

## God is Not Like Us (Psalm 50)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton Friday night, April 1, 2011, at [ReGeneration Conference](http://www.goldcountrybaptist.org)  
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\*A shorter version of this message was preached at GCBC Sunday AM, April 3, 2011

- A. W. Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*: ‘What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. ... Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God. For this reason the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God. This is true not only of the individual Christian, but of the company of Christians that composes the Church. Always the most revealing thing about the Church is her idea of God, just as her most significant message is what she says about Him or leaves unsaid, for her silence is often more eloquent than her speech ... Were we able to extract from any man a complete answer to the question, “What comes into your mind when you think about God?” we might predict with certainty the spiritual future of that man ...”

Psalm 50 <sup>1</sup>A Psalm of Asaph. The Mighty One, God, the LORD, has spoken, And summoned the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting. <sup>2</sup>Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God has shone forth. <sup>3</sup>May our God come and not keep silence; Fire devours before Him, And it is very tempestuous around Him. <sup>4</sup>He summons the heavens above, And the earth, to judge His people: <sup>5</sup>“Gather My godly ones to Me, Those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice.” <sup>6</sup>And the heavens declare His righteousness, For God Himself is judge. Selah. <sup>7</sup>“Hear, O My people, and I will speak; O Israel, I will testify against you; I am God, your God. <sup>8</sup>“I do not reprove you for your sacrifices, And your burnt offerings are continually before Me. <sup>9</sup>“I shall take no young bull out of your house Nor male goats out of your folds. <sup>10</sup>“For every beast of the forest is Mine, The cattle on a thousand hills. <sup>11</sup>“I know every bird of the mountains, And everything that moves in the field is Mine. <sup>12</sup>“If I were hungry I would not tell you, For the world is Mine, and all it contains. <sup>13</sup>“Shall I eat the flesh of bulls Or drink the blood of male goats? <sup>14</sup>“Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving And pay your vows to the Most High; <sup>15</sup>Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me.” <sup>16</sup>But to the wicked God says, “What right have you to tell of My statutes And to take My covenant in your mouth? <sup>17</sup>“For you hate discipline, And you cast My words behind you. <sup>18</sup>“When you see a thief, you are pleased with him, And you associate with adulterers. <sup>19</sup>“You let your mouth loose in evil And your tongue frames deceit. <sup>20</sup>“You sit and speak against your brother; You slander your own mother’s son. <sup>21</sup>“These things you have done and I kept silence; You thought that I was just like you; I will reprove you and state the case in order before your eyes. <sup>22</sup>“Now consider this, you who forget God, Or I will tear you in pieces, and there will be none to deliver. <sup>23</sup>“He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors Me; And to him who orders his way aright I shall show the salvation of God.”

- OUTLINE:
1. God is Not Like Us
  2. God Does Not Need Us
  3. God is Gracious to Us

## 1. GOD IS NOT LIKE US

Tozer again: “The idolatrous heart assumes that God is other than He is - in itself a monstrous sin - and substitutes for the true God one made after its own likeness. Always this God will conform to the image of the one who created it and will be base or pure, cruel or kind, according to the moral state of the mind from which it emerges ... The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him. It begins in the mind and may be present where no overt act of worship has taken place. 'When they knew God,' wrote Paul, 'they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.'

A number of years ago my wife and I were visiting a church, and the pastor was giving an illustration where he talked about heaven, and he said “when I picture heaven and Jesus, I see a great big line of people waiting to talk to him. I’m cuttin’ to the end of the line, just so you know, watch for me. I can’t wait to give him a big hug, I really want to hop on his lap, and then I’m going tell him some jokes and I can’t wait to listen to him tell me a few good jokes ...”

I’ve been in happy-clappy environments where the leader will portray God as if He’s some show to clap, whistle for, and then, when done applauding God, sit down to hear what's next on the program. Some give the impression Christianity is all about a happy healthy best life now.

