UPC Family Devotional

May – Week 3

Memory Verse of the Week

“Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak.” -1 Corinthians 8:9

May 16 Monday 1 Corinthians 7:25-40

Paul is not advising Christians to detach themselves from their daily responsibilities or to become indifferent to the joys and sorrows of life. His point is that we live in this world, but it is not where we ultimately belong. Paul’s exhortations also apply to us today as we anticipate Christ's imminent return. The world we live in is passing away. Therefore, we must regard all things- including God-given, desirable gifts such as marriage - in light of the new world that Christ will establish. We are not to become wrapped up in the things of this world, whether good or bad. Rather, we are to use them to prepare for things that are eternal.

What passing things do you often find yourself engrossed in? How can you use them to prepare for what is eternal instead?

Because we are human beings living in a fallen world, we are not completely immune to the worries related to our circumstances and to the people around us. Our anxieties often tempt us to believe that everything depends on us, and we become so fixated with being in control that we forget to fully trust God. Yet it is precisely when our fears threaten to crowd our minds that we should fix our eyes on Jesus and redirect our hearts to seek first His Kingdom. We all have concerns we cannot ignore, but we can avoid being weighed down by them by remaining conscious of the One we belong to. Let us do everything out of wholehearted devotion for our Lord.

What concerns often weigh you down? How does devotion to the Lord free you from anxiety?

May 17 Tuesday 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

The believers in Corinth are divided on whether they should eat meat which had previously been offered to idols before being sold in the markets. Although idols are really nothing, if a believer still has issues with meat sacrificed to them, Paul exhorts the Christian community to exercise love instead of pridefully asserting their own convictions. Depending on our backgrounds, there will be issues about which we will hold different opinions from our sisters and brothers in Christ. But authentic Christianity is marked by love. We must not allow minor issues that do not concern the fundamental truths of our Christian faith to divide us. Rather, we should exercise empathy in humility as we put the interest of others before our own.

What are some controversial issues that are commonly debated in your Christian community? How can you exercise Christian love in the midst of conflict?

Believers are warned not to use their freedom in a way that could hurt the conscience of “weaker” believers. When we come to Christ, we bring with us a certain amount of baggage. God, by His grace, works in us through His Word and the wisdom and encouragement of other believers to make us more like Jesus. We should always see ourselves as works in progress. None of us is perfect yet, so we need to be patient with one another, especially with those who are still growing in their faith and knowledge of spiritual things. This could mean sacrificing our own comforts for the sake of others and exercising restraint in how we assert our own rights.

Which of your personal convictions are you most reluctant to lay down? How do you accommodate weaker brothers and sisters?

May 18 Wednesday 1 Corinthians 9:1-12

Paul uses his own life as an example what it means to lower oneself for the sake of others. Although he has the same qualifications as any other apostle and has proven successful in ministry, he reminds the Corinthians of the sacrifices he has made for the sake of the gospel. He reveals how he has chosen to relinquish many of the rights that other apostles enjoy, such as marriage and financial support from the churches, so that the Corinthian church might enjoy the spiritual benefits of his labor. This is a lesson we can learn as we seek to build up our fellow believers in the gospel: putting others first, not merely as one time act of obedience, but as a daily lifestyle.

What are some of the commitments and sacrifices that come with your ministry? how can you support those who are in full time ministry?

Paul makes a biblical case for why believers should support full time gospel workers in the church although he has chosen not to demand the financial support from the Corinthians, believers should know that it is, in fact, their obligation and privilege to support ministers like Paul. Most of the time, those in full time ministry bear tremendous burdens, which believers can help alleviate through financial giving, prayer, and practical help. Ministers, 2, must acknowledge that whatever sacrifice they make is an offering to the lawyer for the advancement of his Kingdom and glory alone. As gospel workers in church members work together in a spirit of mutual support, work can be done so that the gospel can spread to the ends of the earth.

How do you support those who minister in your local church? How might God be calling you to serve him in a greater capacity?

