



"Excellence is not a skill. It is an attitude."
—Ralph Marston

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Making the Cut (Part One)

Golf is hard.

It may seem easy enough to imagine hitting a little, white ball a few hundred yards down a fairway into a four-and-a-quarter-inch hole on a distant, manicured green, but reality proves otherwise. Ask anyone who has tried. It is not just hitting off the tee, which may seem to be the hardest thing because a golfer uses that stroke to get his ball as far down the fairway as possible. The shorter shots to approach the green can go awry just as easily as a tee shot. Even when a player has hit his ball to only a step or two from the hole, putting that accursed pill into the cup may be a two- or three-stroke adventure!

Professional golfers seem to hit the ball so effortlessly. Their shots fly three hundred yards and roll down the fairway to an easy wedge shot to the green. They have amazing skills. But even they find sand traps and water hazards. Even they slice or hook balls into contiguous fairways occasionally. Even they three-putt from fifteen feet now and then. Golf is hard for them too.

The Professional Golfers Association (PGA) will not let just anyone enter a tournament to play for the big check. Even these incredibly talented golfers

must have a Tour card, which shows that they have qualified for the privilege. Golfers must win or finish highly in qualifying events or lower tours before they receive invitations to play on the Big Tour. Once that happens, they must finish the year in the top-125 on the money list or win a tournament to secure their cards for the next two years—or they will find themselves playing on the qualifying tours again or back home teaching golf to up-and-comers looking for their own tickets to golf's top tier.

If a golfer must meet the PGA Tour's skill standards to play, why should we think that the perfect [God](#) in heaven disdains requirements for entrance into His Kingdom? Of course, many argue that if God has qualifications for His Kingdom, then we are saved by works, not grace ([Ephesians 2:8-9](#)). This argument, though, is an old canard offered by those who refuse to submit to God's law ([Romans 8:7](#)). [Ephesians 2:10](#) stipulates that, through His creative works in them, God is training Christians to perform good works. Growth in spiritual maturity, leading to works, is an intrinsic part of equipping the saints for service (see [Ephesians 4:11-16](#)). Evil works, obviously, *disqualify* a person from the Kingdom ([Galatians 5:19-21](#); [I Corinthians 6:9-10](#); [Revelation 21:8](#); [22:15](#)).

The Bible shows that with God's gracious calling and forgiveness of sins through the sacrifice of [Jesus Christ](#) comes an expectation of [repentance](#), overcoming, growth, and bearing of spiritual fruit until a person is transformed into the character image of Christ ([Ephesians 4:17-24](#)). If a Christian fails to perform these things, he becomes a lazy, unprofitable servant and subject to severe judgment before Christ. He may even say, "I never knew you" ([Matthew 7:21-23](#)).

Scripture provides several lists of virtues to help us gauge our growth toward spiritual maturity. For instance, Jesus begins His [Sermon on the Mount](#) with eight states of blessedness ([Matthew 5:3-12](#)) that His people should display in their lives: [poor in spirit](#), sorrow, [meekness](#), hungering and thirsting for righteousness, and so forth. The apostle Paul also includes several such lists in his epistles, the best-known being the [Fruit of the Spirit](#) ([Galatians 5:22-23](#)): [love](#), [joy](#), [peace](#), [longsuffering](#), [kindness](#), [goodness](#), [faithfulness](#), gentleness, and [self-control](#). [II Peter 1:5-7](#) advises Christians to add to our [faith](#) such things as virtue, knowledge, self-control, and perseverance, among others. It is difficult to turn anywhere in the New Testament and not find an

example, an exhortation, or a command to grow in various Christian behaviors and attitudes.

The [Old Testament](#) features them too, but perhaps not as prominently. Obviously, the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5) stand at the head of the class of such lists. In fact, the whole Pentateuch is replete with God's commands regarding morality and godly behavior. The entire book of Proverbs presents [wisdom](#) on proper living in [this world](#), as does Ecclesiastes and many of the psalms.

One particular psalm of this kind, Psalm 15, written by [King David](#), introduces itself with a pointed question: "LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell on Your holy hill?" ([Psalm 15:1](#)). Jesus, in His [letter to the church in Philadelphia](#), mentions that He will make the overcomer "a pillar in the temple of My God" ([Revelation 3:12](#)), language similar to what David uses in this psalm. In other words, then, David asks, "What sort of person will You invite to live eternally with You in Your Temple?" Or, as we might say in this New Testament era, "What kind of person will enter the [Kingdom of God](#)?"

David answers his question over the remainder of the psalm, revealing God's high standards for His people, especially those who will form His [firstfruits](#):

He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart;

He who does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor does he take up a reproach against his friend;

In whose eyes a vile person is despised, but he honors those who fear the LORD;

He who swears to his own hurt and does not change;

He who does not put out his money at usury, nor does he take a bribe against the innocent.

He who does these things shall never be moved. ([Psalm 15:2-5](#))

With this formatting, it becomes easy to see that David organizes the answer to his question into five parts and concludes by recasting the opening question into a positive declaration of eternal permanence in God's presence. Each of the five parts focuses on a specific area of everyday life in which we must respond in a godly manner: general demeanor and godliness, speech, appraising and reacting to others, making promises, and money matters. While these categories may not cover every situation over a lifetime, the principles they advocate can be used to determine a proper course of action.

David forces the reader to ask himself, "Does this list describe me?" "Does my life meet these divine expectations?" Or as we might say today, "If these are the qualifications for entry, do I make the cut?" We will study these descriptions of the godly person over the next few weeks to get a better sense of what God expects of His chosen people.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Qualifications of a Godly Judge](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Just as the American Bar Association (ABA) has established qualifications of professional competence and integrity, our future roles as kings and priests in God's Kingdom require far more stringent qualifications. Christ's disciples are going through a rigorous training period to qualify for positions in God's Kingdom by conforming to Christ's image. If we want eternal life, we must work diligently, having a walk worthy of the Lord. We need to learn to rightly divide the Word of God, learning to apply biblical laws and principles in all situations. In terms of integrity, godly judges likewise are required to have transcendent, holy, unimpeachable character. We can only judge righteously if we judge according to the Father's will.

From the Archives: Featured Article

Jesus Disqualified?

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Some say Christ cannot be the Messiah because of His genealogy. Is this true? Richard Ritenbaugh shows why this argument is fallacious and why Jesus IS our Savior!

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