

# Who Can Fellowship with God?

## Psalm 15

BI: “If we say that we have fellowship with God and yet walk in darkness, we deceive ourselves and do not practice the truth” (1 John 1:6).

LTS: Psa. 24

Intro:

Psalm 15 is one of the Psalms of David. It is important to establish that from the beginning because it helps us understand what this psalm is about. We all know that David was a man after God’s own heart. David knew God and loved God. Nothing brought him more delight than be near the presence of God. He once said, “I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than to live in the [wealthy] tents of the wicked” (Psa. 84:10). Of all the faithful saints in the Bible whom we might conclude loved God, David is the only one who gave expression to his love for God in the words, “I love you” O God (Psa. 18:1). David sang praises to God, danced before God, made sacrifices to God, depended on God. If anyone loved and enjoyed sweet fellowship with God it was David.

But David also knew that it was possible to have his fellowship with God broken due to sin. And though there were a couple of occasions when David really sinned against the Lord in a big way, for the most part David was very careful about the condition of his heart before God. He didn’t want anything to interrupt his fellowship with God. So David would plead in prayer,

- “Search me O God and know my heart; Try me and know my thoughts, and see if there is any wicked way in me” (Psa. 139:23).
- In Psalm 19 he prayed, “Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. <sup>14</sup> Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.”

You see, David understood that while the basis of his relationship with God was the sovereign atoning grace of God, it is also true that one cannot live an unrighteous, unholy life and expect to enjoy any fellowship with God. The primary mark of a true child of God is a righteous life. Or, as J.C. Ryle once said, “The only safe evidence that we are one with Christ, and Christ in us, is a holy life.”<sup>1</sup>

You may remember from our Study of Psalm 1 we learned that ultimately those

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<sup>1</sup> J.C. Ryle, *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots*, (Moscow, Idaho, Charles Nolan Publishers, 2002), 50

whom God considers righteous are those who have been forgiven (ps. 32). But those who have been forgiven are those whose hearts God has so changed that they now love righteousness and are characterized by the pursuit of holiness. Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for... righteousness” (Mat. 5:6).

Leading up to Psalm 15 David talked a lot about the difference between the righteous and the wicked. Now he takes the time to tell us in practical terms what a righteous man looks like. What characterizes the life of one who fellowships with God? What living spiritual fruit is born in the those who have been declared righteous by God? We might ask the question like this: What kind of person does God accept into fellowship with Himself?

We live in a day where many are convinced that grace means God saves sinners unconditionally and doesn't care how you live. Is that really what the Bible teaches? Or does it teach that while no one is saved BY their righteous works, we are all saved FOR righteous works. As James argues toward the end of the Bible, “As a body without its breath is dead, so faith without works is dead” (Jam. 2:26).

This was apparently on David's mind when he wrote Psalm 15 because he begins the psalm with a Question: “Who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill?” The question David is asking is a question of eligibility. “Who is eligible to stand in the the presence of God for whorship and fellowship?” What kind of person does God accept? Consistent with the rest of the Psalms, his answer will be that only the righteous are eligible to fellowship with God.

The background on this Psalm is likely a time shortly after David brought the Ark of the Covenant up to the top of Mount Zion and place it in the Tabernacle (Tent) of the Lord. The Ark represented the very presence of God. Perhaps upon writing this Psalm David recalled his first failed attempt at bringing the Ark up the mountain. On that day of festive national celebration a man by the name of Uzzah was suddenly struck dead by God right in the middle of the parade, for simply reaching out to stablize the Ark when the cart faltered. The message was clear: It is a fearful thing to come into the presence of God. God is Holy, Holy, Holy, and one cannot simply saunter into His presence dressed in one's good intentions.

On this day, however, David was careful to move the Ark of the Covenant in the way God required in His law, and had successfully brought it into the Tabernacle on Mt. Zion – the very place where Solomon would build the Temple. It is with this in mind that David writes about who is qualified to enter into the presences of God.

The structure of this Psalm is very simple. David begins with

- I. One Penetrating Question (1)
- II. Four Categories of Concern (2-5)
- III. One Eternal Promise (5).

