

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany

Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 40:1-11; John 1:29-42; I Corinthians 1:1-9

**Isaiah 49:1-7** is the second of the four Servant Songs of Isaiah. In this song, it is the Servant Himself who is the speaker, whereas in the first Servant Song (last Sunday's Old Testament lesson), it was God. Today's Servant Song both seeks to identify the Servant and to define more specifically than did the first song, the mission of the Servant.

“Listen to me, O coastlands, pay attention you peoples from far away! The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me. He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away. And he said to me, “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.” But I said, “I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity, yet surely my cause is with the Lord, and my reward with my God” (49:1-4).

The Servant himself speaks for the entirety of this song. He begins by announcing that he is speaking to the world, and not only to Israel. His address is to the “coastlands” and “you peoples from far away” – all the nations of the continent and of the world. And what he has to announce to them is that God has called him to be God's Servant and to explain his mission.

The Servant begins by stating that he is called by God. This call occurred while he was still *in utero*, before he was even born (for a similar perspective of call, see Jeremiah's understanding of his call in Jer. 1:5). This call is unquestionably authentic and beyond debate. To express the call's authenticity, the author of this song does several things. First, he uses the word “call” to indicate God's choice of the Servant and makes it clear that this call occurred even before this person's birth. Second, he said that God “named me while I was in my mother's womb”. The phrase “named me” is better translated “pronounced my name”, which means far more than simply giving a name to a person. It is both a common and a very powerful phrase used to indicate a call to a particular mission (e.g., in regards to Cyrus, king of Persia, in Isa. 45:4).

Third, the author piles up phrase after phrase to indicate the vocation of the Servant (“The Lord called me before I was born, he made my mouth like a sharp sword, he made me a polished arrow, in my mother's womb he named me, in the shadow of his hand he hid me, in his quiver he hid me away”). In Hebrew poetry, this was a device used to emphasize a particular point. For the device to be used in this instance six times indicates that what is being declared here is irrefutably true. Further, these phrases emphasize the unique person and the unique vocation of the Servant. Whereas many people were called by God (e.g., Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Micah), this passage through its repetition is emphasizing that the Servant's person and vocation is unprecedented. He is particularly chosen by God for a vocation unlike anyone else's, and the writer wants the reader to be particularly clear about that point.

The author then moves to the identification of the Servant. That identification includes who he is and who he is not. He first writes, “And he said to me, “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I am glorified” (vs. 3). On first reading, it seems irrefutable that the Servant identifies himself as Israel itself. But the vast majority of scholars (Catholic, Protestant and Jewish) believe that the word “Israel” is a gloss on the text (that is, was added by a scribe to the text). The evidence for

such seems overwhelming. First, the name “Israel” is absent from the Septuagint, the first translation of the Hebrew text into Greek and the earliest extant document of the Hebrew Bible. Second, the name “Israel” appears in Hebrew texts that are only later than the Septuagint. Third, this is the only place in the Servant Songs where the Servant is identified as Israel itself; all other identifications within these songs are of either a remnant of Israel or of individual people; therefore, to base one’s contention that the Servant is Israel upon a questionable text is not sound. Fourth, this Servant song is clearly a poem, and the placing of the word “Israel” into the meter of the poem disrupts its poetic meter. In essence, the word “overloads” the line metrically (intriguing, this is as true in its English translation as it is in Hebrew; try reading the verse excluding the word “Israel” and note how much more smoothly it reads). Fifth, in this same Servant Song, the author identifies a mission of the Servant being “to bring Jacob back to God, and that Israel might be gathered to him” (vs. 5a). Isn’t it inconsistent to have the Servant be Israel and then state that the mission of the nation Israel is to bring the nation back to God? How can the nation be in mission to itself? The inclusion of the name “Israel” in verse three opposes the intent of the entire passage, which otherwise postulates the Servant as either an individual or a representative person. For all these reasons, even those biblical scholars who are most orthodox in their treatment of scripture in both Jewish and Christian traditions see the word “Israel” as an addition to this text, likely added in the second century BCE.

