UPC Family Devotional

May – Week 1

Memory Verse of the Week

“What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us.”

-1 Corinthians 2:12

May 2 Monday 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Just as the Corinthian believers were divided over their preference for one church leader over another, our modern churches are not immune to quarrels and infighting. When believers lose sight of Jesus, the one whose name we bear, division becomes inevitable. The believers in Corinth were focusing on the external matters of what we liked or disliked about Paul, Apollos, or Cephas instead of remaining grounded in the spiritual reality that bound them altogether: the gospel. Paul exhorts them to seek unity in Christ, who prayed that his disciples might be one and thereby prove to be the people of God. Likewise, let us do all we can to live in harmony with other believers.

How are you promoting unity in your church? What challenges does your church face with regard to being of one mind?

In the time of Jesus and the early church, rabbis and teachers of the law often sought to win recognition by making a name for themselves, and their disciples took pride in associating with schools belonging to a revered tradition. A Paul makes it clear that this should never be the case for those who follow Christ. Our aim is to preach the gospel and to make known the glory of Christ alone. If we are not vigilant, we may turn the gospel into a tool to bolster our image and build our confidence on something other than Christ. Let us instead seek to bring glory to the one who is truly worthy of it all.

What is your motive for preaching the gospel and serving the church?

May 3 Tuesday 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

The world promotes all kinds of things that promise a better and brighter future. But while political ideologies and advances in technology may lend themselves to some forms of progress in society, they will never solve humanity's true problems and needs, which are answered only in the gospel. In light of how serious the stakes really are, the wisdom of the world becomes nothing more than a collection of useless gimmicks. They distract us from seeing how empty life without God actually is, and they are ultimately doomed to fail. On the other hand, God has used a simple story of the gospel to bring about eternal transformation that can never be measured or out- perfoormed.

What recent trends and advancements around you promise a brighter future? In what ways do they fall short in satisfying your deepest needs?

The two groups that interacted most with early Christianity were the Jews on the one hand and the Greeks on the other period as seen in Jesus ministry the Jewish leaders were always demanding on heavenly sign to authenticate his identity and message; and in Paul's ministry, Hellenistic gentiles are constantly searching for secret wisdom. The story of the cross of Christ, however does not make any sense within either of these competing worldviews. For Jews, the Messiah should not know humiliation, and for Greeks, God cannot die. But in his infinite wisdom, God uses the “foolishness” of the gospel to save sinners so that it can be seen that only his power can achieve this impossible task.

How did you come to faith in Christ? What does he offer that the world never can?

May 4 Wednesday 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Paul continues his theme of God upside down methods in drawing people to himself. Where the world loves to elevate and esteem those with significant social credentials or marketable skills, God's Kingdom operates in a decisively different manner. As the Corinthian believers know very well, God called the broken, lowly, and despised to enter His Kingdom, for they humbly recognize their need of Him. This is not an act of favoritism or prejudice on God's part but a display of His unconditional grace. While we may often feel inadequate or out of place, unable to rise to the world standards for success, God reminds us that true glory does not flow upward from earth but downward from heaven.

In what ways do you feel inadequate by the world standards? How is the gospel renewed your sense of identity?

Many of us struggle with the thought of God's sovereign decision to choose specific individuals to be His children. We think it is unfair or arbitrary for God to be the ultimate determiner of humankind's fate. But if our salvation is not based on God's free choice, then what other options are there? We would have to conclude that God is drawn to something within us, a personal feature or ability that we can boast as coming from our own hard work or fortunate circumstances. And if this were the case, we would ultimately have no one to think but ourselves for our own salvation. But this is not how it works. Salvation comes from grace alone through Christ alone.

Which of your personal traits or abilities are you most proud of? When are you tempted to think that this makes God favor you more?

May 5 Thursday 1 Corinthians 2:1-9

Skillful public speaking in ancient Roman society would be roughly equivalent to the popular content put out by modern social media influencers. Whereas humor and entertainment value are most highly regarded today, the ancient Greek art of rhetoric was driven by articulate speech, lofty arguments and profound ideas. Although Paul is well trained in these skills, he feels compelled to lay them aside in order to present the basic gospel story centering on the death of Christ. Forgoing those impressive techniques that most audiences expect and are persuaded by, Paul leans entirely on the power of the Holy Spirit to convert the hearts of sinners. As we share the gospel, let us remain in constant prayer for the spirit to work in people's lives.

How do you present the gospel to unbelievers? What elements do you deem most necessary to include?

The reason why the gospel is not recognized as wisdom by conventional standards is simply because worldly wisdom is too shallow. It concerns itself with human language and ways of thinking that never transcend our own minds and understanding. The gospel, by contrast, is the unveiling of a deep mystery that has existed before the world came to be. He speaks of God's grand narrative, His purposes and plans that implicate not only human beings but all of creation in heaven and on earth. Only in these last days have these plans come to full fruition in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Let us remember that the gospel is completely relevant and essential to every individual we encounter.

How does the gospel compare with current trends and ideas? In what practical ways has the gospel changed your life?

May 6 Friday 1 Corinthians 2:10-16

God’s ways are beyond understanding, such that no human philosophy or scientific investigation can penetrate the depths of spiritual realities. How, then, can we ever come to know God and his plans and purposes for us and for this world? The answer lies in the work of the Holy Spirit. The same spirit who hovered over the waters of a shapeless world makes contact with the human mind and heart to reveal deep truths about God. Through the Spirit, we are united with Christ and enter the very presence of God. He is God’s gift to his people, the church, and he continues to speak to us through Scripture and the sacraments. May we always cherish, worship, and depend on Him.

How have you personally experienced the work of the Holy Spirit in your life? How can you direct your worship and prayers toward Him?

Paul summarizes his comparison between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world by focusing on one fundamental difference: believers are endowed with the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit translates those things that cannot be understood by human minds so that they become second nature to us. In fact our minds themselves are transformed so that we see all things in a completely new light while the world continues to dismiss God's revelation as foolishness, we become more and more instructed in the truth about God, ourselves, and His entire creation. We must rely on the Spirit as the final and authoritative interpreter of His word in order to correctly understand Scripture and apply it to our lives.

How do worldly philosophies compare with scriptural truth? How have you helped an unbeliever understand the gospel?

May 7 Saturday 1 Corinthians 3:1-15

We are drawn to particular preachers and worship styles because the church is made up of people from different backgrounds, traditions, and preferences. Our diversity should be celebrated rather than despised. Divisiveness, on the other hand, should be avoided at all cost. When we form factions and quarrel with one another, we are no different from the world. Paul addresses this childish behavior by explaining the inherent unity that is found among all the teachers in the church: they are all God's laborers, working his fields, and answering to Him alone. Since God is ultimately responsible for all the spiritual growth that occurs in our lives, let us direct our praise and devotion toward Him alone.

Which Christian leaders are you most drawn to and why? What forms of division do you notice in your church?

Paul adds an important caveat to the diverse influences found in the Corinthian church. As the apostolic founder of the congregation, Paul possesses a unique authority derived from a special calling that God has placed on his life. The gospel that he communicates, therefore, serves as a foundation for all Christian ministry that comes after. Although apostles like Paul are no longer with us, the standard of teaching they left behind stands to this day. Insofar as our churches preach the gospel in accordance with the Scriptures, we can be assured of God's approval and authority over us. This also means that additional teachings that enter the church must be tested and judged against this standard.

How much does your church emphasize and communicate the gospel? How can you be more gospel-centered in your own life?