

THE FOOL
Psalm 14

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As governor from the state of Minnesota, Jesse Ventura, stated in an interview with a risqué magazine that organized religion – that’s you, that’s me, that’s church – is “a sham and a crutch for the weak-minded.” **The *American Atheist Magazine* applauded his statement, declaring, “America finally may have a politician who is able to speak his mind honestly, and not be captive to spin-doctors and poll watchers. And atheists finally have a leading political figure who isn’t afraid to use the ‘A-word.’”** (www.americanatheist.org/action/)

Perhaps Jesse’s illustrious career of bashing brains and sailing suplexes didn’t prepare him for the difficult task of gubernatorial governing. It seems like Jesse has jumped off a top rope one time too many with his verbal spiel. Perhaps he never made the transition from a raving wrestler – where you can put your mouth in gear without ever engaging your brain – to being a polished politician where measuring one’s words is a must for success. While he might have been hailed by the atheist magazine for his disparaging remarks on those of us who worship, his approval rating fell an unheard of 19 points overnight.

What does God’s word say about those who deny the spiritual realm of life, those who have no place for God and no place for God’s people?

An atheist in Amarillo wrote this to one of the ministers of First Baptist Church. He said, **“You pray that God will reveal himself to me. Well of course the mythical God of the Christian religion is unable to reveal himself to anyone. This mythical God cannot answer any prayer, cannot stop hurricanes, tornadoes, flood, earth quakes, volcanoes or any of the destructive forces of nature as you well know. Neither can this imagined God stop cancer, AIDS, heart troubles and the other diseases that plague the human race, in fact this make-believe God cannot even cure a simple cold....all the praying in the world cannot change what nature does. Nature can be rewarding or can be destructive. Nature is blind and without reason....praying changes nothing and preachers secretly (*sic*) know this....What I have said here is the truth and no man can prove me otherwise. The chips will have to fall where they may and the guilty are the ones who will resent what I have said....”**

Yes, God’s word does address those who deny His existence.

But scripture doesn’t say nearly as much about the subject as we might think. The Bible begins in Genesis 1:1 where it states that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The Bible goes on to deliver its message with the assumption that God exists. That God doesn’t exist isn’t

even a possibility. So it's interesting to see today that the only thing God has to say about the atheist in the entirety of scripture is that he is a fool.

I want to say several things about the atheist – the one who declares there is no God.

I. I'd like to say that atheism is without any intellectual integrity.

The psalmist says as much in verse 4.
Do all the workers of wickedness not know...

One translation says "Have they no knowledge?" The atheist thinks that he knows so much when, in fact, God says he is a fool. The atheist thinks that he knows so much that he can turn his back on the mystery of God.

Atheism is a dead-end street intellectually. Atheism offers no real answers for the mystery of the universe, the meaning of man's life on earth. The fact that we're here, the fact that the earth exists demands an explanation. To believe for one moment that the universe, which displays as much intricacy and beauty and complexity and power as our universe does, simply made itself is sheer insanity. Being an atheist requires way more blind faith than being a believer. Do you know of anything else that has made itself?

Professor Edwin Conklin, a distinguished Princeton University biologist, once wrote, "The probability of life originating from an accident is comparable to the probability of the unabridged dictionary resulting from an explosion in a printing factory."

Allan Sandage, a scientist, started out as an atheist but turned to belief in God as the only answer to the universe's mysteries. Sandage, a world-renown astronomer who first discovered how fast the universe is expanding and how old it is, was posing questions like, "Why is there something rather than nothing?" And his empirical inquiry would yield no meaningful answers. "It was my science," he notes, "that drove me to the conclusion that the world is much more complicated than can be explained by science." Sandage, after attacking the foundations of religion for years, says that science now really bolsters faith. For example, Sandage says the universe seems specifically designed by a designer for life. Physical constraints, such as the strength of gravity, the mass of the proton, and the charge of electrons, appear so finely tuned that even the smallest variations will prohibit the existence of life. Such fine-tuning strongly implies some intelligent agent to act as tuner. And such intelligence implies a purpose to our existence. ("God in a test tube?" *Current Thoughts and Trends*, May 1999, p. 4)

Yes, the atheist has no intellectual integrity. The design has to have a designer. The motion has to have a first mover. These people, God says, are fools.