So who is the Servant, according to this song if it is not Israel? It is either a remnant of Israelites who are dedicated to the return of the world to God’s intentions for it or it is an unnamed individual.

The author now moves to a statement about the mission of the Servant. “And now the Lord says, who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honored in the sight of the Lord, and my God has become my strength – he says, “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations, the slave of rulers, “Kings shall see and stand up, princes, and they shall prostrate themselves, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you”” (vss. 5-7).

The Servant declares for himself a two-fold mission. First, he declares that he is “to bring Jacob back to (God) and that Israel might be gathered to him” (vs. 5). He is to restore Israel to God’s calling for it – for the nation, its rulers, priests, economic leaders and its people to come into a dynamic and personal relationship with God and each other, to be committed to justice for all but especially for the powerless and marginalized, and to work to equitably distribute wealth so that none are poor or vulnerable.

But the second mission is even more important. The Servant is to be “a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth” (vs. 6b). Former “servants” of Yahweh like Moses, Isaiah and Jeremiah were called to work for the liberation and salvation of Israel (Exod. 4:10-17; Isa. 6:5-7; Jer. 1:6-10). But God’s unique Servant is to become “a light to the nations”. He becomes such a light to the whole world by introducing the world to Yahweh and by working for a society of justice, equity and relationality under God’s covenant of grace-filled love. Thus,

the Servant fulfills, in his actions, the ultimate call to Abraham (Gen. 12:3; 22:18) and to Israel (Exod. 19:5, 6) of bringing about the transformation of all the nations of the world.

What, then, will be the result of the faithful work and witness of the Servant? The One who humbled himself in order to become the Servant of rulers will Himself receive their homage (4:2; 45:24; 52:15). The One who was “despised” and “abhorred by the nations” (vs. 7a), who would have seemed to “have labored in vain, and spent his strength for nothing and vanity” (vs. 4a), whose work and witness would be rejected or discounted by the world will one day be embraced as political, economic and religious leaders and the people come to the realization that the hard news he offered to them was in reality good news, that the way up is down, that the way to save one’s life is to lose it, and that the way to make one’s life truly worthwhile is to give it away to others! And it will be, as the result of such awareness dawning upon the world’s leaders and the people that they will realize that true life comes “because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you” (vs. 7b).

**Psalm 40:1-11** is a hymn that encourages those who either wrote it or chant it to patiently wait for God’s action in addressing their cause, for God will certainly listen. It is divided into three parts, the first part (vss. 1-3) being autobiographical, the second part (vss. 4-10) a strikingly-beautiful testimony of thanksgiving, and the third part (vss. 11-17) being an observation of the likely response of God-haters to God’s support of God’s own people and, consequently, a prayer for help. This third section is strikingly similar to Psalm 70.

The first part of this psalm (vss. 1-3) is a narrative of how God has been at work in the Psalmist’s life. “I waited patiently for the Lord; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the desolate pit, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the Lord”.

We do not know the incident about which the psalmist writes. But it is clear that the psalmist was in trouble, prayed to God about it and waited patiently for God’s response, and that response came. The language of liberation is particularly vivid. The psalmist describes his situation as sinking “into a desolate pit” and a “miry bog”, out of which God has “drawn me up” and has “set my feet upon a rock”, making him secure. You can almost hear the sucking sound of the tar or mud or quicksand giving up its intended victim! The wording and the psalm itself is a continuing reminder of the fact that we are nothing, and have been nothing without God’s transforming empowering work within and among us. For it is God who pulls us “out of the miry bog”. Therefore, what more can we do than to receive and sing out the “new song” that God has “put in my mouth”! In fact, those who see our rescue cannot help but stand in awe of God’s liberating power (the meaning of the word here translated “fear”), and in response “put their trust in the Lord”.

