

Introduction

Today I'm preaching the second part of a two part sermon titled *The Guest of God*. It's a metaphor. God is the host. We are the guests. Listen to what an unknown person said about hosts: "**Hospitality is making your guests feel at home, even if you wish they were.**" Now listen to what Benjamin Franklin said about guests: "**Fish and visitors smell in three days.**" Those quotes reflect the posture of many hosts. They aren't all that thrilled about having long term guests.

But God, as Psalm 15 implies, is. He's a host who wants all of us to be His permanent guests, which I defined last week. But He allows us to be only if we pursue the qualities David lists in verses 2-5. I explained two of those last week. Our character must be true and our dealings honorable. Let' examine the other two today.

Our Tongue Must Be Restrained

The third is found in verse 3. Our tongue must be restrained.

David writes that the guest of God doesn't do three things. First, he doesn't slander with his tongue. He doesn't spread scandalous information about others. Second, he doesn't do evil to a neighbor. He doesn't say or do things that sabotage the lives of others. And third, he doesn't take up a reproach "**against his friend,**" or as it's better translated against, "**against another.**" He doesn't cast slurs on others.

This verse is about our tongue and the words we speak with it. We recognize if we're attentive enough that the tongue is central to human life. For one thing, it's the hardest part of the body to control, even more so than the sexual organs. People sin far more verbally than they do sexually. For another thing, it's exceedingly powerful. Words stir up people's inclination/passions as easily and as effectively as actions do.

The tongue is, as a result, the originator and/or sustainer of most of the conflict that occurs in human life. Physical violence illustrates this. Verbal assault almost always precedes physical assault. I learned that

handling assault cases as an attorney. In all of them, someone's verbal attack incited my clients to anger and subsequent physical attack. Or consider the ongoing discord or strife that plagues people's lives. If the tongue didn't originate the discord and strife, it's usually the main factor that keeps it going. A poem describes the havoc it can wreak: **"A careless word may kindle strife. A cruel word may wreck a life. A bitter word may hate instill. A brutal word may smite and kill."** James 3:6 describes it even more vividly: **"And the tongue is a fire . . . and sets on fire the course of our lives and is set on fire by hell."**

I read an article, for instance, titled "Dealing with Verbal Abuse at Work." It defines verbal abuse as threatening, yelling, cursing, insulting, or mocking. It also identifies its effects on the abused: obsessing about work on days off, physical changes like high blood pressure, feelings of shame, loss of desire to pursue once enjoyable activities, and feelings of guilt. Verbal abuse is a common and major problem in the workplace, which illustrates that the tongue is central to human life.

And we must restrain it because it is. Verse 3 in the context of verse 1 implies that our misuse of the tongue diminishes our relationship with God. James 1:26 says it this way: **"If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless."** That hard-headed statement teaches us two things.

First, our misuse of the tongue is a spiritual thermometer. It takes our spiritual temperature. Using the tongue to harm others indicates weakness in our relationship with God. A Christian I knew routinely made snide remarks that demoralized people or put them in their place. According to James, her religion was **"worthless."** She and we can judge that her relationship with God was a shallow one.

Our misuse of the tongue is also a spiritual thermostat. It not only takes our spiritual temperature but regulates it as well. Using the tongue to harm others lessens our connectedness to God. It offends Him and thus strains our relationship with Him. The Christian I mentioned making

snide remarks drove a wedge between God and her.

To be God's guests, therefore, we must "**bridle**" or restrain our tongue. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said it well, "**It must be a decisive rule of every Christian fellowship that each individual is prohibited from saying much that occurs to him.**" Precisely!

Think of it this way. I have a negative thought about or toward someone because of what he or she is or does. At that point, two things are true. First, I don't have to express it. I can choose not to by trying and training. Second, I shouldn't express it unless doing so achieves a greater good – unless it's more helpful than harmful. Keeping both of those things in mind, I bridle my tongue. I'm verbally discriminating. I don't say much that "**occurs**" to me to quote Bonhoeffer. Remember the old 60's song "Silence Is Golden." That isn't always true of course. When silence is golden, guests of God don't speak. When it isn't golden, they do.

Take this real life scenario as an example of what I mean. Two women discovered that a common friend of theirs was having an affair. One told several people about her friend's affair. In that context, telling others, silence was golden and she was wrong in doing so. The other woman told her adulterous friend that she should tell her husband and that if she didn't, she would, which she eventually did. In that context, telling the husband, silence wasn't golden and she was right in doing so.

You get the idea. The tongue is central to life. It's one of the most imposing forces in it. God, therefore, requires His guests to restrain it.

Our Allegiance Must Be Clear-Cut

There's a fourth quality God requires of His guests. Their allegiance must be clear-cut. David makes just that point in the first two lines of verse 4. He states that guests of God do two things.

