**IN JESUS CHRIST I BECAME YOUR FATHER**

1 Corinthians 4:1-21

Key Verses 15

“Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.”

**Introduction**



In our society there are all kinds of servants of God. But the question is, are all people who call themselves servants of Christ, actually genuine servants of Christ? What makes one a genuine servant of Christ? How can we be genuine servants of Christ? In today’s passage, apostle Paul pointed out that he became a father in Jesus Christ. His remark reveals the character and nature of the work of Christ's servants. May the Lord help us to grow up as genuine servants of God who can imitate Jesus and Paul in our daily practice of shepherding and teaching on campus and home. Amen.

1. Read verses 1-7. How should we regard those who serve God’s people? (1) What is the essential quality of a servant of God? (2) Why should we not judge but wait until the Lord comes? (3-5) Why shouldn’t we take pride in one man over another? (6, 7)

1-1, Read verses 1-7.

This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed. **2** Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. **3** I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. **4** My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.**5** Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God. **6** Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, “Do not go beyond what is written.” Then you will not be puffed up in being a follower of one of us over against the other. **7** For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

1-2, How should we regard those who serve God’s people? (1)

***This, then, is how you ought to regard us: as servants of Christ***

* As we have studied earlier, the Corinthians had been disputing about which servant of Christ was the greatest.
* One took pride in following Apollos. Another took pride in following Cephas. And there were those who were devoted to Paul.
* They saw the servants of Christ as contestants in some popularity contest. Their attitude was not right.
* Pastors are servants of Christ, no matter the degree of their charisma. Christ is the one who chose, equipped and sent them.
* The Corinthians should receive them as Christ’s servants, respect them, and listen to them as ones who have been sent by God.

***and as those entrusted with the mysteries God has revealed.***

* Christ entrusts his servants with the secret things of God. One great secret is the message of the cross. To those who repent and believe, it is the power and wisdom of God for salvation. (Ro 1:16)
* The kingdom of God is another secret (Mk 4:11). God’s world salvation plan is also a secret (Eph 3:6). These secrets must be revealed by God.
* God reveals them to those who study the Bible diligently, like those seeking hidden treasure (Mt 13:44).
* Servants of Christ study the word of God until they find the heart desires of God. These servants know Christ intimately, for they have the mind of Christ!

1-3, What is the essential quality of a servant of God? (2)

***Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.***

* The quality God is looking for is not intelligence, but faithfulness. Sometimes faithful people do not seem to be so smart, but they are faithful.
* Servants of Christ must be faithful in teaching the Bible. They must deliver the Lord’s message as of first importance.
* They must share the message as it is, without changing the contents to suit their own feelings or purpose.
* Paul proved himself faithful. He stayed in Corinth according to the Lord’s command even though he suffered so much (Ac 18:9-11). Then the Corinthian church was born.
* Likewise, we answered God’s call to live as Bible teachers. We give our hearts year after year to teach the Bible, but students don’t want to join us.
* So often it is just us and our kids and one or two students in our fellowship. We wonder what is the meaning of this tedious mission oriented lives? But, we pray to reveal God’s faithfulness.
* God is working through His faithful servants. We must value faithfulness the most. We must also thank God for faithful Bible teachers. Where there are faithful Bible teachers, there is hope.
* We must pray to be faithful to Christ. Christ said, “Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev 2:10b).

1-4, Why should we not judge but wait until the Lord comes? (3-5)

***I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. 4 My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God.***

* Servants of Christ must not care much about human judgments. Paul also tells us that he did not judge himself.
* Paul did his best in serving Christ and allowed his conscience to guide him in observing an exemplary work ethic, striving for excellence.
* But he knew that human excellence was not good enough. What mattered was whether Christ was pleased or not.
* If God was pleased, Paul was happy, no matter what men might say. If God was not pleased, Paul was very sorry about it, no matter how much praise he might receive from men. Only God’s judgment matters.

