

READ Romans 1:18-23

One of the great struggles we face as people living in a material world is wrapping our minds around the idea that there is a being that is outside of the material world who caused everything to be. Next week, in our monthly focus lesson, we are going to talk about the rationale for God being a necessity when we consider our own existence, but today we are going to take a look at God's response when men want to ignore Him as if He is not even there.

This text of **Romans 1:18-23** is important for us to grasp because it shows us the grim consequences for men when they fail to give God the proper acknowledgement and respect that He deserves. The greatest of consequences is the revealing of His wrath against them because of their unwillingness to glorify Him as Lord and show gratitude. Some would object to such punishment as being unfair since we, being material, have not experienced the immaterial God so as to be convinced of His existence. However, Paul pushes back against that notion by recognizing God's invisible attributes, eternal power, and divine nature being evident by the surrounding creation. Therefore, as the Apostle states, those who rebel are left without excuse. Though they think themselves as wise by thinking they should only believe in that which can be seen, touched, examined, or tested, they are actually proven to be fools as they strive to live in this godless state.

This was true of the Gentile world during the days of Paul, but it has also been true for humanity as a whole throughout our history. Men have always found themselves to be foolish through striving to live as if there is no God, and even David observed this and had something to say about this in one of the Psalms that is attributed to him. **Psalm 14** shares similar language with what we have seen here in **Romans 1**, and David speaks of the fool and the godless who live as if there is no God. Our goal this morning is to see their efforts to ignore God as truly having no affect on Him, what He sees, and how He will act. Let's read this Psalm together and then consider God's point of view given what David is describing, and how it can help us be better followers of God. ***Read Psalm 14***

The language that is seen in v.2 concerning God looking down from heaven is not unique to this Psalm alone. **Psalms 33:13 & 103:19** both speak of the Lord looking down from heaven and observing mankind and what is taking place upon the earth. **Psalm 2** also speaks of God being aware of what is taking place on earth as evidenced by Him laughing at those who seek to take a stand against Him. Some have a deistic view of God which, in its classical form, believes that God created the world only to allow it to run its course without ever directly intervening in what is take place. He has simply wound up the world and has set it on its ways. I want us to be keenly aware from this text and approach this text from the standpoint of God not only seeing what is going on, but also being active in what is taking place in this world. We'll first look at what God sees, and then we'll look at how He is responding to what He sees.

Psalm 14**A. From Heaven, God Sees****1. He sees people living as if He is not real. (vv.1,3)**

- a) As the Lord looks down from His heavenly throne, He observes, as David states, a people who are living as if there is no God. David describes these people as fools, and David's own personal experience might have had something to do with the particular word that he uses in this instance. There are numerous Hebrew words that can be translated "fool", but David uses the word *nābāl* in this instance. Let's remember that David dealt with such a fool who had the name Nabal back in **I Samuel 25**, David deals with this man who is described as being "*harsh and evil in his dealings*" (**I Samuel 25:3**). Even his servants treated David as the fool is said to treat the Lord...as if he is a nobody who will do nothing. The connection between David, the incident with Nabal, and the use of this word for fool makes sense.

- b) Our minds might automatically think of the secular and atheistic society that we live in today where God is flat out denied and said to not even exist, but that simply was not the case in ancient times. They believed in the gods, but they didn't always believe that the gods cared enough about what was going on with mankind to do anything about the evil they were committing. They didn't believe they would be held accountable. Thus they had no fear of the gods in living corrupt lives that were defined by vile deeds. They were not worried about being seen by God as having all turned away and not one being found as good.
- c) This type of mindset that is seen in this Psalm can also be found in a few other places. We've already read such a mindset in **Romans 1:18-23**, but also consider what is said in **Psalm 10:3-11** concerning the mindset and corrupt behavior of the wicked man. Though he is not called such in this text, this type of man would also squarely fall under the same shameful moniker of fool as can be found in **Psalm 14**. How sad for this to be what David envisions God seeing as He looks down from heaven.