Fool is the Bible's most contemptuous term. The fool is a person who doesn't know what's going on in the cosmos. As Eugene Peterson has said, the fool is not a person who is ignorant and searching, not a person who is lost and looking. The fool doesn't know that he doesn't know what

is going on. In fact, the atheist – the fool – thinks he knows it all, that he has it all figured out, that he has the dope, that he knows the ropes.

It doesn't take an Einstein to look at the movement in a human hand, at the mystery of life, to watch a woman carrying and bearing a child to know that the beauty and mystery of creation has not just happened. Everything is perfect. The gravitational constant is perfect. The ratio of carbon to oxygen is perfect. The mass of a proton is perfect. The temperature range is just perfect because the distance to the sun is perfect. The size of the earth is perfect. The rotational speed is perfect. Put another way, if you're going to try to maintain an atheistic stance with any intellectual integrity, you've got a lot of explaining – boy, have you got a lot of explaining to do.

The fool has said in his heart there is no God.

I would say the atheist has more blind faith in his pseudo-science than we have in our informed faith.

II. The second thing I want to say is this: The atheist has no moral foundation from which to live a good life.

It is common to hear people say, “No one should impose their moral views on others, because everyone has the right to find truth inside him or herself.” This belief leaves the speaker open to a series of very uncomfortable questions. Aren't there people in the world who are doing things you believe are *wrong* – things that they should stop doing no matter what they personally believe about the correctness of their behavior? If you do (and everyone does!), doesn't that mean you *do* believe that there is some kind of moral standard that people should abide by regardless of their individual convictions? This raises a question. Why is it impossible (in practice) for anyone to be a consistent moral relativist even when they claim that they are? The answer is that we all have a pervasive, powerful, and unavoidable belief not only in moral values but also in moral *obligation*. (Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God*, p. 151)

If there is no God, then there is no way to say any one action is “Moral” and another “immoral” but only “I like this.” If that is the case, who gets the right to put their subjective, arbitrary moral feelings into law? You may say “the majority has the right to make the law,” but do you mean that then the majority has the right to vote to exterminate a minority? If you say “No, that is wrong,,” then you are back to square one. “Who sez” that the majority has a moral obligation not to kill the minority? Why should your moral convictions be obligatory for those in opposition? Why should your view prevail over the will of the majority? The fact is, says Arthur Leff, late Yale Law professor, if there is no God, then all moral statements are arbitrary, all moral valuations are subjective and internal, and there can be no external moral standard by which a person's feelings and values are judged. Yet Leff ends this intellectual essay in a most shocking way: *All things are now, everything is up for grabs. Nevertheless: napalming babies is bad. Starving the poor is wicked. Buying and selling each other is depraved.... There is such a thing as evil. All together now: Sez Who? God help us.* (Tim Keller, *The Reason for God*, p. 159)

The people of God know what is absolutely wrong. “Thou shalt not kill” – that is wrong. “Thou shalt not steal” – that is wrong. “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” We know that because there is a God – a God who created us, a God who created the universe, a God who has said, “Hey, these are the rules. These are the moral absolutes.” The atheist, instead, is floating in a sea of subjectivity with no place to turn and no moral imperatives by which to govern life.

Notice what happens to this atheist in verse 1b

They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; there is no one who does good.

In verse 2, we have God looking down from heaven upon the sons of men. It’s almost a mockery to the atheist. The atheist who says there is no God on the throne is now being watched by Yahweh Himself. God, still on the throne, looks down from the superior position – looks down on the atheist in his inferior position – to see if the atheist understands, to see if he’ll seek after God.

