

# “Who, Me?”—A Reality Check of the Human Condition

Psalm 14

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**Main idea:** Though all of humanity is totally depraved and deserving of judgment, there is hope in the salvation of the Lord.

For the choir director. *A Psalm of David.*

The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God.”  
They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds;  
There is no one who does good.  
<sup>2</sup>The LORD has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men  
To see if there are any who understand,  
Who seek after God.  
<sup>3</sup>They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt;  
There is no one who does good, not even one.

<sup>4</sup>Do all the workers of wickedness not know,  
Who eat up my people *as* they eat bread,  
*And* do not call upon the Lord?  
<sup>5</sup>There they are in great dread,  
For God is with the righteous generation.  
<sup>6</sup>You would put to shame the counsel of the afflicted,  
But the LORD is his refuge.

<sup>7</sup>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.

## Introduction:

Many people celebrated Halloween a few days ago. Television stations played marathons of horror movies featuring all sorts of cooky to creepy fake monsters. People dressed up in scary costumes of fake monsters. Many people went to haunted houses to have fun being scared by fake monsters.

But Psalm 14 tells us something we don’t really want to hear. It tells us that monsters are real—spiritual monsters, that is. They are all around us every day. Driving next to us on the road, working in the cubicle beside us, sitting next to us every place we go. And even more scary, in our natural state—apart from the regenerating work of Christ in our hearts—the spiritual monster is us.

- **Thomas Boston**—He (man) is **a spiritual monster!** His heart is where his feet should be—fixed on the earth. His heels are lifted up against heaven—which his heart should be set on. His face is

towards hell; his back is towards heaven; and therefore God calls him to “turn.” He loves what he should hate; and hates what he should love. He joys in what he ought to mourn for; and mourns for what he should rejoice in; glorieth in his shame, and is ashamed of his glory; abhors what he should desire; and desires what he should abhor.<sup>1</sup>

You won't be surprised to hear that this kind of description of human beings in our natural state is not exactly embraced by our world today. This is offensive stuff. Psalm 14 is offensive to our prideful sensibilities. This psalm is one of the most comprehensive descriptions of the total depravity of mankind in the entire Bible. This is the doctrine that mankind is **not** basically good, but essentially evil apart from God's supernatural work in us. This is a doctrine that was taught in the Old Testament and the New Testament by people like David, Isaiah, Paul, and Jesus, Himself. Total depravity doesn't mean that we are all as bad as we could be, but that every part of us (our body, mind, will, emotions, motivations, and spirit) has been infected by sin. And therefore, we all stand deserving of judgment.

This is our nature inherited from Adam—and it's a scary thing. And in Psalm 14, David lays it out bare before us. He offends us because we need to hear it, he warns us because we need to wake up, but he also gives us hope that there is a remedy for this wicked nature of ours. Though by nature we are all radically depraved, it is possible to be among God's people; to be part of the righteous generation; to have God as your refuge; to know His salvation and restoration.

**Main idea:** Though all of humanity is totally depraved and deserving of judgment, there is hope in the salvation of the Lord.

We can look at this psalm from the perspective of three simple exhortations:

- A. Don't be a fool: A description of depravity (vv.1-3)
- B. Don't be ignorant: A consideration of consequences (vv.4-6)
- C. Don't be hopeless: A reason for rejoicing (v.7)

## Exposition:

### A. Don't be a fool: A description of depravity (vv.1-3)

In these first three verses, David laments the prevalence of the wickedness he sees around him and in the world. He speaks first for himself and what he sees of the fool's heart and life. Then, he tells us how the Lord also looks at and examines humanity and what the Lord's conclusion is.

#### 1. The fool's heart and life (v.1)

<sup>1</sup>The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God."

David starts by describing the attitude of the fool. Fool (נָכַח) is used throughout the Old Testament, not usually to describe someone who is intellectually slow, uneducated, or stupid. Rather, the “**fool**” is someone who chooses the ways of the world over the ways of God—someone whose life is characterized by going their own way, being taken in by temptation, and who does not give heed to God.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Boston, *Human Nature in its Fourfold State*

- **Isaiah 32:6**—For a fool speaks nonsense, And his heart inclines toward wickedness: To practice ungodliness and to speak error against the LORD, To keep the hungry person unsatisfied And to withhold drink from the thirsty.

