

Don't Be Fooled

Psalm 14

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G. K. Chesterton was an English author, philosopher, and Christian apologist of the early 20th century. In 1908, *The Times* of London asked several authors to write on the topic, "*What is wrong with the world?*" Chesterton, in his usual quick-witted style, wrote the shortest reply for which he is famous. He wrote:

Dear sirs,
I am.
Sincerely yours,
G. K. Chesterton

Chesterton's point was that what was wrong with the world is that human beings are sinners, so it is no use trying to find someone or something else to blame for the problems in your life and in the world. They begin and end with you.

One of the main points of Psalm 14 is that we are all sinners. The Apostle Paul quotes Psalm 14 in Romans 3, where he describes the universal human condition of sin. King David's point in Psalm 14 is that we are all ruined by sin, and so we all become the problem. Each one of us has rebelled against God.

That's the bad news of this Psalm. There is also good news in this Psalm, but I will save that for later. For now, I want us to hold on to the bad news so that we understand King David's point in Psalm 14 – "*We are the problem.*"

Before we move into Psalm 14, I want you to understand where we are in the Psalter and some key characteristics of this Psalm. First, remember that Psalms 1 and 2 function like the *Preface* of the Psalter. They are the *first unit* that introduces the main themes of the Psalms. Psalms 3-9 are the *second unit* where David writes in response to Absalom's rebellion against him. Psalms 10-14 form the *third unit*, where King David contemplates the way of the wicked, which was introduced to us in Psalm 1. So, this morning, we wrap up the *third unit* with Psalm 14. Next, Sunday, we will move into the *fourth unit*, which is Psalms 15-24. In this *unit*, we will consider the way of the Righteous King.

The second characteristic you need to notice is the connection between Psalm 14 and Psalm 15. So, while Psalm 14 concludes the *third unit* and Psalm 15 introduces the *fourth unit*, Psalms 14 and 15 are placed next to one another to form a pair of contrasting wisdom Psalms. Psalm 14 contrasts the sinner with the blameless person in Psalm 15. Keep this in mind as we cover Psalm 15 next Sunday.

The third and final characteristic of Psalm 14 that you should notice is that Psalm 53 is nearly an exact duplication of Psalm 14. Only vv. 5-6 are changed. As I mentioned earlier, most of Psalm 14 is repeated in Romans 3:10-12. Additionally, Romans 1:18-32 provides an explanation and application of Psalm 14:1-4.

Here's something to keep in mind as you read things in Scripture that are repeated. Anything God says, even once, is very important and demands our attention, but when God says it more than once, it demands that we pay even closer attention.

Here's the main point of Psalm 14, and it is a point that is repeated throughout all of Scripture: *All humanity is corrupt and has turned away from God, but the Lord remains the refuge of the righteous and therefore the hope of His people.*

Let's begin working through Psalm 14. I will make some applications as we work through the text, but our final application will be at the end. I have four points to help us work through Psalm 14.

I. The Fool Declares, "*There is no God.*" (v. 1)

In v. 1, we hear the voice of the fool, and when he speaks, he speaks out of the overflow of his heart. Look at v. 1:

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds; there is none who does good.

Have you ever heard someone say, "I don't believe in God"? Sometimes it's said casually, like a passing remark; other times it's said with conviction, almost as a declaration of independence. In our modern world, atheism and skepticism are becoming increasingly common. Psalm 14 reminds us that this is not a new phenomenon.

In v. 1, David begins with a very blunt indictment. He tells us that,
"The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'"

The Hebrew word for "fool" here is the word "*nabal*." You may be familiar with this word because it was the name of a man in 1 Samuel 25. *Nabal* was a very smart businessman. He owned lots of land, cattle, and crops. He had wives and children, but *Nabal* was a fool. He was not a fool because he was stupid or lacked intelligence. On the contrary, he was a fool because he was perverse and lacked any moral sense. When David, the future King, came to him and asked for aid, after David had protected his herds and herdsmen from the Philistines, he mocked David and refused to help him. Ultimately, this foolish mistake cost him his life.

Friends, if someone is a fool, it doesn't mean they lack intelligence, but rather someone who lives with moral blindness. The fool's problem is NOT that he cannot think, but that he WILL NOT humble his heart before God. He has a spiritual heart problem.

