

The Folly of Unbelief:

Practical Atheism

Psalm 14

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The fool^a says in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good. ²The LORD looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. ³All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one. (Psalm 14:1-3)

Chapter 4 of this selective study on the Book of Psalms focused upon “dogmatic atheism.” This chapter focuses on the phrase “practical atheism,” which is the opposite of “dogmatic atheism.” Practical atheism zeros in on the absence of God in our thoughts and actions. In other words, practical atheism deals with those who believe in God but act as if God does not exist in their daily actions. Many Christians profess God, but, in their ethical behavior and commitment to Jesus, they deny God through their day-to-day actions. Paul writes about this mindset to Titus: “They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him” (Titus 1:16). The English word *fool* is from the Hebrew word נָבָל (*nā·bāl*), which means “foolish or godless.” The following comments from Warren W. Wiersbe (b. 1927), American pastor and writer of Christian literature, may explain the meaning more clearly: “The *nabal* fool has a moral problem in the heart, not a mental problem in the head.”¹ In other words, it is not *dogmatic atheism* but *practical atheism*. Again, he writes: “*Nabal* fools are self-righteous and don’t need or want God. They want to live their own lives the way they please.”²

^a The Hebrew words rendered *fool* in Psalms denote one who is morally deficient.

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe: *Be Worshipful: Glorifying God for Who He Is, An Old Testament Study—Psalms 1-89* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Victor, 2004), 58.

² *Ibid.*, 59.

NO ROOM FOR GOD

As we read Psalm 14, we are quickly conscious that this psalm is a lament, or an expression, about the corruption of the wicked. Artur Weiser's (German scholar) words are also on target: "The threat is apparently directed against God and of their responsibility for their fellow countrymen, impoverish the poor for the sake of their own selfish ends and thus destroy the nation."³ He continues:

It is characteristic of the biblical idea of God that that statement is not meant to be understood as a reflection on the existence of God and thus not as some kind of dogmatic atheism, but as a 'practical atheism' which tries to elude the demands which the reality of God makes on man's life.⁴

Psalm 10:4 is a good commentary on Psalm 14:1-3. Listen to David as he pens: "In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts **there is no room for God**" (10:4). It is in this same vein that the author of the Book of Hebrews encourages believers not to forget God. He, too, expresses danger in their growth in Christ if they are not careful to keep their eyes focused on Him: "Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?" (Hebrews 12:7). In our thoughts and actions, do we have room for God in our lives? We, as Christians, have been empowered to grow toward maturity. The author of the Book of Hebrews had just written:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. ² **Let us fix our eyes on Jesus**, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, **so that you will not grow weary and lose heart**. (12:1-3)

Absence of God in Our Thoughts

Even though many Christians have made a good start, nevertheless, we often witness individuals who have lost their zeal for God. Have we lost our interest in the things of God? Are we sidetracked? Are we living off our earlier conversion and commitment and are now coasting nonchalantly as if God does not really exist? This is what is called *practical atheism*. Many profess faith in God, but, at the same time, they live their lives as if God does not matter. Are we in danger of laxity toward spiritual things? Are we self-indulgent in the things of the world? The quality of commitment, among many Christians, is not very deep. One of the first things that will help us to divorce ourselves from *practical atheism* is a deep-seated desire to worship God. We should remember that worship is twenty-four hours daily, not just one hour on Sunday morning.⁵ It is not uncommon for us to think more about our social clubs and worldly pleasures

³Artur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), 164.

⁴Ibid., 165.

⁵See Dallas Burdette, "True Worship," in Dallas Burdette, *Biblical Preaching and Teaching: Jesus and Our Responsibilities*, Volume 1 (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2009), 358-375.

than we do the church of the Living God. Robert Raines, ordained minister and director of the Kirkridge Retreat and Study Center, captures the essence of commitment with his remarks:

Anyone who regards his attendance at Sunday worship as an optional matter depending upon whim, fancy, or personal convenience, is not seriously interested in the new life with Christ. To be a Christian is to be a living member of the Body of Christ, whose characteristic action is the communal worship of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁶

THE CHURCH AND PRACTICAL ATHEISM

Sunday Attendance

As we reflect upon our own spiritual life, we should ask ourselves about the place of corporate worship (assembling with Christians on Sundays) in our daily walk with God. One obligation that is incumbent upon every believer is to assemble with other believers in order to encourage others in the faith.⁷ The author of the Book of Hebrews, in spite of physical danger from the government and legalistic Judaism when assembling, cautions believers not to abandon, or give up, the gatherings of the church of the firstborn ones. The author writes, so it seems, with passion as he calls attention to the negligence of some believers toward the gathering of themselves with God's people as a corporate body. Take note of his words as he endeavors to capture the mood and importance of coming together: "**Let us not give up meeting together**, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:25).