The fool says, **“There is no God.”** So, the fools are atheists. But what kind of atheists are they? For many of us, atheists are people who do not believe that God exists at all.

But David probably never even met anyone who said they believed in nature, science, or whatever, but not in God. The atheists described in this psalm are not true atheists, in that sense, who actually deny the existence of God. They are not intellectuals who sit down and debate God philosophically and intellectually. They are practical atheists, as the rest of the psalm goes on to describe. Their atheism is an act of the will. They choose to live *as if* there is no God. They don’t care that there is a God. In their minds, they are not accountable to Him.

The existence of God and their accountability to Him does not come into play when they conduct business—honesty and integrity before Him don’t matter. God’s existence doesn’t come into play in how they talk to their wives, husbands, or children. God’s existence doesn’t come into play when browsing the internet or the television. God’s existence doesn’t come into play when thinking about how to spend their hard-earned money. And it’s not because they don’t know that God exists, but because they choose not to pay attention to the God whom they know does exist.

- **Job 21:14-15**—They say to God, “Depart from us! We do not even desire the knowledge of Your ways.  
<sup>15</sup> Who is the Almighty, that we should serve Him, And what would we gain if we entreat Him?”

They are atheists because they choose their will over God’s will.

And notice, they say that there is no God **“in their heart.”** That means their hearts and mouths may not match.

- **John Calvin**—They may not utter this detestable blasphemy, There is no God, with their mouths; but the unbridled licentiousness of their life loudly and distinctly declares that in their hearts, which are destitute of all godliness, they soothingly sing to themselves this song.<sup>2</sup>

They might say they believe in God. They might talk theology for hours. They might sing hymns with the voice of an angel. They might pray with sublime eloquence. They might teach a small group. They might preach from a pulpit. They might do all of this and more but still in their heart say, **“There is no God.”** That is, despite what they say, in their hearts, they have no true love for God or His people, or true compassion and mercy for the hurting and afflicted, or true desire for Christlikeness in their lives.

And how do they live? What are their lives characterized by? Moral bankruptcy; moral perversion:

- a. *“They are corrupt” (v.1a)*—literally to spoil or ruin something. Their insides are spoiled, rotten, poisoned.

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<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on Psalms*

- b. They commit "*abominable deeds*" (v.1b)—Their wicked deeds are what come out of what is rotten on the inside. And those deeds are abominable. They are detestable deeds in the eyes of God. They are corrupt on the inside, and this corruption flows out in their lives and affects everyone around them. They spoil whatever surrounds them, like a drop of poison in a bowl of soup.

This is exactly what Jesus said:

- o **Matthew 7:20-23**—That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. <sup>21</sup> For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, <sup>22</sup> deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. <sup>23</sup> All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.
- c. "*There is no one who does good.*" (v.1c)—David looks for righteousness; for goodness—and he is at a loss. He can't find any true goodness. They are corrupt, practicing abominable deeds in the eyes of God, and failing to do good. This is what David sees all around him—even among his own people.

## 2. The Lord's examination (v.2)

<sup>2</sup> The LORD has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God.

David says that the Lord looks down from heaven. He leans over, as it were, to look at and examine the hearts of all people everywhere across this world. What is He looking for? He is looking for any people at all who "**understand**"—that is, any who are wise, or who have wisdom. People who realize that God is there, God is powerful, God is to be known and obeyed.

He is looking for any people at all who "**seek after God**"—that is, is there anyone who responds to what is obvious: that there is a God with whom we have to do? And how, therefore, can I know Him and live for Him? Is there anyone who desires to live according to God's will and Word. Is there anyone following Him?

This language evokes earlier occasions of God looking and assessing mankind:

- **Genesis 11:5**—The LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.
- **Genesis 18:16-33**—Then the men rose up from there, and looked down toward Sodom.... <sup>21</sup> "I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me."

## 3. The Lord's conclusion (v.3)

So, David pictures God looking down on the whole earth, and what does He see?

- "They have all turned aside."
- "Together they have become corrupt."
- "There is no one who does good, not even one."

Again, these words evoke passages in Genesis:

- **Genesis 6:5**—Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.
- **Genesis 6:11-12**—Now the earth was corrupt [same word as Ps.14 -שחת- ] in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence. <sup>12</sup> God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.

