

“HUMAN DEPRAVITY—PART II”

Psalm 53

Pastor Keith E. Gephart

INTRODUCTION

Do you believe in God? Surprisingly, most would still answer that question in the affirmative. Belief in God’s existence has always been practically universal among the human race—in all times and among all people. Of course, the nature of this divine being, or whether he is one or many, has been held in many forms. The original truth has He is There and He is not Silent.

The purpose of this message is not to expound theism. Rather it is to face squarely a huge problem among those who would probably not overtly deny the existence of God; it is the problem of **practical atheism**.

Our psalmist confronts a problem head-on that we must face—there is such a thing as practical atheism. Practical atheism is the result of a larger problem—human depravity. Human depravity stems from man’s original sin which practically amounted to the usurpation of God’s rightful place—first by the tempter, then by the tempted. When we willfully violate the will and purpose of God, we usurp His authority and deny His existence. The person who does so is a **fool**.

Autonomous man was never intended by the Creator; we were created to be fully dependent upon God and fully submissive to Him. Peace, happiness, fulfillment will only be found as we submit our lives to Him and obey Him willingly. When men flout God’s authority, disorder, confusion, and misery result.

Through redemption some have turned from their natural depravity and found deliverance and holiness of heart and life. However, the warfare of the wicked One against God and truth continues--Wicked men persecute godly men. God tolerates such irregularity—but only temporarily. One day He will make all things right—rewarding His people and punishing the wicked. **God will reward his children. Godly living is worthwhile.**

YOU MUST NOT DESPAIR—GOD WILL REWARD THE RIGHTEOUS—REJOICE IN HIM!

Here David shows that the human race is morally corrupt and that wicked men—especially from other nations, oppress God’s people—Israel. But he is confident that God is their defender and he anticipates a day when He will vindicate Israel. Perowne, in the words of Ewald, notes that “it would scarcely be possible for a great truth to be sketched in fewer or more striking outlines” (p. 183).

This psalm is a companion with Psalm 14, written also by David; its application is not so much to the wicked in the nation who afflict the godly, but to the wicked of the world who attack Israel. There are 9 primary differences between the 2 psalms—esp. v. 5. Also, Elohim is used consistently here, whereas Ps. 14 uses both divine names.

This psalm shows us: *THE GREAT CORRUPTION; THE GREAT MISCALCULATION, and THE GREAT SOLUTION*

I. THE GREAT CORRUPTION (1-3)

A. The Practical Atheist (1)

Del. calls this “**the climax of imbecility**” (p. 983). This is not as much (it can be that) a philosophical assertion of atheism, but rather, as in previous psalms, a confident assertion that God is either unaware or unconcerned about what man does for evil or for good—e.g. 10:4, 11; it is a denial of God’s “moral government” (Perowne, 184). His life speaks this thought—whether he actually states it or not. His “heart” says it! This is “practical atheism”; they live as if there is no God who will hold them accountable.

1. The motivation of his heart

- “Fool”—cf. Nabal in I Sam. 25; a practical synonym for the word “scoffer.” Note the placement of Ps. 53 between 52 & 54: Doeg I S. 22; Nabal—25; Ziphites—26.
- One who has cast off the fear of God; one who claims to have great discernment, but really follow a self-directed course. Paul gives us the “last word on atheism” in Rom. 1:22: “Claiming to be wise they became fools.” For, said Paul, “What can be known about God is plain to them” (19), and “they did not see fit to acknowledge God” (28).
- He says it in his heart—he is convinced of it and his heart motivates him in thought, feeling, and will to follow his own path.
- He denies that there is a God—at least a personal one.

2. The Evidence in his life (plural verbs here to apply to all such fools—and esp. to “the sons of men” of v. 2)

- Corrupt—“They have corrupted their doing—deeds.” [In relation to morality]
- Abominable injustice—“They have made their doing—deeds abominable.” [In relation to God—His evaluation]
- Does no good-- this is man-ward corruption; see Rom. 1; Job 21; Ps. 10. There is no exception noted here any more than the Lord made an exception for Noah and family in Gen. 6:5, 12. Besides, no one escapes this morass of corruption **except by grace**—Del. p. 983.

B. The Universal Depravity (2-3)

Here in verses 2 & 3 the assessment of v. 1 against “**the arrogant materialist**”, though somewhat an extreme example, is now shown to have universal application to all of mankind. Note that some of the same terms reappear.