The second part (vss. 4-10) is a strikingly-beautiful testimony of thanksgiving. That part moves from the psalmist’s personal and particular story to its universal application.

“Happy are those who make the Lord their trust, who do not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after false gods. You have multiplied, O Lord our God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us; none can compare with you. Were I to proclaim and tell of them, they would be more than can be counted. Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin-offering, you have not required. Then I said, “Here I am; in the scroll of the book it is written of me.” I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart. I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation; see, I have not restrained my lips, as you know, O Lord. I have not hidden your saving help within my heart. I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation. I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness from the great congregation” (vss. 4-10).

The substance of this thanksgiving prayer occurs in verses 6-8. “Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin-offering you have not required. Then I said, “Here I am; in the scroll of the book it is written of me”. I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart”.

These few verses very poetically get at the heart of this psalmist’s thanksgiving and, for that fact, his entire ministry. He does not invest in the performance of the liturgies and rituals of Temple worship; such will not bring him to God. Nor is that what God wants out of him. What God wants out of him is “an open (or receptive) ear”, a “delight to do your will”. God wants him to incorporate “your law within my heart” – to live out one’s faith before God, acting justly, loving the people, and walking humbly with God!

In the midst of this thanksgiving prayer is a rather obscure sentence that doesn’t make its meaning readily clear, and yet is crucial to understanding the message of this psalm. “Here I am; in the scroll of the book it is written of me”. What does this mean?

A better translation would be “Look, I come; in the inscribed scroll it is written to my debit”.<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew *alay* that is normally translated “of me” is actually an economic term, one that deals with the removal of debt (cf. Job 13:26; II Kings 22:13), and so is better translated “to my debit”. God came to the Psalmist’s rescue (as described in verses 1-3). Now, the Psalmist “owes God” his liberation. But there is no way that the Psalmist can pay what he owes! Certainly, keeping all the regulations and rituals of the Law won’t pay such a price. What reading the scripture (“the scroll of the book”) will teach him is that, if he remains open to God’s message to him that is contained within that book, he will discover that God has acted and keeps on acting to “pay the price” of the psalmist’s greed and lust for domination, freeing him to receive God’s grace and now “delight to do (God’s) will”.

The third part (vss. 11-17) is an observation of the likely response of God-haters to God’s support of God’s own people and, consequently, the psalmist’s prayer for help. One would expect that a psalm would first record the prayer of a people who are in despair and then a report of how God had intervened to address that despair. In this psalm, however, it is the exact opposite. It is out of the evidence of God’s intervention on the part of the psalmist that those

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<sup>1</sup>So translated by Mitchell Dahood, *The Anchor Bible: Psalms I* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), p. 243; also see pgs. 246.

‘who seek to snatch away (the psalmist’s) life’ react with violence and persecution. What, then, should the Psalmist do to such reaction and rejection by his peers?

“Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me; O Lord, make haste to help me. Let all those be put to shame and confusion who seek to snatch away my life; let those be turned back and brought to dishonor who desire my hurt” (verses 13-14).

What should the Psalmist do? Precisely nothing but remain patient and wait for God’s intervention. God will eventually take care of the psalmist’s tormentors. What goes around comes around. And God will bring vengeance upon their heads. So, the Psalmist instructs himself and all those who join him in being criticized and minimized, keep your head up and continue to go about the mission God has given you. Do not lower yourself by answering your detractors. Just keep on keeping on, with your eyes on the prize! And God will take care of the rest.

**John 1:29-42** is the introduction by the author of this gospel of Jesus. It is intriguing that a majority of the text consists of John the Baptizer speaking about Jesus, not Jesus himself speaking. The gospel lesson begins with John seeing Jesus walking toward him, which then prompts John to declare, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel” (1:29-31). John then continues, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God” (vss. 32-34). Finally, John says to two of his disciples the next day, “Look, here is the Lamb of God” (vs. 36). This is the testimony given by John the Baptizer about Jesus, according to the author of the Gospel of John.

