UPC Family Devotional

July – Week 3

Memory Verse of the Week:

“Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion for God loves a cheerful giver.” -2 Corinthians 9:7

July 18 Monday 2 Corinthians 6: 14-7: 1

In Deuteronomy 22: 10, God prohibits the Israelites from plowing a field with an ox and donkey yoked together; the animals are simply too different from one another, making the task of staying on course extremely difficult and counterproductive. This points to a spiritual lesson that Paul expounds for us today, in which binding ourselves with unbelievers and our worldly values inevitably leads to habitual compromises that turn into sinful lifestyles. As followers of Christ, we submit to his lordship over every part of our lives. Our careers, relationships, and life goals are to be guided by His commands, and our values are to be practiced within a community of likeminded believers.

When has the influence of unbelievers tempted you to compromise in your walk with Christ? What would be a godly way of relating to unbelievers?

This passage imparts a hard truth that we must nevertheless accept if we are to be the people our Lord calls us to beat. Unbelievers are in bondage to sin and under the power and influence of the devil. Believers, on the other hand, have been delivered from judgment and now keep their lives pure out of reverence for the Lord. This does not mean that we look down on unbelievers, but we must choose to avoid influences and relationships that are incompatible with the rule of the spirit, who lives in us. Walking in holiness may require painful choices, but God promises His presence and a pleasure to those who set their lives apart for His sake.

What relationships in your life could compromise your commitment to Christ? How does the Holy Spirit help you discern how to live in this sinful world?

July 19 Tuesday 2 Corinthians 7: 2-7

although Paul's opponents unfairly questioned his ministry, he responds with love. He is unapologetic in defending his apostleship, but at the same time he makes it clear that he is not out to condemn anymore. On the contrary, he tells the Corinthians what great pride he takes in them and how he is encouraged by them. In spite of all the troubles he faces in his ministry in general, and with the Corinthians in particular, his joy in Christ overflows. It is easy to become bitter when others question our motives in serving the Lord, but Paul gives us a better example. We must expect to be criticized at times, but we must also learn to love even our critics.

When have you been criticized unfairly in your service to God? How can you respond to criticism with an attitude of love?

Paul describes the intense outward conflict he experienced in Macedonia and the resulting inward fears it generated. But God sends comfort for his soul through Titus, who comes to meet him. Paul is refreshed, not only by his reunion with Titus but also by the news of the love and concern of the Christians in Corinth. He goes from restlessness to overflowing joy. The loving relationships we have with our other followers of Jesus are a source of great encouragement and delight. The prayers, presence, and genuine concern of God's people bring tremendous comfort. When troubles overwhelm us, let us seek the fellowship of God's people, knowing that, through them, He provides what we need in order to sustain us.

What are some ways other Christians have comforted you in times of trouble? How have you comforted others in their struggles?

July 20 Wednesday 2 Corinthians 7: 8-16

With candid vulnerability, Paul reveals the sorrow he felt at the idea that the Corinthians were hurt by his previous letter, where he confronted them about their blatant sins. Having seen their repentant response, however, he rejoices. Speaking the truth can be difficult. Rebukes are easily misinterpreted, and even if things turn out well, there is often some relational strain in the aftermath. Nevertheless, we must not be afraid to speak the truth out of love for our brothers and sisters. Truth may sting, but the risks of living in sin and hypocrisy far outweigh the momentary friction we might cause. Let us carefully, lovingly, but boldly speak truth for the glory of God and the strengthening of His church.

When have you had to confront someone with a hard truth? How can we remain loving even when we confront others?

Paul takes the time to encourage the Corinthian believers with words of deep affection that reveal his complete confidence in them, grounded in the gospel. This ensures that his letter does not merely deliver truth but does so in a way that brings about renewal in the church. Sometimes we find ourselves speaking truth, not so much for the sake of others as for our own satisfaction of being proved right. Self-centered motivations can lead us to speak truth harshly, maybe even destructively. But scripture calls us to speak the truth in love, so that we can help one another grow in Christ (Eph. 4:5). Let us edify the church by speaking words of truth and encouragement to one another.

