UPC Family Devotional

May – Week 2

Memory Verse of the Week

“For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight.”

-1 Corinthians 3:19a

May 9 Monday 1 Corinthians 4:1-8

Paul's reference to the “mysteries” of God speaks of a kind of knowledge that is unfathomable to people unless God reveals it to them. While it is possible to understand the Bible intellectually as an ancient text or part of a nation’s history, spiritual truth can only be uncovered through the work of the Holy Spirit, who graciously opens our eyes to the gospel. At the same time, God has entrusted Paul and other human messengers with communicating His Word to the church and ensuring that it is faithfully passed on. For this reason, we are eager to share God's Word and hear it preached, but we also rely on the Holy Spirit to help us discern and understand His Word through human instruments.

When did the Bible begin to make sense to you? What role have church leaders had in your spiritual growth?

The Corinthian church was divided over whom they regarded as the best leader- whether Paul, Peter, or Apollos. Yet, while the Corinthians mistakenly thought that their church leaders were engaged in some kind of competition, Paul informs them that they are all united in God's work. In our day, we still tend to elevate one preacher above others or judge a church based on its entertainment value or outreach programs. But the only conflict that should exist for Christians is our war against sin and the devil. Fellow believers who are sincerely serving the Lord should never be regarded as our enemies or competitors. Rather, we should cheer them on and rejoice in their work of furthering the gospel.

When have you seen competition between Christians affect the church? What can you do to promote greater harmony in your community of believers?

May 10 Tuesday 1 Corinthians 4:9-21

Paul tells the Corinthians about all the hardships and dangers the apostles have been going through for the sake of proclaiming the good news of Christ. It is worth not noting, however, that this is not just a first-century occurrence. It is still happening in our present day. All over the world, Christians suffer for the sake of the gospel. Regardless of age, gender, or ethnicity, Christians from every walk of life and period of history have experienced the hardships and dangers that come with being a follower of Christ. Let us pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters that, in the face of extreme suffering and even death, they would remain strong in the faith.

How are you serving your persecuted brothers and sisters? How can you pray for them more specifically and regularly?

Paul reminds the Corinthians that everything he says, he says out of love for them. They may think he is being harsh, that it is only because they are behaving like children who need stern discipline. And as spiritual infants, they do not even realize there are errors. They may, at times, need loving correction from those in authority over us whether they are our parents, pastors, or even Christian friends. A rebuke from a godly person is an act of love that we should regard as coming from God Himself. Rather than getting on the defensive and trying to justify our misbehaviors, let us humbly receive correction so that we can mature in our walk with Christ.

Why is it hard to accept correction? When have you seen the good fruit of a godly rebuke in your life?

May 11 Wednesday 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

One of the challenges we face as Christians is learning how to live in this world without being of this world. Our societies often celebrate the very things Scripture teaches us to avoid, including attitudes and behaviors like greed, violence, drunkenness, and sexual immorality. Things were no different for the believers in Corinth, who lived in a Pagan society and confused the freedom they had in Christ as an excuse to do whatever they wanted. Paul urges them to remove the sexually immoral man from among them because repentance and restoration cannot happen until they realize what they have done wrong. Let us not use our freedom as an opportunity for sin but as an opportunity to live righteous lives.

What are some ways you are learning to live faithfully for Christ? What would you say to someone who justifies sinful behavior or on account of the freedom we have in Christ?

The effects of sin are rarely confined to the person committing it; they impact others as well. For example, someone who chooses to drink and drive puts not only their own life in danger but the lives of passengers, pedestrians, and other drivers as well. Paul warns the Corinthian church that just like yeast in dough, it is only a matter of time before sin spreads and envelops the entire community. Since we have been made clean by the blood of Christ, we must no longer associate with the sinfulness of this world. Instead, we ought to seek righteousness as an expression of our relationship with God. Let us deal with sin resolutely while also being gracious toward others.