2. He sees a lack of understanding. (v.4a)

- a) David sees God, in his mind's eye, as looking upon the earth, observing what is happening down here, and shaking His head in disgust all while saying, "*Will evildoers never understand?*" The problem doesn't seem to lie in a deficiency of intelligence for later on David will write about the sinners being able to frustrate the plans of those they are oppressing. It isn't that they are mentally deficient, and it isn't as if God has not given them the ability to understand how they ought to live through design. Instead, as we consider these people as fools, we ought to see them as being willfully ignorant of a proper understanding of how they ought to behave in this life.
- b) We can again connect this into what we find Paul stating in **Romans 1:18-23**. The Gentile world is accused of suppressing the truth. What could be known about God was evident among them because God had shown it to them and they were clearly seen. They knew of God, but they refused to glorify Him or give thanks to Him for what He has done. God isn't looking down wondering if He has done enough for His creation to be able to rightfully acknowledge His existence. No, He is instead looking down disappointed that He finds people who refuse to acknowledge what He has done and show themselves as completely lacking in understanding.

3. He sees a lack of love. (v.4b)

- a) They are not only lacking in understanding, but they are also seen to be completely lacking in love based upon how they treat their fellow man. There is an animalistic flavor to the way they carelessly use, abuse, and consume others as they would even bread. This type of behavior comes to them almost as naturally as something simply as eating bread. There is no sense of value for others in the mind of an animal, but such should not be the case with humans who have been made the image their Creator. If God is love then love ought to be a motivating factor in how we treat one another as humans and imagers of God. This is clearly missing in the mind and behavior of the fool who seeks to live as if there is no God.
- b) Once again this lines up very closely with the description of the Gentile world as Paul describes in **Romans 1:18-23**. Instead of men and women seeking to give glory to God for who He is and what He has done, they resort to giving honor and glory to one another, birds, four-footed animals, and reptiles. The love they ought to be giving to the Creator and the ones created in His image is instead given to that which is so much lesser. Again, how said it must be from God's perspective to look out upon this world and see this as being the mindset and behavior of men...but He isn't going to simply sit back and watch.

B. From Heaven, God Is Active

1. He is against the evil doer. (v.5a)

- a) Though foolish men are thinking and living as if God is not real or at the very least not going to stand against them in their corrupt ways, the reality is that God is very much aware of what is taking place, and He is going to be active against the vile deeds of these foolish men. Though **v.5** might be somewhat difficult to understanding in regard to their meaning, I think the most logical understanding can be identified as God taking His own stand against the evil actions of these fools. Though they are consuming God's people like bread, and though they are frustrating the plans of those they are oppressing, God is going to even now fill them with dread because of their deeds.
- b) This is simply just the reality of living a life that is opposed to God and His will for mankind. Without God there is no feeling of outside safety or security. Everything rests and falls upon your own strength, wit, or will, and to many that is a dreadful thought because they recognize through their own failures, and the failures of others who live the same way as they do, that disaster is never far away. They recognize that such a lifestyle as they live is wholly and completely dangerous for even those they associate with are as they are... corrupt, vile, and ruthless. The writer of **Proverbs 1:8-19** certainly explains their plight well. God is not supporting them in their wickedness, and He is actually actively working against them as He seeks to support those they oppress.

2. He is supporting the righteous. (vv.5b,6b)

- a) As evildoers seek to oppress and cause harm to those they can take advantage of, we find God doing just as He is said to do time and time again...caring for those who are oppressed. Though the evildoer might consume His people like bread, David says that God is with them in their righteousness. Though the sinner seeks to frustrate the plans of God's people, God is said to be their refuge. The storms of life in the form of attacks from evildoers in various ways might rage all around God's people, but there is immense peace that is available to God's people through knowing that God is with them as their refuge.
- b) I really like the way **Psalms 34:15-18** speaks along these same lines. It adds more detail and a divinely inspired commentary on the few words that are spoken of here in **Psalms 14** concerning God's support of the righteous. Oftentimes it is better for us to simply allow for Scripture to be its best commentary, and here is a great example of such when we're thinking about God's care for His people who are suffering at the hands of evil men.

3. He will restore His people in the end. (v.7)

- a) Finally, we see David closing this Psalm on a very hopeful note. Though there has been great lament at the state of mankind, the psalm now shifts to focusing specifically upon God's deliverance of His people from the work of fools and their corrupt works. Though there is pain given by the hands of sinners for a time, there is great deliverance given from the presence of God in Zion that is coming in the future.
- b) Such hopeful statements of David are encouraged to be embraced by all of God's people. The call of the Psalmist is for all of Jacob's people to rejoice and be glad when God restores the fortunes of His people. It is quite possible, if this Psalm was written by David, that this Psalm would have been firmly planted within the minds of those Jews who were a part of the times of captivity in foreign lands. They would remember the foolish ways of their captors who doubted that God would rise up to deliver His people, lean upon God's support in their strife, and look forward in hope to their restoration to their own land. A bleak opening to this Psalm is surely overshadowed by the hopeful future of those who trust in the Lord.

