moral life – which is to say, how believers ought to feel, think, and act in regard to one another, other created things, and God.

### Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by asking God to guide members' reflection on the resurrectional meaning of their baptism.

### Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Philippians 3:10-14 from a modern translation.

### Reflection

The event of Christ's bodily resurrection provides a distinctive shape, motivation, and enabling power for the Christian moral life. It is Christ's *resurrection* – not his resuscitation, revivification, or reanimation – that gives shape to our discipleship, and this event must be interpreted within the narrative of God's work through the people of Israel and the Church. I draw a three-part outline of this distinctive shape – taking our present bodies, our resurrectional bodies, and the Body of Christ (which is the Church) seriously – from an early baptismal confession: "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, / and in his only begotten Son / our Lord Jesus Christ, / and in the Holy Spirit, / and in the resurrection of the flesh, / and in the holy catholic church." In the focus article I suggest that the three aspects are nested in this way: taking our resurrectional bodies seriously does

not lead us to devalue our present bodies, but to value them rightly (i.e., within a new, eschatological perspective); and taking the Body of Christ (the Church) seriously does not lead us to value the other identities and morally formative relationships less than we should, but to value them rightly (i.e., within a new, ecclesial perspective).

### *Study Questions*

1. Form three small groups to brainstorm specific examples of how discipleship is formed in the ways mentioned in the outline. In regard to taking our present bodies seriously, I mention three sorts of examples: “providing urgent or long-term care directly to particular human bodies in need – for instance, to those who are unborn, very young, disabled, sick, or dying,” “working to correct the broken social systems that endanger many human bodies – such as material poverty, unjust and unhealthy food production, disordered constructions of sexuality, or predatory warfare,” and employing “the creative arts, literature, teaching, or counseling to encourage a rightly ordered appreciation of the human body.”

In regard to taking our resurrectional bodies seriously, I suggest that we begin to see our “present embodied lives as wonderful gifts from God which [we], in turn, can donate to one another and back to God” in preparation for life together with God. Thus, we have reason to resist the various ways that society tempts us to worship the human body – by sexualizing young bodies, denigrating older or disabled bodies, and distorting medical care to extend the present life of those who can afford it. And in some situations we may be called to risk our present lives and health for the sake of God’s kingdom.

In regard to taking the Body of Christ (which is the Church) seriously, I mention taking our identity and growth as members in Christ’s body as more fundamental than other “identities of family heritage, nationality, race, and gender ... [and] wealth, social status, and political affiliations.” We take on some moral projects through the Church and in concert with other members, but we evaluate all of our moral projects (and loyalties) through the lens of the commitments and habits that we form in worship.

2. Cameron Jorgenson laments that “modern spiritual sensibilities have led both Christians and Jews to conceive of the afterlife in wholly ethereal terms.” Indeed, with “our imaginations shaped more by Plato than by Jesus, we pine for the release of our souls from the prison-house of our bodies.” This is clearly illustrated in the American folk-hymn that exults: “when I die, hallelujah, by and by, I’ll fly away!”

By contrast, Jorgenson explains, the Christian hope for life after death should be centered on Christ’s *bodily* resurrection. Christ proclaims “See, I am making all things new” (Revelation 21:5) in the context of John the Revelator’s vision of “a new earth” where risen believers will dwell bodily. The meditation quoted from Charles Haddon Spurgeon’s sermon “A New Creation” is a reflection on this proclamation.

Relate the three books that Jorgenson reviews to the outline in this study. All three emphasize that our hope for life after death must take our present bodies more seriously. Matthew Levering, especially, highlights the need to distinguish resurrectional bodies from present bodies, and to value the latter in light of the former. All three interpret resurrectional hope in the context of membership in God’s people.

3. As a naturalist, Eugène Burnand depicts the effect of Christ’s resurrection through the very human actions and passions of two disciples, Peter and (according to tradition) John, as they race to the empty tomb. Their surprise and concern are realistically portrayed in both figures’ faces and in John’s clutched hands. Yet they also run with hope. “They are running away from the three crosses on the lower right of the composition and towards the light of the dawn,” Heidi Hornik explains. “The liturgical colors of both Easter and Lent (purple, gold, and white), found on the horizon and through the sky, are reflected by John’s robe.”

### *Departing Hymn*

“The First Day of Creation” is on pp. 53-55 of *Easter*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.