

Fools at Heart, Saved by Grace

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[0 : 0 0] Psalm chapter 14, and we'll read the entire psalm.

This will be from the ESV. The fool says in his heart, there is no God. They are corrupt.

They do abominable deeds. There is none who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God.

They have all turned aside. Together they have become corrupt. There is no one who does good, not even one. Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread and do not call upon the Lord?

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

[1 : 0 7] You would shame the plans of the poor, but the Lord is his refuge. 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. Let Israel be glad.

I suspect the majority of people would say humanity is inherently good. At the very least, they would say there's a little good in all of us.

Perhaps we would also find some that would claim that we are born morally neutral. We're neither good nor evil until we choose to do good or evil. In most cases, this kind of anthropology leads to a soteriology of works.

In other words, if someone believes man is inherently good, or at the very least morally neutral, he will most likely believe salvation is based on a running record of our works.

[2 : 3 9] If our good works outweigh our sins, he thinks, then we'll go to heaven. And if not, we may still go to heaven, because after all, God is gracious, right?

This, however, is not what the Bible teaches. Man is not good. We are not even morally neutral.

As David says here, they have all turned aside. Together they have become corrupt. There is none who does good. Not even one. If you've ever raised children, you don't need the Bible to tell you this.

I have never taught my children to lie. I have never taught them to be disrespectful or disobedient, not intentionally anyway. Even so, I have caught them lying.

I have caught them being disrespectful or disobedient. So where does this impulse come from? If it doesn't come from outside of them, then it must come from within.

[3 : 4 7] The prophet Jeremiah says the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick. Our sinfulness is not merely a matter of committing sin.

Our very nature is sinful. Elsewhere, David says, I was brought forth or born in iniquity. And in sin did my mother conceive me.

We are sinful from the very moment of our conception. Now, we may not enjoy dwelling on this subject for obvious reasons, but we can't overstate its importance.

David even wrote a song about it. Notice the inscription at the top of this psalm. The inscription was not added by our Bible translators or publishers.

As far as we know, it is original to the text of Psalm 14. It is part of God's breathed-out scripture. And it says, to the choir master.

[4 : 49] David says, I want the congregation of God's people to sing this song about their depravity. Yes, sing songs about God's mercy and his salvation, but let us never forget from what we are saved.

He saves us from our sin. In a very real sense, he saves us from ourselves. Verse 1 is probably familiar to most of us.

David writes, the fool says in his heart, there is no God. Now, to be clear, the word fool does not refer to someone who lacks intelligence.

What he lacks is understanding. He may be an otherwise brilliant man, but he's simultaneously senseless regarding spiritual and moral matters.

Namely, he claims there is no God. Now, unsurprisingly, this verse makes most of us immediately think of the practical atheist.

[5 : 53] We think of someone such as Richard Dawkins, who has been an outspoken critic of religion for years now. In 2006, he published his most famous work, The God Delusion, in which he argues that science has rendered a belief in God completely useless.

He has said, and I quote, Faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence.

Mr. Dawkins is looking at things upside down. The book of Hebrews says, By faith, we understand that the universe was created by the word of God.

By faith, we understand. It isn't tangible evidence that compels us to believe. We believe, and then we understand.

We trust in God, and then the world begins to make sense. The fact is, no amount of tangible evidence will ever convince the atheist.

[7 : 03] Consider the unbelieving Jews who saw sign after sign from Christ himself. They couldn't possibly deny his power. Yet, they still refuse to believe.

And instead, they said, It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of the demons, that this man is able to do what he does. The practical atheist doesn't exist because he lacks evidence.

That's not the issue. You'll notice the fool in this text doesn't deny God merely with his lips. The fool says, In his heart, there is no God.

This denial comes from within. It's part of the very fabric of his being. This defiance of God. And it is defiance. It's his very nature.

In Job 21, Job says, They spend their days in prosperity, and in peace, they go down to Sheol. They say to God, Depart from us.

[8 : 08] We do not desire the knowledge of your ways. What is the Almighty that we should serve him? And what profit do we get if we pray to him? That's bone-chilling defiance.

Paul says the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God. For it does not submit to God's law. Indeed, it cannot. Hostile to God.

In the Greek, this verse in Psalm 14 literally says, The fool says in his heart, No God. No God. The fool blatantly defies God.

To be clear, though, David is not exclusively describing the practical atheist, or the one who altogether denies God's existence. This kind of denial, this kind of defiance, it comes in many forms.

