

Why I'm an A-Atheist

Psalm 14

Studies in the Psalms #14

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I YOU recall, a little over five years ago I preached a sermon on Psalm 14 entitled, “What’s Wrong With Atheism?” It’s been the most downloaded sermon from our site. Today we return to this same Psalm. It’s a communal lament and meditation about how pervasive sin is and how oppressive our opponents are. One old Reformation writer said that in Psalm 14 “David teaches that all people are dolts and fools; they do not have any right knowledge of God but are mired in darkness...[they] do not seek God's honor but only focus on their own temporal benefit, so they can fill and fatten their belly and gut and live in all kinds of lust, riches and worldly honor, without fear of God.”¹

In particular it laments the reality that many deny God’s existence and his influence over their lives. But as we lament this, we long for the Savior. I want to think through this Psalm with you and how it applies to us and so I’ve entitled it, *Why I’m an A-Atheist*, that is, why I do not believe in atheists!

¹ Nikolaus Selnecker in *Psalms 1–72*, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis, Reformation Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament 7 (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2015), 108–109.

Because of Their Confession (v. 1a)

The first reason *Why I'm an A-Atheist* is *because of their confession*.

Look at the memorable words of the first half of verse 1: **The fool says in his heart, “There is no God”** (*‘ayin elohim*). It was Augustine who said they say this in their hearts because no one even dares say out loud that there is no God. What would he think of our time? Have you noticed in conversation with so-called atheists how much they talk about God? It’s one of the striking features of the so-called “new Atheism.” Whether it’s a pop Youtube video, on Bill Maher’s show, or in a Christopher Hitchens book, for people who don’t believe in God they sure do a lot of talking about him!

Now, what does **fool** or *nabal* mean? This is one of many Hebrew words that can be translated as “fool.” And it’s meaning is not intellectual foolishness but moral foolishness. This is one of the silly arguments atheists will bring up to try and disprove the Bible. They’ll say, “The Bible says you’re a fool if you deny God, but Thomas Edison and Carl Sagan were not dumb.” The fool describes those whose lifestyles are characterized by an “aggressive perversity.”² The “fool” is not so much a theoretical atheist who has read and reasoned away God’s existence, but a practical atheist who has chosen to

² Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, 79.

reject God's existence because it gets in the way of his or her lifestyle. The fool is the one who lives life as if God does not matter; as if he does not see what you are doing; as if he will not do anything about it. That's why the best illustration of a *nabal* is Nabal in 1 Samuel 25. He lived as if David's existence didn't matter. Turn with me to Job for a moment at 21:7–15. This is a practical atheism that says, "I am unaccountable." Turn back with me to Psalm 10 where you see this in the one who says, "There is no God" (10:4) and who says in his heart, "You will not call to account" (10:13). Martin Luther said these "live like pigs" and "as long as they gorge themselves and get drunk and have enough money, etc., they do not care at all about heaven."³

Because of Their Corruption (vv. 1b–3)

The second reason *Why I'm an A-Atheist* is *because of their corruption*.

Why do people deny God's existence? Their words are just a thin veil to cover their deeds. Notice how the Psalm immediately goes on to describe the practical reasons and results for claiming God does not exist: **They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none ('ayin) who does good** (v. 1). In fact, that word **corrupt** is the same one used in Genesis 6:12 to describe how bad the world was before the Flood and it's used again in

³ Luther in *Psalms 1–72*, ed. Selderhuis, 109.

Exodus 32:7 to describe the incident of the golden calf. And then in verse 2 the Psalm uses an “anthropomorphism.” Have I explained what that is yet? This is when we describe God as if he were one of us. Does God, who is a spirit, have a body like us humans? Does he have eyes? Is he really only “up there” so that he needs to look on us way down below? No, but it’s how we describe his majesty. So look at verse 2: **The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God.** So-called “atheism” is not just denying God verbally or mentally but it’s a life in which there is no positive living for God’s glory. And then the Psalm says, **They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt** (this word is used of spoiled milk⁴); **there is none** (*‘ayin*) **who does good, not** (*‘ayin*) **even one.** If we step back and put this into biblical context we know that ever since the beginning practical atheism has been the great temptation of the devil to humanity. His promise is that we can be like god. Why? So that you do not need him but can live your life as you choose. In other words, to deny the one true God is to say yes to idol of self.