Application Thoughts

A. My denial of God in word or action has no affect on His reality.

1. The fool is one who thought and lived as if there was no God who would hold him accountable for his deeds, but that did not stop dread from filling up his heart as he had nothing of substance in this life to hope and trust in. The consequences of his actions as we read from **Proverbs 1** come from the fact that those who rebel against God are going to eventually suffer the consequences for such. Try as we might to ignore God and not give any thought to Him or our accountability to Him, this is not actually going to have any bearing on Him whatsoever. God is not contingent based upon our desires or actions.
2. It is for this reason, as we might have heard it said, there will be no atheists on the judgement day. Try as they might to speak ill of the concept of there being an all-powerful Creator who is responsible for everything...Try as they might to ridicule and mock those of us who believe in God...Try as they might to scrub our society of any influence of religion and faith...Their denial of God and any denial of God that I might have is not going to have any affect at all on whether or not God is real or if He is active in this world. At the end of this reality, every single person who has either declared or denied the existence of God is going to know that He is. We who have hope will be overjoyed, and those who have denied will deny no more as their eyes behold His glory. We all would do well to remember that the only contingent element of our acknowledgment of God is whether I believe & am saved or I deny & am condemned.

B. My attitude toward God will affect my attitude and behavior toward my fellow man.

1. As is seen within this short Psalm, the strong notion of our attitude toward God influencing my attitude toward others cannot be denied, and the result that follow are very logical. If I deny the existence of God within my mind then I have no legitimate reason to give any respect or show any love towards my fellow man. It is no wonder those who say there is no God and deny any accountability toward Him treat their fellow man with such disdain and contempt as we have seen not just here in **Psalm 14** but also in **Psalm 10** & where we began in **Romans 1**. If I don't respect the fullness of God then there is absolutely no reason for me to respect those who are simply an image of who He is. If there is no one above me to whom I am accountable then there is no need for humility toward anyone else! I am top dog!
2. We would all scoff at the idea of denying God on the front end in order to mistreat our brother on the back end, but let's reverse these for a moment and recognize this truth that John so rightly establishes in his letter we know as **1st John**. There the inspired writer tells us that we cannot say that we love God if we do not love our fellow man (**I John 4:20,21**). Therefore, I might be someone who professes an acknowledgement and love for God, but if I then turn around and mistreat and show hatred towards my fellow man...I am nothing but a liar, and I actually should be counted among the fools who likewise live as if there is no God. If I want to be counted among God's people then I must recognize that any hatred towards others will logically lead to the conclusion that I do not truly recognize God as Lord in my life.

C. As much as we might suffer at the hands of godless men, God's restoration will be far more abundant.

1. Lastly, I want us to recognize from this psalm that the temporary sufferings we endure at the hands of evil and wicked men in this life do not even begin to compare to the love, grace, and mercy that God provides to us as His people. Though they might consume and frustrate us, there is nothing they do that compares to the blessings we enjoy in the Lord. His presence in our lives as a refuge in the time of trouble, trial, and storm should make any trouble instigated by men as being nothing at all in the grand scheme of our existence and our service to God as a part of His family.

2. I love the hope and confidence that David has at the end of this psalm that encourages and moves the readers to find their own great sense of joy and gladness in the Lord. I'm sure we would all agree that such is made much easier when we have the same attitude as is found in **Psalm 56:9 & 118:6** which both say in a few different words...if the Lord is on my side and I trust in Him; I will not be afraid or fearful. What can man do to me? Though we groan in this body for a short time, let's remember the words of Paul that we walk by faith and not by sight (**II Corinthians 5:1-7**). We recognize the struggles of this world, and have faith and full confidence that the glories of the next will far and away make up for the ways in which we might suffer in this one. God is faithful, and He will uphold His people in a way that far makes up for and goes beyond what we might suffer for His name!

Main Point/Conclusion: Mankind's denial of God does not stop Him from seeing their folly, holding them to account, and healing those who seek His restoration.

We must admit that we are in a world that is overrun by those who live as if there is no God. They don't believe He is real or that He will hold them accountable for their sins in the end. While we might pity them in their foolishness, we would do well to be mindful of our own actions. Though we might say we believe in God, we must be sure that our behavior is consistent with our confession. May God bless us and strengthen us to not only confess there is a God, but may He strengthen us to overcome this world so we can live out that confession, as well.