This is not a good assessment of mankind. Everyone is going the wrong way—away from God. Everyone has become corrupt. Not one is doing good. Wickedness and sin are everywhere and in everyone.

This, of course, is what Paul was trying to make very clear 1,000 years later in Romans 3:10-18:

- **Romans 3:10-18**—“THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; <sup>11</sup> THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; <sup>12</sup> ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.” <sup>13</sup> “THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING,” “THE POISON OF ASPES IS UNDER THEIR LIPS”; <sup>14</sup> “WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS”; <sup>15</sup> “THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD, <sup>16</sup> DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS, <sup>17</sup> AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN.” <sup>18</sup> “THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES.”

You say, wait a minute. There are many atheists, unbelievers, people of different religions and no religion who do very, very good things. They help others, they work for peace, they educate, etc.

But this statement doesn't mean that people can't do good deeds. What it means is that we can never do anything good enough to satisfy God. He demands perfection. And all our righteous deeds are tainted by our sin. We can never do anything all for his glory.

### Illustration

It's like we keep trying to turn in counterfeit money as if it's the real thing, but it keeps getting rejected. We try to perfect the color, the font, the art. We work tirelessly at the small details and spacing of markings, and the holographs. And our money is rejected every time because we don't realize that we print all our money on construction paper, and we do that because that's the only kind of paper we have. We can't counterfeit true goodness because even our righteous deeds are filthy rags, stained with sin, inevitably infected with our inward corruption (*Is.64:6*).

### Application

Are you trusting in your own goodness? Jesus said that no one is good except God. Did He forget about you? The fact is, whatever good things you have done in your life; whatever good things you will do tomorrow to help others or better society—go ahead and please do them. But, beware of thinking that they merit you anything before God. They are and will be tainted with sin. Your only hope and my only hope is to trust in the work of Christ alone. He, being God, is good and perfect; and He lived a good and perfect life in our place. Don't be a fool. Trust in what He has already done, in His merits, in His righteousness.

## B. Don't be ignorant: A consideration of consequences (vv.4-6)

David moves now from describing the depravity and practical atheism of the unbelieving human race to describing their ignorance, their coming judgment, and the vindication of the righteous.

### 1. The ignorance of the wicked (v.4)

<sup>4</sup> Do all the workers of wickedness not know, who eat up my people as they eat bread, and do not call upon the Lord?

Do they not know? Not know what? What are they ignorant of? First, they are ignorant that they are sinning at all. They are totally blind to the fact that what they are doing is sinful, wicked, evil in the eyes of God.

Second, they are ignorant of the consequences of their sinful behavior. They know that they are defying God and living in disobedience, but they are ignorant about how God will respond.

Third, they are ignorant of God, in general. They lack a factual knowledge of God—of His greatness, omniscience, and holiness. But they also lack the experiential knowledge of God that comes from having a relationship with Him and leads to loving obedience to Him. Unlike the righteous, they don't know God to be a refuge, a helper, a king, a shepherd, a savior.

They are ignorant. But they are not innocently ignorant. It is not just that they have never been taught or never been fortunate enough to hear the truth. They are willfully ignorant, intentionally ignorant, defiantly ignorant. They refuse the truth; they refuse knowledge—and prefer instead to continue proudly in ignorance. In their minds, ignorance is bliss because ignorance allows them to live life their way.

#### a. They persecute God's people (v.4b)

Living life their way includes persecuting God's people, the righteous. The ones whose heart was wicked and sinful, just like everyone else's, but whom God cleansed, forgave, changed, and declared righteous. The unbelieving eat up God's people as if they are eating bread. Bread was the most common food in the daily lives of the Jews. It was their staple; they ate it every day and thought nothing of it. That is how the wicked persecute the righteous—without a thought; it's just natural to them, like eating bread.

#### b. They choose not to call upon the Lord (v.4c)

They choose to not **"call upon the Lord"** (v.4c). It's not that they don't know how to call upon the Lord, it's that they don't want to. That is, they choose not to seek Him, not to repent, not to pray from the heart, not to walk in obedience to His commands. They remain intentionally, willfully, purposefully, ignorant.

