

Living in Fellowship with God

Psalm 15

Studies in the Psalms #15

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THE Pew Research Center just released a major study of “Religion in Everyday Life.” I want you to get ready because this is pretty shocking stuff. What percentage of Christians in America think it is an essential part of what it means to be a Christian to believe in God? **86%**! What about praying regularly? **63%** How about reading the Word of God? **42%**. How about attending public worship? **35%** How about resting on the Sabbath? **18%**.

Is that as shocking to you as it is me? This illustrates how bad the problem is that we face not just in the culture but within the church! We’re living in a new dark age. And what these statistics illustrate is how important it is to know what it means to know God so that you and I can have fellowship with him. And that’s what Psalm 15 teaches us: ***Living in Fellowship with God***. And it does so in terms of describing the lifestyle of those already in fellowship with him. Did you catch that? Psalm 15 is **not** describing the basis, the cause, or the reason of our salvation; it’s describing the effects of salvation in the life of the one born again by the Holy Spirit in

Christ.

Why do I say that? Because the way it is structured and the way it reads it sounds like it is a liturgical response at the tabernacle and later the temple. It's like Psalm 24.¹ Turn over there with me. As you would come to the worship space you would engage this dialog. And so right up front you would be confronted with the demands of the law and your need of forgiveness. And by doing so it lead the Israelite to confession, to sacrifice, and to faith that one day a final sacrifice would come. This is why it's Christological. And so we can clearly read this Psalm and say, "Jesus is the only one who fulfills this Psalm in every way possibly." Amen? And now we can live in it!

The Question (v. 1)

First, in verse 1 we read *the question* of living in fellowship with God: **O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill?** Back to that Pew Research study, notice how practical living is connected here with knowing God himself! Of course believing he exists is essential to being a Christian!

¹ See also Isaiah 33:14-17

You should notice if you've been with us going through the Psalms in order that this is in direct contrast to Psalm 14. "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" The fool dismisses God; but here in Psalm 15 the faithful desires God. That's another reason why this is a question of one already made alive in Christ. The things of the Spirit are not and cannot be understood by the unregenerated person. This is a question of the child of God. And notice that it's also a metaphorical question since no one actually lived inside the tent of the Lord. Of course, if you're like me and you don't know why anyone would ever camp in a tent when there are perfectly fine hotels with soft beds and showers, this question is a strange one! But this question is a way of saying that one wants fellowship with God all his or her life, which the tabernacle was a microcosm of. And if sleeping in a tent is what it takes to be close to God, you sleep in the tent! Is growing closer to God in fellowship the desire of your heart? Can you say with David, "One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple?" (Ps. 27:4) If David in the Old Testament could say that when he could only see the shadow of God's dwelling in the tabernacle, how much more so we who have the substance of it in Jesus

Christ?

The Qualities (vv. 2–5)

Next, in verses 2–5 I want you to see *the qualities* of living in fellowship with God. This comes out when you see the structure of these verses.² There are three positive qualities in verse 2 mirrored by three negative qualities in verse 3. Then there are two positives in verse 4 mirrored by two negatives in verse 5. Children, really quick, what is $3+3+2+2$? If my math is correct that's 10, right? Where else in the Old Testament does God mention ten things that we are to do? In the Ten Commandments. And since ten is a number of wholeness in the Bible, this means that these qualities of living in fellowship with God are representative of what it means to be a child of God. That's important because not everything here applies to everyone. For example, the poor could not lend to another. For example, those not involved in the legal system would not be tempted to take a bribe.³ These are meant to describe the well-rounded godly life.

Now, the objection from those surveyed in that Pew Research study obviously would be that everything this list mentions are things that make up a god life. Being a Christian is all about being a good person. I didn't

² Davis, *Slogging Along in the Paths of Righteousness: Psalms 13–24*, 44.

³ Davis, 48; Kidner, 81.

mention but right after belief in God being essential to being a Christian, the next things in the list are being grateful for what you have, forgiving others, and being honest. In fact, most of the things people said were essential to being a Christian were personal qualities or are things we do to others. How do we respond? Children, how do you show your love to your mom and dad? Obviously by telling them you love them or obeying them when they ask you to do something for them, right? But how about loving your brother or sister? Is that showing love to your mom and dad? How about sharing with your brother or sister? Is that showing love to your mom and dad? Yes! You see, we show love to God not only by directly loving him but also by loving others. Theologians used to call this immediate worship and mediate worship. We love God immediately when we serve him alone, reverence his name, and so forth. But we also worship him mediately, that is, through means of loving our neighbors as ourselves. That's what verses 2–5 are describing.

Living in fellowship with God evidences itself in this representative list of qualities. **He who walks blamelessly.** This means whole-heartedly in covenant loyalty God as well as neighbor. It's the word used of Abraham in Genesis 17:1, "walk before me and be blameless;" it's the word used to

describe Job in Job 1:1. Then the quality of blamelessness is defined as **he who...does what is right**, meaning, externally, and **he who...speaks truth in his heart**, meaning, internally. And notice again the contrast with the fool of Psalm 14:1, who says in his heart there is no God while the godly says in his heart the truth. **He who...does not slander with his tongue**, or to put it into relevant terms for us, “he who does not go right to Facebook or Twitter or to a comment box and go off on his neighbor.” **He who...does no evil to his neighbor**, which is the negative way of saying “he who loves his or her neighbor as yourself.” **He who...does not take[...] up a reproach against his friend**. The root of that word **reproach** is used six times in 1 Samuel 17 of Goliath’s reproach of Israel’s God. How do you treat your brother or sister in Christ? Are you a Philistine or are you a Christian?

Martin Luther once described a pastoral visitation of Saxony in these words:

The deplorable conditions which I recently encountered when I was a visitor constrained me to prepare this brief and simple catechism, or statement of Christian teaching. Good God, what wretchedness I beheld!...Although the people are supposed to be Christian, are baptized, and receive the holy sacrament, they do not know the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed, or the Ten Commandments, they live as if they were pigs and irrational beasts, and now that the Gospel has been restored they have mastered the fine art of abusing liberty.⁴

⁴ Lull, 471.

May I never be able to say this of you, beloved! May we strive for the qualities of those who have fellowship with God. Let us be those **in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but who honors those who fear the LORD.** Let us be those **who swear[...]** to their **own hurt and does not change.** Let us not **put out our money at interest.** Interest was as high as 50% in Old Testament times. The Old Testament does not condemn outright all loans, such as business loans. What was condemned was preying on the vulnerable.⁵ When some needs financial help is your first question, “How can I gain from this” only to make their lives worse?⁶ Let us never participate in loansharking, paycheck advances, or car title loans, which only bury the vulnerable deeper in debt. Let us be generous and kind. Let us be those who **do[...]** **not take a bribe against the innocent.** Here is the character, here are the words, here is the discernment, here is the allegiance, and here are the dealings of the child of God who lives in fellowship with God. And **he who does these things shall never be moved** because God has dealt with us in such a way!

⁵ Deut. 23:19 cf. Ex. 22:25; Lev. 25:35–38; Prov. 28:8. In Reformation times, the city council of Geneva allowed up to 5% interest, but the one who abused would be excommunicated. Luther believed users should be excommunicated and only reinstated if they gave back all their ill-gotten gain. See *Psalms 1–72*, Reformation Commentary on Scripture, 112.

⁶ Futato, 73.