

*** The Heights Baptist Church * Series: The Psalms ***
*** Topic: Righteous Living * Psalm 15 * 8/24/25 ***

MAIN POINT

It is only through Jesus that we can meet God's standard of perfection.

INTRODUCTION

James 3:2 tells us, "We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check." Why is controlling our tongue so difficult?

Part of the answer is that it expresses what we are thinking or feeling in the moment, before we have time to discern what is best. "Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12:34).

James 3: 6 says, "The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell." Why do you think it is so important to learn to control our tongues?

The Greek word translated as "course of one's life" means, "the wheel of human origin, which as soon as men are born begins to run." There are no "do-overs" for what we say. The repercussions of thoughtless comments that can spring from our sinful natures or emotionally charged moments can be far-reaching.

Today we will be discussing Psalm 15, which is a short Psalm about what God requires of those who would dwell with Him. And front and center of these requirements is the need to control our tongues.

UNDERSTANDING

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PSALM 15:1-2

What question is David really asking in verse 1?

During Israel's time in the wilderness, the Ark was kept in the "Holy of Holies" in the Tabernacle, and this is where God's glory appeared to the Israelites as a column of fire by night, and a column of smoke by day. Before Solomon built the temple on Mount Moriah, David kept the Ark of the Covenant in a tent on Mount Zion. His statement is really asking more than just about who is allowed to enter this tent. It is poetically asking about who is allowed to enter God's presence.

What does the answer to David's question given in verse 2 mean?

Only one who is blameless can enter God's presence. This is described in verse 2 as someone who is perfect in what they do, and what they say. What they say reveals what is in their heart.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PSALM 15:3-5

What specific actions in verses 3-5 help amplify the answer to David's question verses 1 and 2?

The person who desires to enter God's presence must control their tongues, not envy those who choose to live in sin, keep their oaths even when it isn't easy to do so, and be generous to others.

How would you summarize how the specific actions in verses 3-5 help amplify David's answer given in verse 2?

God's presence and God's principles always go together. "Be holy, because I am holy" (Lev. 11:44).

CONTROLLING MY TONGUE

ASK VOLUNTEERS TO READ MATTHEW 12:34-35 AND 15:18-20

What is the only real way to effectively control your tongue?

We need to purify our hearts.

ASK VOLUNTEERS TO READ PROVERBS 12:6, 13:3, AND 14:3

What is the main lesson we need to take away from these verses?

Often, the first thing that comes to mind about what we are about to say may not be the best thing. And there will be consequences. We see examples of this principle repeatedly in road rage incidents. It is better to control our tongue than to escalate a situation.

CONTROLLING MY ACTIONS

ASK VOLUNTEERS TO READ JOHN 14:21, JAMES 1:27, AND 1 PETER 4:3

Summarize what these verses say about our actions as Christians.

We need to not feed our sinful natures, but out of love for Christ, do what He commands. And this includes helping other people.

ACCEPTING THE GRACE GOD HAS OFFERED ME IN CHRIST

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ ROMANS 3:20-24

Based on this passage in Romans, how many of us will actually be able to earn the righteousness required to come into God's presence by obeying the Law of God?

No one will be declared righteous by obeying the Law. All have sinned and are in need of our Savior. In Jesus' sermon on the mount (Matt. 5-7), Jesus preached a sermon that has a similar message to Psalm 15. He doesn't preach the gospel in this sermon, but He lays out how we are to live as His people. We need to take two lessons away from this. First, none of us is good enough to meet God's standard of perfection. Second, we have a responsibility to live our lives in a way that honors God, not self.

A SPIRITUAL PICTURE FROM THE CEREMONIAL LAW IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament Law can be divided several ways. One way is to separate the Law into moral laws and ceremonial laws. And the moral laws can be divided into laws about our relationship with God (The first four commandments) and laws about our relationship with people (The last six commandments).

But the ceremonial laws don't seem directly related to either of these, but they are symbolic of spiritual truth. These include laws about clean and unclean food, and laws about bodily discharges that make you unclean. Any unclean person was not allowed to enter the temple for worship.

