UPC Family Devotional

June – Week 1

Memory Verse of the Week:

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

-1 Corinthians 13: 13

May 30 Monday 1 Corinthians 13:1-7

In the opening words of his letter, Paul thanks God because the Corinthians are not lacking in any spiritual gifts. Now, he reminds them whatever gifts they may possess are useless if they are not driven by love. The Greek word he uses for love is *agape*, which speaks of a selfless, voluntary affection that is divine in origin and revealed most clearly in Christ. This love is essential for our lives and churches, without it, the most dazzling displays of a spiritual insight or the most impressive acts of religious devotion are of no use and bring no benefit to anyone. Let us strive to know God's love and share it with others.

How do you think God measures success in ministry? When has someone demonstrated God's selfless love to you?

Pause description of love oscillates between what love is and what it is not, and what it does and does not do. In this, we see both the attitude that characterizes those who display God’s love as well as the actions that result. This precise, practical description of love should prompt us to examine how we view ourselves and how we relate to others. One pattern that stands clearly is that authentic Christian love downplays the self and attends to the needs of others, seeking to build them up according to God’s truth. Let us remember that this is how God loves us so that we can extend the same kind of love toward one another.

Take some time to think about how God manifests each characteristic of love towards you. How can you extend this toward others?

May 31 Tuesday one Corinthians 13:8-13

Paul provides one final contrast between spiritual gifts and love: spiritual gifts are temporary and destined to end, but love continues forever. Spiritual gifts are not the end goal; they are among the many means that God uses to help us grow into what we are truly meant to be: reflections of Jesus and His love. When Christ returns and we step into eternity, there will no longer be any need for prophecies, tongues, or miracles. If we focus on and obsess over spiritual gifts, then we will remain as mere infants in Christ, not realizing that God has so much more for us than these temporary realities that belong only to our short journey on earth.

Why are we prone to seeking spiritual gifts at the expense of Christ-like love? What are some ways you can use your gifts and knowledge to demonstrate Christ's love to others?

The metaphor of a mirror is Paul's way of describing the useful albeit imperfect nature of spiritual gifts. Although an ancient mirror would provide a reasonably accurate picture of a person, it will be a blurry image nonetheless and cannot be compared to a face-to-face encounter. God has revealed Himself completely in the person of Jesus but until He returns, our main access to Him remains embedded in the preaching, prophecies, and writings of the apostolic church, according to which we live each day in a spirit of faith and hope. The good news is that these dim reflections will soon give way to a perfect revelation of Christ in all His glory. When that day comes, we will be completely united in His love for all eternity.

What unanswered questions do you have about God? How does His love satisfy you in the face of earthly disappointments?

June 1 Wednesday 1 Corinthians 14:1-12

The spiritual gift of speaking in tongues is a divisive and controversial topic today, but in the early church it was a normal manifestation of the spirit in which a gifted person would pray or speak in a language that was unknown to the majority of the listeners. Paul, however, contrasts this gift with that of prophecy, where God's revelation is speaking to a congregation in the common language. While speaking in tongues is good, prophecy is better because it edifies everyone in the church. In our day, prophecy finds its parallel in preaching, which ought to take prime place in every worship service. There's no moment or event greater than collectively hearing God's voice through His word.

What is your attitude toward the preaching at your church? What can you do to get more out of the sermons you hear?

Many of the Corinthian believers seem to elevate the gift of tongues because of its overt supernatural quality, which in turn makes the speakers very popular and more tempted to show off their ability. Drawing from the sphere of music and linguistics, Paul argued that intelligibility is far more valuable than the mere utterance of sounds. We ought to value a spiritual gift because of its meaningfulness and benefit to the community rather than its mode of delivery alone. Masterful demonstrations of leadership, artistic ability, and public speaking are among the gifts that enjoy a lot of recognition and praise in our churches today. But may we tune our hearts and minds to focus on content more than charisma.