1-5, Why shouldn’t we take pride in one man over another? (6, 7)

***Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, “Do not go beyond what is written.” Then you will not be puffed up in being a follower of one of us over against the other. 7 For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?***

* Servants of Christ faithfully proclaim the message of Christ based on the Bible—nothing more, nothing less.
* Paul said, “Do not go beyond what is written.” Members of the body should accept it humbly and come to Christ.
* We must always stick to the message of Christ from the Bible and not go beyond the Bible to realm of our own ideas or focus on messengers and their styles.
* As we focus on what is written and obey its content, our Church community becomes increasingly beautiful.
* It is the Bible that unites us in one fellowship, just like the name of our church - UBF. In the center of this fellowship of students is the BIBLE, therefore let the Bible be our focus.
* We will see him as he really is – Our Master and King – Possessor of all authority in the heaven and earth; then we can see His servants correctly as servants of the supreme Master and not Master in themselves.
* This is the correct perception that Paul hoped to instill to solve rivalries and competitions, so that only Jesus will be exalted our ministry.
* John the Baptist displayed a similar sought of wisdom when he said about Jesus “He must become greater; I must become less” (John 3:30).
* As Bible teachers in order to work effectively as a team, we must faithfully and consistently make Jesus greater and ourselves less.

2. Read verses 8-17. How did some Corinthian believers view themselves? (8) What good examples did Paul show through his own life? (9-13) How did Paul relate himself to the Corinthians believers? (14, 15) What did Paul urge them to do? (16) Why did he send Timothy to them? (17)

2-1, Read verses 8-17.

Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have begun to reign—and that without us! How I wish that you really had begun to reign so that we also might reign with you! **9** For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like those condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings. **10** We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong!You are honored, we are dishonored! **11** To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. **12** We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; **13** when we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world—right up to this moment. **14** I am writing this not to shame you but to warn you as my dear children. **15** Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. **16** Therefore I urge you to imitate me. **17** For this reason I have sent to you Timothy,my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.

2-2, How did some Corinthian believers view themselves? (8)

***8 Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have begun to reign—and that without us! How I wish that you really had begun to reign so that we also might reign with you!***

* Paul rebukes the Corinthians for thinking that they were above carrying their cross.
* The Corinthian Christians thought that they were already glorified, sitting on thrones like kings, sharing the power and reign of Christ.
* They looked down on others and judged others, even the servants of God who weren’t so charismatic and who seemed to be suffering endlessly in this world.
* Their concept of serving Christ was worldly. They thought it meant having power and glory in this world.
* To correct them, Paul explained the reality to them. The reality is that servants of Christ suffer a lot for God’s glory while living in this world.

2-3, What good examples did Paul show through his own life? (9-13)



***For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like those condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to human beings. 10 We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong!You are honored, we are dishonored! 11 To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. 12 We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; 13 when we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world—right up to this moment.***

* Paul had in mind the victory processions of Roman conquerors. The conquering general in a white and golden chariot led the procession and was followed by soldiers in shining armors.
* At the very end of the procession were prisoners of war, who were jeered and spit upon and beaten, as they headed to the arena to be fed to the lions.
* In terms of this procession, the Corinthians thought they were in the place of the conquering general.
* But Paul said that apostles are like the men at the end of the procession. They suffer much and died in the most humiliating circumstances.
* We don’t wish such sufferings by nature, but God puts his servants in such circumstances to reveal His glory through our sufferings. That is why genuine servants of Christ are willing to participate in the suffering of Christ.



* **Horace G. Underwood,** a Princeton graduate, went to Korea as a missionary in 1885.
* He married Miss Horton by faith and for mission, who was 8 years older than him.
* They traveled in Korea to preach the gospel and minister to suffering people.
* They became spectacles to the native people in Korea. The Underwoods became like monkeys in the zoo for Christ.
* However, in this way the gospel spread throughout Korea. Theirs is not a story of riches, fame and success, but of hardship, sufferings and misunderstanding.
* And God bore abundant fruit through their lives of faith. There are now four generations of the Underwoods serving as missionaries. A true servant of Christ should have a resume of sufferings more than of worldly honors.



