

Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians

The Future of Your Body

Introduction: Seize the Day!

Many of you may remember the movie *The Dead Poets’ Society*, released some 15 years ago. Set in 1959, it tells of an inspiring English teacher, John Keating (played by Robin Williams), and the impact he made on teenage boys. Keating arrives at Weston Academy, a stodgy prep school, as an emergency, midyear hire. His first act as professor is to march his poetry class out of the classroom to the trophy case of Weston’s proud history. Through the glass these young boys stare at the photographs of former students dressed in the same enforced haircuts and uniforms. With their own reflections staring back at them in the glass, Keating asks the haunting question, “Where are they now?” “Feeding worms!” is the reply. These once vibrant youths are now reduced to the dust of the earth and are feeding worms. With that end in view he whispers the now popular Latin phrase, *Carpe diem, carpe diem* (“seize the day”). If death shapes the future, wouldn’t today be a good time to start living? With that image seared in their minds, Keating begins to unlock new passions inside these boys in order to teach them how to live. One by one, they begin to step out of comfort zones to risk themselves in the moment. Whether it is found in ripping the chapter of Pritchard’s rigorous rules of understanding poetry out of their textbooks, risking romance with a girl out of one’s league, or joining the secret “Dead Poet’s Society,” these boys all become united in their search for life in the moment. Because they were forced to look eyes wide-open into a future where death had the final word, their outlook on the present was markedly changed. With bold acts of individualism, including a tragic suicide, *Carpe Diem* became infused in all of them.

(Alternative Introduction: the movie *The Family Man*. Our knowledge of what the future could be does shape how we live in the present)

Challenge: Seize the Future!

But for us as Christians, as we stare into the future, we do not see death and decay. Ultimately, we will not be worm food. Instead, we will inherit a glorious new world and new physical bodies like the resurrection body of Jesus. We will inherit a new home where a new heaven and a new earth will be reunited, where God and His people will be joined again. And if we understood how to live in light of that great future, then along the way, we will answer for ourselves some of the major questions plaguing us today. 1 Corinthians is helpful in that way, because the theme of 1 Corinthians could very well be *Carpe Futura: Seize the future!*

Main topic	Problem addressed 1 Corinthians 1 – 4; 5 – 7; 8 – 10; 11 – 14	Tied up in the conclusion (the resurrection chapter 15)
Intro	The Corinthians need strengthening and wisdom: “So that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as <i>you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ</i> . He will also strengthen you <i>to the end</i> , so that you may be blameless on <i>the Day</i> of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1:7 – 8)	Focus on the Future hope of Christ’s return and renewal of the world. “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins... Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” (15:1 – 19, 58)
Part 1: Unity in the Body, Spiritual	The church is being torn apart by factions; people have their favorite leaders: “Yet among the mature we do speak wisdom, though it is not a wisdom of this age or of <i>the rulers of this age, who are doomed to perish</i> . But we speak God’s wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.” (2:6 – 7)	Jesus will destroy the ‘rulers of this age,’ who divide humanity: “Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.” (15:20 – 34)

Leadership		
Part 1: Unity in the Body, Spiritual Leadership	Church leaders do not honor one another: “According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw the work of each builder will become visible, <i>for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done.</i> If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.” (3:10 – 17)	In the Future, God will test the work of every minister, i.e. the quality, and whether it is built on the one foundation, Christ: “Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” (15:58)
Part 1: Unity in the Body, Spiritual Leadership	What are Christian leaders? How should we regard them?: “Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God’s mysteries. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. <i>Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive commendation from God.</i> I have applied all this to Apollos and myself for your benefit, brothers and sisters, so that you may learn through us the meaning of the saying, ‘Nothing beyond what is written,’ so that none of you will be puffed up in favor of one against another. (4:1 – 6)	In the Future, Jesus will judge us accurately: ‘For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins...[But Christ has been raised from the dead] Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.’ (15:16 – 17, 58)
Part 2: Sexuality and the Body / Believers Wronging Each Other	One man having sexual relations with his stepmother; he needs to be put outside the corporate body of Christ, so that he would repent and be saved from his own sin in the near or distant future: “When you are assembled, and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in <i>the Day of the Lord.</i> ” (5:1 – 13)	Paul says that our attachment to sin will cultivate in us a desire to reject our true human inheritance from God: “If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’ Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company ruins good morals.’ Come to a sober and right mind, and sin no more; for some people have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame... Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.” (15:32 – 34, 50)
Part 2: Sexuality and the Body / Believers Wronging Each Other	Believers are suing each other in secular courts. But ironically, believers will judge the world and angels in the future; we are competent to advise each other: “When any of you has a grievance against another, do you dare to take it to court before the unrighteous, instead of taking it before the saints? Do you not know that <i>the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels—to say nothing of ordinary matters?...</i> But you yourselves wrong and defraud—and believers at that. Do you not know that <i>wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God?</i> ” (6:1 – 9)	Believers will share the position of Christ: “The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we will also bear the image of the heavenly.” (15:47 – 49)
Part 2: Sexuality and the Body / Believers Wronging Each Other	The Corinthian Christians think they can do anything with their bodies, even sin: “Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, malakoi, arsenokoitai, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. ‘All things are lawful for me,’ but not all things are beneficial. ‘All things are lawful for me,’ but I will not be dominated by anything. ‘Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food,’ and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and <i>will also raise us by his power.</i> ” (6:9 – 20)	What we do in the body (e.g. sex, greed, etc.) matters eternally because our bodies will be raised and might somehow be affected: “So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable...For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality.” (15:35 – 57)