I’ve been in great big stadiums full of Christians before where different parts of the audience chant “We got Jesus yes we do, we got Jesus how about you?” or substitute his name in pop songs

Before I was a pastor I used to often get emails from co-workers with some syrupy sentimental presentation of either “Jesus” or some slogans and clichés this person says God told them them, and then the end of the email says something like “If you love Jesus, you will forward this to 10 people and watch to see good things happen” (sheer superstition)

There’s a T-shirt that says “Jesus is my homeboy” –one of the best-selling T-shirts a few years back. People seen wearing it included Brad Pitt, Ben Affleck, Ashton Kutcher, and other names I won’t even mention because they are associated with immorality.

- Listen, any bringing God down to our level, making Him like us, is blasphemy. It’s idolatry. God rebukes it (v. 21)
- The Lord of Lords is not the “homey” of worldly celebrities – or anyone for that matter. The Bible portrays the real Lord as a consuming fire who will judge all who blaspheme
- The true Christ of Scripture is not a superstition-granting good luck charm or fortune cookie that makes good things come into your life if you forward theologically incorrect emails to 10 or more people. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the transcendent sovereign, who I think is actually offended by most of the clichés and slogans thrown around with His name or attributing things that He is not.
- King Jesus does not need a pep rally of people chanting that they’ve got him, yes we do, how about you, just substituting his name for class spirit or team spirit? He is a holy God! He is the matchless, magnificent, majestic and mighty Master of the universe who needs nothing from us!

- The sovereign God of the Bible is not an entertainer who wants our applause, or someone who needs people to clap and whistle like He's some worldly show.
- And I don't think that when we see the Lord of the universe in all His glory we're going to tell him our favorite jokes and casually hop on His lap while He tells us some good ones. If you believe the Bible, every knee is going to be bowing and every tongue will be confessing Jesus Christ is LORD and we will worship Him in reverence. God is not any of those trivial and shallow and superficial portrayals.

Look at verse 21 again God says "*You thought I was like you*" [?!]  
*But now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you.*

We need to understand the context of this psalm. It is not written as a rebuke to pagans out in the world, it is written to professing believers within the community of faith. The writer, Asaph, was the leader of worship in Israel, and this psalm has to do with the type of worship that honors God and worship that dishonors God.

This psalm is not written for people "out there" (in the world, or in other types of religions or other types of churches), it's written for the professing people of God "in here," it's for people like you/me.

Look at the end of v. 4, it says God "*will judge his people.*" 1 Peter 4:17 says "*judgment begins with the family of God / household of God.*" Ps 50:5 "*faithful ones who have made a covenant with me ...*" (your translation may call them "consecrated ones" or "saints" or "godly ones.") In v. 7 God addresses them as "*my people.*"

In v. 8 He is speaking to those bringing sacrifices, in other words they were doing the outward form of worship that God required in the OT for the people of Israel, as God's covenant community.

Where did they receive instructions about sacrifice and worship? Go back to Exodus 3 and let's see how God revealed Himself to Israel, and remember God is the same yesterday, today, forever. In Exodus 3:3, you know the story, Moses sees a burning bush.

<sup>4</sup> *When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."*

<sup>5</sup> *Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."* <sup>6</sup> *And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.*

It's been pointed out that Moses did come flippantly or jokingly into God's presence – instead it was with lowly submission, humble contrition, reverential awe, and healthy holy fear. He "covered his face in fear, afraid to even look at God ... Moses was traumatized by his proximity to deity and rightly so" (Lawson, 82).

If you look at Exodus 19, God is preparing to give His people His instructions on worship and how they should live in relation to the Lord and to their fellow man, the Ten Commandments. Ex 19:10: *“the LORD said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments”<sup>11</sup> and be ready for the third day. For on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.<sup>12</sup> And you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, “Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death.”*

God gave the people other detailed instructions about His terms for how He would meet His people to give His law, and if any were to disobey His instructions, they’re struck dead. God is making a point loud and clear that He is not to be approached casually or without reverence or without a holy and health fear of the Lord.

