

The Folly of a Fool

Psalm 53:1-6

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Introduction: “Say it again” is the title one pastor used to introduce this Psalm, because it is almost identical to Psalm 14. Yet the headings are different: “*To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David*” (Psalm 14); & “*To the chief Musician upon Mahalath, Maschil, A Psalm of David*” (Psalm 53). “*Mahalath*” probably refers to the name of a tune or instrument; “*Maschil*” is defined as contemplation or instruction. Though very similar in content, there are differences. Some would suggest a much later writing for Psalm 53, perhaps in response to the deliverance from the Assyrian leader Sennacherib during the reign of Hezekiah (see II Chronicles 32:1-23). But it seems best to take it as also written by David, sometime later during his reign as king. Different circumstances account for the differences of the psalms. Yet the common theme of both is the depravity & foolishness of mankind, in David’s time & down to today. It is also suggested that David is reflecting on his experience with “*Nabal*” (I Samuel 25). He is described as *churlish & evil in his doings*” reflecting his name which means “fool.” Let’s compare & contrast Psalms 14 & 53 as we look at Psalm 53 in more detail tonight.

I. The **definition** of a fool (:1a) >

A. “*Kesyl*” – the dull, stupid fool.

B. “*Ewiy*” – the unreasonable, perverted fool.

C. “*Nabal*” – (used here) – the brutish person who is like a stubborn animal (cf. I Samuel 25:3 & 25, the man named “*Nabal*.”).

Summary: The fool is “one who is morally perverse, not mentally deficient” (Ryrie). See Isaiah 32:5-6, where the same word is translated “*vile person*.”

Application: “*Nabal* fools are self-righteous & don’t need or want God. They want to live their own lives the way they please. Their problem is willful ignorance & not lack of normal intelligence” (Wiersbe). [Illustration from Billy Sunday.]

II. The **declaration** of a fool (:1b) >

A. “*In his heart*” – not just the seat of one’s feelings, but the seat of will, intellect, & emotion. “It seems here to refer to the evil thoughts & surmises of a depraved & atheistical mind” (Plumer).

B. “*No God*” – One who wishes there was no God. “The fool cannot satisfy himself that there is no God, but he wishes there were none, & pleases himself with the fancy that it is possible there may be none; he cannot be *sure* there is one, & therefore he is willing to *think there is none*” (Matthew Henry).

Summary: “To say there is no God is to belie the plainest evidence, which is obstinacy; to oppose the common consent of mankind, which is stupidity; to stifle consciousness, which is madness” (Spurgeon).

III. The **depravity** of a fool (:1c-4) >

A. “*They are corrupt*” – speaks of that which is rotten, putrid, or decayed. Compare Jeremiah 13:7, in reference to Jeremiah’s marred sash.

B. “*They have done abominable works*” –

1. Deeds that God abhors; see Proverbs 6:16-19.

2. Implies deeds not done that should have been done (“*none that doeth good*” in :1 & :3).

“Sins of omission must abound when transgressions are rife. Those who do the things which they ought not to have done, are sure to leave undone those things which they ought to have done. What a picture of our race is this!” (Spurgeon).

- C. *“They are all together become filthy”* – a word used of milk that has soured & become rancid.
 Summary: Man’s total depravity means that though he can do *“good things”* (Luke 11:13), none of his good doing merits heaven & because of his fallen, sinful nature, he can only be saved from eternal judgment by the grace of God (Ephesians 2:8-9 & Titus 3:5).
 Application: See Romans 3:9-12, 19, where Paul quotes these verses to show that the world is guilty before a Holy God.
 Note: *“Understand”* in verse 2 speaks of “to deal wisely” & compare James 3:13. The verb speaks of right purpose & right action. *“All gone aside”* (Psalm 14:3) is here recorded as *“gone back”* – not just turned aside but going in the opposite direction. They fail to pursue the purpose for which they were created – to glorify God (& cf. Romans 3:23).
- D. *“Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge...”* –
1. They “do” iniquity & have no true knowledge:
 - a. Agnostics or atheists refuse the revelation of God – Romans 1:18-20.
 - b. The unsaved around us? See I Corinthians 15:34.
 2. They “devour” the righteous:
 - a. This is a Bible metaphor for exploiting the helpless – Psalm 27:2; Micah 3:1-3.
 - b. *“As they eat bread”* – “Daily, ravenously, as though it were an ordinary, usual, every-day matter to oppress the saints of God” (Spurgeon).
 3. They “deny” the Lord (*call not upon the LORD*):
 - a. “Instead of praying to God, the wicked prey on the godly” (Wiersbe).
 - b. “God Himself is the speaker here, & He says in effect, that prayerlessness is practical atheism. In that light are you an atheist?” (Scroggie).

IV. The **destiny** of a fool (:5) >

- A. *“In great fear”* – “they feared a fear” (Hebrew). “A panic terror seized them: an undefinable, horrible, mysterious dread crept over them” (Spurgeon).
- B. *“Where no fear was...”* – without a cause; they inwardly are cowards who deny God.
- C. *“God hath scattered the bones...”* – “Perhaps nothing was more disgraceful to a nation at war than to have the bones of its dead army scattered over the land rather than buried” (MacArthur).
 [This is why some date this Psalm to Hezekiah’s day – annihilation of Sennacherib’s army.]

Conclusion: What are the lessons for us to learn from both Psalms, 14 & 53? Pastor Tim Fellure points out: “He (the fool) says there is no God because he will not have God over him. He is angry at the God whose existence he denies, & he hates the God whom he has decided does not exist. Two things can always be said of an atheist: one, he says there is no God; &, two, he hates Him.” Consider also this thought for personal/family worship: “Atheism is no mere intellectual problem: it is a manifestation of sin in the naturally deceptive heart. It stands contrary to the light of nature that so evidently reveals the existence & glory of God, not to speak of the clear revelation of God in His Word. In fact the conscious decision to deny God leads invariably to a lifestyle that is corrupt. Sadly there are many who may not profess to be doctrinal atheists but nonetheless live as though God does not exist, a practical atheism” (Reformation Study Bible). Another lesson to make note of is that the teaching of these 2 psalms is repeated again by Paul in Romans 3:10-12. Sin & its consequence must be acknowledged before a Savior will be sought to be saved from sin. Finally, what evidence do we give in our lives that not only does God exist, but that He is our Creator, Redeemer, & Sustainer? Remember the challenge of Paul to the Corinthians, *“Awake to righteousness, & sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame”* (I Cor. 15:34). Are we making Him known not only by our lips, but by our life?