



"The greatest use of life is to spend it for something that will outlast it."

—William James

26-Jul-19

Making the Cut (Part Two)

Part One introduced the scriptural concept that, while a person is justified only by God's grace through the blood of [Jesus Christ](#), [God](#) expects His called-out ones to respond to His [merciful](#) election with obedience to His commands and with doing good works leading to character growth in Christ's image ([Ephesians 2:8-10](#)). A "no works" philosophy has no place in true Christianity. Christians must learn to work just as the Father and Son are working ([John 5:17](#)).

The Bible, we saw, provides several lists of virtues, attitudes, and behaviors that please God, as well as others showing what God condemns. Thus, the apostle Paul advises us in Colossians 3 that, once we are "raised with Christ" in [baptism](#), we are to "put off" all forms of wickedness and "put on" the righteousness of Christ. Members of God's church rehearse this obligation every year in the symbolism of the [Feast of Unleavened Bread](#), ridding our homes of leaven, a symbol of corruption, and eating unleavened bread for seven days ([Exodus 12:15-20](#)).

One of these lists of good behaviors is Psalm 15, written by [King David](#), who asks, "LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in

Your holy hill?" ([Psalm 15:1](#)). He answers these questions in the next four verses with ten behaviors that can be sorted into five significant areas of life: general demeanor and godliness, speech, appraising and reacting to others, making promises, and money matters. Note that David does not intend the ten behaviors he mentions to comprise all righteousness. Instead, we are to understand that they are *representative behaviors* of those who are genuine sons and daughters of God.

Before examining David's answer, we should consider his question more closely. Some scholars speculate that this psalm follows what they call an "entrance liturgy," that is, a song sung either by pilgrims approaching the Temple precincts or priests entering the sanctuary itself. However, while other ancient religions had such entrance songs, no evidence exists that Israel ever did. David's psalm is entirely moral in flavor, whereas the other religions' entrance songs tend to be cultic, describing symbolic actions and sacrifices that must be offered before a suppliant could gain entrance. Most commentators reject the "entrance liturgy" idea in favor of classifying Psalm 15 as a [wisdom](#) psalm, explaining the moral rectitude of a true disciple.

David's question comes in two parallel clauses: He asks first, "Who may abide in Your tabernacle?" and then, "Who may dwell on Your holy hill?" While these are similar, they are not the same. The second builds upon and advances the first.

First, the two verbs, "abide" and "dwell," may seem synonymous, but their Hebrew equivalents are less so. "Abide" translates the Hebrew word *gur* (*Strong's* #1481), which more properly means "to sojourn." "Dwell" renders Hebrew *shakan* (*Strong's* #7931), which has a longer-lasting sense: "to dwell, inhabit, settle down, abide." The first verb suggests staying in a place for a limited period, while the second implies longevity, and as the psalm's final sentence declares, permanence.

Second, a similar shift occurs between the final nouns, "tabernacle" and "holy hill." The Tabernacle, of course, is the tent—made in the wilderness of light materials like cloth, skins, and wood with metal fixtures—that stood as the place of God's presence among the Israelites. It was purposely both impermanent and mobile, that is, it could be disassembled and moved from place to place as God directed the movements of His people toward the

Promised Land. Another of God's feasts, Tabernacles, highlights this symbol of living in temporary lodgings.

David's mention of God's "holy hill" points to Mount Zion, an immovable, geographical feature, where Solomon would later build the Temple, a fixed, permanent structure made of heavy wood, stone, and metal built on a massive foundation. It could be neither disassembled nor moved. God chose this "holy hill" in Jerusalem to be His dwelling place on earth ([II Chronicles 6:6](#)), and despite all that has transpired over the centuries, He "will again choose Jerusalem" when Christ returns ([Zechariah 2:12](#)). Throughout eternity, His dwelling place will be New Jerusalem ([Revelation 21:1-3](#)).

David's parallel questions, then, move from impermanence, brevity, and temporariness to permanence, endurance, and perpetuity. They progress from sojourning in a temporary dwelling to settling in a permanent place. In this way, he likely suggests a "now and later" or "this transitory life and the eternal life to come" reading of his words. If this is the case, he is informing us that God expects His people to live now in this physical life as much as possible as they will live as spirit beings after their resurrection, as his two questions receive only one answer. Our manner of living today as members of the church should parallel our way of life in God's Kingdom.

This temporary-permanent or now-later motif is not uncommon in Scripture. In the Resurrection Chapter, Paul writes of the resurrection-body along these lines:

[The body] is sown a natural [or, *physical*] body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man. ([I Corinthians 15:44-49](#))

Later, the apostle touches on this theme regarding trials:

For our light [affliction](#), which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. ([II Corinthians 4:17-18](#))

The author of Hebrews also utilizes it in describing the [faith](#) of Abraham: "By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with [Isaac](#) and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" ([Hebrews 11:9-10](#); see also [Hebrews 11:13-16](#)). Just as Abraham displayed his faith by living God's way in expectation of his place in the future city of God, so should we, having the same goal, walk righteously before God throughout our conversion.

Next time, we will investigate the beginning of King David's answer to his questions.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Approaching God Through Christ \(Part One\)](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Religious bumper stickers are woefully incomplete in terms of revealing the full counsel of God, which is more complex than "believe on the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved." The whole counsel of God is a multi-faceted, many-layered, complex teaching, requiring a dramatic change in lifestyle. Many worldly religious people have only a rudimentary knowledge of Christ's teachings, exhibiting a lack of maturity or wisdom, well beyond basic Sunday school knowledge or basic bumper sticker mentality. The deep things of God can only be revealed by the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit. In Romans 10:4, "telos" or "end" refers to completion, fulfillment, ideal, or goal

rather than the 'termination of.' Jesus Christ is the complete embodiment of God's instruction (Torah). The law was not annulled, but it was made clear and personal in Christ's complete life of obedience. The goal for which the Torah aims is the life of Jesus Christ. In Galatians 3, Paul cautioned people against thinking the law could justify (legalism). The law (or Torah) served as a custodian or pedagogue, bringing Israel to the Messiah-the Great Rabbi. Paul continued to extensively use the teachings of the Old Testament, including the Law, Prophets, and Writings. The entire Old Testament points continually to Jesus Christ (John 5:39). The tabernacle of the Old Testament had its reality in heaven, a copy of the heavenly tabernacle in which Jesus Christ serves as High Priest, our access into the Holy of holies. God the Father has opened the way into the Holy of Holies.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[The Elements of Motivation \(Part Six\): Eternal Life](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

If you knew you would live forever, how would you live? John Ritenbaugh explains that, biblically, eternal life is much more than living forever: It is living as God lives!

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