Jesus doesn’t speak until verse 38, and then his comment is short and to the point. To the two disciples of John who have come over to Jesus after John has told them that Jesus is the “Lamb of God”, Jesus asks, “What are you looking for?” After they reply by asking Jesus where he is staying, he counters with “Come and see” (vs. 39). Except for a concluding comment (vs. 42), that is all that Jesus says in this Gospel lesson! Therefore, one can conclude that, whereas this is the introduction of Jesus that appears in the Gospel of John, that is all that it is – an introduction! The story is nothing other than the gospel writer telling us of people who are introduced to Jesus, learn about him, are given receptivity by Jesus, and who choose to respond. With Jesus saying and doing nothing substantive, but purely based upon the testimony given by John the baptizer and by Jesus’ open hospitality, Andrew recognizes that this Jesus is the Messiah (vs. 41), and brings his brother Simon to meet the Master. It is only upon meeting Simon that Jesus speaks his first significant line: “You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas” (or, in Greek, Peter) (vs. 42).

What is the introduction of Jesus that is so persuasive to John’s disciples and to Simon that they commit themselves to Jesus as the Messiah? John the baptizer describes Jesus in five ways.

First, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (vs. 29). Second, “This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me’” (vs. 30). Third, “He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes you with the Holy Spirit” (vs. 33, and is obviously a reference to Jesus baptism as recorded in Matt. 3:16). Fourth, “I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God” (vs. 34). Fifth, “Look, here is the Lamb of God” (vs. 36).

The substantive statements are the first and the fourth: “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” and “This is the Son of God”. The other three statements are clearly commentary on these two. So let’s look at those two statements carefully.

First, John uses the metaphor “Lamb of God” to describe Jesus. John’s confession of Jesus as the Lamb of God recalled to both Jewish believers in Jesus and to Jewish non-believers the Passover Lamb whose shed blood protected the Israelite slaves from the angel of death in Egypt’s final plague (Exod. 12:1-32). It also recalled the Lamb of the Atonement that cleansed people of their diseases (Lev. 14:1-32) or the Scapegoat upon whom people’s sins would be placed (Lev. 16:15-34). This was further enhanced by John’s claim that Jesus, as the sacrificial lamb, “takes away the sin of the world”. It is significant that the word “sin” is singular in the Greek, not plural. Thus, it emphasizes the world’s collective alienation from God, not individual sins, a condition of human society rather than specific acts of wrong-doing. This Jesus, John the baptizer is declaring, is God’s redemptive “Lamb” who has been brought by God to earth in order to free human society from its proclivity to dominate, oppress, exploit, and marginalize out of its greed, lust for power and its need to control.

But John also declares something else about Jesus. He witnesses to Jesus as “the Son of God”. This term had very little credence in the Hebrew world of Jesus’ time, primarily because its use would seem to endorse the polytheistic religions in which kings and emperors were seen as “sons of God” and in which pagan gods had children. But the concepts that Israel was seen as a “son” of God (e.g., Exod. 4:22-23; Deut. 1:31), and the literary license of selected Psalms (e.g., 2:7, 12; 8:4) that spoke of God in plural rather than singular voice suggested those who might have a unique, son-like relationship with God. Certainly the Servant Songs (Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-7; 50:4-9; 52:13—53:12) speak of the Servant as having a unique relationship with God that causes the suffering of the servant to become capable of redeeming and liberating humanity. So, although the term “Son of God” was rarely used in Hebrew thought, the concept of one in a unique and redemptive relationship between God and humanity was thinkable. Therefore, the term itself when used by John to describe Jesus must have been, at one and the same time, both grating on Jewish ears and somewhat intriguing, making one want to foster a relationship with Jesus and to explore further his relationship with God!

