

A Portrait of a True Worshipper

Psalm 15 (KJV)

1 Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill? **2** He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. **3** He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour. **4** In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord. He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not. **5** He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be moved.

True Worship Is Connected with Holiness

This Psalm needs to be one of the most regularly visited psalms in our Bibles. We often look to various psalms to encourage us, ones like Psalm 23, 42, 91, and 119, but Psalm 15 is one that needs to resonate with every child of God.

Psalm 14 is about a polluted man, a sinner... the fool has said in his heart. Psalm 15 is about a perfect man, the saved... who will abide... who will dwell?

It is a psalm of holiness that promotes true worship. This psalm, when placed in practice, very much mirrors the characteristics of a man who has the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5: 22-23) displayed in his life. It takes a crucified man (Gal. 5:24-25) to live out what David has penned in this psalm.

Holiness is one of God's most important attributes and we should be preoccupied with the holiness of the Lord. When we are meditating on the holiness of God, there are things that take place in our soul:

We become aware of our own sinfulness.

We become aware of the sinfulness of those around us and in society at large.

We live a life of repentance, pleading with the Lord to cleanse us.

We have a proper view of God and His exaltation.

We long to give up our evil ways and then seek the righteous ways of God.

This psalm concludes a grouping of Psalms. Psalm 9-15 are all about the godly and the wicked. David is going to help define what a godly worshipper looks like.

While many may question the classification as this psalm being one of holiness, we must be very clear that holiness covers far more than the dos and don'ts that many immature Christians want to reduce holiness to. In fact, one of the reasons that many are struggling with identity in our day is because of the absence of the attitude that is expressed in Psalm 15.

"Holiness is not something to be received in a meeting; it is a life to be lived out in the detail of godly devotion." – David Martyn Lloyd-Jones

"A deep realization of the blazing holiness of God is essential for all who would rightly approach God. Not until a person has beheld the holiness of God is he able to understand the true state of his or her spiritual condition. Everyone must see himself in light of the holy character of God." – Steven Lawson

One of the concepts that this Psalm moves toward is to encourage us to look at how we approach the Lord in the time of worship. Reverence is one of the rapidly disappearing values of the previous generations, because we are losing the majesty of the Lord.

This Psalm helps to move me to a place of reverent devotion so that I can go into a 21st century sanctuary that has been set aside for worship. The value of this Psalm is seen when I look at...

Where my feet have taken me...
What my actions have said about the condition of my soul...
Whether my tongue has spoken truth or twisted it...
If my tongue has participated in slander...
How I have looked at the actions of sinners...
Whether or not there I have a healthy fear of the Lord...
How I have spent my money or how I have invested it...

We cannot afford to enter a house of worship whether it is private or corporate with unholy thoughts and conduct. We cannot approach God with unwholesome words that have maligned and torn down.

Proper worship always requires proper preparation. In the Old Testament, the Levitical law was very clear as to how a priest was to come to the Tabernacle or the Temple to serve. I am certain that none of us would want a surgeon to do surgery on us without having spent the proper amount of time scrubbing his hands all the way to mid-forearm. Dirty hands are unacceptable for a surgeon and dirty hearts are unacceptable to a saint.

The Great Questions

Psalm 15:1 (KJV) Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?

Does it make any difference as to how I show up to worship? I think this question can be clearly answered by looking to one of the parables of the Lord in Matthew 22:1-14. There was a wedding feast that was prepared but for various reasons those who had been invited to the feast did not come.

The king found that even his messengers had been mistreated and some of them were killed. So, he destroyed the cities where it happened. His next instructions were to go out into the highways and hedges and compel guests to come in.

One of the guests who showed up did not have on a garment that was suitable for him to go to the feast and the king did away with him casting him into outer darkness. It does matter how we show up for worship! This goes far beyond the level of how that we dress, although, I do think that we ought to honor the house of the Lord and be presentable when we come to church.

This parable clearly shows us that the reason for the feast, which is generally understood as salvation, serves the purpose of honoring God and to show the fact that salvation provides refreshment and comfort to those who respond to the call of the Lord.

It matters how that we come to this feast of worship in the tabernacle, in the holy hill, and in the sanctuary of the Lord.

Ephesians 4:24 (KJV) And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

Colossians 3:12 (KJV) Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;

When we have had a genuine work of the Spirit, there will be a great concern as to how we come into the presence of the Lord. Don't let yourself forget the importance of how to approach the Lord when you come to a place of public worship.

Reverence is increasingly lost in our age, because we have forgotten about the majesty and awe of the Lord.

When David asks these two questions in Psalm 15... who will abide in thy tabernacle... who shall dwell in thy holy hill... he keys in on two things: moral integrity and personal holiness.

No matter where you look in Scripture, or in life for that matter, these two points are always inseparably linked together. David longs to ask these questions so that we do not come into the presence of the Lord with unholy thoughts and conduct, with unwholesome words, and how I have treated others.

It is a heart-searching question that deserves an answer:

How prepared am I to come to a place of worship? Who can enjoy communion with God?