## 2. The judgment of the wicked (vv.5-6)

David looks ahead to the future. Though the fools, the wicked, do not know what is coming, the righteous do. David sees the wicked there, on that day, standing in great dread. Literally, “they will fear with great fear, or be terrified with a great terror.” In dread of what? Terrified of what? In dread of the righteous judgment of God. Other psalms tell of that judgment as being carried out by God’s anointed, by the Messiah to come:

- **Psalm 2:12**—Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way, For His wrath may soon be kindled.
- **Psalm 110:5-6**—The Lord is at Your right hand; He will shatter kings in the day of His wrath. <sup>6</sup> He will judge among the nations, He will fill them with corpses, He will shatter the chief men over a broad country.

On that day, the unbelieving will suddenly realize and understand the truth—they have been fools in living life without thought of God, and now it is too late. They will stand there terrified of the wrath of the Lamb when they are declared guilty before the Holy One.

### Illustration

Imagine you are a college student. And you are taking a class from a professor you don’t think much of. You don’t like him, and you think his assignments are stupid and pointless. So, you willfully choose not to keep up in your reading for a class, not to ever study, not to do his assignments, not to even think about the class because you think the professor or teacher is a pushover. Then, one day, this professor hands out a test that will determine your whole grade, and you are caught totally off-guard. You look at the test, and you have no clue, and it’s impossible to cheat, and you turn in a blank sheet. You made a series of very foolish decisions to willfully ignore the professor.

In the same way, living life as if God does not exist and as if you are not accountable to Him is the height of foolishness. Some of the biggest brains in the world have proven themselves to be fools in this way. Don’t imitate them.

## 3. The vindication of the righteous (vv.5-6)

But what a contrast there is with the righteous on that day. Then unbelievers will see that those they had been persecuting, afflicting, and putting to shame will be vindicated. They will see that God is with the righteous generation; He has been their refuge all along, and He is their refuge also in the judgment. They need not fear, for God is with them, and God has dealt with their sins. The wicked and unbelieving will find that they have no refuge. All their sin, all their defiance, all their ignoring of God will be laid bare, and because their sin has not been dealt with, they will pay the eternal consequences of it.

The righteous will be vindicated. Therefore, don’t be hopeless.

### B. Don’t be hopeless: A reason for rejoicing (v.7)

And now, all this pontificating on the universal wickedness of unbelieving men and women makes David long for and pray for the salvation of the Lord.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

Zion is a reference to Jerusalem. David prays that God would save from the place where His name dwells. He puts confidence in God to restore His captive people. He looks forward to God fulfilling His promise to vindicate His people, to deliver them, to restore them, to save them.

This is the expectation of the Old Testament saints for the promised deliverer, the Messiah. The One who would crush the head of the serpent who has been opposing God and His people since the garden; the One who would come as a prophet like Moses, but greater by far; the One who would come and rule from David's throne forever and ever; the One who would come and save His people from their sins.

David longed for that day—for Messiah to come—and so did Hezekiah, Josiah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and all the prophets. They knew that when that day came—when He came—then there would be rejoicing and gladness such as has never been seen!

And He has come! God answered David's prayer and the hope of all the Old Testament saints. We live on the other side of the coming of the salvation promised to God's people. Christ Jesus has come and finished the work He came to do to save us. He gave up His perfect life on the cross and rose from the dead so that whoever believes in Him need not fear the judgment that He will bring when He comes again. Salvation has come in Jesus, and salvation and judgment are coming in Jesus.

## Conclusion:

We are left then, at the end of this psalm, with two options: When Jesus Christ comes again as the anointed Messiah of God and Judge of all mankind, will you be terrified, or will you rejoice?

You will be rightly terrified if you live like the fool described here. That is, if, in your heart, you say, "There is no God." If you live life without thought or care of God, if you choose your own way rather than His, if you refuse to acknowledge that you are the wicked, the sinner, the rebel, and if you refuse to repent of your sin and trust completely in Jesus as your Savior and Lord, then on that day you will stand terrified before Him.

But, if you have come to the place where you can admit that your heart is all wrong by nature; that you are that spiritual monster; a doer of abominable deeds; corrupt and selfish to the core; a sinful, defiant, rebel towards your Creator; and truly capable of any sin. If you have realized that you must have a heart transplant, and you have repented of that sin and have placed faith solely and wholly in Jesus Christ, making Him your refuge, then on that day, you will rejoice and be glad forever for "*there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*" (Rom.8:1).

And here and now, in thankfulness to God for that unbreakable security, let us love Him and serve Him with greater fervor and passion and zeal.

Amen.



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