"The Day approaching" refers to the impending destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Yet, in spite of religious persecution, believers were told not to neglect their assemblies. When we gather on Sundays, this service gives us an opportunity to show which side we are on. When we meet with Christians in a local setting, this kind of action demonstrates where our loyalty lies. If we wish to please God, we cannot wink at the fellowship of God's people. How do we feel about the Sunday assembly? Do we allow the things of the world to keep us from gathering with God's people? Is our attitude the same as that of Jesus when He conducted His ministry on earth? Luke records some comments about Jesus and the Sabbath and the Synagogue:

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside.¹⁵ He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him.¹⁶ **He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom.** And he stood up to read. (Luke 4:14-16)

One of the great dangers among us, as Christians, is that we forget that a saint is someone in whom Christ stands revealed. Is God absent from our thoughts? Is God missing from our actions? What is our practice, or habit, concerning Sundays? We often forget the initial act of grace in our conversion. Yet, this initial act of grace has to be worked out in our lives that are

⁶ Robert A. Raines, *New Life in the Church*, (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1961), 59.

⁷For a more detailed study of isolationism from the church, see Dallas Burdette, "Christianity versus Isolationism," in Dallas Burdette, *Biblical Preaching and Teaching*, Volume 1 (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2009), 283-296.

continually trying to respond to the loving grace of God. When the psalmist writes: “The fool^a says in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Psalm 14:1a), he refers to those who act as if God does not exist. In other words, God is absent from their thoughts as well as their behavior. Psalm 14 reveals the universal corruption of humanity. A. F. Kirkpatrick (1849-1940), Regius Professor of Hebrew at Cambridge University (1882-1903), writes: “The deep and universal corruption of mankind is traced to its source in their failure to seek after God (1-3).”⁸ Again, he writes with keen insight as he calls attention to the meaning of the word *fool*: “*The fool*, a class of men, not a particular individual. The word *nā-bāl* here used for *fool* denotes moral perversity, not mere ignorance or weakness of reason.”⁹ The psalmist speaks of those who are “practical atheist,” not those who actually deny the existence of God.

Christian Ministry

Many Christians are “practical atheists” when it comes to the necessity of the church in their lives and in their willingness to share the Gospel of God with others. Many believers have forgotten that the church of Jesus is a ministry in which the Good News is proclaimed. We should never forget that one objective of God’s fellowship is to preach the Kingdom of God and repentance. Whenever we think of the Kingdom of God, we should reflect on the rule, or reign, of God. As sinners, we submit to God’s kingdom and seek to share Jesus with others that they too may share in the transformation of relationships with God and with one another. To accomplish this objective, we must share the Gospel that Jesus proclaimed. We must never forget that not only did Jesus come proclaiming the Gospel, but He Himself is the Gospel.

Jesus called His disciples and sent them forth to make known His Gospel. In the world, we must exhibit ourselves in visible form as a community. The idea of the church is essential to Christian teaching. There is a sense in which we cannot have Christians without having the church since the church is the body of Christ. For many individuals, the church appears to be irrelevant. The song that Christians often sing—“Onward Christian Soldiers”—is alien to the experience of many Christians. The church as a military company was not foreign to the early believers. Both men and women assumed roles of involvement in the advancement of God’s kingdom on earth. We, as believers, are to exercise the role of involvement. Yet, many of us never see ourselves as a task force for the furtherance of the Gospel of Christ. Too many believers take Christianity too lightly.