⁴ Alec Motyer, 36.

But here's where this gets serious for us. Don't verses 1-3 sound familiar to you from the New Testament? If you turn over to Romans 3 you'll recognize them. Right after he's explained the sinfulness of the world of the Gentile or non-Jew, he goes on to say that the covenant people, too, were totally depraved. That's why he says in Romans 3:9, "both Jews and Greeks are under sin," and again at the end of the lengthy quotation from the Psalms at verse 19, "Now we know that whatever the law say, it speaks to those who are under the law"—meaning, the Jews. Apart from God's grace in Jesus Christ this is you and me! Let's not run around mocking atheists or fist bumping each other because we have it all figured out. You, too, are a sinner who naturally wants to cover up your sins! This also means that our godly living matters. A while back there was an article in *The Atlantic* that surveyed why young people become atheists.⁵ One discussion point was that young people respected those who not only took their Bible's seriously, but who sought to live it out passionately. One college student said, "Christianity is something that if you *really* believed it, it would change your life and you would want to change [the lives] of others. I haven't seen too much of that."

⁵ <http://www.theatlantic.com/national/print/2013/06/listening-to-young-atheists-lessons-for-a-stronger-christianity/276584/>

Because of Their Persecution (v. 4)

The third reason *Why I'm an A-Atheist* is *because of their persecution*.

Look at verse 4: **Have they no knowledge, all the evildoers who eat up my people as they eat bread and do not call upon the LORD?** And look at that image: persecution is as common to the atheist as eating bread is to survival! In other words, the internalized confession, “There is no God,” always gets externalized in persecution. This is why the new atheist talks about the God he or she claims not to believe in. They are just as fundamentalist and zealous to evangelize as we are! Their confession must lead to action. In the past how did atheistic governments persecute? By wiping out those who believed in God. The biggest murderers and terrorists of the twentieth century were communistic countries because they denied God and made government their God. How do we see this persecuting threat today in our own society? I recently read an LGBT advocate state the real motivation for all that we are seeing around us. “Burn the Binary” was the headline. Get rid of the concepts of male and female. Why? Because this is what Psalm 2 says. Peoples rage against God to get God off their backs and out of their consciences. And the result for us is going to be hate speech accusations, difficulties staying in this building because of community

pressure, and the list goes on.

Because of Their Realization (v. 5)

The fourth reason *Why I'm an A-Atheist* is *because of their realization*.

There they (meaning the so-called “atheist”) **are in great terror, for God is**

with the generation of the righteous. You would shame the plans of

the poor, but the Lord is his refuge (vv. 5–6). If you’ve talked with

unbelievers you know that they know that something is wrong in the world,

with their lives, and there’s going to be something done about it in the end.

A person can only try to quiet down their conscience for so long. Do you

know what Joseph Stalin’s, the great leader of Russia in the twentieth

century, last act was while on his deathbed? This is a so-called atheist,

remember. It is reported that he sat up one last time, shook his fist upward

towards the ceiling while look up, and then he fell down and died. There’s a

new book out that discusses Christopher Hitchens’ last days dying of throat

cancer and the possibility of him making a profession of faith. Why did they

and why do so many others do this? Because they are guilty and they know

it!

Conclusion: Our Prayer (v. 7)

I'm not an atheist. I don't believe there is such a thing according to Psalm 14 and Romans 1. So how should you and I respond to those who by their confession and corruption deny him, who by their persecution seek to stamp him out, and who by their realization of his reality live in fear? Notice how the Psalm ends in contrast: **Oh, that salvation (*yesh'ua*) for Israel would come out of Zion! When the Lord restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad** (v. 7). David looked forward to the coming of the Savior. He has come. Are you praying for your unbelieving family and friends? Are you living a godly life in front of them? Are you inviting them to hear of the Savior?