Psalm 15 explores the character of a holy man. When we give ourselves to these things, we live in fellowship with God. Yet, it must also be made clear that this is not a sort of "list" to live by, but rather a stimulus to find the entire tone of holiness in the Word.

The Great Qualifications

Psalm 15:2-5 (KJV)

2 He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. **3** He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour. **4** In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord. He that

swaereth to his own hurt, and changeth not. **5** He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be moved.

David starts in verse two answering the two questions that he has asked. When he concludes with his description, there will be twelve areas that have been addressed. David uses something in this Psalm called a couplet. It is where he will take two similar concepts and put them together to make his point.

These couplets cover twelve regions of holiness. These qualifications give us a portrait of a true worshipper. They all express an independent idea.

A True Worshipper Walks and Works

The first couplet is walking uprightly and working righteousness

We see a man who has a walk that is upright and is blameless. He is a whole man that is sound in his thinking. The great danger of our days is that we tend to compartmentalize the spiritual and the secular. The tendency to be strong in one area and weak in another.

The upright walk leads to righteous works! To do righteous works means that we must make choices that are based on our commitments. Those who make poor choices generally have weak commitments and those who have strong choices are those who have strong commitments.

The Bible has much to say about righteousness and what it is associated with:

Deut. 6:25—Righteousness is connected with observing the commandments of the Lord.

Psalm 4:5—Righteousness requires sacrifices.

Psalm 11:7—The Lord loves righteousness.

Psalm 18:24—The Lord rewards according to our righteousness.

Psalm 35:28—We should speak words of righteousness.

Psalm 40:9—Righteousness is to be preached to the congregation.

Prov. 10:2—Righteousness will deliver us from death.

Prov. 11:5-6—Righteousness directs our paths and delivers us from evil.

Prov. 21:21—If you follow after righteousness you will find more righteousness.
Matt. 5:6—There is a hunger and thirst for righteousness.
Matt. 5:10—There is persecution that comes with righteousness.
Matt. 6:33—We are to seek righteousness first and above all things.
Rom. 6:13—We are to yield our bodies to righteousness.
Rom. 14:17—Righteousness is the kingdom of God.
2 Cor. 6:7—There is an armor of righteousness.
2 Cor. 6:14—Righteousness has no fellowship (agreement) with unrighteousness.
1 John 2:29—A mark of being born again is the presence of righteousness in one's life.

A True Worshipper Speaks Truth

The second couplet is speaking truth in his heart and not slandering his neighbor.

The word “backbiting” is an old English word for slander; wanting to damage someone's reputation and lower their influence among others.

David reminds us that the tongue of the worshipper is different from the tongue of the pretender. It is again hammered home to us how important the tongue and speech is all the way through the Psalms. It does matter what I do with my words.

We cannot afford for our tongue to be a scourge—Job 5:21

We do not want our tongue to be sinful—Job 6:30

We don't want our tongue filled with cursing, deceit, fraud, mischief and vanity—
Psalm 10:7

We do not want our tongue to be filled with flattery and pride—Psalm 12:3

We do not want to slander with our tongue—Psalm 15:3

We do not want our tongue to speak evil and guile (crafty, wily, treacherous)—
Psalm 34:18

One of the chief sins of the church today is gossiping about and harming others with our tongues. Gossip, criticism, and slander have probably done more damage to the church than any other single sin.

“Pity your brethren; let it suffice that Godly ministers and Christians are loaded with reproaches by wicked men—there is no need for you to combine with them in their diabolical work.” – Matthew Poole

I have a choice, as you have a choice, and I want my words to count. The godly should desire for our words to:

Be filled with singing and praise—Psalm 126:2

To be just—Prov. 10:20

To be wise—Prov. 12:18

One that uses knowledge—Prov. 15:2

Filled with wholesome words—Prov. 15:4

When truth stirs in our heart, our words are going to be affected by the presence of the Lord. The Lord wants obedient truth-speaking servants to dwell in His tabernacle and His holy hill.

A True Worshipper Has Right Relations

We now come to the third couplet... A true worshipper has right relations with others. He will not do evil to his neighbor nor will he take up a reproach against them.

Genuine worshippers, true worshippers, will maintain right relations with others.

He does not bring harm to them. He will not discredit a person in the eyes of others. His words will be truthful and affirming. (Different from tolerant and silent.)

Here are some great questions to ask yourself:

Do I treat other people with respect especially those who have a less important position in life than you do? Do I snub people? Do I talk down to others in condescension? Am I mean to people?

The answers to these questions tell us a whole lot about ourselves.

A True Worshipper Will Accept the Right and Reject the Wrong

The fourth couplet comes from Psalm 15:4 and helps us to understand that a true worshipper will be known by the people he accepts and rejects.

David notes that in whose eyes (the true worshipper) a vile person will be condemned (despised, rejected). What is the vile? That which is morally and spiritually worthless, polluted, dirty, and morally depraved.