<sup>16</sup> *On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled.*

<sup>17</sup> *Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain.<sup>18</sup> Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly.<sup>19</sup> And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder ...*

... **20:1** *And God spoke all these words, saying,<sup>2</sup> “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.<sup>3</sup> “You shall have no other gods before me.*

... <sup>18</sup> *Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off<sup>19</sup> and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.”<sup>20</sup> Moses said to the people, “Do not fear, for God has come to test you, **that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.**”*

Now turn to Deuteronomy 4, where we get additional important background to Ps 50. God is addressing the generation of Israelites who were faithful, feared God, and God speaks in covenant terms, looking back to Ex 20 and forward to Ps 50 (with application to us)

Deuteronomy 4:10 reminds them of that day: *“how on the day that you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, the LORD said to me, ‘Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children so.’<sup>11</sup> And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, while the mountain burned with fire to the heart of heaven, wrapped in darkness, cloud, and gloom.<sup>12</sup> Then the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice.<sup>13</sup> And he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments, and he wrote them on two tablets of stone.*

[and then most of the chapter is warning against putting any gods before God. The OT also uses idolatry language for “*idols of the heart*” – i.e., idols we make within our mind or heart, which John Calvin called “the idol factory” in us. God warns against idols all the way till v. 26 where it says]

...<sup>26</sup> ***I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you will soon utterly perish from the land ...*** [i.e., in context, if they were guilty of having other gods before God, first command]

**30:19** *I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live,*  
<sup>20</sup> ***loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days ...***

When God says “choose life,” it’s not mere decisionism, or man’s walking an aisle, praying a prayer – v. 20 defines exactly what life looks like for a true follower of the Lord: “*loving the LORD your God, obeying His voice, holding fast to Him, for He is your life ...*”

The LORD is not something we add to our life, *He is our life if we truly have life in God*. He’s Lord of all or He’s not your Lord at all. You can’t call Him Savior if you won’t call Him Lord or if you’re not seeking to live for Him as His bond-servant, His bond-slave. That’s how biblical believers understood their relationship to the Lord, because that’s what the biblical word *Lord* implies/includes. Lord Jesus said if you love me, you’ll keep my commands.

But we have a problem in relation to v. 19-20, choosing life, loving the Lord, obeying Him. The Bible also says in the OT that there is no one who seeks God, when we choose *the way we want*, we all like sheep go astray, there is no one who chooses the good, *none is good*, not one, the heart of man is deceitful and desperately wicked and so the first and greatest command is our first greatest problem!

<sup>6</sup> ***And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.***

It’s not a work *we do* to be saved, it’s God’s work in us. We need a spiritual heart surgery to have this life, to love God, and once that has taken place we will love God from the heart, and v. 8 says we will obey the voice of the Lord and keep His commands. Several times the OT calls for circumcised hearts, heart surgery, a heart transplant, God cutting out the old heart, putting in a new one instead. The NT language is regeneration, new life, new birth, etc.

You could keep reading on your own the rest of Exodus and Leviticus, all the commandments, and you would see God’s Law, requirements for worship and sacrifice, the holiness God demands, the heart God demands, not a formalism, but a fear, a reverence, in transformed hearts seeking to obey (NT calls God transforming hearts “regeneration”– conference theme). That’s the context and background to help us understand Psalm 50.

**Psalm 50:3** *Our God comes; he does not keep silence; before him is a devouring fire, around him a mighty tempest.* <sup>4</sup> *He calls to the heavens above and to the earth, that he may judge his people ...*

This is courtroom language. God enters the courtroom, and v. 3 is language like at Mount Sinai. God calls earth and heaven as the witnesses, since they were the witnesses back in Deuteronomy.  
<sup>6</sup> *The heavens declare his righteousness, for God himself is judge!*

