



*10 The heart knoweth his own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy. 11 The house of the wicked shall be overthrown: but the tabernacle of the upright shall flourish. 12 There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. 13 Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness. (Prov 14:10-13)*

I must apologize for making this a four or five part devotion on Proverbs 14, but even minimal justice cannot be done in a two part series. This is a particularly powerful chapter that merits a methodical study of its constituent parts. I hope and pray that all who read will apply due diligence to confirming all of the scriptural text, personally, that I have referenced in the devotion. There is great power in the direct reading of the Word of God from the Source itself - much more power than a simple quoting of it by mortal hands.

An excellent scriptural reference with which to begin our devotion today would be: *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.* (Gal 5:22-23) You will note that there is an abject lack of charismatic fruits listed, or even tithing or public piety. Of course, spiritual fidelity to church, friends, and neighbors is encompassed by these less presumptive gifts of love and joy. The one fruit that I wish to emphasize, pursuant to our text today, is JOY!

*10 The heart knoweth his own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy.* This one verse incorporates volumes of understanding if we could but glean full meanings from a single sitting. No one can order our joys or sorrows for these are commodities that exist in the hidden man's heart. On every major city sidewalk,

there are pedestrian who walk daily with intense sorrow in their hearts and a smile on their faces. We often cloak our sorrows with a smile. But it is unlikely that we would cloak our joys with a frown. What is true joy, and where may it be found? Joy is founded, not on present victories, but future prospects. Joy is a function of HOPE. Our greatest joy should always be anchored in the future promise of all that God has in store for those who love and obey Him. Even if our shoulders are heavy with the burdens of life, and our hearts filled with present sorrows, our hope in Christ mitigates all such sorrows and burdens. *For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.* (Psalms 30:5) There will always be a brilliant sunrise after every dreary and dark night. There will always be a bright and beautiful sun to shed its effulgent rays of warmth and light upon the hearts of men. Remember, God began Creation in Darkness and finished it in Light - "...and the EVENING and the morning were the first day, etc."

As the Apostle Paul has told us, there is even joy to be had in tribulation: "... *I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation.*" (2 Cor 7:4) Can you imagine the hope-filled joy of the Wise Men when they left Jerusalem and again spied the Star? *When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.* (Matt 2:10) There can even be joy at the door of the Tomb of a loved One if that Tomb is EMPTY! *And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word.* (Matt 28:8) Is it not the great beauty of future promise that most tantalizes our hearts for joy? *Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets.* (Luke 6:23) If we are assured of a highway of gold tomorrow, do we not step more lightly upon the muddy ruts of today's earthly walk? Subdued joy often precedes effulgence of joy. The men on the Road to Emmaus were overcome with joy when they met a stranger that explained to them the meaning of the events of recent days, yet, their joy was so strong that they could barely believe the enormity of truth that was about to be revealed: *And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat?* (Luke 24:41) When the Lord has spoken to your heart in a special and personal way, could you contain the joy?

Do you have 'fullness' of joy? Is this even a possibility? By all means, it is if we have the faith to believe with great depth of understanding: *These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.* (John 15:11) If we have the joy of Christ in these inferior vessels of clay, our joy must be full! Having the joy of Christ secreted away in our bosoms, all sorrow will be turned to joy. Do you believe this, Friend? *Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.* (John 16:20) The hope that is fostered by future promise of joy strengthens us to abide all torments - even a rude cross: *Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.* (Heb 12:2) It is for this reason that we, today, can enjoy unspeakable joy: *Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.* (1 Peter 1:8-9)

11 The house of the wicked shall be overthrown: but the tabernacle of the upright shall flourish. How is this so? Have we not read the very counsel of Christ? I can add no further meaning to the perfect clarity of the words of Christ: *Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.*

*And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.* (Matt 7:24-27) If that wicked house is not overthrown according to our schedule, it certainly shall be according to God's.

12 There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. Which way is it that seems right to man? Is it not the way in which man is not required to live up to his duties and responsibilities? Is it not the way that is downhill and full of many other people of like sinful natures? *Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.* (Matt 7:13-14) When we come to Christ, we must come holding nothing back - our old sinful wills must also be exchanged for His perfect will. The "*way that seemeth right unto a man*" is that way which is sinful and carnal. If we remain on that way, we are marching to our eternal demise. There is also a Way that seemeth right to God. He has told us of that Way, and we had best set our hearts on it: *I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.* (John 14:6) This, my friends, is the ONLY Way! *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.* (Isaiah 55:8)

13 Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness. If your heart is in the mud, so will your joy be quenched. To be honest, it is impossible to escape the net of sorrow in this life completely. But we have hope! We have assurance of a future victory! This is the food of joy which the Christian consumes as his daily manna. But the stubborn and proud come not to this table of joy. They will do it, as Frank Sinatra claims to have done it - MY WAY! *This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.* (Matt 15:8) I wonder what meaning the words of Sinatra's song have for him today? I much prefer the Lord's Way insofar as He gives me the Light to see it. How about you, dear Reader?