Yes, some people openly deny God, but others will profess to believe in either a God, or maybe the God, while still playing the part of the fool who says in his heart, There is no God.

[9 : 23] Consider Romans 1, where Paul describes the pagan Gentiles, and he says, 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.

Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Therefore, God gave them up to the lusts of their hearts, to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the creator, who is blessed forever.

Amen. Now notice some of the similarities between that passage in Romans 1 and what David writes here in Psalm 14, verse 1.

Paul, too, calls them fools. They lack understanding, specifically about God himself. And it's from their hearts this foolish defiance comes.

[10 : 40] And the end result is they deny God. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie. Even so, you'll notice that these Gentiles still practiced religion.

They were still a very religious people. They still believed and worshipped various gods. They didn't altogether deny the existence of a spiritual heavenly being as someone like Richard Dawkins would.

Does David have them in mind when he writes Psalm 14, verse 1? Absolutely. They denied the one true God.

In fact, we can go even further. Through the prophet Isaiah, God said of the people of Judah, this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips while their hearts are far from me.

That's a euphemistic way of saying they don't know me. They defy me. They deny me. Their lips say one thing, but their hearts reveal something else altogether.

[11 : 54] And it isn't good. In other words, there are people who profess to believe in the one true God, and yet they are still fools who say in their heart, no God.

David isn't exclusively talking about the outspoken practical atheist here. The fact is, he's talking about everyone. He's talking about Adam's entire fallen family.

We are all corrupt by nature. We are all rotten from within. We all do abominable deeds because that's what an inherently corrupt person does. There is no one who does good.

Now, perhaps we're tempted to argue with David. Perhaps we're tempted to defend ourselves and say, I can do good. Maybe I misstep from time to time, sure, but in general, I'm a pretty good person.

And if that's our argument, fine. But our disagreement isn't with David. It's with God. Notice, the Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man.

[13 : 06] The Lord looks down to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside. Together, they have become corrupt.

There is no one who does good, not even one. So first of all, whom is God examining here? He's examining the children of man.

And the word man in Hebrew is the same word translated elsewhere into Adam. God is examining the children of Adam, if you will. Who are the children of Adam? All of us.

Every last one of us. Okay? Well, second, what is God looking for? When He examines the children of man, what's He looking for? He's looking to see if there are any who understand, who seek after Him.

He's looking for people who are looking for Him. But He doesn't find any. None. And keep in mind, the Lord sees not as man sees.

[14 : 10] Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord, He looks right into the heart. He's not looking for religious people, to be clear. He's not looking for people who merely profess a belief in Him.

He's looking for sincere, obedient people who love and truly trust Him. But He finds none. They have all turned aside.

Together they have become corrupt. There is none who does good. Not even one. God's evaluation of humanity here is all-inclusive.

All. Together. None. While He certainly sees many religious people, He sees many people professing to believe in Him and people who appear to do good in this world, God's infallible judgment, His conclusion of the matter is that all have sinned and fall short of my glory.

I can't remember who said it, but I remember the line that goes, God finds nothing in man to turn his heart, but more than enough to turn his stomach.

[15 : 22] Once again, though, many people in this world, they're prone to push back. They would argue humanity isn't that bad. But to be clear, David isn't suggesting that we are all as wicked or as sinful as we could be.

Read Romans 1 again. Paul implies that God restrains the wickedness of men because what we see happening as God judges the people in that case is he's letting go of those restraints.

So to some degree, we are only as wicked in this world as God allows us to be. David is also not suggesting that we are without a conscience or without a sense of right and wrong.

Sometimes we refer to God's moral law, namely the Ten Commandments, as His natural law. It's a natural law because God built it right into His creation.

As a result, Paul says, again in Romans 1, people are without excuse. In Romans 2, he writes, so when Gentiles who do not by nature have the law, that is the prescribed written law, do what the law demands, they are a law to themselves even though they do not have the law.

[16 : 47] They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts. In other words, a person doesn't need God's written law right in front of them to read in order to be guilty of breaking that law.

God's natural law was built into Him. The fact that He does good at all actually proves the point. But even more to the point, He has a conscience.

He has something inside of Him that knows the difference between right and wrong even though He suppresses the truth. And lastly, David doesn't mean that we're unable to do what appears to be good works.

Sure we can. I just read what Paul said in Romans, even Gentiles who do not have God's prescribed law sometimes do what the law demands. God's however, there is a significant problem with their so-called good works.