1. The Divine inspection: “Leaning over and looking down”; His sovereignty is thus displayed, as well as the idea of “the earnestness of the inspection” and an observation from above (Alex 40). *Compare the Lord’s observation of the scene at the Tower of Babel incident* (Gen. 11:5-6) and that of Sodom in Gen. 18:21. The action is done and the results conclusive!
2. The Results of the Inspection—**the entire human race is depraved.**
 - No one acts wisely.
 - No one seeks God. Surely if some such were to be found, the all-seeing gaze of God would not miss finding them!

- They have **all** turned aside. “all of him (each individual) has turned aside” (emphatic). The verb means “to fall away, backslide”—from God’s ways, to “suffer apostasy.”
- “**Together**—lit. “in its or their unions” — not merely “altogether”, they have become corrupt.” NEB renders the verb freely: “**rotten to the core.**” Leupold points out that the root comes from the idea of the *souring of milk* (140).
- **There is no one** who does good.” The same words from v. 1 are here repeated—but with additional emphasis: **not even one.**

Yahweh is careful not to exclude anyone (Perowne, p. 184): “All”; “together”; “No not one”.

This description reminds us of the *description at the time of the Flood*, and also Paul’s description in **Romans 3:10-12** which quotes this psalm and shows that this description is:

- Universal (Jews and Gentiles).
- Perennial.
- Note, however, that Paul quotes “freely” and does not even follow the LXX exactly.
- He argues from Scriptures—Psalm 14:1-3 [53] and Ps. 5:9; 10:7; 36:1; 140:3; Is. 59:7-8.

This Great Corruption has also led to Great Miscalculation on the part of wicked mankind; they tend to think that they will get away with their sin and not be held accountable; **how wrong they are.**

II. THE GREAT MISCALCULATION (4-6)

A. Failure to Discriminate (4)

1. They do not know: “Do the workers of iniquity not know?” Possibly, a reference to their moral ignorance, but here more likely a reference to “their failure to anticipate God’s defense of his people (vv. 5-7).

Kidner here notes that the “exploiters and secularists” here have “an animal complacency” about them “which is only matched by that of the practiced sinner of Proverbs 30:20”: “She eats and wipes her mouth, and says, ‘I have done no wrong’” **This indifference and ignorance might well be “more impenetrable than the bluster of verse 1.”** The ignorance here is put in absolute terms—they do not know; they are “stupid like the brutes” (Perowne, p. 185).

2. They are “workers of iniquity.” The next point elaborates upon the particular iniquity.
3. They consume the godly: “**Who, eating my people eat bread.**” They devour God’s people as casually as they devour bread; or, as Leupold suggests, “they devour God’s people to feed themselves”—literally “the eaters of my people they eat bread.” “They live by means of ungodly preying upon their victims” (Leupold, 140). See the even more vivid description of eating God’s people in Micah 3:1-3. They eat God’s people with the “same unconsciousness with which they would take their accustomed meal.
4. They do not call on God—Pray. “Upon God they do not call.” “Elohim comes first for emphasis. See also such passages as Jer. 10:21 and Hos. 7:7—they are so “brutish” because they do not pray.

B. Failure to Foresee (v. 5)

1. Future Trouble for the Ungodly (5)

a. Their Great Fear: “There they are in great dread.”

- There is a place and time when they will answer to God: “There” refers to “that situation or that time when the Almighty, the Just One, who cannot tolerate iniquity forever, begins to vent His wrath upon those of Israel who oppress the Lord’s true children.
- Then they will have “**a dreadful dread.**” Then, when God’s longsuffering turns to wrath, dread and terror seize them and “they tremble through and through.” On such coming dread of the wicked, see Is. 2:19ff—into the caves and rocks before God’s terror as the earth trembles; cf. also Rev. 6:15ff for a similar description.
- They fear where there was not [a reason to fear—a God worked fear]

b. Their Scattering: “God scattered the bones of those who encamped against you.”

c. Their shame: “You put them to shame”—cf. Ps. 14—ungodly tried to shame the godly

d. Their utter rejection—involves divine abhorrence and contempt.

2. Present Security for the Righteous (5)—they put the wicked to shame.

Despite the **great depravity**, and **the great miscalculation** of the wicked, God has a **great solution**.

III. THE GREAT SOLUTION (7): “Would that there were the salvation of Israel from Zion.”

A. Deliverance for the Godly will come out of Zion—the place where Yahweh reigns.

B. Yahweh will “restore the fortunes” of his people.

C. His people will “rejoice” and “be glad.”—Jacob & Israel

CONCLUSION

Great corruption, Great Miscalculation, but a Great Solution.

Yes, things look pretty bad—but not for the **godly**, for the **ungodly!**