

I'd like to start with a simple idea. What you know your future to be changes your present. There are any number of ways to apply this principle. I know of someone who is going through a change of vocation. On his Facebook page, he has a countdown of how many days are left at his old job, with a happy little cartoon cat walking out of a bag. Get it? What he knows his future to be has changed his present. There's an attitude of anticipation and excitement because of what's coming next.

Or let's say that two people are offered the same job, and it's hard work. The first person is promised \$1000 a month, and the second person is told they'll receive \$1 million a month. Same exact job. Which person is going to find more joy in their tasks? Of course. The million dollar a month worker is going to be whistling while they work. Why? Because what we know our future to be changes our present. This is true in obvious ways (like that example), and also in ways that might not be so obvious at first because they run so deep.

In 1 Corinthians 15 the apostle Paul contrasts two worldviews; two ways of looking at life; two ways of navigating the twists and turns of existence, and what's stunning is that these ancient viewpoints haven't gone anywhere. This clash of philosophies is utterly modern and relevant. What we know our future to be changes our present and governs our behavior. So what are the conflicting perspectives? Let's see.

In verse 32 of chapter 15, Paul quotes the first world view, which says, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” Down through the ages that has continued to serve as a popular philosophy. You've heard it expressed in slightly different ways: “Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.” “You only live once, and when you're dead, you're done, so let the good times roll.” These days it's been reduced to the acronym YOLO. The idea is to grab as much life experience for yourself as you can—because why? Because this life is the only chance you've got. What's implied is that there are no rules except what seems right to you.

The second worldview is captured in verse 22: “For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive.” This viewpoint says that physical death is not the end of a human being. A person who lives in a faith connection with Jesus lives forever, and someday that “forever life” will include an imperishable, resurrected body. This is, of course, the central claim of the Christian faith.

So do you see how these perspectives clash? YOLO is ancient but completely modern; its built on the presumption that when you die, it's just the end. Game over. Christian faith is built on the presumption that “whoever lives and believes in Jesus Christ will never die.” And since what you believe your future to be changes your present, these two belief systems produce ‘ways of life,’ they produce values and behaviors that we can track and recognize. And the question really becomes, “which way do you want to live?”

To help answer that question, we need to look at another way these two viewpoints conflict with each other. “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die,” or “You only live once,”

basically puts your self on the throne of your life. The “YOLO” perspective says, “What matters most is that I have this range of experiences, that I live on the edge, that I push the envelope and try things out, because I’ve only got so much time.” But did you hear how many “I’s” there were in that statement? One of the main flaws with “You only live once” is how self-centered and self-concerned it is. And of course it would be that way. You’re trying to check off all the items on your list before it’s too late. But who are you helping along the way? Well, that’s not really a concern. I might do a few good things for someone else to make myself feel like I’m an OK person, but that’s not really the focus of my life. And the real nightmare is, this is where we all begin. It’s human nature to put myself on the throne of my life. Something has to move me off of that spot, or else “You only live once” and the self-obsession that goes with it is going to sound pretty good to me.

Thank God for the Gospel, truly. Thank God for His Word and Holy Spirit. Because it’s that combination that de-thrones us. It’s God’s Word and Holy Spirit that convinces you there must be a better way to live than “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” That better way is centered not on the self but on another; it’s centered on the Son of God. Jesus takes you completely off the throne of your life, and He does it because He loves you. He wants to bring you out of the misery of a self-absorbed life and the despair of “you only live once.” In order to accomplish that, He first gave His life as a sacrifice that would settle your account with God. You see, the problem of self-centeredness and sinful pride would need to be dealt with; its control over us would need to be broken. We are not equipped to do it so Jesus did, when He suffered and died on the cross, and then, rose again from death to a new kind of risen life. And in doing that, in defeating death’s mastery over us, Jesus has given us a promise that is like rocket fuel for our souls. What you believe your future to be changes your present, right? If I trust Jesus’ words, “Whoever lives and believes in Me will never die;” if I trust in Paul’s words, “...in Christ, all will be made alive,” the Word and Spirit are breaking through, and putting Jesus on the throne of your life, and Jesus the King wants you to know that you are eternal. The one thing we are afraid of most—death—has no claim on you, because Jesus has covered you with His love and allows you to share His risen life. You are never dead and done. Your life is all tied up in Jesus’ resurrected, forever life and that has already started. That is phenomenal news all on its own. But there are immediate, instant benefits, too.

If you know your eternal future to be secured in Jesus’ resurrection, that changes you in the present. It turns you inside out, so that grabbing as much as you can for yourself is no longer your motivation. You’re looking outside yourself with the radical forgiveness of Joseph in today’s reading from Genesis. You willingly endure danger and difficulty for the sake of others, as Paul mentions in verse 32 of his letter. You can even learn the countercultural value of loving your enemies and the art of being merciful, as Jesus teaches in Luke 6. Those who are critical of Christianity sometimes say that belief in eternal life and heaven makes us no earthly good, but do you understand? It actually makes you more helpful, more compassionate, more willing to do things that the world doesn’t value at all. Because this life is not all there is. There is something more important than me checking off items from my bucket list. There is a risen Savior on the throne of your life. Let Him pour His power into you. Let a future with Him change your present!