

PSALMS

Chapter 15

O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill? ²He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart; ³who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend; ⁴in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but who honors those who fear the LORD; who swears to his own hurt and does not change; ⁵who does not put out his money at interest and does not take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved.

Ps 15 Instruction to those who wish to have access to God at his temple. (CSB)

Many scholars think that Ps 15 was an entry prayer that reminded the Israelites of their need for holiness in God's presence. Chemnitz: "He is not describing the cause of our justification or the means of apprehending righteousness, nor the form wherein our righteousness actually consists, but He is describing it by its fruits and who they are who have attained true righteousness and dwell in the church of God" (*LTh* 2:641). (TLSB)

Format: V 1, Your holy hill; vv 2–5, a description of the worthy. (TLSB)

Psalms 15-35 do not differ greatly from the preceding psalms, which dealt with the arrogance of the wicked and the suffering of God's servants, but there is a distinct shift of emphasis. Most of the following psalms place less emphasis on the misdeeds of the wicked and devote their attention primarily to the security and blessing of God's people. Psalm 15 contrasts the blameless saint who walks with God with the fool of Psalm 14. This psalm is a more elaborate version of Hebrews 12:14: "Make every effort...to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord." Jesus likewise said, "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teacher of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20). (PBC)

15:1 *sojourn in your tent* – Poses a daunting question: Who is worthy to enter and remain in God's holy presence? (TLSB)

holy hill – The tabernacle. Later, God's dwelling was the Jerusalem temple, built on Mount Zion. (TLSB)

Tent and hill are figurative because the psalmist is referring to the presence of the Lord. The tent was where the Lord dwelt in the holy precinct, and Mount Zion was the hill on which it came to be located. Of course, no ordinary worshiper could live permanently in the sacred precincts; only the priests and Levites, because that was their place of service, would have their dwellings close by. These verbs, then, refer to the Israelite's participation in worship, and so verbs of temporary dwelling were used, sojourning and settling down for a short time. The worshiper could stay all day in the sanctuary, but usually only stayed for the festivals, sacrifices, and prayers. But even that could be described as temporarily dwelling with the Lord. (*A Commentary on the Psalms* – Ross)

15:2–5† Not only sacrifices or ritual purity (as among the religions of the ancient Near East) but moral behavior (as a response) is required of a worshiper of the God of Israel. (CSB)

The rest of the psalm will answer these questions with ten characteristics of those who may spend time in the sanctuary worshipping the Lord. There were, of course, many more qualifications that could have been added here, but ten was enough to make the point that the fellowship with God one must be perfect. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

15:2 (1) *walks blamelessly* – The verb “walks” is idiomatic for living or following a course of actions. The word “blamelessly” has a wide range of meanings, including perfect, unimpaired, innocent, having integrity, complete, sound, even-tempered, and flawless (without blemish, as of animals). The standard is high; the standard is God. Jesus also said “You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). The first line would have been sufficient to cause most pilgrim worshipers to realize they needed to make confession and offer the appropriate sacrifices. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Perhaps equivalent to “walk with me and be blameless.” After Abram’s and Sarai’s attempt to obtain the promised offspring by using a surrogate mother, God appeared to Abram. The Lord made it clear that, if Abram was to receive God’s promised and covenanted benefits, he must be God’s faithful and obedient servant. His faith must be accompanied by the “obedience that comes from faith.” (CSB)

The emphasis on good works does not teach salvation by works any more than Christ, Paul, or James teach salvation by works when they stress the necessity of good works in the lives of God’s children. Our works motivated by Christian love demonstrate the reality of our faith. On Judgment Day Jesus will point to these works of love as evidence of our faith. (PBC)

This signifies completeness of moral conduct, that is to say, a many-sided, well rounded-out pattern of living which leaves no important area uncultivated. (Leupold)

(2) *does what is right* – The word “righteousness” as discussed earlier (s.v. Ps. 1:5) refers to what is morally and ethically right according to the standard of God. this line therefore says that the person who is acceptable to God is the one who does the will of God, one who conforms to the standard of God that is revealed in his Law. As this psalm will show, that would include the heart attitude along with the external compliance with the commands. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

One of several terms in the OT for God’s people; it presents them as justified or declared righteous and hence living rightly. In every human relationship they faithfully fulfill the obligations that the relationship entails, remembering that power and authority (of whatever sort: domestic, social, political, economic, religious, intellectual) are to be used to bless, not to exploit. (CSB)

(3) *speaks the truth* – The word “truth” refers to what is reliable and dependable. What is said must be right; it must correspond to reality. If it is a promise or a report, it must be reliable. This line takes the standard to a high level; truth must be spoken from the heart. There can be not guile, no hidden agenda, no half-truths. The truth that is spoken must be sincere; it must be the intent of the heart. Paul reminds believers to let their “yes” be “yes,” and their “no” be “no”; they are to commend themselves to the conscience of others. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

heart. In Biblical language the center of the human spirit, from which spring emotions, thought, motivations, courage and action—“the wellspring of life. (CSB)

