

TBC – 8/4/02 p.m.

## THE PRACTICAL ATHEIST

Psalms 14, 53

**Intro:** The importance of Psalm 14 is seen in the fact that we have it twice in the Psalter. It appears again in Psalm 53. Therefore, we must conclude that the message is of infinite importance. However, there is one important difference between the two Psalms. In Psalm 14 Deity is referred to primarily as Jehovah; in Psalm 53, as God. We have “God” in Psalm 14, but we do not have “Jehovah” in Psalm 53.

From this some expositors have felt that Psalm 53 was more general in character, including a description of the whole world, Gentiles as well as Jews. But that Psalm 14 was written later for inclusion in the temple worship, and so would have applied more to the people of Israel.

Another idea is that Psalm 53 looks upon God as the Creator, whereas Psalm 14 views Him as the Redeemer. Dr. John MacArthur in a recent message expressed the belief that people will not be inclined to turn to God as the Redeemer until they first recognized Him as the Creator. Genesis 1 forever relates God to the work of creation, and by that we should understand that we include not only God the Father, but the Lord Jesus Christ also, and the Holy Spirit – the triune God. And this may explain why our own country has moved so far away from God in all respects because we do not, as a nation, look upon God as the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and the Sustainer of all creation. But whether we are speaking of God as God, or God as the Lord, the truth remains the same.

I mentioned in my message this morning that I do not believe that there are, or ever have been, any true atheists. And I base that statement on what the Apostle Paul said in Romans 1. Following Paul’s great statement about the Gospel in verses 14 through 17, he had this to say:

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;

19 Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.

20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:

21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things (Rom. 1:18-23).

Look especially at verses 19 and 20. Notice also Paul's use of the words "foolish" in verse 21 and "fools" in verse 22. And, from verse 24 to the end of chapter 1 in Romans we see, as we do in Psalms 14 and 53 the consequences of turning away from the truth that there is one sovereign, eternal God, whose work is to be seen in creation, and which work demands the existence of a God Who exists before creation, and who has demonstrated His wisdom, His power, and His goodness in all that He has made – or that the Godhead has made.

And note in verse 21 the word "imagination." It is a Greek word from which we get our English word *dialogue*, and it means *thinking*, or *reasoning*, or even *debate*. So this means that man's thinking has gotten all distorted, and this distortion is the result of sin. We go to people with the Gospel which is an entirely new way for them to think.

But now we come to the first verse of either Psalm 14 or Psalm 53 and we are immediately confronted with

### **I. GOD'S DEFINITION OF A FOOL (Psa. 14:1a).**

Let us think for just a moment about that word "fool." It is a person who is both weak and wicked. He is senseless, out of his mind. Now he may be a very brilliant person in other ways, but he has fallen prey to an entirely illogical and senseless way of thinking about himself, about the world, and about God. This is the Hebrew verb from which Nabal in 1 Sam. 25 got his name.

I have said that it includes the idea of wickedness because it is a sin, a gross sin, not to recognize God as God.

Now David said that it is what a man says in his heart which determines whether he is a fool, or not. A man does not have to go on record as being an atheist in order to be a fool. It is what he tells himself in his

heart that determines that. Solomon spoke of man in this way: “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Prov. 23:7). God has written a great amount of truth on man’s heart, but the fool is the one who denies that, suppresses that, and who does not want to have anything to do with God.

But we are not through with our definition yet.

The Hebrew of Psa. 14:1 is simply this: “The fool hath said in his heart, **NO GOD.**” If your Bible uses italics to indicate words that are added, you will have “There is” in italics.

Now this has led to two interpretations, and probably more, but two in particular. It can mean, as the KJV would suggest, a denial of the existence of God. But the man who says that is lying against what he really knows in his heart is true – that there is a God; there has to be a God. It is the height of foolishness, of folly, to deny the existence of God. A man can be brilliant in many ways, but a fool where God is concerned if he denies that there was, and is, a Creator.

But there is another interpretation that has been given to this verse, and probably this interpretation includes even more than those who deny the very existence of God. It is that large segment of the population of the world which says by the way they live, “No God for me!” They don’t want to have anything to do with God. They are not concerned about pleasing God. They want to do whatever they want to do. They are like ostriches which hide their heads in the sand to make things go away that they do not want to see. This is really the idea in that verse in Psalm 10:4 which describes the wicked, and is translated, “God is not in all his thoughts.” The margin in my Bible says that a better translation is, “All his thoughts are, **NO GOD**” (emphasis is mine). He doesn’t want to have anything to do with God. He wants to live like there is no God. He is a practical atheist.