He will reject sinners and his ways. He doesn't want their defiling influence, associations, or partnerships.

1 Corinthians 15:33 (KJV) Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.

Here is what we will find... A true worshipper will not only move away from those who are out of step with God, but he will move into step with those who fear the Lord.

Who are my models? Who are those to whom I look up to? Whose life am I emulating? Whose actions and character do I find offensive?

Probing questions are always good for the soul...

A True Worshipper Has an Unwavering Commitment

The fifth couplet shows us that a true worshipper has an unwavering commitment even when it may lead to his own loss.

Here is a man whom David says that swears to his own hurt, he keeps his oath. Here is a man who keeps his word. He remembers to do what he says that he will do.

This passage provoked my own conscience, because there have been times when I have told people that I would pray for them, send them books, send them some notes, write a letter, and so forth and failed to do it. I think that most all of us have to admit that we have fallen into that category a time or two and the reason

we preach the Word is so that we can be provoked to good works and repentance.

A true worshipper will be one who maintains the integrity of his word. Integrity does not start with our words, but it starts with our heart. A heart must be regenerate, born-again, if it is to accomplish the will of the Lord.

David informs us that this is a man who will stand for what he has promised to do even if it comes at a great inconvenience or loss to him personally. Furthermore, he will not change when there is an urge to bend or buckle under the pressure.

Peer pressure is a challenge for all of us! No matter how young or how old you are, there is always a tendency to adapt and to change when we get in places where changing is the easy thing to do and maintaining your commitment is the hard thing to do.

A True Worshipper Is Conscious of His Money

The last couplet deals with money. There are some scholars who say this is a reference to tithing, but the strongest evidence points to lending money that has exorbitant amounts of interest attached to it.

Moses had condemned this practice very strongly, in fact to take advantage of the poor in this manner was forbidden.

Exodus 22:25 (KJV) If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury.

Leviticus 25:36 (KJV) Take thou no usury of him, or increase: but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee.

There were other regulations for money in the Mosaic Law:

Deuteronomy 23:19-20 (KJV)

19 Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of any thing that is lent upon usury: **20** Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury:

that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all that thou settest thine hand to in the land whither thou goest to possess it.

Deuteronomy 24:10-13 (KJV)

10 When thou dost lend thy brother any thing, thou shalt not go into his house to fetch his pledge. **11** Thou shalt stand abroad, and the man to whom thou dost lend shall bring out the pledge abroad unto thee. **12** And if the man be poor, thou shalt not sleep with his pledge: **13** In any case thou shalt deliver him the pledge again when the sun goeth down, that he may sleep in his own raiment, and bless thee: and it shall be righteousness unto thee before the Lord thy God.

Ultimately we must make certain that we do not allow ourselves to be bought by the world's system of affluence and craving for money.

The Great Assurance

Psalms 15:5 (KJV) He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be moved.

After these qualifications, there is an eternal promise that is like what Peter wrote to the scattered saints in 2 Peter 1:10. Give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:

If you do these things, you will never be shaken. This is a man who is:

Planted by the rivers of water bearing fruit, no withering of the leaves, and prospering—Psalm 1:3

Has a foundation on the rock and the storm will assail, but will not prevail—
Matthew 7:24-27; Luke 6:47-49

Steven Lawson has written a commentary on Psalms. In addressing Psalm 15, he gave the following story:

A mother was visiting her son at college. Upon entering his dorm room, her eye swept across the walls which were covered with more than a dozen suggestive pictures. Her heart was grieved, but she said nothing. Several days later, the

mailman delivered a package to the young man. It was a gift from his mother, a beautifully framed print illustrating the truth of Psalm 15:1-2. The boy hung the Scripture that was in calligraphy on the wall above his desk, and the more he looked at the verses, the more he began to feel convicted by his other pictures. That night as he went to bed, he removed the pin-up picture which hung closest to the framed verses. Then, the next day, another picture was consigned to the wastebasket. Day after day the rest of the pictures began to disappear from the walls until only one frame remained—the illustrated print of God’s Word.

He goes on...

The key to living a holy life is to live a Scripture-saturated life. When God’s Word dwells within a person, sin diminishes. The light of his holiness always exposes areas of darkness, driving them away. Living a righteous life requires focusing and meditating upon the glory and majesty of the Word. The knowledge of the Scriptures, when united with faith, tends to drive out the practice of sin.

Acceptable to God

This passage is so closely related to Psalm 24, Isaiah 33, and to a certain degree the Sermon on the Mount. It literally helps us to see the standard that God sets for those who desire to worship Him.

It also strikes at the heart of self-righteousness for those who think they may not have anything to confess or repent of.

To be acceptable to God:

Personal conduct that is blameless. Life characterized by righteous acts. Speak the truth sincerely. Do not slander. Do not bring reproach to others. Do not cause others pain. Distinguish between vile people and righteous people. Hold to the sanctity of an oath or a contract. Take care with how money is used. Do not receive bribes.

This brings a security to a saint of God, but it also brings us to a place where we are prone to see our need for God!