May 19 Thursday 1 Corinthians 9:13-18

Paul appeals to the Old Testament priestly laws to make a case for financially supporting ministers in the church. Since pastors and teachers sow spiritual seeds, those who benefit from the preaching of the gospel should reciprocate by supporting them in practical ways. In this way, the financial wellbeing of the minister becomes both a responsibility and privilege because it provides the opportunity to participate in what God is doing. Whenever we make sacrifices for the sake of the gospel, we invest in its growth and spread. We become vessels and instruments that God uses to provide for his servants to ensure that his will is accomplished in the world. Let us rediscover the joy of giving toward the work of the gospel.

How do you feel about giving financially to churches and ministries? How is God challenging your priorities and the perspectives in this area?

Although Paul is fully aware of his rights to be financially supported by the church, he's not making this argument in the hope of receiving money from the Corinthian believers. Rather, he is highlighting the unique nature of his high calling and refuses to allow anything to deprive him of the joy of serving the Lord voluntarily and free of charge. Also, he wants the believers to know that the call to ministry is an obligation which is fraught with difficulty, just as Jesus himself promised. Ministers are ultimately accountable to the Lord, who has called them to a privilege that no amount of money can compensate. May we be inspired to serve the Lord with zeal.

What is your main motivation for serving the Lord? How is this motivation changed and developed as you mature in the faith?

May 20 Friday 1 Corinthians 9:19-27

What would you be willing to do for the sake of the gospel? Paul explains his method of adjusting his lifestyle and approaches to ministry but depending on his audience in order to effectively present the message of the gospel to different kinds of people- whether Jews or gentiles. In order to maximize his reach and effectiveness, he seeks to fully empathize with those he preaches to without compromising his core beliefs. As we preach the gospel, we will meet some people who hold to cultural values and practices which are different from ours. May Paul’s example challenge us to learn to accommodate others according to this helpful principle: in essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.

What cultural or contextual issues do you have to keep in mind as you preach the gospel? What adjustments can you make to maximize your gospel witness?

Christian growth does not happen by accident; we have to be intentional about it and employ a certain amount of discipline. Paul draws on examples from the world of sports to emphasize the importance of self-discipline in the Christian walk. All athletes must subject themselves to strict discipline in order to be successful. In the same way, believers must be committed to following Christ wholeheartedly and without compromise, removing any external obstacles and suppressing the fleshly impulses that hinder us from achieving our heavenly goal and reward. We must remember that grace is opposed to earning, not to effort! The grace of God that saved us is the same that empowers us to work out our salvation in Christ-honoring ways.

What godly habits do you need to cultivate? What are some unhelpful habits you need to deal with?

May 21 Saturday 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

Paul draws lessons from Israel’s forty years in the wilderness, during which they witnessed God's wondrous works, guidance, protection, presence, and constant provision of both physical and spiritual food and drink. Yet these still did not prevent most of them from falling away. The tendency of sinful flesh is to rebel against God- even while experiencing His power and blessings. Before we get too critical toward the Israelites for their spiritual amnesia, we should reflect on our own shortcomings and how we are, as the great hymn puts it, “prone to leave the God I love.” Paul warns us not to become complacent in our victories but to set our hearts on pursuing God.

In what situations do you doubt God despite having experienced his faithfulness? How should God's past goodness direct our lives?

Paul points out Israel's idolatry, sexual immorality, unbelief, and grumbling- since they were met with dire consequences. More than mere tales of the past, these incidents in Israel’s history have been recorded for the benefit of future believers. When we read passages that tell of Israel’s failings, we should recognize God's grace in providing us with plenty of warnings and lessons for avoiding temptation. The struggles of the Israelites were not unique to their time; the same temptations are still a danger to Christians today. Therefore, we would do well to pay attention to the Scriptures and receive the urgent direction that God gives through them. As we hear His voice, we will be able to stand firm against temptation.

How have you seen God provide an escape from temptation? How does Scripture guide your day-to-day life?