ASK VOLUNTEERS TO READ LEVITICUS 11:9-10, 13-19, 26-27, AND 44-45

After listing the laws concerning clean and unclean foods, how does God summarize the reason for them in verses 44-45?

Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because God is holy.

People have tried to understand why God had these dietary laws, and one possible reason is the unclean animals (such as pigs or oysters) are more likely to carry disease. But why rabbits, which don't have a high risk of disease? And why did God tell Peter it was okay to eat them, when peoples' understanding of sanitary conditions had not changed? We look for spiritual lessons in the ceremonial law.

"If I had to say in a few words what makes something unclean, it is something that, for one reason or another, is abnormal." Rabbi Jacob Neusner

"...in each case God forbids animals that show an anomaly. Since fish are supposed to have fins and scales, shellfish and eel do not qualify. Birds are meant to fly, and thus emus and ostriches do not qualify.... Domesticated animals... chew the cud and have cloven hooves; therefore, so should all such edible mammals.... After studying the various theories, I have come up with an all encompassing principle that, I believe, expresses the essence of the Old Testament Law on uncleanness. No oddballs allowed." Phillip Yancey, "What's So Amazing About Grace?"

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ LEVITICUS 21:17-21

In these verses, we see that the ceremonial law didn't just exclude animals, it excluded people. So what point is God making? "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. The only way to be clean in God's eyes through obeying the Law was to be perfect. Let's now see how Jesus changed all that.

ASK VOLUNTEERS TO READ MATTHEW 8:2-3, 9:20-22, 23-25, AND 9:28-29,

What did you notice about each of these events where Jesus healed someone?

He touched them, or they touched Him. And this didn't result in Jesus becoming unclean, it resulted in them being healed.

What spiritual pictures, or lessons are there for us in these healings?

All of us are sinful, making us defective, or "oddballs" when it comes to the Law. But through the work of Jesus on the cross, we can receive a righteousness that comes by faith, not by the works of the Law.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ GALATIANS 2:15-16

"He (Peter) said to them, 'You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean.'" Acts 10:28

APPLICATION

What can I do to engage my new nature before engaging my tongue?

Is there any area of sin that I have allowed into my life? What action can I take to bring this area of my life into obedience to God?

Have I slipped back into a works-based religion, where I have trying to earn God's favor, rather than rest in the fact Christ has done all I need to have a right standing before God?

PRAYER

Thank God for making a way for us sinners to be able to enter into a relationship with Him. Pray that we would grow to treasure our relationship with Him so deeply that we are willing to do whatever is right, whatever the consequences, for the sake of His Kingdom. Ask God to help us control our tongues, put self on the shelf, and to be generous to others.

COMMENTARY

Psalm 15

15:1 The phrases “Your Tent” and “Your holy mountain” and refers to the tabernacle and its location on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem. The desire of God’s people is to be in His presence forever (65:4; 84:3-4). If people were unclean, they were not allowed access, since this symbolized entering into God’s presence, and He is holy (5:4-5).

15:2 Lives honestly is literally “walks blamelessly,” and it refers to a life of integrity (18:23; 119:1). The truth of God is not just something proclaimed. It must reside in a person’s heart, which is the mind or the inner person (Dt 6:6; Isa 29:13).

15:3 God is intolerant of those who destroy others with their speech (101:5). Slandering and discrediting come from an attitude of hatred and a desire to harm others (10:12,18).

15:4 Despising the wicked and honoring the godly are attitudes that show we are made in God’s image—we love what He loves and hate what He hates (139:21-22).

15:5 The command against lending at interest was only applicable to fellow Israelites and not to foreigners (Dt 23:20). However, someone who is close to the Lord will follow the spirit of the law and not just the letter. What is common between lending at interest and bribery is that both profit from someone else’s misfortune or lack (Pr 15:27). Those who are able to enter God’s sanctuary will never be moved. This is sometimes translated as “shaken,” meaning that they will be secure (10:6; 13:4).