What does “follow me” mean to us? The words of Jesus call for commitment. As we pledge our lives of loyalty, we will not seek God’s will in isolation from other believers. It is difficult to imagine a company of believers apart from the concept of involvement. What we, as Christians, seek is participation of men and women in an effort to make Christ’s kingdom prevail. Strange as it may seem, many of us do not see ourselves as belonging to a militant

^a The Hebrew words rendered *fool* in Psalms denote one who is morally deficient.

⁸ A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms* (Cambridge: University Press, 1902, 1916), 65.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.

company that seeks to convert the world to Jesus. God formed a fellowship of witnesses in order to accomplish His objectives—the salvation of men and women.¹⁰

We witness to the world by telling others about the One to whom we belong. We cannot be a true disciple of Christ and avoid being evangelists. The method of evangelism is the method of testimony—acknowledgments about the Death, the Burial, and the Resurrection of Jesus for our justification. The body of believers must return to the universal priesthood of believers. The church of the Messiah must not let its witness be limited to just a small group of so-called clergymen or official priests who act as mediators between God and men and women.

The disciples were called so that they might become the fellowship of penetration.

The church building should be a launching pad from which we go out to evangelize the world. The Sunday gatherings should be like a drill hall for the Christian task force. We gather on Sundays in order to be filled with “high-octane.” We “come in,” but we must also “go out.” The church can never be loyal to Christ by simply adhering to the orthodoxy of its teaching about five-acts of worship or its theology. Every believer is to be a witness for Christ. Every church should be involved in recruiting others to proclaim God’s way of salvation in and through Christ.

The church is supposed to be the fellowship of the committed. Are we devoted and unwavering in our acceptance of Christ as our Savior? Are we a part of the task force for evangelism? Our dedication to Christ is to be unconditional and for life. We, in the Christian community, do not have a unique monopoly on commitment. Many people have various loyalties, but, what we, as Christians, do have is a promise to follow Jesus as Lord in our lives. We have a different object, namely, Jesus the Christ. Without belonging to a committed fellowship, our pledge will not be as effective as it should be in reaching out to the lost. As committed men and women, we need the fellowship of God’s people (commonly called the church), because we are basically depraved and feeble.

Loving Others

Even though we are aware of the existence of another world beyond planet earth, we often live as if God does not exist. The aim and call of our Christian lives have often been forgotten. Many of us live our daily lives as if Christianity is an illusion, that is to say, there is not another life after this life. We, as agents of God’s reconciliation, need to reawaken our spiritual faculties to the fact that God exists and that He demands of us a certain kind of behavior. Numerous Christians are living in the external practice of Christianity. In other words, they attend a public worship service every week, but, at the same time, they have tremendous hate for other people, especially those of other races.

Church attendance is necessary, but, at the same time, we need to be conscious that God demands a change in our daily lifestyles. In my fifty-nine years of ministry, I have witnessed tremendous hate among God’s people. John, who was one of the Twelve, writes with stabbing

¹⁰See Dallas Burdette, “The Church: Agents of God’s Reconciliation,” in Dallas Burdette, *Biblical Preaching and Teaching: Jesus and Our Responsibilities*, Volume 1 (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2009), 271-282, for a detailed analysis of Christians as agents of reconciliation.

words as he addresses the subject of love for one another. Listen to him as he pens the following words that we should latch on to with penitent hearts:

We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. ⁴ The man who says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. ⁵ But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love^c is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: ⁶ Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. ⁷ Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. ⁸ Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining. ⁹ Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. ¹⁰ Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him^d to make him stumble. ¹¹ But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him. (1 John 2:3-11)

As stated above, in my seventy years of ministry, I have witnessed hatred among believers, not just toward other races, but animosity toward others for just minuscule, or small, things. Yet, these same individuals will go to church Sunday after Sunday and sing about loving one another, and, at the same time, hate others within the Body of Christ. Many Christians labor under the impression that going to the Sunday assembly will put them in a good standing with God in spite of their external behavior. I have witnessed church after church dividing over insignificant doctrinal issues (interpretation of Scriptures) as well as over the race question. I remember many years ago that two brothers almost got in a “fist fight” over a black family attending the assembly. We divide when we stop loving one another.