When have you benefited from another believer’s encouragement? What are some ways you can encourage those around you this week?

July 21 Thursday 2 Corinthians 8: 1-15

Generosity is central to the Christian faith. The very essence of the gospel is rooted in generosity- God pouring out His love into His undeserving people, giving them life at the cost of His only son. Having become aware of this fact, the believer must recognize generosity as more than just a noble gesture. It is our joyous response and privileged obligation as recipients of God's grace through the gospel. This is why Paul urges the Corinthian church to excel in the grace of giving, and why the Macedonian believers yearn and even plead to share in the ministry of giving. Likewise, let us give ourselves fully to the Lord and ask Him to show us how we can extend His generosity to others.

What is your understanding of generosity? How have you grown in your giving?

The Corinthian church seems to have had some difficulty following up with the commitment they made a year before to support the impoverished church in Jerusalem. So, Paul gently nudges them by reminding them of the example of Christ and of the Macedonian church. He speaks of the latter’s eagerness to give and encourages the Corinthians to do so according to their means. We often encounter the same concerns as the Corinthians when it comes to giving generously: we worry that our own needs will not be met or that our gifts will be mishandled. But let us learn from the example of Christ and of other Christians who excel in this area so that we may be inspired to express generosity in our daily lives.

Who around you is a good example of generosity? Why does Christ's example encourage us to be generous?

July 22 Friday 2 Corinthians 8: 16-24

Paul sends Titus to the Corinthian church to collect their offering for the Christians in Jerusalem, vouching for his eagerness and motivation. He also sends another brother who is recognized by all the churches for his service to the gospel. It is noteworthy that Paul emphasizes these specific characteristics and choosing and commending the co-laborers he partners with. He states that his motivation for the offering is to honor the Lord and help His saints. May we be discerning about who we partner with in God's work. We would be wise to examine others’ motivations and attitude toward the gospel and seek the counsel and affirmation of mature Christians before entering into gospel partnerships.

What gospel work are you currently involved in? How do you decide whom to partner with in this work?

“Only God's opinion matters” is a popular saying among Christians. And while it is true in matters like our justified standing before God, we must not neglect the way in which our lives and conduct appear before others. We should never consider the thoughts of others as more important than God’s, but it is folly to assume that we live in a vacuum apart from the peering eyes of our neighbors and society. Paul says that he and his co-laborers strive to do what is right in the eyes of both God and people. Likewise, may we also make every effort to live as honorable representatives of God so that everything we do can be a testimony to His goodness and grace.

When should other people’s opinion matter to the believer? What aspects of your public conduct do you need to work on?

July 23 Saturday 2 Corinthians 9: 1-9

The apostle Paul exhibits foresight and careful management as he sends trustworthy friends ahead of him to help the believers prepare their gift for the Christians in Jerusalem. He is not micromanaging the Corinthians but seeks to be faithful even in the mundane tasks of collecting and managing financial assistance. He is also concerned about the Corinthians’ attitude as they participate in this work. He wants them to have enough time to give willingly and generously rather than hastily scrape their contributions together when he arrives. He wants their contribution to be motivated by generosity, not by a deadline. Let us be faithful even in the most mundane aspects of the work God has given us and seek to edify others as we work together.

What aspects of God's work do you find mundane? How can you exhibit faithfulness in it?

Paul reminds the Corinthians that God loves a cheerful giver. With this simple phrase, he instructs them to do two things: to give and to be careful while giving. The first part is not too difficult. As Christians, we know that we need to grow in the habit of giving toward God's work, and with practice, generosity can become intentional. The second part is more difficult. How can we give cheerfully, without compulsion or reluctance? The answer lies in God's desire and will for us. As we mature, we long to do what His heart desires. And as we grow a better understanding of His generosity toward us, our cheerful giving becomes a reflection of His goodness.

How have you experienced God's generosity? What is your attitude toward giving of your resources for His work?