Week 11: Introduction to Eschatology: Death and Resurrection

I. Introduction to Eschatology

1. Beyond temporal and logical treatments, Grenz approaches this subject in terms of God’s telos or goal of history. This point is very important in order to understand Grenz’ approach AND for understanding the full range of biblical eschatology.

   (1) His concern is to describe the “divine intention” of creation of God’s actions in history.

   (2) What is God’s intention for persons, human history and creation?

   (3) “Eschatological hope” which is centred in the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead and looks forward to the general resurrection at the eschaton is the major thrust of contemporary eschatology. Since the 1960s all Christian theology has come to be understood as eschatological. Some like Erickson suggest that this is overkill. His “Basic Guide to Eschatology” primarily focuses on the millennium but there is far more to biblical eschatology than rational schemas of the millennium. The “Left Behind” series et al is best left behind to gain the fuller biblical thrust of what Christ’s return means in terms of God’s eschatological fulfillment of history and creation. Hermeneutical differences, worldviews, etc. are as heavy-handed on this topic if not more than in other theological subjects and account for a wide interpretative range of opinions.

2. Grenz develops his treatment in four major aspects (four chapters):

   (1) Personal eschatology: what does God intend for us as individuals?

   (2) Corporate eschatology: what does God intend for humanity and human history?

   (3) Cosmic eschatology: what does God intend for his eternal community?

   (4) Significance of Eschatology: what does God intend for us to understand about His eschatological purposes particularly for the difference it makes for Christian hope in the present day?

3. Interestingly, Bird places eschatology as part 3 (he has 8 sections) right after the section on the Trinity and prior to Christology. He calls it: The Gospel of the Kingdom: The Now and Not Yet. He acknowledges this as a non-traditional format but affirms it for two reasons: (1) the significance of God’s Kingdom as a major “biblical motif” due to its biblical import throughout Scripture and especially, (2) the significance of eschatology for the gospel of Jesus Christ (note Mark 1:15).
II. Personal Eschatology

Does death have the final say? The Christian belief of resurrection, which is based on Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, says a resounding “NO”! While eschatology involves God’s grand purpose in history, we begin our study at the point of individual eschatology as we study the meaning of this life and the basis of hope for life now and in God’s future. Leo Garrett states: “all systematic theology needs to be eschatologically oriented (647). Included in this first section is an inquiry into the meaning of what is often called “the intermediate state” (what happens to us immediately following death and prior to our bodily resurrection?) and whether this concept as traditionally understood is biblically valid. Like Grenz, Garrett begins with personal eschatology and has a beginning chapter on “The Christian Hope”.

1. Personal death

(1) Difficult to define:

a. Cessation of vital signs of pulse and breathing?

b. Cessation of all brain activity?

c. In a technological age death has become a biological enigma.

(2) Death as the end of personal life

a. Does death have the final say about life?

b. Biblical teachings:

(a) OT: death is ambiguous but there is a glimmer of hope.

i. Focus on value of life, especially its earthly longevity

ii. Negative references raise the question of resurrection hope (Job 14:14; Ps 16:8-11; 73:24; Hos. 13:14).

iii. Understood death as separation from God yet future bodily resurrection hope persisted (Job 19:25-27; Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2)

iv. With the exile, an eschatological hope of resurrection of the righteous developed influenced by resurrection beliefs in non-Hebraic sources (Dan. 12:2).
Thus, eschatological hope of a bodily resurrection has its roots in the O.T.: see also Isa. 26:19; Job 19:26. Elijah is a special case who “bypasses” Sheol by means of his fiery chariot!

(b) N.T.: Jesus’ resurrection crystallizes hope.

i. No more ambiguity about prospects beyond personal death

ii. Ancient hope is clearly developed:
   
   (i) Eternal life as present possession (John).
   
   (ii) Hope in face of death’s reality, not just future
   
   (iii) Death is “dead” or vanquished in light of Christ’s resurrection.

c. Theological teachings about death as seen in Christ:

   (a) Death is unnatural because it is contrary to God’s ultimate intention for us; why we must view it in eschatological perspective.

   (b) Death signifies lost community with God, self and others; it constitutes loss of relationships, thus loss of personal identity.

   (c) But because of resurrection hope in Christ, death has lost its sense of ultimacy, its “sting.”

2. Life after Death: the Hope of Eschatological Resurrection

   (1) Introduction

   a. The basis: the resurrection of Jesus

   b. Focal question: What happens immediately after a person dies? What happens between the point of death and one’s resurrection?

   c. The intermediate state: what is it? Is it taught in Scripture?
d. What’s the relationship between eternity, time, immortality? This is our major “conceptual” problem in understanding “sequence” from our time-bound perspective.

e. Hope is intrinsic to life – this is true for non-Christians as for Christians. But hope has its “finest hour” in the Christian hope of eschatological bodily resurrection.

