

PSALLO

Psalm 15:1–5

We have settled on Psalm 15 for this year’s work in the Psalter. There is nothing out of the ordinary in the translation you have before you; all is relatively straightforward in the original. We have named the tune *Lo Yimoth L’Olam* after the last few words in the Psalm, meaning, “He shall never be moved.” This is a fitting description of the everlasting fellowship of the one who dwells with the Lord in His tabernacle. In verse two we have rendered the Hebrew *תָּמִיךְ* (*tamiym*) with the English “perfect,” which is a common choice among translators.¹ Verse 3 renders the Hebrew *לֹא יְשָׁאֵר* as “he slanders-not.” This too is well-attested here in Psalm 15, although the word itself has a much larger range of meaning, including to spy out, or to search or scout ahead. The word is related to the feet, and so the connection may be something similar to “walking about with the tongue” as we have it here, or slandering. The Authorized Version renders it, “backbiteth not.”

The Psalm begins with two parallel questions, asked by its author, David. It is the cry of devotion we hear from the Sweet Psalmist of Israel (2 Samuel 23:1). *Who shall dwell in thy tabernacle, Lord? Who shall abide in thy holy mountain?* Having considered that the Lord God is indeed the highest aim of all men, the greatest of all, David muses, under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, as to how one might have the Lord God as his “immediate vision and fruition.”² It will do us well to pause and ponder that question ourselves. Who can enter that holy of holies? Who can ascend to that holy height? These are the questions of a man devoted to the Lord as his exceeding great reward (Genesis 15:1), yet also one who is acutely aware of his own unworthiness for such company. Note that David asks not just concerning a passing visit to these places, but he asks what it means to *dwell* there, to *abide*. Note further, that the doubling of the question indicates first an urgency in his petition, and secondly an advancement in the expression. In the first consideration, when we have a duplicated phrase in Hebrew poetry, it can indicate intensity, importance, urgency. The question is asked twice because it is of great importance to the Psalmist, and to all who have come to love the Lord by His grace, and for His great mercy to sinners. He advances the thought in the second phrase however, as he speaks of the Lord’s holy mountain. Not only is this a place where the Lord has set up His dwelling, it is a place of purity and separation

from all that is common or unclean. Who shall abide *there*? It is where the Lord dwells, He who is unimaginably holy. We are called ourselves to ask the same questions, are we not? All those who have that same desire, that singular desire, that “one thing have I desired of the Lord” (Psalm 27:4), are called upon here to ask that same question. Who shall abide *there*?

Engaging with the rest of the Psalm, the answer is forthcoming from David, but it is perhaps not what we expected to hear. There are moral attributes given as qualifications that will cause the man who desires to dwell with the Lord to lower his head in shame, for if this is what is required, it is beyond his ken. For the man who understands himself, the distance between the Creator and the creature is indeed, very great—so great that he cannot rightly in himself entertain the thought of such a communion, of such an abode as the *holy* hill of the Lord. Let us examine some of these necessities:

The first set of moral attributes speak of his behavior as it concerns himself. We hear that he must have a perfect walk. And while the word *תָּמִיךְ* (*tamiym*) may not indicate complete moral perfection, it certainly presents an obstacle to fallen men. The next is that he works or does that which is upright. Speaking of his outward behavior, this standard of righteousness is indeed higher than the candid man would dare to claim as his attainment. The next is perhaps even more difficult to surmount, for it speaks of the heart, and truth being spoken there—that is, the inner man is free from self-deception, improper entertainment of error, or deceit. The heart of the one who shall dwell with the Lord is full of truth, and his *inner* dialogue is free from lies, half-truths, and deception. Like the Apostle Paul, the man that truly examines himself, while potentially entertaining outward obedience, will be withered back to reality by the heart-obedience required by the Lord, upon His Holy Mountain.³

The second set of moral attributes concerns his posture toward his neighbors, friends, and companions. Here we have brought under scrutiny his speech, his deeds, and his practice regarding the behavior of others, whether he will receive an evil report concerning his near relations and acquaintances. So not only in regard to himself must he be perfect, but in regard to others as well—how he treats them, and how he treats others who would mistreat them.