As disciples of Jesus, we are not only bound to God, but we are also bound to one another, which also includes people of all races. Racial tension is not anything new to God’s people. The early church faced racial division within its own ranks—Jew versus Gentile. Peter, too, faced this problem concerning Gentiles. The Lord Jesus revealed Himself to Peter in a vision, which vision dealt with his attitude about other races. Luke, the author of the Book of Luke and the Book of Acts, records the following incident in Peter’s life concerning the race question. Prior to this vision, an angel of God appeared to Cornelius, a Gentile, to inform him to send for Peter. Shortly before the men arrived at Peter’s residence, he went up on the roof of the house he was staying in to pray. Luke gives the following story, which story is important to properly understand Peter’s message later to Cornelius and his household:

About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. ¹⁰ He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. ¹¹ He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. ¹² It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. ¹³ Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.” ¹⁴ “Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.” ¹⁵ The voice spoke to him a second time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.” ¹⁶ This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven. (Acts 10:9-16)

^c Or word, love for God

^d Or it

This vision prepared Peter for his encounter with Cornelius. About this time, there was a knock on the door, the Gentiles had arrived. An angel informed Peter to “get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them” (10:20). After Peter arrived at the house of Cornelius, he spoke to Cornelius and the gathered company:

I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism³⁵ but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.³⁶ You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.³⁷ You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.³⁹ “We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree,⁴⁰ but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen.⁴¹ He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.⁴² He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead.⁴³ All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name. (10:34-43)

The Gospel is for all races. Paul writes to the Christians at Rome about the preaching of the Gospel to both Jew and Gentile: “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of **everyone who believes**: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile” (Romans 1:16). Yes, racial prejudice is still alive on planet earth. Racial prejudice is more than just skin color, even though it is this too. Crimes against humanity were committed by Saddam Hussein (1937-2006), Iraq President, against his own people. He was executed on December 30, 2006 for his crimes against humanity. Under his orders, he authorized chemical weapons to remove Kurds from their villages in northern Iraq. Approximately 5000 men, women, and children were killed within days of the attacks. Today, we witness racial hatred in Iraq and the surrounding countries.

We also witnessed racial hatred in Bosnia under the leadership of Milenko Trifunovic (b. 1968—sentenced to forty-two years and died in prison), which came to be known as Bosnian genocide (200,000 deaths occurred between 1992 and 1995). Again, racial prejudice exhibited itself between two ethnic groups that were actually very similar—the Tutsis and the Hutus—in Rwanda. This tragic episode is known today as the Rwanda Genocide, which claimed as many as 800,000 between April and June 1994. Earlier, Hitler (1889-1945) exhibited racial hatred toward Jews and other ethnic groups. Even in church history, we have witnessed atrocities among Christians.¹¹ The answer to the problem of hatred is Jesus the Prince of Peace. It is in this vein that Paul writes as he seeks to curb the hostilities between the Jews and the Gentiles:

Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called “uncircumcised” by those who call themselves “the circumcision” (that done in the body by the hands of men)—¹² remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.¹⁴ For

¹¹For a detailed study of hatred among those who professed Christianity, see Dallas Burdette, “Where the Scriptures Speak,” in Dallas Burdette, *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2008), 87-149.

he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,¹⁵ by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace,¹⁶ and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. (Ephesians 2:11-18)

When we practice racial prejudice, this action exhibits what is called “practical atheism.” Practical atheism is what the psalmist addresses in Psalm 14. A good commentary on “practical atheism” is found in Jeremiah’s (627 BC) words to the people of Judah. He cuts away all the underbrush and goes right to the very heart of the matter. He does not mince words as he calls attention to their ethical behavior, even though they went to church, as we would say:

Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of Judah who come through these gates to worship the LORD.³ This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: “Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place.⁴ Do not trust in deceptive words and say, ‘This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!’⁵ If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly,⁶ if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm,⁷ then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your forefathers for ever and ever.⁸ But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless.⁹ Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury,^a burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known,¹⁰ and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, ‘We are safe’—safe to do all these detestable things?’¹¹ Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the LORD.” (Jeremiah 7:2-11)

Are we looking for a solution to our ways and actions that will bring about a change in our attitude toward God’s people and our ethical behavior? The glory of the Christian Gospel is the answer. We are not lost in a universe without a solution. Jesus is on the throne. Over 700 years before God became flesh, Isaiah (739 BC), through the Holy Spirit, wrote the following words:

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor,^b Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