(2) The basis of eschatological hope: overcoming death in power of Jesus’ resurrection

a. Introduction: Important features to consider:

(a) God’s answer to death is resurrection.

(b) Resurrection inaugurates our eternal participation in God’s eschatological covenant community.

(c) Background of apocalyptic expectation is important to understand N.T. focus on resurrection.

(d) Elements of continuity and discontinuity – there are similarities and dissimilarities to our present body and resurrection body.

(e) Key vision of holistic, embodied persons is the main point for a “resurrection body”.

(f) God is not the God of the dead, but of the living (Mark 12.24-27).

(g) Bible does not speculate HOW God will accomplish resurrection in terms of precise details but enough is affirmed to offer us hope.

b. The resurrection of Jesus Christ: foundation of resurrection hope

(a) Introduction

i. The central event of history is the cross of Christ understood in the light of His resurrection.

   (i) Cross and resurrection are non-negotiably inseparable as to salvation (Romans 4:25).

   (ii) Eschatologically, it gives both foundation and substance to Christian hope of eternal life (1 Cor 15; Tit 2:13).
ii. Bodily resurrection vs. immortality of the soul

(i) Jewish concept of bodily resurrection which is prominent in inter-biblical literature.

(ii) Platonic view of immortal soul abhorred the concept of corporeal resurrection.

(b) Distinctiveness of Jesus' resurrection

i. Jews expected eschatological resurrection for all at the end of history; Jesus' resurrection is the "first-fruit" of final resurrection.

ii. Lazarus, etc. those "raised" by Jesus were actually resuscitated, only to die again.

(c) Resurrection and the Kingdom of God

i. Jesus' resurrection epitomizes the end of history.

ii. The "already-but-not-yet" reality of the Kingdom of God has commenced.

(d) The Historicity of Jesus' Resurrection

i. Historical ways of understanding relationship of faith and history in light of Christ's resurrection

"Did it happen?" – the historicity question

(i) Enlightenment: rational reality means resurrection is a no-go.

(ii) David Strauss: resurrection of Jesus is a myth based on Christian conviction; no miracle.

(iii) Rudolf Bultmann: Jesus' resurrection was the rise of faith in the disciples' experience; no miracle.

(iv) Karl Barth: resurrection is an event beyond historical verification.

(v) Wolfhart Pannenberg: resurrection of Jesus as an historical event open to critical inquiry; history understood from its end-point (Jesus Christ).
Resurrection of Jesus is an objective, historical event. Importance of presuppositions. See Pannenberg, *Jesus-God and Man*.

ii. Where's the balanced view?

Must have room for grace and faith in trusting a God who chooses to work in history His redemptive purpose. Both historical evidence AND faith are required.

iii. How much significance does the resurrected Jesus appearing ONLY to believers have?

(e) Biblical focus: "He is risen" – this is the most common agreement in the N.T. documents.

Biblical witness (not "proofs" in strictest sense for reality of Jesus' resurrection)

i. Empty tomb tradition is important.

ii. Appearances of the resurrected Lord are multiple and diverse:

   (i) Gospels and 1 Cor 15:5-8 (10-11 in all) but not all to same individuals or locations

   (ii) Locations: Jerusalem or/and Galilee?

       Mark and Matthew (mostly Galilee)


       Placement due to gospel focus? Probably.

iii. Drastic change in the disciples is accounted for by the historicity and significance of Jesus' resurrection.

iv. Change in day of worship from Sabbath to first day of week – since Jesus was raised on “the first day of the week”.

v. Phenomenal growth of Christianity (Church) and all the countless Christian martyrs are rooted in the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection and subsequent Christian hope.
(f) The naysayers (those who deny Jesus’ historical resurrection):

a. Women mistakenly went to wrong tomb.

b. Disciples or authorities stole His body.

c. Swoon theory – Jesus passed out on the cross but revived in the coolness of the tomb, later escaped.

d. Disciples bribed guards (Mt. 28:11-15)

e. Appearances perhaps fabrications at best or at least hallucinations on the part of witnesses

(i) Galilee or Judea? Where did the appearances occur?