In the third set of attributes we see that he is required to make right judgments concerning good and evil and his

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1. Psalm 18:30, 19:7, 101:2 & 6, among many others.

2. Westminster Larger Catechism, question and answer #90.

3. Romans 7:7–13. See especially that it was the Tenth Commandment, that one which explicitly concerns the heart, that convicted the Apostle to the Gentiles.

wrath. The payment is not made to Satan. Now, Horton does not believe in the ransom theory per se, but rather winds up collapsing the “good” elements of the ransom theory with the *Christus Victor* theme (243). If Satan holds any allegiance from people, it is an illegitimate claim, not a legitimate one.

Horton believes that there is no future aspect to justification whatsoever (275). Horton does believe in a public acquittal, but rather than including this aspect under justification, he includes it under glorification (see page 279).

Part three speaks of the gift of righteousness, namely, how we get the righteousness of Christ. The heart of this section is his discussion of imputation. Here Horton is at his best: defending the traditional Protestant understanding of imputation over against the NPP, the apocalyptic understanding of justification, and the Finnish interpretation of Luther. Here Horton advocates the idea that Judaism knew and held to the idea of imputation. The disagreement with Paul therefore had to do with the identity of the person imputing, and the identity of the person’s righteousness that is imputed (328). On only one thing I would disagree with Horton in the chapter on imputation: I would not agree with Horton that Peter Leithart is an evangelical (350, fn. 75). In the chapter on works and the future of justification, Horton argues fairly standard Reformed positions, including a careful positioning of works as necessarily consequent to justification, not necessary unto justification (394). I could wish he would have had a larger discussion of the relationship of James and Paul on the question of justification. However, what he does say is helpful (394).

Part four is primarily about faith, the instrument of justification. Horton rejects Roman Catholic understandings of “faith perfected by love,” and emphasizes faith’s receiving and resting nature. Horton rejects also the subjective interpretation of the phrase “faith of Jesus Christ” (which would mean “the faith that Jesus Christ himself possessed”), and understands the phrase objectively (“faith in Jesus Christ”). That this is certainly the correct understanding of the phrase is well supported by the quotation from Moises Silva on page 424. There are a fair number of typos in this section of the volume, and there were a more than average number of typos in the books as a whole.

Horton’s book has many helpful features, and, on the whole, must be judged a success, as long as its main object is kept in view: to convince people who don’t already believe the doctrine. There are controversial and somewhat unclear things in the two-volume set, but this is still a solid contribution. When read in tandem with volumes by John Owen, Anthony Burgess, James Buchanan, J.V. Fesko, and the promising collection of essays edited by Matthew Barrett, the reader will have a thorough grounding in the biblical doctrine of justification. ■

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neighbor. He justly judges the vile, rejecting him as the object of his favor or friendship, and he honors, literally, he glorifies, or ascribes worth to those who fear the Lord. He is a man of right discernment.

The fourth set of attributes concerns his own lack of self-interest, even when it is costly to him. He keeps his vows even when it hurts; he refuses even the nominal return upon his generosity and lending, and he refuses unrighteous enrichment at the expense of those who are innocent. He is a man who puts away his own self-interest for the good of others.

In all these descriptions we have a picture painted of not one of Adam’s race—at least not in the full sense and perfection of any of these attributes as they are first found in the Lord God, who dwells on that Holy Hill. We are reminded in this listing of impossible moral attributes to fallen men that there is One who has, as man, met this holy standard. Hear Bonar:

None can be said to have fulfilled the conditions, or come up to the character here sketched, excepting Christ, if we view the matter in its strictness; although every member of His body lays claim to His imputed obedience, and exhibits a goodly specimen of the effect of this imputation in producing personal holiness. We consider this Psalm as descriptive of our Head in His personal holiness, and of His members as made holy by Him.”⁴

This is the truth of the matter. We, humbled by these descriptions of replete holiness of heart, speech, and behavior are caused to look outside ourselves, for in our fallen condition, we cannot dwell with the Almighty, we cannot in any capacity other than as a usurper, an interloper, enter into the place of that holy and rarified air. It is the *Mountain of His Holiness!* And so we use that hermeneutical key that assists us in unlocking the Psalms, as we keep “one eye on David, and one eye on Christ.” As we look to our Head, who has attained, although no one else was found worthy to “open the book, and loose the seven seals thereof” (Revelation 5:1-5), we proclaim that He alone is worthy. We are taught here in Psalm 15, of the perfection of Christ, the only one of our race who has perfectly kept these moral attributes, being “made of a woman, made under the Law” (Galatians 4:4) and who also is “holy, harmless, undefiled, separated from sinners” (Hebrews 7:26).

