

Psalm 14

A Psalm about morality not *God's* existence

Intro: Hard to find a verse in the psalter or indeed with a sharper rebuke to atheists than Psalm 14:1 'fool says in his heart there is no *God*'.... The New Atheists raise it, and find it very objectionable to be called a fool. I'm not sure if they understand the rebuke being given, for we usually take a fool to mean someone who is stupid intellectually. But that's not the charge here: a fool in the Bible is someone who is morally deficient. That in fact is an even deeper rebuke, since it's one thing to be wrong about an academic issue, a different thing to be immoral. So what's being said is a critique of the spirit of our age.

Part of our problem is that we think that the question of *God's* existence is an intellectual one, rather than a moral one, as though the two can be separated. In fact they can't.

So when *God's* existence is questioned, we might expect a bunch of reasoned arguments for a person to believe in *God*. That's not the way the Bible approaches it. Here, as elsewhere, *God's* existence is assumed, as though people just ought to know it.

Despite the introduction, this psalm isn't about *God's* existence, but about morality, and human moral failure, where our treatment of *God* forms just one part.

But before we get into it, let me point out that this psalm is the only one that has a repeat. For psalm 14 is almost identically to psalm 53. However the two psalms do differ in their conclusion - psalm 53 speaks of a siege instead of shaming the poor in verse 6, and so take a more national context, and this one a more personal context. [Pray]

Let's start by noticing different elements of the moral life that the psalm draws to our attention.

- What you say to yourself about *God* and his existence. This is a moral matter. You cannot limit your moral life to just what other people can see. Your moral life includes your inner life, your self-talk, the things you say to yourself about how the world is, how other people are, who *God* is, these are all moral matters. V1 Those who think *God* is too hidden in fact have missed a failure of their own character.
- Many key moral principles are hidden. Possessions for example
- [Toddler property laws: If I like it, it's mine. If it's in my hand, it's mine. If I saw it first, it's mine. If I had it a little while ago, it's mine. If it's broken, it's yours.]
- [Scene at bar of beer possession - two identical photos: one you own the beer in front of you, the other, you don't]
- They are able to see the invisible fact of human dignity - that to kill a human is different to killing a whale or an elephant. There are many invisible realities that are crucial to see to live the moral life. *God's* existence is another one of them.
- So part of the proper moral life is accepting *God's* existence.
- Your character - we have corrupt character, v.1 Now David varies in this psalm between saying things that are true of all people, and saying things that are true only of the wicked - we need care in distinguishing the two. But the phrase at the end of verse 1, 'they are corrupt' does seem to be a generalization about all people, since it is followed by generalized phrase, 'there is no one who does good'. But we are all corrupt. Our character falls short of what it should be - We tend away from the patterns of life that we ought to walk in... how we tend toward selfishness, toward covering up

our failures, toward greed, impurity and all the rest - we are all corrupt in different ways, and to different extents, but the corruption is there

- V1 we have vile deeds. Our moral life isn't just about our character, it's about our deeds. And there is a sickness to our deeds, a repulsive element. They become repulsive partly from their motivation. We have illicit thoughts about the opposite sex, about gaining power, about being seen to be successful, persuasive, good-looking, knowledgeable, courageous, godly, and those elements drive our deeds, as much as, sometimes even more than our desire to help, to serve, to please God. So even in our best deeds, some of our vile motivations are still there. And that is why David can say no one does good, for no one's motivations are wholly pure in any of their deeds.
- V2 Our understanding is also part of our moral failure. For it is a moral failure not to understand how we ought to live. There is no one who fully grasps the moral life they are called to - who has every element of the moral life rightly set out in their mind - and that is their fault. Those who don't sit under God's word are very far from understanding - but even those of us who do sit under it still misunderstand how we should live in various ways. You can see that moral understanding is meant to come to us all naturally, because oftentimes it does - we know we shouldn't murder or dishonor our parents or steal or be mean - we know we should be generous. We understand and accept these things simply by hearing them. Which shows that's how it is meant to be. But there are so many areas of the moral life our society and each of us misunderstands. And that's our fault because it comes through our misdeeds, our selfishness, our lies warping our own understanding.
- [V2 'seek God'] And a key aspect that would help our understanding is to seek God. To have a direction of working with intent to know God, to obey him, to understand him. Everyone should seek

him by asking him for wisdom and understanding, giving him thanks, seeking to love him, valuing him above all else. It's a key part of the moral life, our direction and intent with respect to God.

Nobody seeks God purely and wholeheartedly the way they should.