First, they despise reprobates. Reprobates are the wicked – those who think and act perversely. To "**despise**" them means to hate their wickedness – not them but their wickedness. We might think it's a given

that people despise reprobates but that often isn't the case.

Proverbs 28:4 explains what I mean, **“Those who forsake the law praise the wicked.”** Those who forsake the law are those who reject the Bible as a body of moral knowledge. They believe there is no objective standard for determining what is right and wrong. Multiple studies show that is now what most Americans believe, including those who go to church. The result is that they're out of touch with reality. They think and act as if what is good is bad and what is bad is good.

Proverbs 28:4 reveals a consequence of that. They praise the wicked. As Isaiah 32:5 says it, they call the fool noble and speak of the rogue as generous. That is a frequently observable phenomenon in American culture. Consider one celebrity as an example of what I mean. By Biblical standards, she is a rank materialist whose personal consumption is off the charts. Yet, listen to what the Huffington Post writes about her. She is **“the queen of all media, a movie star and just all around amazing—but she could also be considered a bona fide saint thanks to her mind-blowing generosity.”**

Rank materialist – mind blowing generosity. How do we explain the radical difference of perception? It's that our culture largely rejects the Bible as a body of moral knowledge. Not grasping what is right and wrong as a result, it then praises the wicked.

But guests of God don't. They view the Bible for what it is – a body of moral knowledge. They believe that its principles and precepts constitute an objective standard for determining what is right and wrong. The result is that they're in touch with reality. They think and act as if what is good is good and what is bad is bad.

Consequently, they despise reprobates, verse 4a. They also honor those who fear God, verse 4b. Derek Kidner's commentary on verse 4 is absolutely incisive: **“What looks at first sight pharisaical in 4 is in fact no more than loyalty. This man is not comparing himself with others, but giving his vote: declaring what he admires and where he stands.”** That is a million dollar insight. Guests of God cast their

vote for Him in the routines and relationships of day-to-day life. Their thoughts, feelings, words, and actions make clear what they admire and where they stand. They admire what Jesus admires. They stand for or against what He stands for or against. Their allegiance, in other words, is clear-cut. It's to Him.

The Christian owner of the Hartville Kitchen Restaurant closes on Sunday. A Christian routinely buys and reads the gossip tabloid, the *National Inquirer*. A Christian father prefers that his teenage son be godly rather than popular. And a Christian single regularly buys unnecessary things on credit that she can't afford. What do those acts and that preference say about what those people admire and where they stand?

Consider the following: the people and things we praise, the television shows we watch, the music to which we listen, the politicians for whom we vote, the things we read, the hobbies we pursue, the groups to which we belong, the things we write on Face Book, the things we buy, the priorities we set, and much more. Suppose someone who didn't know us spent a week with us, observing and analyzing all of that. Would he or she be able to tell beyond any shadow of a doubt that we're followers of Jesus? Or would there be some doubt in his or her mind? Our allegiance to Jesus should be so clear-cut that it leaves no doubt in anyone's mind, including ours, that we're followers of His.

Our Place Assured

Those then are four qualities that being the guests of God requires. Our character must be true (2), our tongue restrained (3), our allegiance clear-cut (4a-4b), and our dealings honorable (4c-5b). Those are qualities of holiness and remember what I said last week. They're representative not exhaustive. There are others. The Bible reveals what they are and I've preached about almost all of them. To be the guests of God, we must pursue them. We intend to make our character true, our tongue restrained, and all the rest. We then complete our intention by

trying and training our best to do that.

All of that teaches us what intimacy of relationship with God ultimately requires. It's that we descend into the particulars of holiness. We shouldn't be general and vague when it comes to holiness. We should be specific and precise instead. We learn from Scripture and the still small voice of the Holy Spirit the details of what God expects us to be and do. We then make and carry out the decision to be and do that.

I was studying 1 Corinthians 13, for instance. I learned a particular of holiness as I did. God wants me to genuinely rejoice when others outshine or best me. I then made and am carrying out the decision to be the kind of person who does that. I'm trying and training and God's presence and power are transforming me. I'm not completely there yet but I've grown significantly in that quality.

The moral of the story is that we need to devotedly pursue the qualities that God wants His guests to have.

Conclusion

David reveals the result when we do that in the very last line of his psalm, verse 5c. We "**will never be shaken.**" That means that we're stable and secure in our relationship with Him, and even the world.

I'd explain it this way in closing. We can *enter into* relationship with God and not *possess* these four or any qualities that He requires. But we can't *stay* in relationship with Him and not *pursue* them. Notice I said "**pursue**" them not "**possess**" them. That's a critical point. These four qualities and the others aren't ones that God *finds* in people. They're ones that He, in relationship, *creates* in people. But as always, we have a part to play in that. We must cooperate with Him by identifying and pursuing them.

So, let's identify and pursue them. We'll be permanent guests of God if we do.