

Psalm 14: Practical Atheism 03-10-19 PM

In Psalm 14 David describes God looking down from heaven to see who is righteous. The image is dramatic: God finds none who are good. Paul later uses this passage in Romans 3 to make the case that neither Jew nor Gentile are sinless. But the specific context of this image is that God is looking at a particular type of person: one who says that there is no God.

What is an Atheist? Atheism could simply be defined as the BELIEF that there is no God. It is not to be confused with Agnosticism, which is the UNCERTAINTY of God. In America, about 10% of people claim to be atheists (per the highest polls). In Oregon, 31% of people identify themselves as nonaffiliated when it comes to religion, which is the highest rate of such in our country. We should expect that this will only increase over time, as seen in places such as Europe.

But in this Psalm God may not be referring to the people who are clear about their absence of belief. Consider that this psalm points to the man who “says in his heart” there is no God. Meaning: this person may be saying something else with their mouth, but in their heart is where their absence of belief is found. We might describe this person as a practical or functional atheist; their absence of belief is hidden, perhaps even from themselves. This atheism is instead manifested in their lifestyles. This person is a believing unbeliever, a Christian atheist.

A person is a Christian Atheist when they believe that everything depends on them to be fulfilled. It is the person who leaves no room for the work of God, such as in evangelism, or in faith. Consider that Paul to the church in Corinth *“So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase....For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.”* (1 Corinthians 3:7,9). Perhaps in their lives they leave not room for God to work. Perhaps in the work of the church they do not believe that by following God's pattern God will do His part too.

A person is a Christian Atheist when they do not consider judgment. Many live their lives with a profession of faith, but an absence of consideration for a judgment day. Jesus said *“But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the Day of Judgment”* (Matthew 12:36) Paul told the Roman church of Christ *“(God) will render to each one according to his deeds”* (Romans 2:6). Too many live with a moral recklessness that suggests the absence of real belief.

A person is a Christian Atheist when they have no fear of God. *“For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.”* (Hebrews 10:26-27). We are told to fear God constantly; perhaps those who do not, simply do not believe in God in their heart?

Finally, someone is a Christian Atheist when they believe God thinks like them. They may believe that God won't send good people to hell; what they mean is *“those I think are good”*. They think that God is not concerned with how we worship, or more specifically, *“what I think is worship”*. They feel that when they do something, God does not think it is sinful. This is all because they believe God thinks like them. If we think that God sees things just as we do, we truly do not believe in God, we instead see ourselves as God. Such blasphemy is common among men who profess to love God; they love themselves.

A true believer must have a mind that rejects this behavior. We must do so by placing God in charge, as Paul did in II Corinthians 12. We must learn the fear of God as spoken of in Philippians 2:12. Finally, we must find the Mind of God, as spoken of in II Timothy 2:15