The star witness for the prosecution is the heavens, the place where the stars are, and the sun, mentioned in v. 1. The testimony of the universe in v. 6: *God is righteous as Judge*. Ps 19 says the heavens declare God's glory. Others say creation declare His faithfulness. The witnesses God called for back in Deuteronomy now testify in this courtroom scene, and the faithful just judge must give a verdict. The defendants, the accused, are God's people in v. 4, in v. 5 those in the covenant community of faith. The judge is clearly God in v. 6, and God also takes the stand to witness for the prosecution:

<sup>7</sup> *"Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, I will testify against you. I am God, your God.*

That's a play off or parody of Israel's classic covenant "Shema" in Deuteronomy 6:4, kind of the pledge of allegiance they made each day out loud: *"Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart ..."*

God adapts that same language: "Hear O, Israel ... I am God, your God ... Hear now and I will testify against you" (and it's because in v. 8ff their heart was not right and did not love the Lord even as they did all the outward religious things, regular sacrifices, etc.)

The heart of the accusation reaches its climax in v. 21, and it has to do with the heart of the worshipper and who he believes God to be (and remember, in the Bible, man thinks in his heart, as a man thinks in his heart, so is he): v. 21 "... *You thought that I was like you. But now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you.*"

Before that point, God was silent with His verdict, slow to wrath... but now the rebuke must come at this point, the gavel must come down on man who has brought down God in his heart and mind. The Hebrew is emphatic in v. 21: ***"You thought I was like you!"***

This is the source of the problem in the text. All the other sins in this chapter are a symptom of the ultimate problem in v. 21, to think that God is just like us, altogether like us, or in other words, making a "god in our image." The Bible begins by saying God *made man in His image*, but sinful man likes to think *we can make God in our image, like us, like what we like to think of God is like*

There's a reason the first of the 10 commandments starts with who God is and that no other god must be put in His place. Because if anything else or anything less than the fullness of God as revealed in Scripture is not in the right place in our heart and mind, all else where we sin is domino effect of a wrong God or low view of God.

<sup>2nd</sup> of the 10 commandments: *Don't make for yourself an idol*  
That's exactly what they had done in v. 21 in their mind / heart)

<sup>3rd</sup> commandment: *Don't dishonor God's name*

In v. 16 God rebukes them for how they use God's name and Word on their lips while their lives dishonor Him (v. 17). It's like Jesus said "honoring with their lips while their hearts are far from Him"

4<sup>th</sup> commandment: *Honor the Sabbath Day, Keep it Holy*

The OT Day of worship though had been dishonored by those in Psalm 50 because their hearts weren't thankful in worship (v. 14)

5<sup>th</sup> commandment: *Honor your father and mother*

v. 17 says “*you hate discipline ...*” God’s discipline is mediated through the discipline of parents. How does your attitude towards your parents relate to your view of your heavenly Father?

Proverbs 1:7 says “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, but fools despise ... instruction / discipline*”

6<sup>th</sup> commandment: *You shall not murder*

In v. 19-20 they were killing with their words and thoughts

7<sup>th</sup> commandment: *You shall not commit adultery*

In v. 18b, these people may not have been committing the act itself but they were associating with those who were immoral (we can do this in associating ourselves by what we watch, look at, heart sin)

8<sup>th</sup> commandment: *You shall not steal* (v. 18 – it doesn’t offend us, we enjoy and celebrate theft in video games, or in movies, etc.).

9<sup>th</sup> commandment: *You shall not lie against your neighbor*

In v. 19 there is deceit and evil speech taking place. In v. 20 it’s not only speaking down on a neighbor but against your brother, your mother’s own son, who you should love, your lips destroy

10 commandment: *You shall not covet what belongs to another*

This is the sin behind v. 18, stealing and adultery, coveting what belongs to another, whether it’s property, or whether it’s the privileges of marriage that only belong within God’s bounds of marriage covenant. Coveting also reveals a discontent heart, which is the root behind an unthankful heart, and that’s what v. 23 says is the only heart that honors or glorifies God, a heart that is thankful, not matter what God has given or not, v. 14 says this is the sacrifice God wants, an attitude of thankful gratitude in worship.