With all of that in mind, then, let's read the text.

Read Psalm 15

## **I. One Penetrating Question (1)**

1. The opening question may sound familiar, but probably not because we all know this psalm. It is more likely that it sounds familiar because we are better acquainted with Psalm 24 which asks (3), "Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand In His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart... etc."

2. The question in Psa. 15 and the one in 24 are different, but have the same focus: Who is eligible to worship and fellowship with God?

3. This would be a good question for us to consider each Saturday evening, would it not? We would do well to engage in some level of spiritual introspection before we come into the house of the Lord on Sunday.

4. Now, the answer David offers to his own question is not an exhaustive rendering of God's righteous requirements. It does, however, offer us four major categories of life about which we should pay particular attention.

I. Your Character (it should be holy)

II. Your Communication (It should not be injurious)

III. Your Companions (they should love God)

IV. Your Cash? (It should not entice you to sin).

David has asked the penetrating questions, let's consider his answer offered as...

## **II. Four Categories of Concern (2-5)**

### **1. Your Character:**

1. I want you to notice here that of these four categories, two are positive and two are negative. Two of them tell us what righteousness does and two show what righteousness refuses to do. This first one is positive. Who is eligible to worship and fellowship with God? "He who walks blamelessly and does what is right."

A. David is describing a man who maintains a righteous character. The word

blameless here means that which is whole or sound. This is a morally well-rounded man. He is NOT morally upright in some areas and wicked in others. No, he is a man of general integrity.

- B. We have all known people who appear gracious, kind and godly in church, but at home they are angry and selfish tyrants who rule their families by fear and intimidation.
- C. From time to time we read about a renown Christian celebrity who “fell” into gross immorality. The truth, however, is that nobody falls far. A man who “falls” into immorality is one who in his heart and in his secrete moments has been descending into the depths of immorality one step at a time for a long while. The reality is just now coming to light.
- D. The man of integrity is not merely known for what he doesn’t do, but for what he does. He (2) “Does what is right.” That is, he practices active righteousness. He helps those in need. He teaches his children to obey. He gives an honest day’s work for a day’s pay. And all the while He speaks truth in his heart.” In other words, he not only says things that are true, but he considers the truth God has revealed and speaks it to his own heart. And he strives to be especially honest with himself about his own sin.
- E. This, beloved, is a man of integrity. This is a man who is above reproach. He would be the first to admit that he is not perfect, but he strives to please the Lord inside and out.
- F. So, a man who is eligible to worship and fellowship with God is one who is careful about his character.
- G. And we could stop along the way with each one of these and ask, are you a person of character? Is your outer life a true reflection of what is in your heart? This is the kind of person who is eligible to fellowship with God.

## **2. Your Communication:**

1. The righteous man “does not slander his neighbor.” Verse 2 offered a positive trait, Verse three, however, speaks in the negative. That is, what a righteous man refuses to do.
2. In the 10 Commandments, the 9<sup>th</sup> is “You shall not bear false witness.” But it involves more than saying things about others that aren’t true. It also involves revealing negative things about others that may in fact be true!
  - A. Verbal sins are often the one’s that we most readily excuse. To use Jerry Bridges term, they are, to many of us, “respectable sins.” When we hear them, or say them we merely brush them off as no big deal. But unrighteous speech is

a big deal with God. And it can interrupt your fellowship with God.

B. The proverbs are full of warnings about how we use our words.

- 12:18 “There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.”
- 17:4 “An evildoer listens to wicked lips, and a liar gives ear to a mischievous tongue.”
- 18:21 “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.”
- 21:23 “Whoever keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps himself out of trouble.”

C. And James warns that “If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person’s religion is worthless.” That’s a strong word! James is saying that if we commit unrepentant verbal sins against one another the lord considers our religion worthless! Why? Because if it were real it would be producing righteous speech! And true repentance.

D.

E. It’s a sobering thought to consider that it’s possible that our sinful words spoken in the privacy of our homes may disqualify us from fellowship and communion with God... at least until we repent.