(ii) Diverse testimonies of the “witnesses” of the reality of his resurrection body

(g) The Theological Significance of Christ's Resurrection

"What does it mean?"

i. Most significantly, God's Kingdom rule has been inaugurated in history yet to be consummated.

ii. Other major consequences concerning Christ and believers:

   (i) Affirmation of Jesus' Sonship (Rom 1:4)

   (ii) Confirmation of His redeeming work (2 Cor 5:21; 1 Cor. 15:17)

iii. Demonstration of His Lordship over death and Satan (Phil 2:9-11; Col. 2:15)

iv. Anticipation of believers' resurrection (1 Cor 15:20; 1 John 3:2; Phil.3:21)

v. Impact for whole of creation (Rom 8:19-21)

vi. Basis of redemption and a lively hope (1 Pet 1:3)

vii. No need for believers to fear death (Heb 2:14)

(h) Our questions about resurrection body (Phil. 3:21; 1 John 3:2)
i. Jesus' resurrected form: continuity and discontinuity with pre-resurrection body; see Acts 1:3. Jesus’ followers had some difficulty recognizing the resurrected Lord. Luke says he even ate fish before them and invited Thomas to verify the real existence of his resurrection form. All it seems to assure them He was actually alive from the dead. The purpose seems to be assurance more than precise description. Note: He only appeared to “believers” and not all of them believed.

ii. Our future spiritual body (1 Cor. 15:44) – How similar will our resurrection body be to the descriptions of the form of His resurrection body? Is Paul claiming in Phil. 3:21 that Christ’s resurrection “form” will be the pattern for ours as Christians? Again, I think Scripture assures us God is aa competent to give us our proper resurrection “spiritual body” as He gives us what we presently require in this life. See Harris, 119-33. Harris says we need to see it as “heavenly, angel-like and without physical instincts”, 123).

(i) Purposes of His ascension (See Harris, 72-97.)

Harris notes that the full range of importance involves the reality of His resurrection and its import for his “vindication, exaltation and ascension, and to the coming of the Spirit” (72).

(1) Exaltation (Phil. 2:9) – confirmation He is Messiah.

(2) Sending of the Spirit (John 16:7)

(3) Make preparation for believers (John 14:2)

(j) His current ministry as Coregent with Father

i. Sends H.S. to indwell, empower believers (John 14:17; Acts 1:8)

ii. Intercession (Heb. 4:16)

iii. Lord & Head of His Church (Eph. 1:22; 5:23)

iv. Lord of creation (Col 1:17; 2:15)

(k) Theological Summary (see Garrett, 690-91)
i. There is a huge difference in eschatological resurrection and “resuscitation” such as in the case of Lazarus and all others brought back to this life only to die “again”.

ii. Resurrection life is a different “plane” of reality than life as we now know it (no tears, no death, no marriages, rebellious teens, etc.).

iii. Eschatological resurrection will be a bodily resurrection (not the clothing of an immortal soul).

iv. Eschatological resurrection will mean the full redemption of the human body by God’s power to create it.

v. The eschatological resurrection body will be a “spiritual body” conducive to eternal life; what all that means we do not yet know.

3. Competing world views on culminated personal life (note these are non-Christian views with no teaching or expectation of eschatological resurrection)

What happens when a person dies according to other worldviews besides the Christian hope of eschatological resurrection?

(1). Monism: the personal life melds in to the divine
   a. Process theology: through prehension, humans become aspects of the experience of God
   b. Radical feminists (Rosemary Reuther): at death the individuated ego is absorbed into collective personhood
   c. Many New Age philosophies follow Hinduism

(2) Reincarnation: at death the individual reemerges in a new earthly life form in a repetitive chain of rebirths

(3) Immortality of the soul: at death the individual enters the fullness of eternity by discarding the body (based on Greek dualism)

4. “Competing” Views of Life after Death within Christian perspectives

Much confusion and lack of understanding are involved in trying to understand what happens from the point of death until the final resurrection at Christ’s return. Some of the main interpretations follow:
(1) Death and resurrection as one event (instantaneous resurrection at death)

a. RCC pope (Benedict XII) in 1336 said death takes Christians into God’s presence; wicked to hell

b. Recent RCC view is immediate reception of resurrection body at death.

c. View of W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*

   (a) Paul had two views of resurrection:

      i. 1 Cor 15 – future resurrection of body

      ii. 2 Cor 5 – more advance perspective of no intermediate state by immediate transition

   (b) Davies focused on human nature as absolute unity.

   (c) But what about passages about future resurrection and 2nd coming as occasion of deliverance and glorification (John 5.25-29; Rom. 2.3-16; 1 Cor 4.5; 2 Thess 1.5-2.12)?

   (d) This individualization overlooks corporate idea in Bible of one resurrection (Pannenberg).

