

The Wise and Foolish Heart

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Psalm 14:1-7 The fool has said in his heart, "*There is no God.*" They are corrupt, They have done abominable works, There is none who does good. ² The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men, To see if there are any who understand, who seek God. ³ They have all turned aside, They have together become corrupt; *There is none who does good, No, not one.* ⁴ Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge, Who eat up my people *as they eat bread*, And do not call on the LORD? ⁵ There they are in great fear, For God *is* with the generation of the righteous. ⁶ You shame the counsel of the poor, But the LORD *is* his refuge. ⁷ Oh, that the salvation of Israel *would come* out of Zion! When the LORD brings back the captivity of His people, Let Jacob rejoice *and* Israel be glad.

Genoa Peak is a mountain top that stands on the western border of Nevada. If you climb up to it, you can get two good views. To the west is the verdant valley, which is Lake Tahoe and beyond it California. To the east is the dry parched desert which is most of Nevada.

Now imagine yourself standing at this spot and considering which way to go. On which side do I want to build my house and make my life? Based purely on scenery, not considering the politics of California, I think most of us would agree that it would be foolish to head down into the desert instead of the greenery of the Lake Tahoe valley.

This is the heart of what Psalm 14 is getting at. There are those who turn to the west. They seek God and live in his blessings. Then there are those who turn to the east. They turn their backs on God and seek fulfillment, life, good times apart from him. They who turn their backs on God are fools.

The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God."

We often treat this phrase as a confession or a statement to be considered in a scholarly way or scientific way. Does God exist? What is the proof of his existence?

Paul reminds us in Romans that those who deny God's existence are without excuse. God has revealed his divine attributes in nature. He has also written his law in our hearts. So, we would rightly say it is foolish to deny the existence of God. The proof is all around us.

But that isn't really what this Psalm is talking about. The Psalmist says, "in his heart", what he means is what he is thinking in his inner being. He is talking about the attitude with which a person lives their life. He is talking about whether someone seeks God and his goodness or whether they turn their backs on God.

Those who say in their heart there is no God, are those who do not believe that they will have to answer for their works. They can live as they like because there is no God who will judge them. They might even give lip service to God. They might come to church. They might say the apostle's creed, but in their heart, they do not believe that they are accountable for their actions. These are they who choose not to seek God but to seek their own goodness.

YOLO, a popular internet meme, sums up the attitude which the Psalmist is expressing here. You only live once, therefore live as you want. Seek your own happiness. Don't worry about God.

Derek Kidner puts it this way: It "is not merely a sincere if misguided conviction, but an irresponsible gesture of defiance."

Such an attitude the Psalmist says is foolishness.

We can think of the two sons in the parable of the prodigal son. The younger son takes his inheritance and wastes it with sinful living, prodigal living. The elder son stays and does the will of his father.

The younger is choosing to turn his back on God. In his heart he says there is no God. There is no authority that I must answer to. I can live as I want, and I will be happy for it. That attitude is what the Psalmist calls foolishness because the younger son did not find a happier life in his prodigal living.

The Psalmist continues to discuss how this attitude leads to corruption not happiness.

Psalm 14:1 They are corrupt, They have done abominable works, There is none who does good.

James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

All goodness comes from God. God is goodness. God is the green valley. To choose God is to choose the green valley, to turn your back on God is to descend into the corruption.

You'll notice how this Psalm continually associates seeking God with goodness, and not seeking God with evil and corruption. Look at verses two and three. God looks to see if there are any who seek God, but they have all turned aside. That is, they have turned away from God. They have said in their hearts there is no God. They have become corrupt.

We mentioned before the parable of the prodigal son. Back in verse one we read "abominable works." This phrase is the Hebrew equivalent of prodigal. They have chosen the wasteful living of that younger son.

All good things come from God. To turn your back on God is to waste all the goodness that he has given to you. Turning your back on God leads inevitably to corruption. This is the foolishness the Psalm speaks about.

The "proof" of God's existence which the psalm points to is the emptiness of a life without him and the blessedness of walking with God. The Bible repeatedly calls on us to test the goodness of God.

**Psalm 34:8 Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good;
Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!**

**Psalm 2 reminds us that the righteous are "like a tree
planted by the rivers of water . . . The ungodly are not so"**

Psalm 50:15 Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me."

Romans 2:4 Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

Again, and again God invites us to taste of his goodness and in that tasting learn that he is the one who is good and is therefore alone God.

When we think again of those two sons in the parable of the prodigal son, it can be tempting to see the path of the elder as boring and the path of the younger as exciting. But God warns that there is no goodness in the path of the young. It is the path of foolishness.

4 Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge, Who eat up my people as they eat bread, And do not call on the LORD? 5 There they are in great fear, For God is with the generation of the righteous.

You may remember that iconic scene in Jerry Maguire where Renee Zellweger comments, "First class . . . It used to be a better meal now it's a better life."

The most compelling of all the illusions of this world are the lives of the rich and famous, the powerful, the popular. Look at how happy they seem. Look how many things they have. Look at their lives, surely there is goodness (happiness / joy) in those lives.

Yet the Lord warns of the foolishness and emptiness of such a life. That this to is a foolish choice.

God does not refer here to all the rich and powerful, but to those who have made themselves wealthy by exploiting their neighbors. There are those who have received wealth / power / fame through following the Lord. Abraham, David, Daniel are some biblical examples. Such men have not turned their back on God. They have not said in their hearts, "there is no God." These are not the ones that God is talking about in these verses.

Here God speaks of those who seek riches above all else, "they eat up my people." They exploit the poor for their own gains. They gain wealth by stepping on the backs of others.

The difference is not the wealth. The difference is those who seek God and his goodness and those who turn their back on God.

Those who turn their back on God though they may outwardly have the semblance of a good life, they live in "great fear." Though they tell themselves that they do not have to worry about God, nevertheless their conscience does not give them peace. They live in fear of others doing to them what they did to others.

This lifestyle although it has the outward appearance of a happy or blessed life is foolishness / emptiness.

**7 Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion!
When the LORD brings back the captivity of His people,
Let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad.**

Goodness cannot come from man. There is no goodness anywhere in the world. Therefore, the psalmist looks to mount Zion, to the temple. He looks for the goodness that God has promised in the coming of the Messiah. He waits for God's goodness because he knows that is the only place he will find it.

We have been talking as though there are two types of people; those who choose to seek God and those who turn their backs on God. In reality the Psalm makes it clear that

all would choose the way of the fool. All would choose the path of the younger son. “They have all gone astray.”

Yet the Lord has promised goodness despite our foolish attitude. The Messiah has come out of Zion. The younger and the elder sons both receive forgiveness from the Father. We in our foolishness have turned our back on him. Yet in his everlasting love the Father has embraced us again as sons.

It is foolish to say in your heart there is no God; I have to get mine while the getting is good. The salvation of the Lord has come out of Zion and the promises of the Lord will be fulfilled. Look to the Lord for goodness. Amen