All 10 commandments were being broken because the first one was broken in v. 21, not keeping the true God before us, thinking God is like us, or thinking God is less than what He says He is. All the other sins in Ps 50 are symptoms of the source problem, v. 21.

Martin Luther nearly 500 years ago rebuked his Catholic opponent Erasmus: “Your thoughts of God are too human.” Man-centered, God-lowering thinking is a root of all kinds of evil fruit in our life. Making God in our image or likeness or by our “likes” is serious.

It can begin for us with sentences that begin something like this:

“I like to think of God as ...”

“When I picture Jesus, I see ...”

“Well, my God is a God of love...”

“You know, I don’t like to think of God as ...”  
 “On judgment day I think it will be like this ...”  
 “We have free will, so God can’t do what *this verse* says”  
 “That doesn’t seem fair to me by my standards, so I think”  
 “I know this verse says this about God, but I think God is”

What we think or want God to be is irrelevant at best, or idolatry at worst – an idol is any image or thought of God different than the fullness of who He is revealed in scripture, it’s putting another god before God, and is a serious violation of the first commandment.

Don’t think because you don’t have a statue that you pray to at your house that the hundreds of Scriptures about idolatry don’t apply to you – there are “Christian American idols” as well. The focus of Ps 50 isn’t pagans who make graven images out of stone. This psalm is not rebuking those who bow before a golden calf – this psalm is concerned with those involved in worship of the God of the Bible, in religious exercises God has established, doing the very things God commanded for believers, and yet at the same time their mind has fashioned a different God, a diminished God, a distorted view of God, a deity they’ve made in their image.

False views of God Christians can be guilty of:

- God is all love (we can’t pick some attributes, not BK)
- Heavenly repairman (exists just to fix our problems)
- Celestial Santa Claus (the best book I know to recommend to study the attributes of God, and develop tonight’s study further is by Steve Lawson, it’s called *Made in Our Image: What Shall We Do with a “User-Friendly God”*)
- Galactic Grandfather
- Bumper sticker “Jesus is my copilot” (!)

Lawson, p. 37, describes the copilot: ‘You see him “smiling and welcoming everyone coming on board. His job is to be on standby – ready to step in and help should an unexpected emergency demand it ... However, once the emergency is over, he returns control to the pilot. He is always *at* the controls, but never totally *in* control ... How convenient it is to have a subordinate sovereign – able to drive, but only at our discretion! Reduced to a secondary, supportive role, the Lord is always there, watching and awaiting our call in times of crisis. But in the interim He does little. Occasionally, He checks our instrument panels, ready to step in if needed, or comforts us when something goes wrong; but for the most part He is on standby. His will is always subordinate to ours.’

Listen, we’re not in the front with Jesus as our co-pilot, we’re in the bottom of the plane, with the luggage and it’s only by the grace of Jesus that He hasn’t dropped us out the hatch to our death yet! It is by His sovereign mercy alone that any in this room are still alive

## 2. GOD DOES NOT NEED US

In v. 9-13 God makes the point that He does not need us, God is self-sufficient. The point of our worship is not that God wants our fellowship like He’s lonely or has some need, because He has no needs. We are the ones with the needs. God doesn’t need us at all. He didn’t need goats and cows, v. 9. He’s not running low on animals!

He's not running low on cattle for His fields, v. 10 says, He owns the cattle on a thousand hills. It's all already His. He owns it all.