Part 2: Sexuality and the Body / Believers Wrongs Each Other	The Corinthian Christians are too tied to this present world, and all of its concerns: "I mean, brothers and sisters, <i>the appointed time has grown short</i> ; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For <i>the present form of this world is passing away</i> . I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman and the virgin are anxious about the affairs of the Lord, so that they may be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to put any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord." (7:17 – 35)	They need to consider the Future and how near it is. That will help put things like marriage & singleness, etc. in perspective. It will help them be less ambitious and concerned about financial security: "Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." (15:58)
Part 3: Mission and Our Bodies	The Corinthians are being influenced and divided by spiritual powers: "Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many gods and many lords, yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him." (8:5 – 6)	Jesus will destroy the 'rulers of this age,' who divide humanity: "Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet." (15:20 – 34)
Part 3: Mission and Our Bodies	Paul preaches because Christ has been raised to the heavenly throne: 'For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me...' (9:16 – 17)	Paul reiterates his authority for preaching the gospel of Jesus: 'Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand...that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve...[then] to more than five hundred brethren at one time...then...James, then to all the apostles; and last of all... to me also. For I am the least of the apostles...' (15:1 – 7)
Part 3: Mission and Our Bodies	Paul pushes his body out of love for others in Christian mission: 'Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.' (9:25 – 27)	Paul refers to his bodily hardships as 'worth it' only in light of his future bodily resurrection with Jesus: 'If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied...Why are we also in danger every hour? I affirm, brethren, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.'" (15:19, 31 – 32)
Part 3: Mission and Our Bodies	Paul speaks of the time of the church as 'the ends of the ages': Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. (10:11)	Paul gives the larger framework for why the 'ends of the ages' is now, and it relates to Jesus' resurrection: '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. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power.' (15:20 – 24)
Part 4: Unity in the Body / Spiritual Gifts	Paul refers to the creation order to support women/wives speaking in prayer and prophecy, bearing the word of God equally with men: 'But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ... For a man is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man...and all things originate from God.' (11:2 – 12)	Paul refers to the creation order by naming Adam in contrast with Jesus (15:21 – 22), quoting explicitly from Genesis 2:17 (15:45) regarding the creation of Adam, and quoting from Psalm 8, which is Israel's reflection on the dignity God gave human beings from creation, and applying it to Jesus' rule over all (15:27). He then commissions all in Christ, men and

		women alike, to the 'work of the Lord' (15:58).
Part 4: Unity in the Body / Spiritual Gifts	They are excessive in certain gifts, mainly tongues. They need to love each other, because love is not just our duty, it is our destiny. It is the one characteristic that will last into eternity: " <i>Love never ends</i> . But as for prophecies, <i>they will come to an end</i> ; as for tongues, <i>they will cease</i> ; as for knowledge, <i>it will come to an end</i> . For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but <i>when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end</i> . When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; <i>then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known</i> . And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love." (13:1 – 13)	They must keep the Future in mind, and the fact that they are participating in a new resurrection order, rooted in Christ's love, that will last into eternity: "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...you are still in your sins...Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." (15:13 – 14, 17, 58)

Applications

1. What subject in 1 Corinthians do you feel has been the most challenging to you?
2. In what sense do you need a reminder of our great future in Christ? In other words, what area (or areas) of your Christian life do you feel needs the most infusion of hope from the Future?
3. The last verse of chapter 15, verse 58, seems to tie up multiple thoughts that Paul has already offered. What is 'the work of the Lord'? How is Paul defining that here? How can you make more room in your life for 'the work of the Lord'? How can you remind yourself that it is worth it?