But no, look at verse 3.

They have all turned aside together; together they have become corrupt. There is no one who does good, not even one.

Look at verse 4.

Do all the workers of wickedness not know, who eat up my people – God’s people – as they eat bread.

Yes, when there is no God then there is no respect for the life that God has created. We quickly tumble down a slippery slope that says, “All I really care for in life is to have my own needs fulfilled.”

If there is no God, we set ourselves free from all dependency. We are really the lord of reality. We find that we can make people respond to our desires, acquiring skills that put us in control of situations – nothing to relate to but ourselves.

The psalmist declares it fiercely as an indictment. “They eat up my people as they eat up bread.” Cannibals. They treat other people as consumer goods. It leads to social oppression. The self begins to make its own rules and satisfy its own compulsions. There is no God. There is no moral absolute. There are no rules. The social result is, according to the psalmist, the people around us become as food. They are there to fulfill our needs.

You see, there is a myth going around that what I believe in my own heart is nobody else’s business. But it really is, because what I think about in my heart shapes the way that I act in society. If I am an atheist in my heart, making myself sovereign in the place of God and, therefore, arranging things in accordance with my appetites and needs and fantasies, I become a pirate in society. I relentlessly look for ways in which I can get what is there for my own uses with no regard for what anyone else gets. I have become a cancer to society.

The atheist doesn’t know how to live. Is lying wrong or right? How does the atheist know? There is no God to speak. Is truth good or bad? The atheist does not know. He can sign a contract one day and break his word the next because there is no God to say that lying is wrong. Should he

feed the poor and care for those who are in need? No need to. There is no God watching after them.

One of the largest emphases of this psalm is that God takes care of the poor. The atheist, those who devour the poor, cannot overcome God.

Look at verse 6.

You (atheist) would put to shame the counsel of the afflicted, but the Lord is his refuge.

Verse 7.

Oh, that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion! When the Lord restores His captive people, Jacob will rejoice, Israel will be glad.

It's funny. You know, Christians used to be called atheists because they didn't accept all the gods of the Greco-Roman world (see John 4:22). They simply believed in the one God. And since we denied the existence of all the false gods and stood for the one creator God, the one saving God, Christians initially, in the Greco-Roman world, were sometimes deemed atheists. Julian the Apostate, who hated Christians and did his best to discredit them, called them "godless Galileans." But notice what he was forced to say about them: Christians "feed not only their poor (Christian poor) but ours also."

Yes, ultimately the atheist is floating in a sea of subjectivity with no moral anchor. They are adrift at sea, a selfish sea that ultimately leads to the worship of self.

III. There is a third thing I want to say. The atheist, though he or she claims not, actually is a worshipper – but they are really just a worshipper of self.

Have you ever noticed how much the atheist tries to imitate the church? Religion? There is an atheist Bible that exists. If you're an atheist, why do you need a Bible? The Atheist Alliance itself declares atheism is a human centered vision. Yes, the atheist worships. He just ends up worshipping himself.

I don't know about you, but I'm certainly not worthy of worship. In fact, there is an atheist church. There is a North Texas Church of Freethought as an atheist alternative. It's called a fellowship of unbelievers. It's amazing how much the terms of the Christian community – terms like fellowship and Bible and evangelism and outreach – are all used and employed by the atheist. They even have youth ministers. They meet on Sunday. Why would an atheist who didn't believe in God, much less that Jesus was the Son of God, worship on the day of the Resurrection?

And what do they do at this "church service" where they worship themselves? **They try to "self actualize" and "develop a greater awareness of the vast spectrum of thought and feeling connected with the human condition." It's in the Dallas/Fort Worth area. By the way, just like a church they'll take a tax deductible donation. They have membership. (www.church.freethought.org/intro.html)**

Dan Barker calls for evangelistic atheism, where atheists are trained how to engage a believer, much like a believer is trained how to lead someone to Christ. (www.infidels.org/org/ffrf/fttoday/back/evangel.html)

Yes, everywhere we turn and everywhere we look, we see that the atheist, indeed, does worship. Indeed, does have church. It's just a church that's not centered on God, but centered on self. It's a worship not of the Creator, but rather a worship of the creature.