(2) Soul Sleep

a. RCC concept of soul sleep (13th century, John XXII)

b. Martin Luther, many Anabaptist, Socinians (today: Seventh-Day Adventists)

c. Texts: I Kings 2.10; John 11.11; Acts 7.60; 13.36; I Cor 15.6, 18, 20, 51; I Thess 4.13-15

d. Key strength: blissful condition of righteous after death

e. Criticisms:

   (a) A first-century euphemism?
(b) Presupposes dichotomy of soul and body with soul sleeping and body decomposing

(c) What about biblical references to personal, conscious existence between death and resurrection (Luke 16.19-31; Lu.23.43)?

(3) Conscious existence of soul after death: various interpretations of intermediate state (stage)

Note: Bird frames his discussion of personal eschatology in terms of the intermediate state, or “what happens when you die?” See 309-25.

a. Idea of intermediate state as “a disembodied, personal, conscious existence of soul between death” and Christ’s return (Erickson)

b. Idea of purgatory

(a) Basic concept: a place of purification for believers where remaining guilt can be expatiated.

(b) A major difference between RC and Protestant belief

(c) Idea developed during patristic period

i. Clement of Alexandria and Origen: if died without time to do penance, must be purified through fire.

ii. Practice of praying for dead was widespread in Eastern Church in first four centuries.

   (i) Augustine agreed.

   (ii) Aquinas – guilt can be removed after death but not punishment (venial sins)

(d) Sources: 2 Maccabees 12.43-45 main reference; also Mt 12.32; I Cor 3.15 (basically a RC view)

(e) Rejected by Reformers

   i. No explicit biblical support found

   ii. Contradictory to justification by faith

   iii. Clear teaching of Gal. 3.1-14; Eph. 2.8-9
(f) Grenz’s critique

i. Downplays finality of earthly life

ii. Disembodied person experiences changes prior to final judgment

c. Theological reviews of an intermediate state:

(a) Erickson: Yes. Believers experience the presence and unbelievers the absence of God.

i. Same qualitative but less intensive experiences as will occur in heaven or hell

ii. A tenable concept of disembodied existence, neither self-contradictory nor absurd

iii. Righteous received into paradise (Luke 16.19-31; 23.43)

iv. Being absent from body means being present with Lord for believers (2 Cor 5.1-10; Phil. 1.19-26).

(b) Garrett, Yes. After death means being in presence of God for Christians but not in final state; conscious. Non-Christians in state of conscious suffering but not final. Second coming, resurrection from the dead, final judgment, all to come later.

(c) Hockema, No. No independent biblical doctrine of such because teaching on this state “never to be separated from its teaching on resurrection of the body and the renewal of the earth”.

(d) Bird says Paul did not seem to connect the intermediate state with the parousia, and that he really did not give any description per se of it. He notes 2 Cor 5:1-10 as Paul’s principal text which suggests his hope and belief in a post-mortem presence with Christ prior to His return. Above all Paul desired to please the Lord in his “bodily” as well as his “heavenly body” (320-22).

(e) Grenz. Yes and No

i. OT Sheol not the repose of essential person after death nor a place of bliss

ii. NT texts do speak of continuation of personal life after death (Phil 1.20-24; Lu 16.19-31; 23.42-43; 2 Cor 5.6-8).
iii. Resurrection hope is crucial. Goal of Christian hope is resurrection, not an intermediate state. Through death God keeps the unrighteous until eschatological judgment as well as believers who are kept with God. To this extent Grenz holds to intermediate state.

“In the N.T. understanding the believer does not enter into the completion of salvation in some intermediate state at death, but only at the coming of the Lord at the consummation of history” (Matt 25.34; I Pet 1.4-5 (Grenz).”

(f) Hunt, Yes.

i. Bible brings out varied meanings of the believer’s resurrection.

ii. Receive eternal, resurrection life at conversion (John 3.16)

iii. Intermediate sense of fuller resurrection life (2 Cor 5.1-5)

iv. Fuller sense yet in final R. (1 Cor 15.52).

v. Believing dead with Christ the Lord after death than while living on earth

(g) Summary of positive and negative views of an “intermediate state” (See Garrett, 673-74):

i. Negative:

   (i) It either presupposes or at least suggests the independent reality of a “bodiless soul”.

   (ii) It appears to ignore the finality of death.

   (iii) It appears to depreciate the bodily existence.

   (iv) It appears to distract from the resurrection of the body.

   (v) It appears to undermine the necessity of a final judgment since “heaven” and
“hell” are to some degree already being experienced.

ii. Positive:


(ii) The concept of an intermediate state is preferable to that of “soul sleep”.

