

Psalm 14 – Week of January 16

Memory Verse: Psalm 14:1

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

This month, the group of Psalms we are studying in this weekly devotional are all designated as wisdom psalms. They help us learn how to live wisely. Over the past two weeks, we have studied Psalms 1 and 127. Both of these Psalms have given us insight in what it means to live wisely. This week, we will look at another wisdom psalm, Psalm 14. However, this Psalm presents the opposite of wisdom - folly. This Psalm describes what it means to be a fool. Biblical wisdom is presented positively - how to live wisely, and also negatively - how to avoid being a fool. So this week we will see what a fool does, and the encouragement from Scripture is to not live in this way. The challenge for all people, is that the foolish way is our natural tendency. This is part of what it entails in having a sinful nature - naturally, we will choose to live foolishly. Living wisely, and not foolishly, is not simply a decision that the natural man can make. Only the person who has the Holy Spirit of God indwelling them can truly live wisely.

Throughout the Bible we find repetition being used to stress an important point. When the Bible says something twice or more, God is telling us, "This is really important!" Psalm 14 is repeated, with only minor variations, in Psalm 53. Psalms 14 and 53 describe folly. They tell us what a fool is like. What we should think as we read these Psalms is "I want to learn the characteristics of a fool, because I do not want to be a fool in God's eyes."

Verse 1 presents two characteristics of a fool. First, the fool denies, or ignores, God. The Bible says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 9:10), so it stands to reason that the denial of God is the foundation of folly. That is what we find here in verse 1. You may be highly educated, academically gifted, and honored by society, but if you deny the existence of God, then you are a fool. Why? Romans 1:19-22 provides a commentary on this verse. In Romans, Paul writes that the existence of God is plainly seen to everyone through creation. People who deny God in spite of the evidence found in creation have become fools, and their thinking is futile and foolish.

A fool need not explicitly say that there is no God. A person may say with his mouth that there is God, but in his heart he practically believes that there is not. This is a kind of practical atheism. One may say they believe in God, but whether God exists or not makes no difference in their daily life. Psalm 10:4 says, "In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God." Practical atheism does not deny the existence of God, it simply ignores him. Where is God in your daily life? If someone were to watch all that you do during the day, would they say that God makes a difference in your life?

The second half of verse 1 reveals a second characteristic of the fool. A fool is corrupt, his deeds are vile, and he does no good. By this we see that there is a moral component to wisdom. A person who ignores God's commands cannot claim to be wise no matter his education or experience or accolades from society. If there is an omnipotent creator God who has instructed his human creation how to live, then it is folly to ignore his commands. Along with the moral component to wisdom, this verse also asserts folly is theological. The Bible links the denial of God to the denial of good. So there is a vital connection between what you believe and how you live, between loving God and loving neighbor. How do you

recognize a fool? A fool is someone who denies God, either actively (through statement) or passively (through indifference) and turns away from the way God has prescribed to live.

As you read verse 1, perhaps you thought of someone you know who fits this description. Maybe they say they don't believe in God. Maybe they say they do but live with indifference to God. All of us can think of people in our world who fit this description of a fool. But as we read on to verses 2 and 3, we see the Psalm take an unexpected turn. It says all have turned aside. It says no one seeks God. It says no one does good, not even one. This is surprisingly universal language. It says all of us are fools, because we have all rebelled against God. Even the best of men have acted foolishly in choosing their own way instead of God's way. How do you recognize a fool? Look in the mirror.

This realization is the first step to gaining wisdom. It is the first step towards salvation. This is why Paul quotes these verse in Romans 3:12 to show that we are all sinners. That we are all lost in our sins with no hope of gaining salvation ourselves. In our foolish nature, none of us will seek God. We need a redeemer. That is the prayer and promise of verse 7, that salvation would come! Salvation has come in Jesus Christ. And all who turn to him rejecting their own folly, trusting in his wisdom, in his life and death, can find true wisdom and salvation.

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