How have you witnessed sin impact a community? How can we deal decisively with sin while being gracious to others?

May 12 Thursday 1 Corinthians 6:1-11

One of the marks of a healthy Christian community and leadership is how they deal with disputes. Healthy communities find ways to deal with disputes that are fair, thoughtful, hopeful, and redemptive. They seek to resolve conflicts decisively and with grace. Additionally, how Christians handle conflicts with each other is part of their broader testimony to the world. If our relationships are marked by infighting and strife, we are soiling our witness to those outside of the church. Jesus himself said that the world will know we are his disciples by our love for one another. Let us do what we can to resolve our conflicts with grace so that our testimony can remain pure.

Who is someone you might need to resolve a conflict with? How can you do this with grace and wisdom?

Maintaining unity with other believers takes effort because there are so many destructive forces at work that can divide us: pride, unforgiveness, prejudice, just to name a few. Here, Paul laments the lawsuits that some of the Corinthians are filing against one another and urged them to do away with petty infighting for the sake of unity. This does not mean that we should ignore the sins of others, for those who continue to live in sin will have to answer to God. As far as it concerns us, however, we should be willing to suffer hurt and be wronged instead of lashing out at others vindictively. Rather than fighting to be right, we should fight to be one.

What personal sins can potentially cause division in your relationships? What are some steps you can take to fight these sins?

May 13 Friday 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

As people seeking to live faithful lives before God, it is important that we learn the difference between what we can do and what we should do. In our fallen world, there are values, attitudes, and behaviors that may be permissible that are not always beneficial, especially from the standpoint of Christian discipleship. Like in Corinth sexual immorality is pervasive in our culture today, and the temptation to succumb to those desires is strong. Fighting these temptations is not a matter of mere will; we must rely on the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead empowers us for righteous living. Let us continually draw strength from Him.

What things have you relinquished for the sake of faithful discipleship? What permissible but unhelpful things are you holding on to?

Knowing the power of a sexual temptations, Paul urges the Corinthian believers to “flee” from them. That term carries a great sense of urgency, and is the same word used to describe Moses’ escape from Egypt. In other words, when you were tempted to sin sexually, get yourself out of that situation as fast as possible! The importance of sexual purity comes from the fact that we are not our own. We have been bought and paid for by the precious blood of Christ, who redeemed us by his voluntary sacrifice for our sins. By pledging ourselves to Jesus, our Lord and Savior, we are in effect saying that we belong to him. May God's grace help us to fully honor him with our bodies.

What strategies have helped you overcome temptation? Why is the gospel so important in our struggle against sin?

May 14 Saturday 1 Corinthians 7:1-16

It is important that we do not vilify sex as something wicked or evil. God created us with the desire for physical intimacy and provides marriage as a way for that desire to be fulfilled. Physical intimacy is one of the ways a husband and a wife are able to express their love for one another. In fact, Paul encourages husbands and wives to honor one another with their bodies to help keep their marriage healthy and whole. Sadly, sin has distorted our perspective of sex, turning it into a means for gratifying our desires through lust and manipulation. May God help us reclaim a healthy perspective on sexual intimacy so that we may honor Him and our spouses with it.

What does it look like for you to embrace a healthy perspective on sexual intimacy in your current life stage? Why must sexual intimacy be reserved for marriage?

Whether we are married or single we have the opportunity to honor and serve the Lord. For the sake of dedicating one's whole life to ministry, Paul encourages single people to consider his own chosen path of celibacy, if they are gifted in such a way. At the same time, however, marriage is by no means a sin and should be celebrated and protected. Those who are married should remain in that covenantal commitment that God has bound them to. Believers married to unbelievers should likewise remain with their spouse where possible, without fearing God's disapproval. Rather than fretting about being the only believer in the marriage, the believing spouse should be encouraged that their holiness brings blessing upon the whole family.

If you are married, what are some ways you can improve the health of your marriage? If you are single, how can you devote more time and energy to gospel ministry?