(iii) Rev. 6:10-11 suggests a realistic view of “time after death”.

(iv) “Paradise” may indeed be what the intermediate state is.

(v) Paul in his letters to Timothy and the Thessalonians appears to endorse the concept (1 Thess. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:6-8).

(h) “No one interpretation of the intermediate state has so far won anything like unanimous acceptance so that diversity of opinions continues to prevail.” (Hunt)

(i) Murray Harris says “Nowhere does the New Testament use the expression ‘intermediate state’ and nowhere does it speak directly or at length about the matter.” He surmises the N.T. writers prefer more of a “corporate concept” thinking more in terms of an interval between Christ’s resurrection and the final resurrection.

d. Actual situation of the dead? This question brings up the relationship of time to eternity (See Garrett, 653-60; Harris, 133-42).

(a) Changed perspective toward time by those who are dead?

i. Share God’s composite perspective.

ii. Events perceived from the end.
(b) No gap is sensed between death and eschatological resurrection from the dead’s “perspective” since they are not any longer in our time-bound frame of reference.

(c) Try to avoid both the separating of eternity from time as well as seeing eternity as endless time.

5. The Resurrection and Its Connection with Immorality (See Murray Harris’ excellent discussion, 189-240.)

(1) Only God is referenced in the Bible as “immortal” (1 Tim. 6:16) but the Bible affirms that humans are ‘mortal’ in the sense of the relationship of immortality to eternal life. We were “not (created) immortal yet immortality was a potential possession” by accepting the gospel (192).

(2) The Platonic view contained in “the Phaedo and the Phaedrus writings of Plato stresses immortality as “inherent” and its relationship to the “invisible, eternal realm of the Ideas or Forms and its participation in the Form of life” (201). The individual may be considered to be immortal because he/she has a soul which is “eternally pre-existent, incorporeal, invisible and indissoluble”. Thus the body is repugnant and obstructive to the soul (a highly dualized view). Though there is a more positive view later in Plato, the welcome event is “physical disembodiment”. Personal bodily resurrection is not a positive idea in Plato.

(3) The N.T. affirms “immortality” as both a “conditional” and a “future possession”. What we receive through Adam is not “immortality” but the certainty of death. It is the second Adam who offers immortality; this takes place at resurrection embodiment.

(4) Summary of relationship between immortality and resurrection:

a. Both of these concepts are essential to understand the N.T. evidence regarding Christian destiny. They actually are inseparable concepts and are complementary to each other. The N.T. usage of immortality stresses:

(a) “resurrection is a continuing state rather than a single event,

(b) is a permanent rather than a temporary condition, and

(c) is a transformed state constantly sustained by God’s life
b. Immortality is the result of God’s transforming power in resurrecting the body (235).

(a) Harris stresses “eternal life” as qualitative more than quantitative; “immortality” is more quantitative than qualitative.

(b) Immortality and resurrection life are NOT identical but “complementary”. Immortality aspect of resurrection insists it continues, is permanent and is not just an event in itself.

6. Theological Restatement

(1) The resurrection of Jesus is both God’s confirmation of Who Jesus is and God’s reminder that death does not have the final say over life.

(2) There remains much mystery as to what precisely happens between the point of one’s physical death and the final resurrection. Christian believers have the assurance that upon death they go to be “with Jesus.” It is wise as Calvin often said not to go further than Scripture teaches us and avoid theological speculation. Paul is convinced in 1 Cor 15 that just as God has adequately prepared a body for us on this earth, he is faithful and competent to give us our “spiritual body” in the final resurrection.

(3) The form of Jesus’ resurrected body in his post-resurrection appearances may indicate there will be some degree of continuity of one’s personality beyond death as to the recognition of one’s uniqueness. However, we need to remember the purpose of his appearances were to bring assurance to his followers that he had truly been raised from the dead.

(4) Since we do not really know what it is like yet to be “present with the Lord” after death, we would be wise not to overstate any concept of an “intermediate state. The “actual” relationship of time and eternity is something we finite creatures do not yet definitively or experientially know.

(5) It is impossible for Christians to overemphasize the importance of Jesus’ resurrection for God’s victory over sin, death, evil, Satan. Without it, there would be no hope, no N.T., no church, no missions, no Lord’s Day, no meaningful future.
Charles Wesley:

*Love's redeeming work is done,*  
*Fought the fight, the battle's won,*  
*Death in vain forbids him rise,*  
*Christ has opened Paradise, Alleluia!*

*He lives, that I may also live,*  
*And now his grave proclaim:*  
*He lives, that I may honor give*  
*To his most holy name.*