What gifts or talents are most impressive to you? How can you encourage and pray for those in your church who are most often in the limelight?

June 2 Thursday 1 Corinthians 14:13-25

Paul is an ardent practitioner of speaking in tongues. Through what is probably a rapturous string of previously unlearned tones and syllables, Paul prays with his spirit, with words that transcend his own understanding. But as spiritually uplifting as this gift maybe, he implores those who practice it to pray for the ability to interpret what is being spoken so that the whole congregation can understand and benefit. It is easy to forget that spirituality is not only a private affair between ourselves and God. Rather, the vitality of the Christian experience comes to its full fruition within community, when the church is able to meaningfully participate in offering prayers and giving praises together as a united body.

What do your private devotional practices consist of? How can you translate these disciplines into activities that bless the church?

Paul wraps up his discussion on tongues from the perspective of the average church attender. He argues that the gift of tongues functions as a sign that the Holy Spirit is powerfully at work in the newly founded churches. Naturally, the highly dramatized character of this particular gift alerts unbelievers that something divine is occurring. But it is not enough for curious visitors to simply be impressed with a spectacular event. Paul wants them to hear and understand God's word so that they might be convicted and converted. Herein lies the superiority of prophecy, preaching, and prayers that are spoken in the common language. May we never underestimate the impact of God's ordinary ways of working in His church.

What tends to draw unbelievers to your church? How can you help them to better understand the Christian faith?

June 3 Friday 1 Corinthians 14: 26-40

Worship gatherings in the early church is led by the apostles must have been within a site to behold. The Holy Spirit was freshly poured out and actively at work producing acts of healing, revelation, and deep bonds of love in the community. But even with the torrents of revival rushing throughout the churches, Paul commands that Christian worship should be marked by orderliness and peace. Rather than interrupting and speaking over one another with their songs of praise or words of exhortation, the Corinthians are to make sure everything is done in a controlled and coherent manner. This principle finds its basis in God's own character and ways. As His people, we must mirror our maker both individually and corporately.

How does your church conduct services in an orderly manner? How can your behavior in church reflect more of God's character?

Paul believes that gendered relationships such as marriage point to spiritual realities, and even the distinctions between male and female matter to God and must be respected and reflected among His people. How these texts are to be applied in churches today differ among denominational traditions, but the general principles of orderliness and respect for authority ought to govern our lives as believers in all situations. Before asserting and insisting on our own, culturally-conditioned opinions on these matters, we must first remember that we are students and disciples. We did not invent our faith but have been invited and led into a new way of living that we may not always understand but nevertheless promises to fulfill our deepest longings.

Which New Testament commands do you struggle with the most? What attitudes can you cultivate to better handle difficult biblical texts?

June 4 Saturday 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

The gospel involves the whole story of Jesus’ life and work but it comes to a focus in His death and resurrection. In this way, it is simple enough for anyone to remember and tell to others. We do not need a particular calling or theological training to share this good news to the world. All we need to do is believe it and the pass it on, which is not difficult to do because our faith is based on eyewitness testimony. Paul’s detailed list of those who saw the resurrected Christ is meant to instill confidence in our hearts. The truth of the gospel is simply a matter of fact, which gives us not only accurate information but a living hope.

What about the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ do you struggle to fully believe? What can you do to have more confidence in the truth of the gospel?

As Paul looks back on the privilege of being entrusted with the gospel, he recognizes his inherent unworthiness because of his sinful past and awkward journey toward the truth. God’s grace, however, not only saved him but also empowers him for a ministry. Likewise, our feelings of inadequacy or latent guilt over our mistakes are never the final determiner of our worth before God. We are His children by grace, and we become mature, flourishing servants of His gospel by that same grace. Let us learn to view ourselves in light of God's power rather than our weaknesses so that we can become instruments refined for His purposes. May his grace cause us to be active and eager to make His gospel known to all the world.

In what ways do you feel inadequate for God's work? How does the gospel change how you view yourself?