<sup>11</sup> *I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine.* <sup>12</sup> *"If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine.*

God says "I'm not hungry, and if I could be, I wouldn't tell you! I don't need to eat, I don't need to sleep, I don't need your sheep!" The blood of bulls and goats can't take away sin or satisfy God (v. 14). God didn't establish the sacrificial system because He needed something, but to remind us that *we need something, that we need someone, we need a sacrifice to cover our sin. We need a Savior!*

God the judge has pronounced His verdict, and we are all guilty. In Job 9 [NIV, v. 2-3, Job asks] *"But how can mere mortals prove their innocence before God? Though they wished to dispute with him, they could not answer him one time out of a thousand ...*

[15] *Though I were innocent, I could not answer him;*

*I could only plead with my Judge for mercy ...*

[32-34] **He is not a mere mortal like me** *that I might answer him,*

*that we might confront each other in court. **If only there were someone to mediate between us, someone to bring us together ...***

God is not a man like us, but God the Son amazingly became a man so there is a Mediator to bring God and man together, Christ! There is a redeemer, Jesus, God's own Son, precious lamb of God Messiah, holy One. God graciously gave sacrifices to remind of the cost of sin, that death was required for sin. As you slit the throat of an animal that had lived among you for awhile, as you slaughtered the lamb and watched it die as the blood ran out and the life went out from it, you had your hand on it and were to realize the graphic picture: *because of your sin you deserved that death.* That should be you being put to death, but God allows substitution. The animal sacrifices all pointed forward to the ultimate sacrifice to come, the sacrifice of Isaiah 53, Messiah, coming as a substitute sheep to the slaughter, led as a lamb to be slain for us, for our transgressions, for our iniquities. It was the only sacrifice that ever truly atoned.

Verse 15 says call on this Lord, He delivers, He saves those who know they are in need of deliverance as sinners, and then you can glorify God. Then you can honor Him. Then your religious actions will not be driven by guilt or by trying to be good enough, but driven by gratitude (v. 14), by thankfulness for God's saving grace.

James Boice wrote, for OT Israelites, the offerings/sacrifices were to 'remind the worshiper that all we have comes from God; even in our worship we only give back a portion of what God has already given us [when we give offerings by money today, it's the same principle]. Second, they teach that the only way of approaching God is by atonement for sins. They remind us that we are sinners and need salvation. But what this boils down to is that rituals, whether the Old Testament system of sacrifices and feasts or the New Testament [ordinances] of baptism and the Lord's Supper, are for our benefit, not God's. Therefore, they function rightly only [with] a spirit of thankfulness in the worshiper. As soon as we begin to think that we are doing God a favor by our worship we dishonor God and slide into a false religion of works righteousness ...

Thankfulness ... emphasizes what God has done and not what we imagine ourselves as being able to do. The real problem with ritual is that, if forms are all there is to our religion, they give us feelings of being right with God when actually we may be guilty of the most terrible sins. This happened to the Pharisees in the days of Jesus ... Formalism leads easily to such hardening, which is why the psalm speaks so strongly about it

... [Boice warns in application against those who suppose] that they can worship God and disobey him at the same time. In verse 16 we find that they are reciting God's laws and taking his covenant on their lips. That is, they are mouthing everything they are supposed to. But verse 17 tells us that they actually hate God's instruction and ignore the Bible's precepts. The theological term for this perilous state is *antinomianism*, meaning "against the law." It is the religion of those who think they can belong to God and nevertheless sin freely. The church is full of people like that ...

What is even worse, there is a type of evangelical theology that refuses to face the fact that such persons are not Christians and indeed even encourages them in the delusion that they can belong to God and at the same time continue willfully to disobey him ... In other words, it is possible to be saved by him without having to follow him ... possible to be [saved] without being regenerated."

But the Bible says if anyone is in Christ, He's a new creation. These people Ps 50 is written to had grown up in the community of faith, just as many of you in this room have grown up in Christian homes. I have no doubt they could have given right answers on a theological quiz and could have quoted Bible verses about God. But the problem in v. 22, look at it, it says "*you forget God ...*" – it's what the old Puritans called "practical atheism."

We sin in secret sometimes like we don't really believe in God's omnipresence (God is everywhere), we don't really pray like we believe God is omnipotent (all powerful), we relish sinful thoughts in our minds as if God isn't really omniscient (all-knowing).