Listen, v. 1 doesn't describe what the fool says with his mouth. He says, "*There is no God*," in his heart. Friends, the heart is the center of a person's desires, affections, and loves. Jesus tells us that out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. *Scripture is very clear and teaches us that the heart is the control center of a person. So, what Scripture teaches us about the heart is that we say what we say and do what we do because we love what we love.*

This means that outwardly, someone may appear religious, polite, or even spiritual. But the inward reality of the heart is that they live as though God is not real. This is often referred to as "*functional or practical atheism*." This person may claim to know that there is a God and even love God, but they live as though God doesn't exist. This is the *functional atheist*.

Notice what v. 1 says flows out of this denial. Corruption, abominable deeds, and a refusal to do good. When we push God out of our thinking, morality collapses. The Apostle Paul, quoting Psalm 14, described the fool's corruption and abominable deeds this way in Romans 1:18-23,

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

The wicked see the majesty of God in the world, and they suppress the truth. The late R. C. Sproul says,

“According to Romans 3, there really are no atheists. Their problem is NOT that they don’t know there is a God, but they hate what they know.”

So, just in case you’re feeling good about yourself in that you believe in God, the last phrase of v. 1 indicts us all, doesn’t it? Listen to it again:

There is none who does good.

The Hebrew word for “none” in this sentence means exactly what it says. It means *none or no one*. Again, the Apostle Paul helps us interpret and apply this last phrase of v. 1 when he says in Romans 3:9-12,

What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, ¹⁰ as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God. ¹² All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

Verse 1 of Psalm 14 is the bad news verse. It is easy to begin reading v. 1 and think, “Well, at least I’m not a fool.” That’s not the point of v. 1. The point of v. 1 is to put us all in the category of the fool. We all begin here.

One of the LORD’S main points of v. 1 is that there is no neutral group. There is not a group that is wise and another group that is foolish, and then another group that is in the middle, and they can’t make up their minds. If you are undecided, you are in the foolish group, so don’t be fooled into thinking that you are somehow neutral. There is only wisdom and foolishness, obedience and rebellion, boasting in the LORD or boasting in one’s own sinful desires. Bottom line: There are only two groups in Psalm 14: The fool and the people who call on the name of the LORD, and you are in one or the other.

II. The LORD Assesses the Fool from Heaven (vv. 2-4)

In vv. 2-4, we hear the voice of the LORD speak as he assesses the fool from His throne in heaven. First, let’s listen to what the LORD has to say in vv. 2-3:

The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. ³ They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

Now the LORD looks down from heaven—not with human eyes, but with divine judgment—and what does He see? He sees that there is a universal turning away from Him.

There is none who understands. No one who seeks after God. All have turned away from Him. All are corrupt. No one does good, not even one.

This is a sweeping indictment of humanity’s sinful nature. As we saw earlier, the Apostle Paul quoted these very verses in Romans 3 to demonstrate that all have sinned and fall short of God’s glory.

Listen, left to ourselves, none of us seeks after God. We might seek religion, spirituality, self-fulfillment, community, or try to quiet our consciences, but we do not truly seek God with a contrite heart ready to turn from our sin and trust in Jesus as our Savior and Lord unless the LORD first shows us our sin and our need to be saved from the consequences of our sin.

Verse 4 adds a stinging detail to the LORD’s assessment as He looks down from His throne in Heaven:

“Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread and do not call upon the LORD?”

Sadly, the wicked not only ignore God but also devour His people. Verse 4 says that just as casually as someone eats a piece of bread, so the corrupt exploit, oppress, and harm the righteous.

Why do they do these things? Why do they oppress God's people? It is because the hardening of their hearts has led them in the way of the wicked to the point where they increase in evil towards others, and especially toward God's people. Their hearts are darkened and grow even harder as they immerse themselves in their sin.

Finally, we need to make one more observation about v. 4. The mention of "*my people*" in v. 4 is the first indication that there are some who, by God's sovereign grace, have been pulled out of the "*group of fools*" and placed in covenant relationship with God. Now, they are known as "*my people*." How does this happen?

Remember where we have been. Psalm 14:1-3 describes us all before we came to faith in Christ. Now, in v. 4, there is a group called "*my people*." To be in this group, God had to do something that we were incapable of doing; we had no ability whatsoever to do; and would never desire to do so that we could be taken out of the *group of fools (sinners)* and placed in covenant relationship with God and become "*my people*."