- V3 But more than being corrupt, we have *become* corrupt. So many of the corrupt habits we are in, were not always our habits. *We* started them. *We* weren't always lazy *in that way*. *We* men didn't always think about women *in that corrupt kind of way*. *We* started that. Those women who gossip didn't always gossip in that way, they became mean-spirited in particular ways *at a particular time*. *We* became corrupt.
- So there's not even one who does good.

Illustration: Junee jail, prisoners seem like normal people. We all hide our corruption so well. Story of young men in a drunken rampage, damaging property... they arrived on time for their rebuke 'they are good kids really', fails to explain the depths of why they did what they just did.

When you have blackouts in a shopping centre, more stuff is stolen in the dark than in the light. When dictators or politicians or celebrities genuinely believe they can get away with anything, you see their behavior gets far worse. Those who have greater opportunity to be immoral, they are more immoral - sports stars sleep around more, political systems with fewer checks and balances have more corruption, the disabled and intellectually impaired are abused more than those who aren't. It's because people think they can get away with it. With greater military might in the 20th century, mankind killed far more people. And it's all because of what is said right here - we are corrupt, our deeds are evil and vile. There is no one who understands.

Do you accept this verdict on yourself and your countrymen? Without this verdict on yourself, you cannot be a humble person, you cannot find salvation from the disease running through your veins - because you need to see you are sick before you accept the cure.

[PAUSE, MAJOR SHIFT]

Then in verse 4, things change as David asks a question: 'Do all these evildoers know nothing?' It's best here to imagine David now looking over an assembly of his people in Israel, and seeing many evildoers - that is, in this context, those who aren't God's people, who aren't the righteous.

For now instead of the language of 'all' being dominant, the language of 'them' is dominant, 'these evildoers', 'they devour', 'there they are', 'you evildoers'. David is now not talking about all humanity including himself, v4. For he does not count himself as devouring his own people, there are some people who call on God v4. There are people who are not overwhelmed with dread. These are people who aren't these 'evildoers', who are the righteous, verse 5.

But who are these righteous? This notion of 'the righteous' is developed in the psalms as you go through them from the beginning. You can see in Ps 2:9-12, Psalm 5:11-12, and psalm 7:9-12 that the righteous are those who take refuge in God, they take refuge in God's Messiah, they are those who have repented of their evil. And this psalm is continuing to develop the theme of the righteous in the psalter.

V4 - So now these statements apply to the wicked, that is, those who haven't repented, or taken refuge in God. And to answer the question of how little they know, David turns to their immoral deeds, which are over and above the immorality found in the righteous.

- The wicked devour David's people, who are God's people: How one treats God's people in particular is morally important, even for those who don't acknowledge God. For those who have been in their company ought to be able to see that God is with them. And they do see it, it overwhelms them when they come into an assembly of the righteous, into church. For God is there, and as they hear what is said, the prayers, the attitudes, the trust in God, it brings them dread. V5 is saying God is present and discernable even by those who reject him, when his people meet.
- And the average evildoer, non-righteous person would target the righteous, be against them in particular. They might not even do it consciously, but they in fact would frustrate the poor's plans.

For we are to God the aroma^a of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.¹⁶ To the one we are the smell of death;^a to the other, the fragrance of life. (2Co 2:15-16 NIVO)

They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you. (1Pe 4:4 NIV)

A 2012 study by Pew Research Centre showed that between 2006 and 2012, Christians were the most oppressed religious group, being harassed in 151 countries. There's an increasing pool of evidence that says that it's hard to get a socially conservative person into substantial sections of academia in the West. Expect to be excluded when you don't join in the strip club bucks events, when you won't gossip, when you won't get drunk with people, expect them to slander you for it, especially if they're not Christian. For they have smelt the stench of their own death on you.

Don't be put off if you are called a do-gooder, a wowser, a wet-blanket. Expect it, if you are hanging out with non-Christians. Because to them you are the stench of death, when they know you act how you do because of Jesus. It means you are doing well. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Great is your reward in heaven, for that is how they treated the prophets of old.

[LAST SECTION NOW]

V7 Is a statement of longing. It looks towards salvation - restoration of his people out of Israel. Do you long to be restored, have your character, your deeds, your understanding restored to how it should be? Do you long for this world to be cleaned up morally, for yourself to be morally restored? That's the salvation on offer through God's Messiah, through Jesus.

Preach gospel for a while...

Jesus fixes -character

 -understanding

 -vile deeds of past and future

SUMMARY

John the Baptist: Aspects of Greatness

- 1. His parents were great 1:41, 67
- 2. He was filled with the Spirit from birth 1:15
- 3. He humbly prepared the way for Jesus 1:76
- 4. He was an evangelist 1:77-78
- 5. He obeyed God's tough call
- 6. He matured quickly 1:80