No amount of good works will ever be good enough. God is holy and He is perfect. His law is holy and perfect.

[18 : 05] And God in His law demand perfection from us. The book of James says, whoever keeps the whole law but offends in one point has become guilty of all. You've broken the law, period.

That's what matters. Again, let's not forget what David says in Psalm 51. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me.

Paul says, in Adam all die. In other words, we do not merely commit sin. We are sinners.

As Adam's children, we share that fallen nature. We are inherently sinful. Now, we may not like to think of ourselves as depraved, evil people.

We'd much rather think of ourselves as having a little good in us, but that could only be true if we are evaluating ourselves by a standard other than God's law.

[19 : 06] According to God's law, each one of us is guilty. In Romans 3, Paul writes, now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law so that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight since through the law comes knowledge of sin. When the Lord looks down from heaven at the children of man, he is judging according to his law, not our standards, but according to his law.

He's evaluating us according to his perfect standard and we all fall short. We are all fools who say in our hearts there is no God.

Our very nature rejects him even if we never say it out loud. Again, consider the Jews in Jesus' day. The Apostle John says, the true light which gives light to everyone, God in the flesh was coming into the world.

He was in the world and the world was made through him yet the world did not know him. He came to his own and his own people did not receive him.

[20 : 34] Later, Jesus himself says, the light has come into the world and the people love the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

God himself walked among those who claimed to believe in him and to love him and to serve him and they rejected him. That is the true condition of humanity.

We are not born good. We are not even born neutral. Despite whatever our appearances may suggest, we are wicked sinners who reject God.

And worse yet, we are blind to our fallen nature. We don't even see the judgment that is hanging over our heads. God determined that all have turned aside.

Together we have become corrupt. There is none who does good, not even one. And how do we respond? According to verse 4, we're completely ignorant. Have they no knowledge?

[21 : 38] The Lord asks. All the evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread and do not call upon the Lord? Naturally, people don't call upon the Lord because the fool says in his heart there is no God.

In his heart, he doesn't believe in God so he doesn't turn to God. He doesn't seek God for help. He doesn't cry to him for mercy. He doesn't beg him for salvation.

He doesn't ask to be redeemed from his fallen guilty state. He doesn't believe he's fallen. He doesn't believe he's guilty. In his heart, there is no God and there is nothing from which to be saved.

And there's no one to save him if there were. Once again, I'll draw your attention to Romans 1 which says, For the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

For what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world and the things that have been made.

[22 : 51] So they are without excuse. And again, 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.

You see, no one has an excuse for unbelief. Creation itself testifies to God's existence. Even so, notice that Paul says, or notice what Paul says the unbeliever does.

He suppresses the truth. He pushes it down. He avoids it. He ignores it. When the fool says in his heart, there is no God, it's not because he doesn't know the truth.

He simply denies and defies that truth. Sometimes you'll hear a Christian talk about people living in a remote part of the world who have never heard the gospel, they've never read the Bible, they've never been told about the one true God or his son, Jesus Christ.

And this person will say, God won't hold them accountable because of their unbelief. But that's a clear contradiction of what Paul says in Romans 1.

[24 : 04] What can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them, but they suppress the truth. And then he concludes, they are without excuse.

There's a very real sense in which the atheist is a mythical creature. He doesn't really exist. In fact, even someone who denies the God of the Bible, someone who refuses to worship his creator, you'll notice he won't be able to help himself.

He may not worship the creator, but he will worship something. God built this desire to worship into us. And even the practical atheist will find himself worshipping something.

He will give his life in committed devotion to something. Paul says of the Gentiles, for although they knew God, they did not honor him or give thanks to him.

They became futile in their thinking, their foolish hearts were darkened. claiming to be wise, they became fools. And what did they do? They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

[25 : 29] As my favorite secular musical artist once said, Bob Dylan, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you're going to have to serve somebody.

For those who persist in their denial and defiance of God, we see, verse 5, they are in great terror. Now this phrase is in what we'd call the perfect verbal form, which means they aren't necessarily in terror or afraid in the present.

David is describing this terror or this fear they will experience in the future as though it is happening right now. So we might say they will be in great terror or we could even say they should be in great terror.

Terror of what? What should they be afraid of? Judgment. God's judgment. Paul tells the Corinthians, we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

John MacArthur once said, sinners live with the illusion that they can make a judgment on Jesus Christ and avoid him making a judgment on them.

[27 : 00] You judge Jesus wrongly and he will judge you rightly. The question is not what you will do with Jesus.