You don't say out loud that there is no God; you say it with your life. You live as if there is no God, forgetting what you know and have been taught. V. 22 says judgment falls on practical atheists, and it uses very serious and sober and severe language for such sin.

Look across the page at Psalm 53 – it's not the fool who says *with his mouth* there is no God. What does Psalm 53:1 say? The fool has said ... where? "*in his heart* that there is no God." It's April Fool's Day today - if you are that kind of fool, who lives as if there is no God, or the god you have in your mind is a figment of your imagination and not the God of the Bible, if you like 2 Peter 3 are *willfully forgetting God*, or as Romans 1 says, *suppressing* the truth you know about God, if you know the right "Christian" things to say out loud about the Bible but you've never really experienced regeneration, I pray God saves/transforms your heart this weekend and makes you a fool *for Christ like me*, believing in a message the world thinks is foolish, but God has chosen foolish ones like us! Lay down your foolish life, repent, bow before the only wise God.

If you've forgotten God, not willfully, but you've thought lightly of Him lately, or you think little of Him in your life, but your heart does love God and wants to more, I pray God transforms you, too.

William Cowper: “The dearest idol I have known, whatever that idol be. Help me to tear it from thy throne, and worship only Thee”

If the way these Scriptures presents God resonates with your soul and rejoices your heart – if you’re one of us weird people who like how it feels when we’re humbled all the way down on our back because we then look up to a gloriously supreme sufficient satisfying Savior, if you’ve already experienced regeneration, the transformation of your heart, praise our great God for His grace. Seeing God for who He really is, is regeneration/transformation. I love how verse 2 describes the Lord, to the eyes of a believer:

<sup>2</sup> *Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth.*

Zion in Scripture often signifies salvation, in contrast to Sinai (the law). Out of Zion, of salvation, God shines forth as perfection of beauty. A regenerated heart sees beauty and glory in the face of the Lord.

Psalm 27:4 “*One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty, the beauty of the Lord ...*”

Ps 29:2 “*Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness ...*” (NKJV)

Ps 90:17 “*Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us*” (NKJV)

2 Corinthians 4:4 says unbelievers can’t see beauty or glory in Christ; “*the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God ... [but for those God has regenerated, v. 6 says] “God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. <sup>7</sup>But we have this treasure in jars of clay”*

The unregenerate are bored with the things of the Lord, but those God has regenerated see the Lord as beauty, as glory, as a treasure. And the more we behold Him, the more we become like Him. God is not like us but is so gracious to make us more like Him as we see Him as He really is, and I pray He will be doing that this weekend.

1 Jn 3:2 “*we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. <sup>3</sup>And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself,*

2 Corinthians 3:18 *And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.*

I pray the reminders of who God really is and what the gospel is all about, will this weekend refresh you and reignite your passion for Christ, will renew your mind, and you will want to tell everyone you know the glories of salvation, with a grateful thankful heart. Romans 1 says the indictment against unsaved man is “*they did not glorify God nor were they thankful.*” Glorifying God and being thankful go together, and are linked in v. 23 for those truly saved. At the end of the doctrinal section of Romans, after 11 chapters of explaining our great need for a Savior because of our great sin, and then the greatness of God’s grace, Paul launches into thanksgiving:

Romans 11:35 “*Who has ever given to God,  
that God should repay them?*”

*For from him and through him and for him are all things.*

*To him be the glory forever! Amen.*

**12:1** *Therefore I urge you brothers, in view of God’s mercy [i.e., in thankfulness, not to earn, not cause God needs it, you need it], to offer your bodies a living sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual act of worship. Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*

I pray God’s heart-regenerating, mind-renewing, life-transforming gratitude-producing grace will be very present in this place this weekend, overflowing in praise and thankfulness from the heart, to the glory of our beautiful Savior Jesus, our treasure, our Lord, and I pray as we see Him just as He is, we’ll become more like Christ. God is not like us. God does not need us. But God is gracious to us, meeting our need, and making us more like His Son, our Savior