
Psalm 15: A Primer for James

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Using Our Faith To Live the Life To Which We Have Been Called !

Before we get into James directly, let us look at Psalm 15 for a general overview and a primer to the precepts we will learn and be challenged by. As a Christian, you should desire to grow beyond just being saved, right? Being “saved” is being justified by faith for what Christ has done for us. This assures us of eternal life, but is that all? Is there more to the story? No, for Grace; yes, for obedience! Saved? Yes, we are! But, what good is it if we do nothing with our faith? This is what James is addressing. A criticism of Christians by secularists and people whom the church has failed (those who have been hurt by spiritual abuse, gossip, slander, etc.) is that they are hypocrites; they like to take the “cheap grace” and then live their lives as if nothing that Christ did really mattered. The criticism goes on to say that many Christians just seek salvation like a “fire insurance policy” against going to hell. Thus, their lives do not show any *real* commitment to being a disciple. Character, fruit, maturity, and integrity seem to be absent! James is a book of practical living, which challenges us away from just being saved to where the “rubber” of our faith “meets the road” of life. It is a scary book because it requires a response, as does Psalm 15.

The opposite end of this coin of doing nothing with our faith is legalism--the forced practice of being good by means of a set of rules and regulations. Even though these rules may be good, they come from obligation and not from a heart of gratitude. Sanctification is not a part of legalism because the qualities of Christ we are called to emulate are not present. Psalm 15 and James are about living out a life of holiness, not because we have to, or we feel compelled by obligation; rather, because we want to please the Father, we want to grow in Christ, and we want to be empowered by the Spirit. It is not about receiving our salvation; it is about what we do with it once we have it. Does our life make a difference or are we just saved? And, if so, James and Psalm 15 say, “so what!”

Many commentators over the last two millennia have noticed that James is a succession of sermons based on Jesus’ own words and Psalm 15 (See James Background Article). Psalm 15 is about righteousness and ethics. It is called an “entrance liturgy” about how we approach God in His Tabernacle, the tent dwelling prior to the building of the Temple. Priests were not allowed to approach God in a wrong attitude or for personal agendas or with just ceremonies; rather with a heart of virtue (Lev. 10; 22:2). For us, it is how we worship and treat God and how God desires us to be to others (Psalm 1; 24:3-6; 33:14-16), as our personal agendas will cloud His work in us. This Psalm is a crucial image of how we are to approach God and how we are to live our lives (Col. 1:1-8). It is a template to James, his life, his work, and his Epistle. It should also be our template on how we approach God and life with others! This Psalm is also an

excellent way to analyze to see if Christ is indeed working in you! Do you wonder if you are really learning and receiving His Truth? Do you wonder if you are really willing, and able to impart His Word, Fruit, and Character to others, as we have been called to? Then, this is the Psalm to impact you, for you to memorize and live by! This is the Psalm for the Christian who is real, authentic, and desires to glorify our Lord, model His precepts, and be impacting to others! These are the traits of faith that will produce results in a life that is victorious and impacting (Phil. 1:6; 3:7-11; 4:4-9). Being willing and able to develop your faith and Christian walk will help, along with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, to build your maturity and character (Gal. 5:22-23; 2 Pet. 1:5-11).

As Christians who desire to grow in Christ and be more than we are now, we must come to the point that we allow the search and conviction of the Holy Spirit upon our lives to the very core of our souls (2 Cor. 13:5)! Once this happens, the result will be more faith and more use of ourselves to Christ. The result for your church will be more focus upon His precepts and increased prayer, which will bring an outpouring of the Spirit and renewal! This will impact your neighborhood and the world in which you live. It all starts with your determination to encompass the faith He has given you and obey! What is stopping you?

The wondrous privilege we have is that because of Grace, we may be able to “ *dwell in the Lord’s Sanctuary* ” and place our home “ *on His Holy Hill.* ” But, what good will it be if we do not show our gratitude and obedience for what He has done by living out His principles!

