

"A man ought to live so that everybody knows he is a Christian ...
and most of all, his family ought to know."

—Dwight L. Moody

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Making the Cut (Part Three)

Last time, we explored [Psalm 15:1](#), which is comprised of the two questions [King David](#) asks to open the psalm: "LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?" Though they are written in parallel, they are not strictly synonymous. The second question builds upon and expands the first, proceeding from sojourning for a time in a tent to living permanently in God's Temple. The author wants the reader to grasp that the standard of behavior expected of God's people in this life is the same as what will be lived by the saints in the resurrection. [God](#) has one law for all (compare [Exodus 12:49](#); [Leviticus 24:22](#); [Numbers 9:14](#); [15:15-16](#), 29) and for all time ([Psalm 111:7-8](#); [Matthew 5:18](#); see [Isaiah 40:8](#)).

David lays out the first set of God's standards in [Psalm 15:2](#): "He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart." *The Bible Hymnal* we use each [Sabbath](#) provides an acceptable paraphrase: "He who walks in righteousness, all his actions just and clear; / He whose words the truth express, spoken from a heart sincere" ("Who Shall Dwell On Thy Holy Hill," p. 14). These three are overall, positive requirements, setting the bar high for those who [seek God](#). They are followed in the next verse by three specific prohibitions.

Again, as in verse 1, we do well to mark the verbs and their modifiers. The verbs here are "walks," "works," and "speaks," a standard biblical triad of actions that define the whole person. Walking is a familiar figure of living life. Early in Scripture, Enoch is described in these terms: "Enoch walked with God three hundred years" ([Genesis 5:22](#)). In [Genesis 6:9](#), [Moses](#) notes, "Noah was a just man, [perfect in his generations](#). Noah walked with God." To Abraham, God says in [Genesis 17:1](#), "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless."

True, a person could walk—live his or her life—in a way that does not please God. Billions have done so. This reality makes the modifier important. In [Psalm 15:2](#), the word modifying "walk" is "uprightly," *tamim* in Hebrew (*Strong's* #8549). It has the sense of "complete," "whole or entire," or "sound," and it is often translated as "blameless," "perfect," or "without blemish."

Tamim appears in Moses' description of Noah as "perfect." It indicates that nothing Noah said or did displeased God. His entire relationship with God was of the most acceptable nature. The narrative of Genesis 6-9 reinforces this initial description, informing the reader, "Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did" ([Genesis 6:22](#); see 7:5, 9, 16).

First thing, then, David establishes an exceptionally high standard: perfection, blamelessness, complete integrity. This moral standard covers the entirety of a person's way of life—his walk with God—giving no exceptions. For instance, one must be blameless on vacation; there is no "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas" under God's judgment. A person must be as pleasing to God at home as he should be at church, at work, among his buddies, at the mall, at the ballpark, or on the road. A person who does otherwise can rightly be called a hypocrite and his witness of God before [the world](#), blemished.

The next two elements in verse 2 divide a person's upright or blameless walk into two component parts: deeds and speech. What a person does, his works, is to be "righteousness" (*tsedeq*; *Strong's* #6664). Like *tamim*, it is a relational word describing how we treat other people, so depending on the context, *tsedeq* can be translated as "faithfulness," "honesty," "fairness," or

"justice," or rendered to give the sense of conforming to an accepted standard of proper interaction, such as God's law. A person is righteous when he honors his parents, conforming himself to the fifth commandment. He is also righteous when he is faithful to an agreement, honest in his dealings, fair in his treatment of disparate people, and just when he makes a judgment. A person's works are truly righteousness when they conform to God's own deeds toward others.

The second component covers the use of the tongue, which the apostle James calls "a fire, a world of iniquity" ([James 3:6](#)), adding, "But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison" ([James 3:8](#)). Yet, God requires the person who will dwell with Him for eternity to speak "truth in his heart." The phrase points to the unbreakable connection between the inner person—the mind, the heart—and its fruit, speech. David's description here anticipates Jesus' comment in [Matthew 15:18-19](#): "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies."

As impossible a task as it may seem to be, God requires His people to tame their tongues. Everything that comes out of their mouths should be sure and trustworthy. They should certainly never lie, but they also must shun half-truths, white lies, or obfuscations. They should not use their mouths for useless arguing, [gossip](#), cursing, slander, [meddling](#), or insulting. Paul advises, "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one" ([Colossians 4:6](#)). [Jesus](#) warns that we will have to give account for every idle word we speak ([Matthew 12:36](#)).

What we say and how we say it give others a window into our hearts. If we are harsh and condemning in our words, it is evident that inside, we are cruel and critical. If we gossip and slander, we are revealed as lovers of rumor, choice tidbits, and scandal, and we do not care who suffers when they are spread. If we curse and blaspheme, the condition of our hearts is exposed as profane, obscene, and ungodly. Conversely, if our speech is genuine and positive, full of wisdom and comfort, the light of God shines into the world, proving our hearts to be pure and aligned with God and His way of life.

By reading only slightly between the lines, King David's list of required character traits starts off by setting an impossibly high standard: the very character of God Himself. It is, of course, the same standard set in the New Testament: "He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked" ([1 John 2:6](#)). The message is clear. Those who wish to "follow the Lamb wherever He goes" in the world to come ([Revelation 14:4](#)) must follow the example He left for us in His Word of His blameless character and behavior.

In Part Four, we will delve into the three corresponding prohibitions in [Psalm 15:3](#).

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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['Perfect In His Generations'](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

An important key to correct biblical interpretation is to understand a verse or passage as the author intended, not according to our own prejudices. Richard Ritenbaugh explains that Genesis 6:9 has suffered such a biased interpretation and shows what the Hebrew really implies.

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