



# What's Wrong?

Psalm 14



## Something Wrong with Creation?

- ❑ “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (*Genesis 1:1*). “God created man in his own image...male and female he created them” (*1:27a*). “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (*1:31a*). There was nothing wrong with God’s original creation.
- ❑ However, as we consider our world (both past and present), many problems are evident among the human race. It is apparent that many things are “wrong” in this world.
  1. What is the evidence that many things are “wrong” in this world?<sup>1</sup>

## Something Wrong with People?

- ❑ As Psalm 14 says, there is obviously something wrong with people. Read Psalm 14.
- ❑ In verse 1, the psalmist mentions “the fool.” This designation is assigned by God who “looks down from heaven on the sons of men”<sup>2</sup> (v. 2a).
  2. What are the characteristics of “the fool,” based on verses 1-4?<sup>3</sup> What words are used to describe “the fool?”<sup>4</sup>
  3. According to the psalmist, how is the fool’s behavior connected to his/her relationship with God?<sup>5</sup>



### Reflection

- What do you “say in *your* heart?” Maybe you struggle with belief in God, but something in your heart motivates you to seek truth & seek God. That is *not* foolish! Keep seeking!

<sup>1</sup> This question assumes that “right” and “wrong” exist, which some people deny. Assuming they do exist, what is the basis of determining “right” and “wrong?” Some worldviews undermine any real basis.

<sup>2</sup> “sons of men” (*bene ’adam*) – the most general and widespread term for “human beings.”

<sup>3</sup> The phrase “there is no God” refers more to *practical* (or *functional*) atheism than theoretical atheism (which was rare in the ancient, pre-Greek, world of the Eastern Mediterranean). “The functional atheist is not concerned so much with the theoretical question as to the existence of God; rather, he lives and behaves *as if* God did not exist. Indeed, the functional atheist may well admit the theoretical possibility that God does exist, but affirms by his speech and behavior that such existence is irrelevant...[Meanwhile] many atheists are very moral people” [relative to other people, including many who claim to believe in God] [Peter Craigie, *Psalms 1-50* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 126.] See Psalm 10:2-4 which uses the same phrase (*’ên ’elohim*) in verse 4.

<sup>4</sup> “corrupt,” “vile (evil, wicked) deeds” (v. 1b); “has turned aside,” “corrupt” (v. 3b); “does not do good” (vv. 1b, 3b); does not understand; does not seek God (v. 2b, 4a); “does not call on the LORD” (v. 4b).

<sup>5</sup> The primary characteristics of the “fool” (*nābāl*) are moral in nature, but the basis of morality is God. Thus the root problem is not behavior, but lack of understanding (of God) and lack of seeking God (vv. 2-4). Thus they fail to know God (through His self-revelation) and fail to have a relationship with Him (by His grace). This fundamental problem is traced to “the fall of man” (Genesis 3), where the first humans valued moral autonomy and independence over submission to God, thus dishonoring Him and rejecting His authority. The “fool” may be a highly intelligent person, but true wisdom is the wisdom of God. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Proverbs 9:10; cp. 1:7). Speaking of those who rejected God, Paul says, “Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools” (Romans 1:22; see 1:18-32).

## Effects of Wrongfulness

- ❑ The psalmist makes it clear that wrong behavior harms others. Evildoers are “corrupt” (v. 1b, 3a).<sup>6</sup> This corruption spoils and infects the surrounding world (like a moral pollution).
- ❑ In particular, evildoers shamelessly mistreat their fellow human beings. They overpower and humiliate the poor and weak (v. 6a). Such behavior is as natural to them as eating bread (4b).
- ❑ However, the evildoers are on the wrong side! “For God is present in the company of the righteous” (v. 5b). The LORD is the “refuge” (place of safety and security) for the righteous poor (v. 6b).<sup>7</sup> Thus evildoers fear, while the righteous have peace of mind (v. 5).

## Extent of Wrongfulness

- ❑ Psalm 14 speaks of two categories of people – the evildoers and the righteous.
  - ? As you read Psalm 14, what immediately comes to mind? Who are the “evildoers” in your world?
- ❑ We may be quick to exclude ourselves from the evildoers group, but notice the inclusive language in God’s evaluation of the sons of men: “there is *no one* who does good” (v. 1b, 3b); “*not even one*” (v. 3b); “*all* have turned aside” (v. 3a).<sup>8</sup>
- ❑ In his letter to the Romans, Paul quotes from Psalm 14:1-3 as part of his teaching on the universality of sin.<sup>9</sup> “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (*Romans 3:23*). The necessary result of sin is “death” (6:23a) – both physical and spiritual. “Spiritual death” is alienation from God, who is the Source of life. This condition extends to every human being.



## Deliverance from Wrongfulness

- ❑ The psalm ends with an expressed desire for salvation and restoration (v. 7). Though this is expressed in terms of Israel,<sup>10</sup> its ultimate fulfillment is relevant to all people.
- ❑ All people need deliverance, not only from their enemies, but also from their own sin. All people need restoration to a relationship with God; resulting in spiritual life, wholeness and blessing. This deliverance & restoration is received and realized through faith in Jesus Christ.

## Reflection/Application

- There *is* something wrong with people. What is the root cause of this problem?<sup>11</sup> If the human condition is like a sickness, what is the correct diagnosis? Attempt to understand the biblical diagnosis, and explain it in your own words.
- If you are a Christian, reflect on Psalm 14, and ask yourself these questions: In what ways am I sometimes like “the fool?” In what ways can I identify with the mistreated? What correction or encouragement can I take from this psalm and apply to my life today?

<sup>6</sup> Actually, two different Hebrew words (*shāhat*, *’ālah*) are translated “corrupt.”

<sup>7</sup> This does not mean that the righteous poor do not suffer. Many do! But they can be comforted by the fact that God is on their side, and that they will be cleared from shame, and have honor restored (e.g., see Matthew 5:10-12).

<sup>8</sup> “While the psalmist does recognize a small group of oppressed righteous whom God protects (14:5-6), the emphasis is clearly on the failure of humanity-at-large to fulfill the creation intention to be God’s image” [Gerald Wilson, *The NIV Application Commentary: Psalms – Volume 1* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 294.]

<sup>9</sup> There are various ways to define “sin.” One definition is “any action or attitude that is opposed to the nature and will of God.” This coincides with the rejection of God’s rightful place in our lives (Psalm 14:1a). “Sin” can also refer to “the state of human nature in which the self is estranged from God” (that is, there is a broken relationship).

<sup>10</sup> “Israel” and “Jacob” refer to the LORD’s covenant people in the Old Testament. “Zion” (in Jerusalem) represented the center of the LORD’s earthly rule.

<sup>11</sup> Of course, different philosophies and religions have different answers to this question. Many point to some type of ignorance, as if education or enlightenment will solve the problem. However, the real problem is much deeper.