If you are wondering if you have growing faith and a mature walk with Christ or if you need the precepts to know what to do, the results of the former will be:

- Walking with integrity and honesty, genuine and just to God and to others!
- Worshiping, rejoicing, and praising Christ as Lord!
- Teaching God’s Truth with power, conviction, and clarity!
- Restraining the tongue that reflects the soul!
- Working and living for righteousness and truth!
- Modeling Christ’s love to others!
- Always humble, generous, gentle, and kind!
- Not over-worrying, but trusting in the Lord!
- Committed to the importance and practice of prayer!
- Speaking from the heart with love!
- No gossiping, slandering or lying—or even listening to it!
- Not doing evil or reproaching others!
- Despising ungodliness!
- Honoring people who fear and respect the Lord!
- Not being influenced by power or position—of self, or of others!
- Not being corrupt!
- Not extorting, manipulating, or using people for false gains!

- Not taking bribes or fighting against the innocent!
- Allowing the Holy Spirit to direct your life!
- Swearing to one's own oath and keeping promises!

Those who do these things will never be shaken!!!

What are the results? Usually, when we treat others well they reciprocate and treat us well, too. These are the instruments used to determine character and how one has taken in and used faith. These gauges do not lie. If these precepts are weak, functioning improperly, or not at all, then there is something definitely wrong and you need to get on your knees and into His Word. Without a real, working faith, you will not be able to be used by God to build His Church! (Prov. 26:10)! **Need help?** Of course you do; we all do! I know I do! This is one of the roles of the Holy Spirit. So, commit yourself in prayer to Him to strive with all of your strength and with His guidance to implement these principles! Remember, we will not be perfect; we will have times of failure. The call for us is not perfection; it is to strive in this direction with all of our faith, mindset, and resources available!

Real faith will cause the above principles to work from you to those around you! A real, called, mature Christian—especially a church leader—must follow these principles from a heart and a desire to please God, resulting from the work of the Spirit within him or her. A pretender or false teacher in the pulpit will not exhibit these characteristics either publicly or privately!

Questions:

1. How do you feel when a Christian is dishonest or gossips to you? Why is this bad?
2. How well can you relate to these principles from Psalm 15? Are they realistic and practical for you, for today? Why, or why not? What do you think? Do your thoughts mesh with Psalm 15 and the rest of Scripture?
3. Read Eph. 2:8-9 and James 2:14. Compare and contrast these passages. How do they differ? How are they the same?
4. How can your growth in Faith and Character impact your church?

5. Some Christians put their emphases on what they believe, while others emphasize on how they are to behave. What are the values of belief and knowledge, and how does this relate to how we react in life?
6. Look at each of these “Principals” and answer the question, *how have you applied these to yourself, your family, your friends, your church, and people in general?*
7. Why would you or a church not want to follow these principles?
8. What about ways to demonstrate these principles to others around you so that it affects “who you are” in your personality and deeds? In doing so, you not only hear what God says, but truly listen and apply His “principles” in all that you do.
9. What happens when we are not following these or other godly principles?
10. What would be the characteristics of a pretender or false teacher? Would he or she model the above precepts? How would you know?
11. Our focus must be on edifying and encouraging. So, what can you and/or your church do to make this a priority?
12. Which of the stanzas of Psalm 15 strike at you so that you need to deal with it in your own life? When, and how will you?
13. How will these principles be used to build your faith and church?
14. How can you improve your spiritual walk so you can be the person who models Psalm 15?
15. Can you think of other practical ways to demonstrate these principles in your life?

Listening and not doing is wrong; but to obey what the Word of God reveals in Psalm 15 is being a *real* disciple! Because of Grace, we may be able to “dwell in the Lord’s Sanctuary” and place our home “on His Holy Hill,” but what good will it be if we do not show our gratitude and obedience for what He has done by living out His principles? Remember the last verse: “He who does these things will never be shaken.”

Let us use our lives for His glory so we point people to Christ with passion, integrity, and consistency!

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This study starts our new eighteen week series in the Epistle of James. Each week, it is our desire to challenge you to grow further in your faith and the application of the Christian life!