As Christians, we are no longer living, as it were, in a far country where sin reigns without any hope, but now, we are living in a country where righteousness reigns, that is to say, God’s righteousness credited to us through faith in His Son Jesus. Even though we still have our adamic nature, we also have our new nature, namely, children of God. Our citizenship is in heaven. Are we committed to the cause of Christ? As believers, we should have as our object of faith a commitment to Jesus as Lord. Is the church, that is to say, God’s redemptive society, a part of our lives? Are we conscious that the church equals the fellowship of the committed?¹²

^a Or *and swear by false gods*

^b Or *Wonderful, Counselor*

¹²See Dallas Burdette, “Unity in Jesus,” in Dallas Burdette, *Old Texts Through New Eyes: Reexamination of Misunderstood Scriptures* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2009), 452-463, for an examination of unity among God’s children.

Remember, mere belief is not enough in God's kingdom; it requires allegiance. God's new community is not just something that we "go" to on Sunday mornings, but it is a relationship that is continuous, regardless of time and performance. If we are not advancing God's love to the world, we are already retreating. Remember, our conversion was an act by which we were called to be witnesses of God's love for the world in and through His Son Jesus. Paul goes right to the heart of the matter of involvement in kingdom work as he writes his Epistle to the Philippians:

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to **work out your salvation** with fear and trembling, ¹³ for **it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.** ¹⁴ Do everything without complaining or arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe ¹⁶ as you hold out^a the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing. (Philippians 2:12-16)

For Paul, this initial act of grace must be responded to and worked out in a life that honors God. Our lives should be lived in such a way that they continuously respond to God's grace. Paul also addresses this attitude of thankfulness for redemption to Titus:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. ¹² **It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,** ¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. (Titus 2:11-14)

If we wish to exemplify Christ in our lives, our eyes should be fastened upon the Eternal Pattern, namely, Jesus. As we begin our spiritual journey, we seek unity with God, which unity results in unity with others. If we fail to retain God in our thoughts, we will not give our hearts to God for His purpose in our lives. The following story is told of a woman who lived around AD 300, which story is related on her grave marker. Olive Wyon (1881-1966), British author and translator of Christian books, reports this account of the woman's devotion to God:

In a remote part of Asia Minor archaeologists have uncovered a very old village cemetery (A.D. 300). On one of the rudely carved headstones they found the inscription: "Here sleeps the blessed Chione, who has found Jerusalem, for she prayed much." There must have been something very fragrant and lovely about this village woman of so long ago. The Church has always been blessed by a countless multitude of such 'saints', though we never hear about them. But we still live in their society, through the Communion of saints.¹³

^a Or hold on to

¹³Olive Wyon, *On the Way: Reflections on the Christian Life* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958), 23.

CONCLUSION

Are we living our lives as “practical atheists”? Or are we living lives of holiness—lives that are conscious of the existence of God? As we reflect upon the word *holiness*, we must come to grips with the meaning of this particular word. This word *holiness* should sound a clarion call for a life of love toward God and love toward our neighbors and our brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus. Love is the chord that holds us together. We need to reexamine ourselves to see if we really and truly are in the faith. How do we feel about the Sunday gatherings? Do our actions concerning Sunday gatherings represent a spiritual barometer of our spiritual priorities? How do we view Bible reading and Bible study? How often do we read and study God’s written Revelation? Do we love one another as Jesus loved His disciples? Are we workers within God’s kingdom? Are we conscious that God works in us to accomplish His will? Do we reach out to the lost? Are we living lives of “practical atheism”?

The next essay will examine Psalm 73. We can identify ourselves with the one who wrote this heart-wrenching psalm, which uphill story is about his journey from doubt to certainty in the God who created the heavens and the earth. As we reflect upon Psalm 73, we will discover that this biography of the psalmist flows from distrust to assurance. Asaph is willing to share with the nation of Israel his spiritual memoirs concerning his depression, or gloominess. In his life story he reveals that he was on the very threshold of an unspeakable disaster—his faith was almost gone. His problem was the prosperity of the wicked versus the poverty of the righteous. He looked at the ungodly and then looked at the righteous. Things did not measure up to equality, so he thought. Asaph’s story is a story of temptation, self-pity, disillusionment, resentment, uncertainty, and near ruin.