What is particularly intriguing is to reflect on these two descriptions of Jesus spoken by John the baptizer – of Jesus being the “Lamb of God” and the “Son of God” – in the light of the earlier language used by John the author to describe Jesus. John the author saw Jesus as the “Word” or “logos”, the life and light of the world, the One through whom grace and truth came. Now, in these later descriptions of Jesus as Lamb of God and Son of God, Jesus is portrayed as the atoning Christ, the One who gives his life “for the sin of the world”. By using all this language to describe the man named Jesus of Nazareth, the stage is set by the author John for an

examination of the ministry, work and witness of the One who is from God, who is God, who is the Creator and Redeemer of society. Jesus has now been thoroughly introduced, and now his work in the Gospel of John begins.

The remainder of the first chapter of the Gospel of John has to do with Jesus' calling of Andrew (vss. 39-41), Simon Peter (vss. 41-42), Philip (vss. 43-44) and Nathanael (vss. 45-51). It is intriguing how the themes of "light" and "seeing", introduced at the very beginning of the gospel account, are sprinkled throughout the chapter and now reach their crescendo at its close. Note their frequency of use:

- ? The Word is "*the light* of all people" which "*shines* in darkness" (1:4b-5).
- ? John is not the *light*, but testifies to it (1:7-8).
- ? "The true *light*, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world" (1:9).
- ? "We have *seen* his glory" (vs. 14).
- ? "No one has ever *seen* God. It is God's only Son . . . who has made him known" (18).
- ? John "*saw* Jesus, and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (29)
- ? John testifies, "I *saw* the Spirit descending from heaven" onto Jesus (32).
- ? John testifies, "I myself have *seen* . . . that this is the Son of God" (34).
- ? John proclaims, "*Look*, here is the Lamb of God" (36).
- ? Jesus *sees* the disciples of John following him and says, "What are you *looking* for?" (38).
- ? They ask where he is living. Jesus says, "Come and *see*" (39).
- ? They "came and *saw*" (39).
- ? Andrew finds Peter and brings him to Jesus. Jesus "*looked* at him and said, "You are Simon, son of John; you are to be called Cephas"." (42)
- ? Philip finds Nathanael and tells him of Jesus. Nathanael replies, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip replies, "Come and *see*" (46).
- ? "When Jesus *saw* Nathanael", he says "Here is an Israelite (with) no deceit" (47).
- ? Nathanael, in essence, says "How do you know me?" "I *saw* you . . . before Philip called you" (49).
- ? Nathanael confesses faith in Christ. "Do you believe because I told you I *saw* you? You will *see* greater things than these" (50).
- ? Jesus prophesies, "You will *see* heaven opened and the angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man" (51).

There is, first, a remarkably large number of references to light and sight in chapter one of the Gospel of John. Second, "light" is always used in description of Jesus. Third, John always announces Jesus as the light of the world, in conjunction with people seeing. Fourth, the invitation "Come and see" is given always in relationship to people discovering Jesus as Messiah or the Lamb of God. It is the standard invitation extended by Jesus. Fifth, "seeing" in conjunction with response to the invitation or to faithful discipleship, means a steadily growing and increasing knowledge of and relationship with God through Jesus.

Obviously, the frequency of the references to “seeing” and “light” are intentionally used by the author as the chief means in chapter one of saying that Jesus is the vehicle (“Word”) used by God to bring humanity into relationship with God and to build a shalom community around that relationship. Entrance into that community comes about, not by ancestry or credentials but by “coming and seeing” what God is doing through Jesus – and in seeing, believing and receiving what one sees for one’s own life. It is a powerful metaphor.

**I Corinthians 1:1-9** is the Epistle Lesson for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany. Like the Old Testament and Gospel lessons for this Sunday, this lesson is also about call. It begins, “Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus”. The letter is written by one who both feels chosen by God and is perceived as such by the remainder of the church to be an apostle of Jesus Christ. The text also mentions as co-writer of this epistle a man named Sosthenes; but because he doesn’t appear elsewhere in scripture or in any other writing, we have no idea who he was, what his relationship with Paul was, or whether he co-authored this letter or simply recorded the dictated words of Paul. But it is clear that, in his representation of himself to the Corinthian Church, Paul wanted them to perceive him as being “called to be an apostle”.

