



"As we grow in holiness, we grow in hatred of sin; and God, being infinitely holy, has an infinite hatred of sin."

—Jerry Bridges

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## **Making the Cut (Part Five)**

In the previous essay, we covered [Psalm 15:3](#), "He who does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor does he take up a reproach against his friend." We found that these three prohibitions reflect, in part, the three affirmative requirements (verse 2) that initiate the answer to King David's double-question in verse 1: "LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?" These prohibitions regulate speech—[gossip](#), slander, talebearing, spitefulness, and the like—especially toward those close to us like relatives, friends, and neighbors.

[Psalm 15:4](#) turns to other matters: "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." The theme of this verse centers on honor. In one sense, it is "Render . . . fear to whom fear [is due], honor to whom honor," as the apostle Paul writes in [Romans 13:7](#). Jesus' two great commandments essentially cover this territory using the idea of [love](#) rather than honor or fear:

"You shall love the LORD your [God](#) with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." [[Deuteronomy 6:5](#); [10:12](#); [30:6](#)] This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: "You

shall love your neighbor as yourself." [[Leviticus 19:18](#)] On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets. ([Matthew 22:37-40](#))

One would think that Jesus' command to love one's neighbor overrules the first of the principles in [Psalm 15:4](#), "In whose eyes a vile person is despised," but David brings out a distinction that makes a difference. The root word underlying "vile person" is Hebrew *bzâ* (*Strong's* #959), which means "to despise, disdain, hold in contempt." Its sense is "to account as worthless." The psalmist focuses our attention on an especially vile, contemptuous, reprobate, worthless person—the kind that is becoming more common as we approach Christ's return.

The Bible's overall use of *bzâ* provides the background we need to see just who he means. It reveals that disobedience to God has its source in *bzâ*, contempt for God. For instance, in [II Samuel 12:10](#), Nathan informs David that his [adultery](#) with Bathsheba indicated that he despised the Lord. Likewise, Solomon states in [Proverbs 14:2](#) that "he who is perverse in his ways despises Him." God's response to the priests who despised His name ([Malachi 1:6-7](#), 12) illustrates His view of such people: "Therefore I also have made you contemptible and base before all the people, because you have not kept My ways but have shown partiality in the law" ([Malachi 2:9](#); see [Job 12:21](#)). Finally, *bzâ* is the word that describes both Esau's despising of his birthright ([Genesis 25:34](#)) and Michal's scorn toward David when he danced before the Lord ([II Samuel 6:16](#)). Both were condemned—Esau was rejected, and Michal remained barren—for their contemptuous attitude for God and His blessings.

*Bzâ*, then, characterizes a person who, in his contempt for God, is wicked, perverse, consumed by [sin](#). David is a rare biblical example of such an individual who repented and resumed a relationship with God, and he would not have done so without God's intervention in his life. Most vile people, in their "enmity against God" ([Romans 8:7](#)), stubbornly remain and perhaps even grow worse in their sins. Such people, God says through David in [Psalm 15:4](#), are to be "despised" (*m'as*, *Strong's* #3988), that is, rejected, refused, spurned, or shunned. Those who reject or spurn God are to be rejected or spurned in return (see [Hosea 4:6](#)).

This teaching in [Psalm 15:4](#) is similar to Paul's warning in [I Corinthians 15:33](#): "Do not be deceived: 'Evil company corrupts good habits.'" The Christian who despises the vile person is one who avoids keeping company with evil persons, thus minimizing their influence on him. In other words, a godly person steers clear of the haunts of the ungodly. In this age, this means not only the bars, the bordellos, and the betting parlors of [this world](#), but also the Internet hangouts of the sinful: extreme social media sites, pornographic sites, and the dark web. The apostle also advises in [I Thessalonians 5:22](#), "Abstain from every form of evil," avoiding intimate or prolonged contact with those who practice it (yet see [I Corinthians 5:9-13](#) for a balance to this).