F. David continues by warning that a righteous man “does no evil to his neighbor nor takes up a reproach against his friend.”

- Nothing is worse than to learn that you have been slandered by someone whom you considered a close friend. One scholar writes, “There is a special wickedness in injuring one with whom we are intimate.”
- That’s what made the kiss of Judas so evil. It was the betrayal of one who had pledged his undying loyalty to Jesus.

G. Those who are eligible to worship and fellowship with God are scrupulous about their communication.

H. I can’t help but wonder this morning, since this is such a common form of unrighteousness, whether there may be quite a few of us in this building today who need to confess to God and to people in our home the sinful and hurtful words we have spoken.

I. Righteous people are concerned about their character, their communication, and...

### **3. Your Companions (4)**

1. Here is the second positive/active manifestation of righteousness in this Psalm. David says a righteous man is one “in whose eyes a vile person is despised and who honors those who fear the Lord.”

- A. In other words, the righteous person is careful about his friendships. He is going to guard against establishing close relations with those who reject God and his word.
- B. Paul warned the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15:33), “Do not be deceived: Bad company ruins good morals.” We tend to become like the people we spend time with. That’s why in Proverbs we are warned (22:24–25) “Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man,<sup>25</sup> lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare.”
- C. And it’s not just people who become our friends, but people we admire as well.
  - It’s common for young people to idolize a certain athlete who is exceptional skilled in his sport but who is wretched heathen off the field.
  - Such men and women are notorious for their abusive, illegal, and narcissistic behavior. They are vile and crude and stand for nearly everything God stands against. And yet we wear their names on our T-shirts and Jerseys, and allow our children to hang posters of them in their bedrooms.
  - David is saying, the righteous man sees in people what really matters. The most important thing about a man is not whether he can throw, catch, and run. It’s not how fast he can swim, or how well she can sing. The question is, do they have a life that reflects the character of Christ?
- D. David is saying that a righteous man is a good judge of character. In his heart, he recognizes the difference between one who is vile and one who is honorable. He is resolved to never honor a wicked person or vilify one who is honorable.
  - Our culture needs a gigantic dose of this kind of righteousness.
  - The problem is, that cannot happen apart from the transforming power of the gospel of Christ.

2. The other manifestation of righteousness David mentions here in v. 4 is that he “swears to his own hurt and does not change his mind.”

- A. Simply stated, a righteous man keeps his word. If he says he is going to do something, he does it, even when he ends up having to sacrifice.
- B. And Jesus taught us, “Let your yes be yes and your know be know.” Even

when it costs you.

- Occasionally, this happens when we resolve to honor those who are truly honorable in this world.
- John Calvin said, “It is no common virtue to honor pious and godly men, since in the opinion of the world they are often as the offscouring of all things (1 Cor. 4:13).” In other words, sometimes honoring righteous people will cost you dearly in this world. But a righteous man does it anyway.

C. Perhaps the one area in the Christian community where keeping your word even when it hurts is most needed is in marriage.

- When a man and a woman stand before God on their wedding day they make a solemn vow to remain true to one another from “this day forward, to love, honor, and cherish in sickness and in health, for better or for worse, richer or poorer, for as long as we both shall live.”
- If true righteousness among church-going people were measured by this one standard alone, the church would be in a world of hurt.
- Righteous men and women are those who swear to their own hurt and don’t jump out of the marriage when the going gets tough.
- Now please hear me when I say, I’m not talking to people who have been divorced, and are now walking with Christ in your new marriage. Rather, I am talking to those of you who are married and are sometimes tempted to think, “there’s got to be a better deal out there somewhere.” That is unrighteous thinking, and you must repent of it.
- The righteous man or woman swears to his own hurt and does not change his mind.

D. So the man/woman who is eligible to worship and fellowship with God is one who is concerned about his Character, his Communication, his Companions, his finally...

#### **4. Your Cash (5).**

1. Here is the second negative mark of the righteous man. It is the second thing he refuses to do; namely, he refuses to “Put out his money at interest and does not take a bribe.”
2. In other words, the righteous man or woman does not involve himself in financial dealings that will hurt others in order to profit himself.