The question is when you see him face to face what will he do with you? The majority of people may deny it but children of Adam are on a path that ends with terror.

Jesus said the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction and those who enter by it are many.

Obviously the people addressed here in Psalm 14 have made a deadly serious miscalculation about themselves and about the world and most importantly about God.

The fool says there is no God and I don't need him anyhow. God says you are foolish you are corrupt and you are ignorant and you have every reason to be fearful because you deserve nothing less than my wrath.

[28 : 16] So there are plenty of troubling truths in this Psalm but I don't want to leave it there. we don't want to miss the good news peeking through the darkness of this Psalm.

Perhaps you noticed that verses 4 and 5 mention a group of people who appear to stand apart from the foolish and the corrupt the ignorant God deniers.

In verse 4 the Lord refers to my people. then in verse 5 God is with the generation of the righteous and finally verse 7 says 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 well who are these people and how in the world did they become righteous if there is none who does good not even one well to answer these questions let's go to Romans 3 where the Apostle Paul quotes this Psalm I'll begin reading at verse 9 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 as it is written none is righteous no not one no one understands no one seeks for God all have turned aside together they have become worthless no one does good not even one their throat is an open grave they use their tongues to deceive the venom of asps is under their lips their mouth is full of curses and bitterness their feet are swift to shed blood in their paths are ruin and misery and the way of peace they have not known there is no fear of God before their eyes now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law so that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world may be held accountable to God for by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight since through the law comes knowledge of sin

I'll stop there for a moment Paul quotes Psalm 14 and several other Old Testament passages here to establish one very simple point we are all guilty sinners all guilty sinners it doesn't matter whether you are a Jew or a Gentile it doesn't matter whether you are a moralist or an atheist you stand guilty before God and his law then again evidently there are exceptions somehow Psalm 14 speaks of the righteous God's people who are they how did they escape the terror to come well let's continue reading here in Romans 3 but now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law although the law and the prophets bear witness to it the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe for there is no distinction for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of

[31 : 54] God and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith this was to show God's righteousness because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins it was to show his righteousness at the present time so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus notice notice notice how Paul reiterates our guilt yet again there is no distinction for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God he doesn't want anyone to deceive himself into thinking he is inherently righteous or can become righteous if he does enough good works we are all guilty but praise be to

God there's a way out we can escape our guilt we can escape the terror to come we can escape the fallen family of Adam and enter into the righteous family of God how so Jesus Christ Jesus Christ alone we can be justified by God's grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood by propitiation Paul means that Jesus on the cross he assuaged God's wrath against us by suffering it in our place we can be justified and we can be declared innocent by God because Jesus was innocent he was born sinless he kept God's law perfectly throughout his entire life and then he suffered God's wrath in our place then just as

God treated his son as guilty he looks at us through his son's blood if you will and he treats us as innocent for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God we are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus who God put forward as a propitiation by his blood and notice that last phrase to be received by faith do you remember what God rhetorically asked in Psalm 14 this was back in verse 4 have they no knowledge all the evil doers who do not call upon the Lord that's the escape that's our means to salvation no we're not righteous by birth and we certainly cannot become righteous through our efforts in this life but we can by

God's grace call upon him for mercy and it is that simple we can turn to him for salvation we can trust that he can and will save us through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus we can receive this justification before him simply by faith Hebrews 11 6 says without faith it is impossible to please God for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him in 1908 a national newspaper asked several authors to answer the question what is wrong with the world G.K.

Chesterton sent in the shortest reply of all this is what he submitted to the paper he wrote dear sirs I am sincerely yours G.K.

[36 : 06] Chesterton perhaps it goes without saying but I'll say it anyhow if we will sincerely turn to God in faith calling upon him for mercy and for grace seeking his salvation then we must first admit we are sinners until we realize that we are the fool of Psalm 14 we have no reason to see the Lord as our refuge and to seek to become part of this generation of the righteous like Chesterton said we must first recognize that we are the problem let's pray our father in heaven apart from you we are foolish and blind but in your great mercy you have made a way through

Christ our redeemer to rescue us from our sin so we ask Lord that you would humble us cause us to turn from the pride of our own understanding and lead us to rest fully in your grace give us a heart that delights in your righteousness and a mind that treasures your truth above all else let the light of your glory shine through us Lord that others might see and glorify you we thank you for your steadfast love we thank you for the hope that we have in Christ to you be all praise and honor and glory now and forever amen to man do if why