David's next statement in [Psalm 15:4](#) is the opposing parallel to the first: "But he honors those who fear the LORD." Underlying "honors" is Hebrew *kabed* (*Strong's* #3513), which is the antonym of *m'as*, "despises." A godly person gives honor, respect, even glory to those who are faithful and devout followers of God (that is, the righteous, the opposite of *bzâ*, the wicked). The person who would dwell forever with God seeks the company of those who honor and obey Him to witness their conduct and learn and grow in character (see [Psalm 119:63](#)).

The final line of verse 4 switches subjects to the keeping of promises or oaths, a matter of personal honor: "He who swears to his own hurt and does not change." The first verb here, "swears," is *ba* (*Strong's* #7650), "to bind oneself by an oath." It indicates a strong affirmation of a promise. Generally, this qualifying behavior concerns keeping one's word. It does not mean honoring just official oaths made in solemn rituals but in principle applies to any kind of promise, pledge, vow, agreement, or contract, formal or informal. "Your word should be your bond," as the old saw goes. If we say that we will do something or make a commitment to an activity, we must do it—otherwise, our promise becomes a lie, a false witness ([Exodus 20:16](#)).

We should consider our promise or oath to be inviolable, even if fulfilling it causes us pain or harm of some sort. We are to be as faithful to our word as God is, and He says His every word accomplishes what He sent it to do ([Isaiah 55:11](#)). Could we trust God if He promised something and then reneged on it? Not at all. We could have no [faith](#) that He will act as He has

said. We know, however, that God does not lie ([Numbers 23:19](#); [Psalm 89:34](#); [110:4](#); [Hebrews 6:18](#); see [II Timothy 2:13](#)), so our trust in Him rests securely on His unaltering truthfulness.

So it should be for us. No matter what it may cost us, we must fulfill our promises. We cannot be like the double-minded man of [James 1:8](#), who "is unstable in all his ways." We cannot give our word and then change our mind just because it may disadvantage us. We must conduct ourselves as [Jesus](#) advises in [Matthew 5:33-34](#), 37:

Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, "You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord." But I say to you, do not swear at all. . . . But let your "Yes" be "Yes," and your "No," "No." For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.

The blameless person keeps his formal oaths to a minimum ([baptism](#), wedding vows), abides by the terms of all contracts and agreements, fulfills his promises, and keeps his word, even if he loses money, wastes his time, looks like a fool, is terribly inconvenienced, misses an opportunity, must do additional work, or suffers a personal setback of any kind. This qualification separates the truly upright from the pretenders.

We will conclude our study of Psalm 15 in Part Six.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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## From the Archives: Featured Sermon

### [The Certainty of God's Promises](#)

by Kim Myers

If we measure God's promises by our own behavior, it would be discouraging and disappointing. But God Almighty can be absolutely trusted to keep all of His promises, including the blessings to Abraham and his descendants. We know for sure that Jesus Christ will return, that we, as

God's called -out ones , will serve with Him for a thousand years. Massive physical blessings were given to ancient Israel during King David's and King Solomon's reign so that gold and silver were as common as field stone. King Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines, indicating that the country was excessively wealthy. Ephraim and Manasseh have become highly influential, protected and insulated geographically (islands, island continents, and ocean buffers) by Almighty God. Historically Britain and America have been successful militarily and economically. We need to see God in history, in current events, and in our own personal lives. God gave Britain the victory over the most massive empires. Britain became a community of nations; the sun never set on the British Empire. Then God transferred the balance of power to Manasseh, routing the mighty British military with a rag-tag group of amateur militias. America and Britain combined control 2/3 of the world's wealth. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob could have never fathomed the vastness of their offspring's holdings. The promise given to God's called out ones (Eternal Life and membership in His family) far outstrips even the physical promises to Abraham. God's laws protect us from the curses of sin while enabling us to live an abundant life. Young people, who have left God's church, have ended up in mental institutions, contracted venereal diseases, including AIDS. Without God's calling, even if we achieved all of our physical goals, perfect health, and

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[Giving Your Word](#)**

by John O. Reid

How sure is your word? One's word is not worth a whole lot these days in the world, but in the church what we say and promise should be good as gold! John Reid writes that God listens to what we promise—so we had better perform it!

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