* The Underwood family took a picture after moving the body of H.G. Underwood from New Jersey to Seoul, Korea.

2-4, How did Paul relate himself to the Corinthians believers? (14, 15)

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***14 I am writing this not to shame you but to warn you as my dear children. 15 Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.***

* Paul spoke to them as his own dear children whom he wanted to correct for their good.
* Paul participated in their birth through the gospel. Just as physical children do not choose their parents, God gives them life according to his own sovereign will.
* It was through Paul’s prayer and Bible teaching that the word of God came into their hearts and gave them new life. God chose to work through Paul by his sovereign will and His grace.
* Paul’s relationship with them was like that of a father and his children. For eighteen months Paul endured many hardships to work with his own hands to support himself and also provide spiritual food for the Corinthians.
* He had gone through birth pains, shepherded them as they grew and protected them, until the tender roots of the gospel could grow strong and healthy in them.
* At one time, Paul was not like a father. He was a legalistic Pharisee who would not tolerate others’ shortcomings. But now he was a loving father-like shepherd who embraces and patiently endures immature children. Praise Jesus!
* Jesus taught us to call God “Father” in the Lord’s Prayer. God loves us like a father. God’s love for us is unconditional, sacrificial, everlasting and longsuffering.
* God loves us so much that he gave his one and only Son Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement to save us from our sins. God is patient with sinners in the hope that we may repent and grow and have a healthy love relationship with him.
* God pours out his grace upon us day after day, though we don’t understand it or deserve it. In this way, God wants to raise us as holy children. When Paul knew God’s heart, he could be a spiritual father to the Corinthians.
* There is a contrast in verse 15 between spiritual fathers and guardians. Fathers care for their children out of love. Guardians serve them to make money.
* It is similar to the contrast Jesus makes between the good shepherd and the hired hand (Jn 10:12-13).
* What is our motive in serving God’s sheep? We must love God’s children with pure hearts as spiritual parents, and give all glory to God.
* Let us revive our personal shepherd life on college campuses and homes so that God’s name would be glorified.

2-5, What did Paul urge them to do? (16)

***16 Therefore I urge you to imitate me.***

* Not all fathers can say this. As a spiritual father, Paul wanted them to learn Jesus’ humbleness and shepherd heart. This would solve their problem of arrogance and enable them to love one another from their hearts.

2-6, Why did he send Timothy to them? (17)

***For this reason I have sent to you Timothy,my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.***

* To help them remember his example, Paul sent Timothy to them. Timothy had learned Christ’s humility and faithfulness from Paul.
* Timothy will also remind them of Paul’s humble way of life in Christ Jesus. He will remind them what apostle Paul taught.
* Timothy’s real and living example would help them to have the universal love of Christ, as it was practiced throughout the world.

3. Read verses 18-21. What problem did Paul address in these verses? (18) How would he deal with this problem? (19-21)

3-1, Read verses 18-21.

**18** Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. **20** For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. **21** What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod of discipline, or shall I come in love and with a gentle spirit?

3-2, What problem did Paul address in these verses? (18)

***18 Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you.***

3-3, How would he deal with this problem? (19-21)

***19 But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. 20 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. 21 What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod of discipline, or shall I come in love and with a gentle spirit?***

* Paul also wanted to come to them to help them solve certain issues that were hurting the church. Of course he would try to solve the matters rationally and prayerfully, but if necessary, he would bring a rod of discipline.
* Yes, like any good father, Paul’s fatherly love included training in the truth. He would not avoid painful encounters if it helped his children spiritually.

Hebrews 12:7-11 reads,

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? **8** If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. **9** Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! **10** They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. **11** No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

**Conclusion**

Today we learned how to become a true servant of Christ. Christ entrusts his servants with the secret things of God. Servants of Christ are faithful people. Servants of Christ proclaim the message of Christ based on the Bible. Servants of Christ are willing to participate in the suffering of Christ. They are spiritual parents. It is not easy to be the servants of God though. But when we pray, God will help us. Especially, let’s pray to grow as spiritual parents like apostle Paul who imitated Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**One word: I became your father in Jesus**