



22 Do they not err that devise evil? but mercy and truth shall be to them that devise good. 23 In all labour there is profit: but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury. 24 The crown of the wise is their riches: but the foolishness of fools is folly. 25 A true witness delivereth souls: but a deceitful witness speaketh lies. 26 In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge. 27 The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death. 28 In the multitude of people is the king's honour: but in the want of people is the destruction of the prince. (Prov 14:22-28)

Not only 'Behavior Modification' but also a fundamental change of the heart is the object of God in His dealings with mankind. Had man listened to God and obeyed, in the Garden at Eden, such a process would not be necessary since a heart devoted to God was already innate in the man and woman that God created. But behavior is definitely an outward sign of the inward righteousness of the Christian. Like the most precious and brilliant gem, happiness is not found in the expected places else everyone would be wealthy with gems and happiness. Our happiness is not nearly so much dependent upon that which, in this world, we GAIN as it is to that which we GIVE. In the natural psychology of the carnal mind, this principle is reversed. The devil has done his work well.

The historian, Gibbon, tells us that Abdulrahman, of the Muslim Caliphs of Moorish Spain, built for his pleasure the city, palace, and gardens of Zehra, beautifying them with the costliest marbles, sculptures, gold, and pearls. He had sixty-three hundred persons—wives, concubines, and eunuchs—at his service. His guard had belts and scimitars studded with gold. At his death, the following authentic memorial was found: "*I have now reigned above fifty years in victory and peace. . . . Riches, honors, power, pleasure—the days of pure and genuine happiness which have fallen to my lot: they amount to fourteen.*" Only fourteen days of happiness out of a long life of opulence. It would seem sure evidence that opulence does not define happiness.

That which is done out of willful intent is not an error, except in the degree that it deviates from the will of God. ***22 Do they not err that devise evil? but mercy and truth shall be to them that devise good.*** Deliberate error may not seem error to its fabricator. Lacking any higher nature, imbued by God, the hands of error are guided by the fool to whom the hands belong. There were some tribes the missionaries discovered in New Guinea who believed that treachery against others was the very highest virtue. Such evil foolishness is born out of centuries of spiritual darkness. But the people of those

tribes have a greater justification for their wicked designs for they had not light previously. But what of nations and people who have been showered in Light and then turn to darkness with deliberate intent? What is the way wherein we may discover the rich grain mercy and truth? *All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies.* (Psalms 25:10) Walking in the Light of the Lord, we are walking in His pure Ways of mercy, truth, righteousness, and obedience. Our devices are not only manifested in our outward works, but our inward desires.

23 In all labour there is profit: but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury. It is not in the nature of man or beast to labor without some profitable end in sight. A beast is spared the rod when he labors according to his masters directions. A man is spared the condemnation of society when he earns his bread by the sweat of his brow rather than from the stealth of his card game. Great historical structures such as the Great Pyramid, the Roman Coliseum, St Paul's Cathedral, or Westminster Abbey did not appear from the mist of a dream though the dream did precede the labor that was necessary to construct them. There is no structure in the world that can be boasted to have been built by the lips and bluster of the fool. If we were forced to live in structures constructed by talk alone, we would be sleeping in the moist dews of the morning. A constant brag and bluster delays the labor necessary to bring the dream to fulfillment. At last, we are gone from the earth and the building has not been built. But there is a greater building that we must be constructing while life remains – that is the building of faith and love, and the Temple of God that is made without hands. But this Temple was not constructed without intense labor – it cost the Lord Jesus Christ much sweat and tears to construct for us. We only need to take tenancy there.

24 The crown of the wise is their riches: but the foolishness of fools is folly. A crown is an outward sign of authority and favor. In the case of a king, he is a king whether he wears his crown daily or not. But the crown is a formal and outward recognition of authority of the king, or favor granted by the Crown. What do we call a son or daughter of a king? Do we not call them princes and princesses? The wise will always be rich even if those riches are not openly displayed. But the wise will always follow the Star of Christ as did the Magi. All who follow Christ are son and daughters of the King of Kings. Therefore, our crown is wisdom and righteousness. Folly is akin to bedlam - it makes no sense for first-day medical student to attempt brain surgery. That must be left to the skilled hands of one well trained and experienced. Our wisdom grows with time and experience. But the fool has no anchor for his soul. Incidentally, do you know where the term 'bedlam' originated? There was a hospital in London for the mentally insane called Bethlehem hospital. The locals abbreviated the English pronunciation to bed'lam. There was always a great deal of screaming and yelling coming from the walls of Bethlehem hospital, so bedlam came to mean confusion and folly.

25 A true witness delivereth souls: but a deceitful witness speaketh lies. The word 'but' in scripture is a mighty important term. It represents a total and often unexpected contrast in circumstances. Look at the manner in which the great Commander, Naaman, is depicted: *Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the LORD had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valour, but he was a leper.* (2 Kings 5:1) All of the power and pelf of the world amounts to nothing if we are afflicted with a deadly and incurable disease. All alike on earth were afflicted with the leprosy of sin at birth. As with Naaman, God is the only Physician to treat that malady.

May I ask a potentially embarrassing question? Are you a true witness, and, if

so, how many souls have you delivered? Or, will you face Christ on the last day empty handed? Suggested in the context of this verse is the fact that it is sincerity and truth that will deliver souls and not deceit. The TV programming is replete with deceitful ministers who seem to limit the power of God to act by the size of the offering posted to them. If we are true witnesses, SOMEONE will be persuaded by our testimony to come to Christ.

26 In the fear of the LORD is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge. We do not typically see confidence defined by fear in our social vernacular; but there is no contradiction as used by God in this verse. If we did not fear our earthly fathers, it would be because those fathers were weak and impotent - unable to defend us from all dangers. Our fear of a loving Father in Heaven is a healthy reverence and respect based upon knowledge and wisdom of His Person and Word. We shall ALWAYS find safety under the wings of God. But we must remember Him both day and night: *My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips: When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches. Because thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.* (Psalms 63:5-7)

27 The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death. The Fountain is the source of the Water of Life. We cannot know God if we have not feared Him. You may not be well-acquainted with the law because you are not a criminal; but a criminal has an intimate familiarity with the law. If a man or woman is able to live a life in perfect obedience to the law of God, they may not fear God. But there does not exist such a man or woman - all have sinned and come short of the righteousness of God. So, like the common criminal who fears the judge, the sinner must fear the Judge of Souls. That fear is changed into love and reverence as the relationship grows in depth. Our fear of offending against the justice of God drives us from the gaping abyss and TO the Narrow Gate of Heaven.

28 In the multitude of people is the king's honour: but in the want of people is the destruction of the prince. When the multitudes of the citizens of a kingdom love their king, the king is greatly honored for their devotion. It is a wholesome reflection on the goodness of the king that his people love him. The degree of devotion of the people are the barometer by which the virtue of the king is measured. *When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.* (Prov 29:2) We have the most glorious King of all Eternity - kind and gracious. In His Kingdom, every soul will love and reverence Him, for all others shall be with the Prince of Darkness. When the people are in want and despair, it is the king who bears the guilt. Not only will the king come to ruin, but his prince will likewise be deprived on his inheritance. Let me so that no Prince or Princess of the Kingdom of God shall be cast down for the King of Kings abides forever.