In fact, would you believe that **Ellen Johnson, once president of American Atheists said at the 25th National Convention – by the way, they have conventions, too, just like churches – she had devoted her life to “share the good news of Atheism.” (www.americanatheist.org/conv25/ejohnson.html)** That is to say, like the church spreading the story of Jesus, she is spreading the good news of the gospel of atheism.

Yes, indeed, the atheist begins to worship himself or herself. Humanity worshipping humanity.

IV. The final thing I want to say about the atheist is this: the psalmist is not simply concerned with the overt, cold and calculating atheist. In fact, he's most concerned not with the Ellen Johnsons of the world but, rather, the one who is an atheist not so much by word but an atheist by deed.

Notice, the fool has said in his heart there is no God.

None in this building would dare stand and declare the absence of God, like Ellen Johnson. But do we declare the absence of God subtly? What's the difference between the atheist who would not dream of sending any of his money to support the cause of Christ and those who claim to follow Christ but don't? What's the difference between the atheist who doesn't believe the Bible and the Christian who never reads it or studies it? What's the difference between the atheist who wouldn't dream of gathering together on the Resurrection Day to worship the God of the resurrection and Christians who neglect the gathering together with the people of God? What's the difference between the atheist who is a man of the world and a church member who lives like a man of the world?

In fact, it's interesting to note that Ellen Johnson, former president of American Atheists, pointed her finger at so-called believers – and in this case, my friend, she told the truth – that attendance at church has never been over 50 percent of the American population. She said that it is an indictment of God's people that, and I quote, **“America's families just do not care enough to take their children to church.” (www.americanatheist.org/conv25/ejohnson.html)**

Wow! In other words, this queen of atheists is pointing her finger at us and saying “You don't really believe in God. If you did, you'd be in God's house.”

Congregation, we're speechless to respond because she is right. She is saying the same thing the psalmist is saying, and that is this: by our actions, by what we give our time to and our tithe to, our gifts to shows what we really believe. What have we said, not with our mouth, but what have we said with our heart?

It's the quiet and unobtrusive atheism – not the Jesse Ventura's who denounce the Bride of Christ, the church, like a babbling politician – it's the quiet and unobtrusive atheism that never calls attention to itself. They never say with their mouths, "There is no God." To the contrary, with their mouths they say what everybody else says about God. But it's their hearts that say there is no God. It's their actions.

Heart atheism, unlike head atheism, doesn't bother really to deny God's existence with logical arguments. All that is necessary is to take the power away from God by not putting Him first in our lives – just as long as He doesn't impinge or bother our own sovereignty.

You see, heart-atheism doesn't bother to protest God's existence with denunciatory speeches. That takes too much effort. It's not even necessary. All that is necessary is to really, in the quietness of your heart, ignore God and ignore God's people, the church. Establish yourself at the center. Arrange everything – people, events, God – all around yourself in such a way that no matter what happens, your self is right.

Gipson Arnold, an atheist, was posed the question: What if you are wrong. What if a God of scripture really does exist? He responded: "If the Bible is true, my fate will be to spend eternity in Hell....As I go through life, I worry about the possibility of going to hell about as often as I worry about the possibility of an elephant falling on me as I shop at the mall." (www.hti.net/www/atheism/t_bquest.html)

The atheist in Amarillo who wrote one of the ministers of our church has passed away. And now he knows that it is the fool who has said in his heart, "There is no God."

What about you? What are you saying – not so much with your verbiage, but what are you saying with your life? What are you saying with your time, your talents? What are you saying by the ordering and prioritizing of things in your life?

It is the fool who has not centered his life upon God.

(Some thoughts and ideas from Eugene Peterson, *Where Your Treasure Is*, page 111-125)