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## ATHEIST

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE was one of the more famous atheists. The son and grandson of Lutheran ministers, his well-known utterance, "Biblical Christianity is the one immoral blemish on mankind," is only surpassed by his other pronouncement: "God is dead."

Both Nietzsche and Bunyan's Atheist started out religious. It seems to be true today that many who deny the "faith once delivered to the saints" started out as professors of the gospel but "when men set out with a dead faith and a worldly heart at length they end up sitting in the seat of the scornful" (Thomas Scott).

A classic passage in the Bible, which addresses this unbelief, is found in Psalm 14:1, "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God" (literally, no *Elohim*). It is not simply God in His essence, undefined and unqualified, that presents problems to Atheist. It is God revealing Himself as *Elohim* that creates huge difficulties to this free-thinking skeptic. It is the God who sets forth His nature as the creating, ruling, sovereign, redeeming judge of the moral universe. This is cleverly illustrated in the story about five modern theologians—Barth, Brunner, Bonhoeffer, Bultmann and Tillich—who attempted to gain entry into Heaven by answering this one question put to them at the pearly gates: "Whom do

you say that I am?" They answered, "Thou art the ground of all being, the leap of faith into the impenetrable unknown, the unphrasable, unverballed, unpropositional confrontation with the infinitude of inherent subjective experience." Of course this is intended to be humorous, but sadly most men can live with a god like that.

The Psalmist puts his finger right on the pulse of the issue—the fool says these things in his *heart*. This is not purely an intellectual issue—it is not the struggle of a deep-thinking, complex mind carefully weighing all the metaphysical options of the vast unknown. It is a heart issue. The writer is pointing to a moral choice made by a man who says, "I will not have anyone in this universe to whom I am accountable except myself."

It has been well said, "The atheist can't find God for the same reason that a thief can't find a policeman." Isn't this Genesis 3 all over again? "Ye shall be as God ... we hid because we were naked and ashamed." In an attempt to hide from God, various kinds of intellectual "fig leaves" adorn the nakedness of the skeptic. However, the bottom line is quite clear—there is a moral issue each one will face at the judgment when all things are "naked and open before the One with whom we have to do."

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