Sincerity. This quality is necessary for one to approach God, for He can read the heart and is not swayed by appearances (1Sm 16:7; cf Lk 18:9–14). (TLSB)

This expression looks at the root of the utterances heard: they emanate from the heart and do not lie superficially on the tongue. (Leupold)

15:3 The three vices listed in this verse contrast sharply with the three godly behaviors described in the preceding verse. (TLSB)

(4) *not slander* – Incidental slander is bad enough; but to be actively spreading it all around is worse. Slandering refers to spreading damaging gossip that is usually untrue or unverified; it will destroy or bring great harm to the person slandered. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

tongue. The most frequent weapon used against the psalmists is the tongue. For a striking example see Ps 12. The psalmists experienced that the tongue is as deadly as the sword (see 57:4; 64:3–4). Perhaps appeals to God against those who maliciously wield the tongue are frequent in the Psalms because only in God’s courtroom can a person experience redress for such attacks. (CSB)

(5) *does no evil to his neighbor* – The word “evil” of course, refers to whatever harms life or causes pain (s.v. Ps. 10:15). The righteous will do nothing that causes pain or misery to anyone. The righteous person has the good of a neighbor in mind – “Love your neighbor” (Lev. 19:18); and a neighbor is anyone nearby or anyone encountered who needs anything (as Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan clarified in Luke 10:25-37). (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

(6) *nor takes up reproach against his friend* – A reproach is a cutting taunt, scorn, sharp criticism or personal attack (s.v. Ps. 22:6). The righteous will promote those who are nearby and praise them because they are good neighbors. James reminded the early church to control their tongues so that blessings and cursing do not come from the same speech (James. 3:9-11). (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

15:4 (7) *in whose eyes a person is despised* – This qualification has to do with spiritual discernment. The verb despise means to treat lightly, treat with contempt (s.v. Ps. 22:6). In the eyes of the righteous, the reprobate is despised. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

those who fear the LORD. Those who honor God and order their lives in accordance with his will. (CSB)

Those whom the righteous honor and respect should be the God-fearers, people who believe in the Lord and out of piety and reverence seek to worship and serve him. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

A conventional phrase equivalent to “true religion.” “Fear” in this phrase has the sense of reverential trust in God that includes commitment to his revealed will (word.) because of their reverence for him. – If a man truly honors God, we cannot but honor him. (PBC)

(8) *who swears to his own hurt and does not change* – The characteristic is that the righteous may swear but will not go back on their oath even if it is painful (s.v. Ps.63:11). The righteous must not change their mind to avoid an unexpected painful outcome, they must keep their word even if it means they suffer loss of some kind. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

The righteous promise to do something harmful to themselves for the good of others. Though the righteous despise a vile person, they still have mercy for others. (TLSB)

15:5 (9) *not put out his money at interest* – The righteous do not put out their money with interest (literally, “with a bite”). This may not refer to a business transaction in which one would borrow for acquisitions and investments, though it may always restrict the use of interest to burden a person so that he is dependent and humiliated for some time. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Interest for profit was not to be charged at the expense of the poor. Generosity in such matters was extended even further by Jesus (see Lk 6:34–35. (CSB)

In contrast to the surrounding pagan cultures, where loans often led to enslavement (cf Mt 18:23–24), lending of money in ancient Israel was intended to help the poor (Ex 22:25; Lv 25:35–37; Dt 23:19–20). The prophets repeatedly rail against any abuse of the poor and vulnerable. (TLSB)

Literally, the Hebrew of this verse says, “Do not give out your money with a bite.” This suggests that this passage is directed against the charging of oppressive interest. (PBC)

(10) *does not take a bribe* – This means to take a bribe against the innocent and pervert the course of justice. Showing partiality to the rich, or failing to be a witness in court, are essentially the same sin, especially if there is something to be gained. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

never be moved – Disturb my well-being, unsettle my security. (CSB)

The righteous will not be shaken in their faith if they live this way, for they will abide in the presence of the Lord and go from strength to strength. (A Commentary on the Psalms – Ross)

Ps 15 Sincerity and the righteous treatment of others, as taught in the Ten Commandments, are emphasized as the foundation to genuine worship. Sad to say, there are times that we come to worship God in an unworthy manner. E.g., we may remain unreconciled with others or persist in behaviors we know to be wrong. As God’s true temple and the mercy seat where full forgiveness is freely given, our Lord Jesus Christ still calls us unto Himself. Through His grace, we are made right with God and counted worthy to stand before the Father’s throne. • Almighty God, grant that all our worship and life may be acceptable in your sight; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (TLSB)