- A. Now we don't have time to talk about what the O.T. law said about lending money. Suffice it to say that the Lord's concern was not the lending of money but the practice of usury. Any Israelite could lend money to another, but not with interest.
- B. On the other hand, and Israelite could loan money to gentiles (like you and me) and charge interest, but it couldn't be exorbitant interest.

3. You see, the righteous man has a completely different view of money compared to the unrighteous. The unrighteous sees his money as something he has earned by his own hand and can therefore be used however he pleases. The righteous man, however, understands that God is the one who gives us wealth. Our money actually belongs to Him and we are to use it to accomplish his priorities and according to His revealed will.

4. If you are a Christian salesman this verse will likely challenge and stretch you in rather uncomfortable ways. But it is appropriate to wrestle with Scriptures like this and let God transform your thinking and practice in ways that will glorify Himself.

5. So this is God's snapshot of a righteous man. It's not a comprehensive description, but it helps us see what the pursuit of holiness looks like in practical terms.

6. A righteous man is concerned about his Character, his Communication, his Companions, and his Cash. Now there is one more thing in this text. We saw

- One Penetrating Question
- Four Categories of Concern, and finally...

### **III. One Eternal Promise:**

1. David ends this Psalm by saying, "He who does these things shall never be moved" ("shaken" NAS)

2. This is a promise of eternal security. People who live like this give evidence that the Lord God is truly their God. This righteousness is the fruit of their salvation.

3. O My friends. You may be sitting here thinking: What hope do I have? I have violated many of these righteous rules! How can I ever hope to be acceptable in the sight of God?

4. I want to say to you this morning that that's a wonderful question! And there is an even more wonderful answer. You see, God understands that no human being can achieve His righteous standards. They are too high and we are all too sinful. All of us



have sinned and fall short of the glory of God! All of us have failed to obey God's commands. There is a sense in which when David asks, "Who is qualified to worship God and fellowship with God," the answer is NO ONE!

- None of us has clean hands and a pure heart.
- None of us is holy in character, righteous in communication, perfect in our companionships, and impeccable with our Cash. We all fall short. And if we were honest, we would have to confess that we fall short of God's standards because we prefer our sin.

5. But here is the good news. In the mercy of God, because of the great love with which He loved us, He sent Jesus Christ to do for us what we could never do. Jesus was always blameless, always told the truth, never slandered his neighbor or betrayed his friend. He always honored His father, and always called evil what it is. When He came to earth he swore to his own hurt, even the extreme hurt of death on a cross for our sakes.

6. You see, Jesus climbed the hill and entered God's tent on your behalf. He paid for all your sin. And if you will receive Him; if you will confess to God that you have no righteousness to offer him but only your sin, he will take it – all of it - and nail it to Christ's cross, and declare you righteous forever. More than that, He will put His Spirit in your heart to give you the desire and ability to live in a manner that please God and to repent when you don't. For the same apostle John who said, "If we say that we have fellowship with God and yet walk in darkness, we deceive ourselves and do not practice the truth" (1 John 1:6), also said, "If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Isn't that a wonderful promise? And everyone who takes advantage of this promise is welcome to worship and fellowship with God in truth.

7. This is God's free offer of grace to you. And it is yours if you will have it.

8. If you are a child of God, let me close with one more thought.

In his book, simply entitled *Holiness*, J.C. Ryle writes, "This I do boldly and confidently say, that true Holiness is a great reality. It is something in a man that can be seen and known, and marked, and felt by all around him. It is light: if it exists, it will show itself. It is salt; if it exists, its savor will be perceived. It is a precious ointment: if it exists, its presence cannot be hid."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> J.C. Ryle, *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots*, (Moscow, Idaho, Charles Nolan Publishers, 2002), 47

He went on to say, “The only safe evidence that we are one with Christ, and Christ in us, is a holy life.” (J.C. Ryle).

9. Oh that we at Calvary Bible Church would engage in the Christ-empowered pursuit of holiness and so that Christ’s excellencies will be evident in us, and we will know with confidence that we are indeed children of God who are welcome to fellowship with Him in Christ.