However, I do think that Bonar is on to something when he says that it is in Christ that we have new ability to walk after all His ways, imitating Him, following His example. And this latter sense of dwelling with the Lord as a Holy People is indeed clear in the Scriptures. We read often of the people of God being a people separated unto the Lord, and as that separated people,

⁴Andrew A. Bonar, *Christ and His Church in the Book of Psalms* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1860), 48.

living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world (Titus 2:12). We are aware of the injunctions and directions in Scripture that press holiness to the people of God, as they are found in Christ (Exodus 22:31; Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7; Numbers 6:5; Deuteronomy 7:6; Ephesians 5:27; 1 Peter 1:15-16). And truly it must be said that the one who has no taste for holiness here upon earth will be very much a fish out of water in the eternal state, for which we are being fitted. Hear Bishop Ryle:

The favorite idea of many, that dying men need nothing except absolution and forgiveness of sins to fit them for their great change, is a profound delusion. We need the work of the Holy Spirit as well as the work of Christ; we need renewal of the heart as well as the atoning blood; we need to be sanctified as well as to be justified. It is common to hear people saying on their deathbeds, "I only want the Lord to forgive me my sins, and take me to rest." But those who say such things forget that the rest of heaven would be utterly useless if we had no heart to enjoy it! What could an unsanctified man do in heaven, if by any chance he got there? Let that question be fairly looked in the face, and fairly answered. No man can possibly be happy in a place where he is not in his element and where all around him is not congenial to his tastes, habits and character. When an eagle is happy in an iron cage, when a sheep is happy in the water, when an owl is happy in the blaze of noonday sun, when a fish is happy on the dry land—then, and not till then, will I admit that the unsanctified man could be happy in heaven.⁵

It is then clear from this Psalm that we have a Mediator who has perfectly, in His own merit, and by His own working, made His dwelling in the Holy Mountain (Hebrews 1:3). He has gone before us, to prepare a place for us, and to prepare us for that place. Let us then ask the questions again: *Who shall dwell in thy Tabernacle, Lord? Who shall abide in thy Holy Mountain?* Only those who are found in Him, who have forsworn allegiance to and assertion of their own righteousness, resting on Him who is worthy, and in recognition of that eternal abode, spend these days upon earth "perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1).■

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5. J. C. Ryle, *Holiness: Its Nature, Hinderances, Difficulties and Roots*, being a series of papers on the subject. Third, enlarged edition (London: William Hunt and Company, 1887), 34–35. Ryle adds the note: "There is no imagination wherewith man is besotted, more foolish, none so pernicious, as this,—that persons not purified, not sanctified, not made holy in their life, should afterwards be taken into that state of blessedness which consists in the enjoyment of God. Neither can such persons enjoy God, nor would God be a reward to them.—Holiness indeed is perfected in heaven: but the beginning of it is invariably confined to this world.—Owen on Holy Spirit, p. 575. Goold's edition."

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A Psalm of David.

Lo Yimoth L'Olam

Todd L. Ruddell

¹Who is it that shall dwell With-in Thy tab - er - nac - le LORD?
³Slanders he not with his tongue, To his neigh - bor he doth no harm.
He vows and chang - eth not E - ven when it doth bring him loss

Who is it that a - bides In the mountain of Thy ho - li - ness?
Re - proach he doth not take A - gainst his neigh - bor that is near
⁵His sil - ver he lends not, Un - to op - pres - sive u - sur - y,

²He with per - fe^ct walk And who work - eth righ - teous - ness
⁴So be - fore his eyes, The vile re - ject - ed is
He a bribe takes not A - gainst the blame - less one,

He that speak - eth truth in his heart.
He hon - ors those who fear the LORD.
Who doth these things shall ne'er be moved.