

**MEDITATION ON PSALM 53:
IMPLICATIONS FOR ECOLOGY**

Psalm 53 begins with a forthright description of those who deny the existence of God in their hearts. They are fools, the first verse says, bringing to mind the unsparing dichotomy between the righteous and the ungodly presented in Psalm 1. This dichotomy of righteous and unrighteous is the only real division in mankind, and all other alleged divisions -- rich and poor, liberal and conservative, Jew and Gentile -- are illusory.

But Psalm 53:1 is most interesting in what it does *not* say. **It does not say that those denying God's existence will always do so publicly.** Denial of God may be confined to the skeptic's heart, the better to appear acceptable in the surrounding culture. **Those who deny God openly are few, but those who deny Him in their hearts may be many.**¹

Private though denial of God may be private, it nevertheless makes one a fool. **Fools engage in foolish behavior eventually visible to all.** Christians, too, may engage in foolish behavior or be drawn into foolish belief, but they are not fools. In Galatians 3:1 Paul addressed the Galatians as "foolish," not as fools, for falling into heretical beliefs, but he also described them as "children of Abraham" (Galatians 3:6).

The behavior of fools leads to corruption, but Psalm 53:1 ends with the sober reminder that **even those who have not gone so far as to deny God in their hearts are still not good in God's sight**, for "there is none that doeth good." The next two verses emphasize that "there is none that doeth good, no, not one," meaning that **even those who accept God's existence are not righteous merely for being theists.**

How is it that the God-denial of fools leads to corruption? **Without God to care for them and their future, the God-deniers see no choice but to plan, scheme, and manipulate their affairs and the lives of others** to bring about a future worth living. Hoarding money, resources, and commodities is the result, along with a lust and greed for investments and other worldly guarantees of future security.²

James 4:1-2 says that believers can fall into the same sinful desire to control their future, for "wars and fightings" among Christians arise because "we have not ... and desire to have." Paul wrote Timothy that "the love of money is the root of all evil" (1 Timothy 6:10). **For believers and unbelievers alike, unbridled greed leads ultimately to corruption.**

Verse 4 introduces the ignorance of the God-deniers. It begins with the rhetorical question, "Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge?" The obvious answer is that they do not. Unless a God-denier has made a public announcement of his atheism, **none can see another's heart to conclude that he has denied God and is therefore a worker of iniquity.** We cannot know the heart motive from which behavior springs (Matthew 7:1), but the fruit of God-denying iniquity has many manifestations.

Does a prominent author insist that evolution explains how the universe came to be and that creation is a belief for the ignorant? We see here the lack of knowledge mentioned in verse 4, for the first two chapters of Genesis assure us that God created by His spoken word. Does a journalist predict that the global environment will collapse unless a herculean

geopolitical effort is made to save the planet?³ Lack of knowledge is again manifested, for Isaiah 45:18 assures us that God "formed [the earth] to be inhabited," signifying that **God has already committed Himself to preserving the earth as a suitable home for life.** We are responsible to be wise stewards of planet earth (Genesis 1:28-30), but the motive for stewardship is to be one of respect and love for the Creator, not fear of the future.

Christians may fall into believing the fearful claims of the "workers of iniquity" rather than "[calling] upon God" (verse 4). The workers of iniquity therefore "eat up [God's] people" as God's people are robbed of a practical faith, trust, and dependence on Him. Rather than being alarmed at the often fearful perspectives and predictions of the media, **the Christian must understand that fear is a predictable consequence of God-denial.**⁴

Verse 5 opens with another warning for believers. **Even "[God's] people" can fall into fear if "they have not called upon God."** In the historical context of Psalm 53, God's people were "in great fear, where no fear was."⁵ Thus there *was* and *is* no basis for fear, despite the prognostications of the ungodly. **On the other hand, the emotion of fear runs through the lives and the thought of the workers of iniquity.** Having denied God, they quake at the prospect of controlling the future by themselves alone. The media constantly exhibit this fear, with pronouncements about impending ecological collapse or impending population crisis. Rather than believing the fears fashionable among the media elite, the Christian should remember that God is constantly calling us to a total dependence and trust on Him, **but dependence on a God believed to be non-existent is precisely what the God deniers cannot live out.**