Here's how we become "*my people*." King Jesus, the true author of Psalm 14, is our sin-bearing King, who by keeping God's laws perfectly and dying in our place as our substitute on the cross paid for our foolish sins against God. He purchased saving grace and faith for God's people.

What this means is that before the saving grace of God gave life to our dead hearts, we were hostile toward God, enemies with God, and only hated God, but through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection from the dead, He brought us out of darkness into His marvelous light. The Apostle Peter says it this way in 1 Peter 2:9-10,

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

This is how God creates His people. When we repent of our sins and by faith seek the LORD and call upon His name – we will be saved. The question is: Have you called on the name of the LORD to save you?

III. The LORD Protects His People (vv. 5-6)

Listen to vv. 5-6 again:

*There they are in great terror, for God is with the generation of the righteous. ⁶
You would shame the plans of the poor, but the LORD is his refuge.*

Poetry can be challenging to understand, and even a good translation, such as the ESV, can leave us wondering what it means. So, let me read it from the *Amplified Bible* because it clarifies the translation of these two verses:

There they [the wicked] shall be in great fear [literally—dreading a dread], for God is with the generation of the [uncompromisingly] righteous (those upright and in right standing with Him). ⁶ You [evildoers] would put to shame and confound the plans of the poor and patient, but the Lord is [their] safe refuge.

So, vv. 5-6 are telling us that the wicked have made a grave mistake. They thought they could just chew up and spit out the people of God, the righteous, but they were wrong, and judgment is coming. They have denied the LORD, and so the *great terror of judgment* has consumed their hearts and minds. The Apostle Paul says in Philippians 2:9-11,

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This is that moment when the wicked realize that they must give an account of their lives. They must bow the knee to King Jesus. Again, there are only two groups here. One group will bow the knee reluctantly, and the other will bow their knees in great joy and love at the One who purchased them by His death on the cross and resurrection from the dead.

The question is, which group are you in right now? Friends, call on the name of the LORD Jesus to save you. Don't wait until it is too late.

Friends, God is on His throne, and one day He will judge all people. He's not wringing His hands and fretting over whether someone believes in Him or not. God is God, and He remains God on His throne, regardless of whether someone believes in Him or not. Not believing in God doesn't make Him less real, no more than NOT believing in the existence of fire will prevent it from burning the one who is in it.¹

The question is, where do you stand with God? Have you humbled yourself, turned from your sins to Jesus, asked for His forgiveness, and confessed your faith in Him as your Lord and Savior? Is the LORD your Refuge? This leads us to our final point in Psalm 14.

IV. The People of God Appeal to Heaven (v. 7)

In v. 7, we hear the voice of God's people appealing to Heaven for redemption. I want you to notice that after six verses of what seems like turmoil, v. 7 is spoken by God's people in quiet confidence. Listen to their prayer:

*Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When the LORD restores
the fortunes of His people, let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad.*

The prayer of the people in v. 7 was for them and for us, because it was answered when Jesus was incarnated into human flesh as the embodiment of God's salvation. He is the One who came from Heaven's Zion, lived a sinless life, and then died a sinner's death on the cross for God's people. Then He rose victoriously from the dead on the third day. Now, all who call on His name are born again. Their hearts are restored to life.

Lastly, v. 7 also reminds us that one day there will be a final restoration. One day God will restore all things. One day, all things will be made new. This old, broken world that we live in and endure suffering will end, and all things will be made new. Our struggle with sin will be no more. We will know the fullness of our restoration.

As we conclude, I would like to make one final point of application. Psalm 14 calls us to examine our hearts. Here's the question: Do you live as a *practical or functional atheist*? Here's what I mean: Do you claim to know and love Jesus, and yet you really don't live for Jesus? Do you honor Jesus with your lips, but your heart is not obeying Him?

You see, you don't have to say with your lips, "*There is no God.*" You can simply do that in your heart, and it will be evidenced by how you live. So, for example, do you claim to know and love Jesus yet never spend time with Him in prayer and in His word? Friends, prayerlessness is a form of godlessness. This doesn't mean you are as bad as you could be, but it may reveal that functionally and practically, you really live like an atheist. You don't pray or trust Jesus because you don't believe you need Him.

Remember, what Scripture teaches us about the heart: You do what you do because you love what you love. What is it that you love more than Jesus? Whatever that thing is, usually is your functional savior, which means it is an idol, and this leads you to be a functional atheist.

¹ Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasure of David, Update Edition in Today's Confessional Language*, p. 80.