Keil and Delitzsch believe that David was not describing here just a certain segment of society in any generation, but he was describing the whole human race. And I believe that there are right! No all unsaved people deny the existence of God, but until God works in their hearts they are going to be perfectly content to live their lives in a GOD-less way!

You and I who know God through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, have a hard time understanding how people can live that way. But they do! We

meet them every day. And we would be just like them if it were not for the grace of God. If a man does pay attention in his heart to the message that God has put there, he may salve his conscience by some form of idolatry, which is making God what you want Him to be, instead of recognizing Him as He is. He has made Himself known in creation. He has made Himself known in Christ Jesus. He has made Himself known in the Bible. But He has made us aware of His existence by the witness of our hearts. But man by nature still says, "I want nothing to do with God."

Now man can easily feel in his intention to live without God, that it doesn't really make any difference whether we recognize God or not. The attitude in our day seems to be, "You believe what you want to, but let me believe what I want to." But does it make a difference? Let's see what our text says.

## **II. THE GOD-LESS LIFE (Psa. 14:1b-**

How does the Lord describe people who are intent on leaving the living God out of their lives?

Will you notice that the Psalmist changes from the singular to the plural when you move from the first part of verse 1 to the latter part of the verse?

The first thing that we read is, "They are corrupt." What does this mean? It means that they are ruined. Sin never makes a person better, but always worse. Solomon said twice as I recently reminded you, "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12;16:25). It doesn't make any difference how you may choose to get along without God, it always leads to death. And this is one of the meanings of the word "corrupt."

But the second statement is: "They have done abominable works." Whatever is abominable to you, is that which you hate. The God-less life will take you where you never expected to go, not only in this life, but in what happens to you after death. You and I by ourselves can't see beyond the end of our noses. The Devil tempts us with that which looks good, and which will certainly bring us happiness. But as Solomon said, all God-less paths lead one way: to death!

The third thing that David mentioned is that "there is none that doeth

good.” I recently got a letter from a lady, a young lady, who wanted to argue with me about this. She obviously didn’t know the difference between what is acceptable to people as compared with what is acceptable to God. Often people have the idea if they think of God at all that they may do a lot of bad things, but they also do some good things, and they are hopeful if they have to meet God sometime that their good will more than compensate for the bad. They don’t know that the best we do is like filthy rags in God’s sight. In fact, they are an affront to God because for us to try to do works to please Him means that we do not understand how very terrible any sin is in God’s sight.

Verses 2 and 3 are an enlargement upon the last statement of verse 1. We have God’s own testimony as to the supposed value of man’s good works. Notice what these words tell us. (Explain.)

What an indictment of the whole human family! When God considers what we are by nature, this is what He sees, and He judges on the basis of what is pleasing to Him, not on the basis of what we think ought to please Him.

At this point I want us to turn again to Romans 1 because Psalms 14 and 53 say essentially the same thing that Paul, directed by the Spirit, said in Romans 1. David in the OT and Paul in the NT had the same thing to say about people who leave God out of our lives.

Please turn to Romans 1, and you follow as I read from verse 24 to the end of the chapter. (Read.)

Three times Paul said that “God gave them over,” or “God gave them up,” but in the original all three times he used the same verb (vv. 24, 26, 28). God handed them over to their sin. What a terrible situation this is! We see this in individual lives, and we see this in nations. I am afraid that is where we are as a nation in our relationship with God. He has given us over as a nation to reap the results of living with no concern for Him, nor for His Son, nor for the Word that they have given us.

**Concl:** How thankful we can be that the Lord has saved us! And we ought to praise Him, not only every day, but many times a day, because of His grace in our lives. I hate to think where I might be tonight if God had not intervened in my life, and you undoubtedly feel the same way if you know the Lord.

But let us all realize that we are here not only to learn more about the Lord, and to grow into a greater likeness to our Lord, but we are here to bear witness to the Gospel. It is the Gospel that God uses to open blinded eyes and to soften hardened hearts. It is the power of God unto salvation to both Jews and Gentiles – the only way of salvation.

Man's sin has made him think that if he wants to get right with God, he can do what needs to be done. But that is a lie. It is also a lie that all religions will take us to God. But that is a lie too. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Who came to earth and shed His blood as a Substitute for sinners, is the only Savior. He has taken our penalty in full, and He is the One and the only One Who can bring us to God. Let's pray for boldness to spread this message wherever we go. This are very crucial days in our nation's history. The Hour in which we live requires godly living and a bold witness for Christ as the only Savior of sinners.