Thus the God-denier is consumed by fear, a fear often disguised in authoritative, dramatic scientific or political pronouncements about what we must do or believe to "save" ourselves from earthly destruction. This fear, engendered by God-denial, will not be present in the new Jerusalem. The "fearful, and unbelieving" will not be there (Revelation 21:8). **Fear, and unbelief toward God, are therefore linked, not only in Psalm 53 verses 1 and 5, but in Revelation 21:8.**

Psalm 53 opens with a dark view of the world focused on the denial of God and the prevalence of corruption, but ends in verse 6 with an affirmation of trust in God. David praised God for the day when God's plan in history will be manifest to all, "when God bringeth back the captivity of his people." This assurance was not only for the Israel of the Old Testament, but is for Christians today, for according to Galatians 3:6-16, Christians are spiritual "children of Abraham."

No matter the degree of God-denial, corruption, lack of knowledge, and fear in the world system, the Christian can be sure that God is working out His purposes in history for His own glory and the good of the Christian (Romans 1:28). As Psalm 24:9 reminds us, one day the "King of glory" will openly "come in" to possess His kingdom. In the meantime, **may we learn to turn from the fears of the world system, instead "[calling] upon God" in trust and dependence for our future.** And may we in love and graciousness call upon others to find the same security in their Creator.

Notes. Bolding in quotations is added.

1 Those who profess atheism openly are often notorious for it. In the nineteenth century, Robert G. Ingersoll made a career as an orator but also as an atheist. One of his speeches was entitled "Ingersoll's Shorter Catechism," in which he expressed his "indebtedness to men like Voltaire and Thomas Paine, whose bold denial and cutting wit were so instrumental in bringing about this glorious era of freedom [from religion]" (R.G. Ingersoll, *Complete Lectures*, M.A. Donahue, n.d., pp. 129-130). In the lecture "What Must I Do to Be Saved?", published November 27, 1882, in the *Chicago Tribune*, Ingersoll claimed that "a great and glorious work is going on until, in a little while, you will not find one [minister] who will admit that he ever believed in the Trinity, in the Atonement, or in the doctrine of Eternal Agony" (Ingersoll, p. 364). Ingersoll thus joined Voltaire in falsely predicting the end of biblical Christianity.

Oxford University professor and evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins "[condemns] not just belief in God but *respect* for belief in God" (Gary Wolf, "The Church of the Non-Believers," *Wired*, November 2006, p. 184). "While frontline warriors against creationism are busy reassuring parents and legislators that teaching Darwin's theory does not undermine the possibility of religious devotion, **Dawkins is openly agreeing with the most stubborn fundamentalists that evolution must lead to atheism**" (Wolf, p. 186). Dawkins' refusal to sugarcoat the atheism behind evolution had a cost, according to Wolf: "He is making life harder for his friends."

To this charge Dawkins replied, "My answer is that the big war is not between evolution and creationism, but between naturalism and supernaturalism ... [T]he '**sensible**' religious people are really on the side of the fundamentalists, because they believe in **supernaturalism**. That puts me on the other side."

2 The miser who hoards is legendary, but more subtle is the mindset of resource hoarding permeating public policy. **Calls for hoarding resources have long been endemic in the environmental movement.** Environmentalists speak euphemistically of "saving the earth" to encourage policies restricting the use of resources nationally and internationally. **But God already preserves the earth** (Isaiah 45:18).

Decades ago, Stanford University professor and environmentalist Paul Ehrlich called for resource hoarding so draconian as to consign untold numbers of people to death were his suggestions implemented:

"I have understood the population explosion intellectually for a long time. I came to understand it emotionally one **stinking** hot night in Delhi a couple of years ago. ... We entered a crowded slum area. ... The street seemed alive with people. ... People clinging to buses. People herding animals. People, people, people, people. ...

"... What kind of policies should we be designing to guide our actions during the time of famines? ... There has been only one realistic suggestion ... a policy ... based on the concept of 'triage' borrowed from military medicine. The idea briefly is this: ... **some decisions must be made on who will be treated. ... In the first class are those who will die regardless of treatment. ...** We [should] devise a similar system for classifying nations. ... There is the ... tragic category -- those countries that are so far behind in the population-food game that there is no hope that our food aid will see them through to self-sufficiency. ... **India is probably in this category. If it is, then under the triage system she should receive no more food**" (Paul R. Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb*, Ballantine, New York, 1968, pp. 15, 159-160).

