Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician’s Melodies

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Psalm 15 — The Godly Person

1.0 Introducing Psalm 15

1.1 Is Psalm 15 intended to be instruction in godliness that can be measured by the Law (Torah)?

1.2 Is Psalm 15 an entrance liturgy designed to be employed by the priests to insure that only worthy worshippers entered the grounds of either the Tabernacle or the Temple?

1.3 Is Psalm 15 intended to replicate the Ten Commandments in ten characteristics of a godly person?

1.4 Is Psalm 15 a wisdom psalm highlighting the Law and obedience?

1.5 Is Psalm 15 the Old Testament’s equivalent of the Epistle of James in the New Testament?
2.0 Reading Psalm 15 (NASU)

15:1 A Psalm of David.

O LORD, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill?

15:2 He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness,
And speaks truth in his heart.

15:3 He does not slander with his tongue, Nor does evil to his neighbor, Nor takes up a reproach against his friend.

15:4 In whose eyes a reprobate is despised, But who honors those who fear the LORD; He swears to his own hurt and does not change;

15:5 He does not put out his money at interest, Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent.

He who does these things will never be shaken.

3.0 Understanding Psalm 15

3.1 Outline

I. The Question (v. 1)
II. The Answer (vv. 2-5b)
   A. Integrity (2)
   B. Relationships (3-4b)
   C. Selflessness (4c-5b)
III. The Promise (v. 5c)

3.2 Notes

- v. 1 Rhetorical Questions
  - Rhetorical questions are employed for dramatic effect.
  - Rhetorical questions create interest and grab the audience’s attention.
  - Rhetorical questions are often used in the Hebrew Bible to open a poem or the stanza of a poem.

- v. 1 Compare the Questions
  - “Abide” is a Hebrew word referring to sojourning or spending the night some place — temporary residence. “Dwell” is a Hebrew word referring to settling down — permanent residence.

Such language seems to direct the reader’s attention to the Tabernacle and the Temple (or, the more permanent abode of God Himself in Heaven).

See Isaiah 33:14-16.

v. 2 “walks … works … speaks”

These three verbs are participles that refer to characteristic or habitual actions. That raises the question of the purpose of this description:

- Does such an emphasis on characteristic action mean that the Scripture teaches “sinless perfection”?
- Does such an emphasis mean that the Scripture teaches salvation by works?
- Is this description of the characteristic actions of the godly refer only to the final sanctification a believer experiences upon arrival in Heaven?

Psalm 15 is about sanctification, not salvation.
See James 2:14-17.

The faith that works does not save,
But the faith that saves works.

v. 2 “in his heart”

The reader expects “with his lips” immediately following “speaks truth.” However, “in his heart” was written by the psalmist.

See James 3:14.
Mark 7:20-23.

v. 3 “not … nor … nor”

In the Hebrew of verse 3 the negatives are used permanent, objective negation, rather than temporary, subjective negation.

As with the participles in verse 2, the verbs of verse 3 refer to tried qualities and habitual actions.

The purpose of the description of godly characteristics that are negative as well as positive is due to the ultimate aim: full (not partial) sanctification. It aims at consistent behavior rather than intermittent behavior.
• v. 3 “does not slander”
  ■ The Hebrew word is related to the words for “leg” and “spy.”
  ■ “Slander” refers to someone walking around seeking tidbits of gossip to pass on to someone else. Such people behave as spies or conspirators trafficking in information that tears someone else down.

• v. 3 “neighbor … friend”
  ■ The word “neighbor” refers to one’s fellow human being.
    o See Leviticus 19:18.
  ■ “Friend” is a word referring to one’s closest relationships — especially those of one’s own family.
    o See Leviticus 21:2.
    o See 1 Timothy 5:4, 8.

• v. 4 “In whose eyes a reprobate is despised”
  ■ “Reprobate” refers to one who has been rejected by God. A reprobate is a particularly vile person.
  ■ What was wrong with Samuel’s attitude when God rejected Saul (1 Samuel 16:1)?

• v. 5 “money … interest … bribe”
  ■ According to biblical teaching, God’s people are to put people before money (cf. Matthew 19:23-26) and God before money (cf. Matthew 6:24; Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5).
  ■ See 1 Timothy 6:10.

• v. 5 Promise
  ■ As in verse 3, the negative employed is permanent and objective. In addition, it is emphatic by means of the addition of “forever.” That’s why the translation says “never” (= “not” + “forever”). It is similar to saying “Never ever …”
  ■ Verse 5 is the answer to the questions asked in verse 1.
  ■ See Psalm 112:6-7.
  ■ See Proverbs 12:3.
  ■ See 2 Peter 1:10
4.0 Singing Psalm 15

Lord, Who May Dwell in Your Sanctuary?

Chorus:
Lord, who may dwell in Your Sanctuary, in Your Holy Hill?
Lord, who may dwell in Your Sanctuary, in Your Holy Hill?

'Tis those whose walk is blameless;
Who do what is right.
'Tis those who speak truth from their heart,
For Lord, they do Your will.

Chorus:
'Tis those who do no wrong unto their fellow man
By tongue, by act, or by any means,
For Lord, they do Your will.

Chorus:
'Tis those who fear the Lord,
Who despise the vile man.
Who deep their oath even when it hurts,
For Lord, they do Your will.

Chorus:


Who Shall Ascend Thy Heav’nly Place?

1 Who shall ascend Thy heav’nly place,
Great God, and dwell before Thy face?
The man that minds religion now,
And humbly walks with God below.

2 Whose hands are pure, whose heart is clean,
Whose lips still speak the thing they mean;
No slanders dwell upon his tongue;
He hates to do his neighbor wrong.

3 Scarce will he trust an ill report,
Nor vents it to his neighbor’s hurt:
Sinners of state he can despise,
But saints are honored in his eyes.

4 Firm to his word he ever stood,
And always makes his promise good;
Nor dares to change the thing he swears,
Whatever pain or loss he bears.

5 He never deals in bribing gold,
And mourns that justice should be sold;
While others gripe and grind the poor,  
Sweet charity attends his door.

6  He loves his enemies, and prays  
For those that curse him to his face  
And doth to all men still the same  
That he would hope or wish from them.

7  Yet, when his holiest works are done,  
His soul depends on grace alone:  
This is the man Thy face shall see,  
And dwell for ever, Lord, with Thee.

— Isaac Watts, *The Psalms of David*, 1719

5.0  **Praying Psalm 15**

- Lord, hear my prayer before your heavenly throne. [v. 1]
- Help me to be honest in all I do. [v. 2]
- Keep me from lying—even to myself. [v. 2]
- Give me sincere love for others. [v. 3]
- Help me control my mouth. [vv. 3-4]
- Remove greed and materialism from my heart. [v. 5]

6.0  **Applying Psalm 15**

- Worship should not be overly casual.
- The heart is important.
- Relationships are important.
- How we handle our money is important.
- None of us can accomplish these things in our own wisdom or power.