But call doesn’t end with Paul. In continuing his greeting at the beginning of this letter, Paul states that the Corinthian Christians are “called to be saints” because they have been “sanctified in Christ Jesus” (vs. 2). The term, “saints” did not mean to Paul what it came to mean in the later Christian church – people who in their holiness outperformed other Christians. Rather what he meant by this term was one who had been “chosen” or “set apart” by God or “made holy” was a “saint” of God’s. In fact, the same Greek root is the foundation for the Greek words translated “made holy”, “sanctified” and “saint”. Likewise, Paul is saying by this statement that one doesn’t make one’s self a saint by seeking to be good or holy; rather one is “called” by God to a life set apart from simply pursuing the political, economic, religious and social objectives of one’s society and set apart to live a life centered in the worship of God and the service of humanity.

Paul wishes the Corinthian Christians both “grace” and “peace” – the word, “grace” referring to God’s freely-given and unmerited favor toward us, and “peace” meaning *shalom* – God’s proper ordering of the world as God intends it to be, and our embracing of the same at the very core of our being and action as Christians.

Having concluded his introduction to the letter, Paul now moves to a statement about the purpose of this letter. “I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind – just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you – so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (vss. 4-9).

Often in its introductory paragraph, Paul will hint at the primary matters he wishes to cover later on in his letter. That is the case with this opening paragraph (following the appropriate greeting).



He most often frames that introduction in a statement of thanksgiving to God for those he is about to call to accountability in the letter, so that his readers don't simply feel criticized by Paul but recognize that any criticism comes out of a genuine concern for them, gratitude to God for them and their witness, and authentic love for them. That is the case in this letter. Paul wants those whom he knows that he is about to confront firmly to first know how much he prizes and respects them. Thus, Paul begins what will be a very critical letter with the words, "I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus". And Paul means this! He is not simply trying to "butter them up", but to make the Corinthian Christians aware of how much they actually mean to him and how much he prizes them!

How has the grace of God been particularly manifested in their midst as God's called ones? Paul continues, "in every way you have been enriched in (God), in speech and knowledge of every kind – just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you – so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ" (vss. 5-7). But it will precisely be the Corinthian Church's "speech", "knowledge" and "spiritual gifts" that Paul will later criticize (1:18—2:16; 12:1—14:40). He will criticize them, not because the spiritual gifts of speaking in tongues ("speech"), words of knowledge ("knowledge"), discernment of spirits, gifts of healing or interpretation of tongues ("spiritual gifts") are wrong, but because the Corinthian Christians have allowed the exercise of these gifts to divide them and to create a party spirit within the church. So it is significant that before Paul criticizes the Corinthian church for the misuse and abuse of their spiritual gifts as a congregation that he will first stress that they have been enriched by these gifts which are evidence of God's call to them. He wants them to clearly understand that he is not criticizing the gifts God has given God's people to effectively live out their call, but rather he will criticize the abuse of those gifts coming out of pride or a desire to dominate or control the church.

So Paul ends his introduction where he began it. "(God) will strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (vss. 8-10). Paul ends his introduction by reminding the Corinthian Church, "Remember, it's not all about you; it's all about God and the transforming of humanity and society into the world as God intends it to be through the intervention of Jesus Christ". You are integral instruments that God has chosen to be used by God to move Corinthian society toward what God longs for it to be. But remember, you are instruments, and not the transformation itself. It's not about you. It's about God. So own your call as God's vocation for you, live out that vocation as thoroughly and as fully as you know how, but keep your life and work centered on God and not on yourself, so that the gifts God has given you to exercise that call can be legitimately used to further God's agenda. And you just be the happy instrument! That's the way of the Suffering Servant. That's the way of Jesus Christ. And that should be your way, too!

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