Thus possibly many would die in the name of resource hoarding to avoid a population crisis which is not real (see J. Henry, "Global Population Past and Present," <creationconcepts.org>, 2007).

3 The media claim that we must act, that we "must act quickly" (Jeff Johnson, "Dealing with CO₂ from Coal," *Chemical and Engineering News*, Vol. 85 no. 14, April 2, 2007, p. 48), that "millions of poor

people will suffer from hunger, thirst, floods and disease unless drastic action is taken ..." (Seth Borenstein, "Climate Report Is Stark Warning," *Tampa Tribune*, April 7, 2007, p. 3), and that "time is running short. If we do not act now, the opportunity [to avoid climate shocks] may not return" (Nicholas Stern, "The Global Climate Imperative," *Business Week*, April 16, 2007, p. 90).

The motivation behind these calls for immediate action is fear. Fear of ecologic collapse is rampant in the media, with articles sporting titles such as "Avoiding Global Collapse" (Stephen K. Ritter, *Chemical and Engineering News*, Vol. 85 no. 9, February 26, 2007, p. 51), and "Warming to Slash Food Supply" (*St. Petersburg Times*, April 11, 2007, p. 10A). The media claim that "catastrophic disruptions" will occur "if emissions of greenhouse gases are not curbed" (Bette Hileman, "A Warming Planet," *Chemical and Engineering News*, Vol. 85 no. 16, April 16, 2007, p. 14). These apocalyptic predictions trigger emotions of fear, dismay, discouragement and hopelessness. These emotions are not a fruit of the Spirit (Ephesians 5:22-23), but they *are* a result of listening to the fears of the world system. These fears are neither biblically nor scientifically justified (see J. Henry, "Environmental Collapse Is Not Happening," <creationconcepts.org>, 2001).

4 Fears of crisis and collapse have long characterized the media. For several decades, the fashionable fears have been environmental ones. **But today's fearful predictions lose credibility when compared with the same predictions of decades ago that remain unfulfilled.**

A modern prediction is that "in the next 30 to 40 years there will be wars over water" as drinking water runs out ("Top Ex-military Leaders Warn on Global Warming," *St. Petersburg Times*, April 16, 2007, p. 4A). But there was an even more dire warning in 1968: "If our current rape of the watersheds, our population growth, and our water use trends continue, **in 1984 the United States will quite literally be dying of thirst**" (Ehrlich, p. 97). Dire -- and false -- predictions seem to be the stock in trade of those refusing to acknowledge that God *created* the earth in the past and *preserves* it for life today.

Imminent global famine has long been a fashionable fear. In 1968 Ehrlich declared, "The battle to feed humanity is over. **In the 1970's the world will undergo famines -- hundreds of millions of people are going to starve to death** in spite of any crash programs embarked upon now. ... **Nothing could be more misleading to our children than our present affluent society.** They will inherit a totally different world, a world in which the standards, politics, and economics of the 1960's are dead" (Ehrlich, p. 11). Ehrlich recognized that society was "affluent," implicitly acknowledging that **the evidence for impending famine was totally non-existent. Ehrlich's false prediction has been forgotten because it didn't come to pass.**

In 1971, there were predictions of the end of civilization as early as the 1990s: "The former head of the Los Angeles Air Pollution Control, who has spoken with scientists all over the world, believes that we have no more than 50 years left. 'I think we will be lucky if we have 25'. Says Ralph Nader, 'I think that is being generous.'" (Jane Wilkie, *The Sun Is Going Down for All of Us*, Stanyan Books/Random House, 1971, p. 50). **So the world was to end at least by 1996!**

These old predictions should be remembered because they place the identical predictions of today into perspective. **These failed predictions show that God is indeed preserving His earth for life.**

5 Psalm 53 is like Psalm 14, which recalls God's deliverance in the Red Sea crossing. Psalm 53 has been taken to commemorate a later event, e.g., the deliverance from Assyria under Hezekiah (Gordon Churchyard, "Will They Never Learn?: Psalm 53," <easyenglish.info/psalms/psalm053-taw.htm>, July 2001). This argument focuses on differences in the two psalms' use of Yahweh and Elohim, and, following the higher critics, infers a much later date for Psalm 53. But like Psalm 14, Psalm 53 is called a psalm of David.