UPC Family Devotional

May – Week 4

Memory Verse of the Week

“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

-1 Corinthians 10:31

May 23 Monday 1 Corinthians 10:23-11:1

Paul uses the example of meat sacrificed to idols to show how our freedom in Christ plays out. Jewish leaders had placed restrictions on Jews living in pagan cities to only buy meat that is ritually clean and free from all associations with idol worship. However, Paul teaches that Christians may buy and eat meat without being concerned about whether or not it had been sacrificed to idols. They are free because of their firm belief that there is only one true God and idols hold no power. As Christians, we live before the Creator of all. We enjoy what He gives us with thanksgiving, and refrain from what He prohibits, knowing it is for our own good.

How do you exercise discernment with regard to your freedom in Christ? What do you refrain from out of reverence for Him?

While Christians need not have a guilty conscience with regard to food sacrificed to idols, they are not free to offend the consciences of others nor cause them to stumble away from God. Even if the one who exercises their freedom by eating food sacrificed to idols does so with thanksgiving, their actions serves no good purpose if it causes a fellow believer to sin or feel ostracized by the community. Therefore, Paul urges believers to aim for the glory of God in all things. The way we exercise our freedom must be informed by love for God and for each other. Let us take to heart the example of Christ, who forsook his freedom so that we would be saved and God would be glorified.

Take some time to pray that God will give you a wise and discerning heart that cares for others.

May 24 Tuesday 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

While there are different interpretations of this passage and much controversy surrounding its significance for today, the main point the apostle Paul makes is with regard to how we present ourselves during worship. In Paul’s time, as in ours, one’s external appearance can make powerful statements about one's identity, values, and beliefs. We should be mindful of our dress and deportment when we gather for public worship so as to avoid unnecessary distractions that remove focus away from the Lord. Our conduct should also demonstrate the respect we have for one another and for the structures of authority that God has ordained for the church and the home. May our conduct always reflect the greatness of the God we worship.

How does worship in your church reflect God's greatness and character? How do you keep your focus on God when distractions occur during worship?

Paul stresses the importance of differentiated gender roles between husband and wife, but he does so to make a larger point: the most important hierarchy is the one in which God is above all, and everything we do as believers should flow from that foundational principle. Since men and women are created in God's image, we should embrace our unique characteristics while also affirming our unity and calling as members of the body of Christ. One of the most basic ways to live this out in community applies to all believers, regardless of whether or not we are married: we strive to put others first, following Jesus’ example of laying down his life for his church.

How does the heart of submission to God make it more natural for us to submit to others? How is God calling you to serve within your own situation and context?

May 25 Wednesday 1 Corinthians 11:17-26

The Lord supper, a God-ordained means of grace, has turned into a time rife with division and discrimination. In the Corinthian church, the influence would eat and drink their fill, leaving the less fortunate with nothing. Paul reminds them that they are called by God to be other-oriented. When participating in church fellowship and activities, we should seek to care for others instead of selfishly seeking to have our own needs met. In our own homes we are free to enjoy God's blessings and provisions. But when we gather as the church we should be quick to serve rather than be served. Let us endeavor to become people who lay down our privileges so that others can feel welcome and cared for.

How are you tempted to act out of self-centeredness in your relationships with other believers? Can you become more other-oriented in your church?

To set the Corinthians in their place Paul reminds them of the sacred mystery of the Lord’s supper. When we receive the bread and cup, we engage in all three tenses. First, we look back to Christ’s saving death on the cross. Then, we presently delight in his presence as we partake of the elements that symbolize his body and blood given for us. And lastly, we eagerly look forward to Christ's return when he will bring full restoration. The Holy Communion is a means for us to both actively remember and boldly proclaim what Christ has done. He invites us to savor the riches of the new covenant so that our relationship with him would be deepened.

What aspect of the Lord’s supper is most meaningful for you? What else helps you actively remember what Christ has done for you?

May 26 Thursday 1 Corinthians 11:27-34

The “unworthy manner” in which the Corinthians took the Lord's supper had a lot to do with their divisive arrogance. In order to avoid this kind of attitude, we are commanded to search our own hearts before partaking of this holy sacrament: is there unconfessed sin in our lives? Is there someone with whom we need to be reconciled? Are we united as a community? If we do not approach communion with a humble and examined heart, we may dishonor Christ and his sacrifice by placing ourselves above the need for God's saving grace. But when we approach God, mindful of our own shortcomings, we receive new mercies from Him that help us strengthen our bond with Him and with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

What sin do you need to confess before the Lord right now? How would you describe your attitude towards your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ?

God does not tolerate impurity in the church and will discipline us in order to get our attention and sanctify us. As we have seen in biblical figures like Job, suffering is not necessarily the result of personal sin. But it does serve as a tool that sharpens our conscience and prompts us to purify our hearts before the Lord. Understanding God's discipline empowers us to have the right attitude to our suffering so that we do not miss out on what God is teaching us. We should welcome God's discipline because we know He is our loving father, who always acts for the good of His children. May we receive His discipline as His true sons and daughters.

What prevents you from submitting to God's discipline? How has past and present suffering served to purify your heart before God?

May 27 Friday 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

As disciples of Jesus, led by God’s spirit, our words should always glorify Christ as Lord. Here, Paul answers a question asked by the believers in Corinth concerning the use of spiritual gifts in public worship, especially the gift of tongues. We do not know whether some people actually uttered curses against Jesus within the congregation, but the point is that our speech reflects our hearts, and no one indwelt by the Holy Spirit will ever speak in a way that detracts from the goodness, glory, and Lordship of Christ. People who are truly led by the spirit gladly acknowledge Christ as Lord, our spiritual gifts are given to us for the purpose of revealing his glory.

How does the way you speak represent Christ? How can we learn to let the spirit guide us in our speech?

Unity in diversity is the hallmark of God's chosen people. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in the Holy Spirit's distribution of various spiritual gifts to the church. Through one and the same Spirit, God blesses and empowers His people with different kinds of gifts that work in tandem with others to manifest the presence of God through healing, miracles, and divine revelation. God's people need each other to carry out our mission to make Christ known. Our responsibility is not to seek after special abilities in order to draw attention to ourselves or build a following. Rather, we should use our gifts to serve and build up the body of Christ, all for the glory of God.

When have you seen God’s spirit at work in your church? How are you using those spiritual gifts you have received?

May 28 Saturday 1 Corinthians 12:12-20

Paul sets forth one of the most powerful testimonies of the church, both in his day and ours: Jesus brings reconciliation not only between God and us but between us and others, whoever those others may be. The illustration of one body and many parts describes the wonderful unity shared by those called to be God’s children. We may come from different cultures, socioeconomic situations, and backgrounds, but through the power of God's spirit, our differences strengthen the whole church. God brings all of us together in the body of Christ, and as we drink from the same lifegiving Spirit we are witnesses to a unity found, not in our sameness, but in the God who harmonizes our differences for His glory.

In what ways does the cultural, social, and economic diversity of the church demonstrate the good news of Jesus? When have you seen God strengthen the unity of your church?

Referring to the interconnected nature of our physical bodies, Paul describes what it means to be a member of the spiritual body of Christ. Just as our bodies need their various parts to function as whole and complete, we too, as members of Christ's body, meet each other we cannot separate ourselves from the body of Christ. Even if it were possible to do so, the church would lose vital and necessary functions, to the detriment of other members. Where I am weak, others are strong; where I am strong, others may be weak. But together, our differences are what allows the church to be the people God calls us to be in a divided and broken world.

How does acknowledging our need for each other promote spiritual growth and maturity? What are the dangers of thinking we can serve Christ without others?