

Proverbs of Solomon – Proverbs 28:14

I don't think the Lord will mind if we take **verse 14** and reverse the order of its presentation. Tonight, we'll retain the parallel poetry, but start at the end. I'm doing this because the second statement helps to shed light on the first. And there is the fact that the second part is easier to understand than the first. *"He that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief, but happy is the man that feareth always."*

"He that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief."

Notice the word *"hardeneth."* I am convinced that every human heart begins its life in a soft and malleable condition. Place two one-year-old babies together – one black child and one white – they will play together without any racial recognition or prejudice. Oh, they may quarrel toys and fight for affection or dominance, but it won't be because of their skin color. Children learn prejudice and hatred from their parents, from other adults and children – and from society. It is by choice that they harden their hearts against others.

And those two small children will listen as we tell them about the Lord, learning the Bible lessons and believing what we tell them from the Word of God. But eventually their depravity will take over, and it will harden them toward the sovereign God. We know children to be sinful little creatures, initially devoid of spiritual life and spiritual perception. But as this verse suggests, it is over time that they actually harden their hearts. To have a hard heart is a choice we sinful creatures make. That is one of the declarations of this verse.

Every child eventually comes to want to be his own god, making his own rules – choosing his own path. But those children, and the adults they become, rarely see the end of the path they are taking. They can't recognize that it is a dark, dead-end alley, and mischief is awaiting them.

The word *"mischief"* is somewhat mysterious in this case. There are two primary ways to interpret and apply it. The Hebrew original is translated *"mischief"* 21 times. And from the way this verse is laid out we might assume that the man walking into this alley will fall into the mischief of some evil person – perhaps a thief or a murderer. The word *"fall"* might suggest some sort of pit or even a trap.

But that Hebrew original word is translated *"evil"* more than 20 times as often as *"mischief"* – 442 times. So the Lord could be saying *"He that hardeneth his heart shall fall into EVIL."* And with that we might read this to say, *"He that hardeneth his heart shall sooner or later fall into the trap of DOING evil things."* As he stubbornly refuses to listen to the Word of the Lord and the conviction of the Holy Spirit, he shall become more and more evil himself.

Either interpretation makes sense. Matthew Henry explains this verse with – *"the hardened man will fall into the mischief of ruin."* And John Gill says, *"this hard-hearted man will fall into the mischief of God's judgment."*

The poetry tells us to contrast this heard-hearted person with – "happy is the man that feareth always."
"Fearful always?????" Isn't this contrary to reason? Isn't this contrary to what we are taught? We are told – and the unregenerated heart concurs – the fearful person is a miserable person. And the man who is *"fearful always"* needs to see a psychiatrist, and get some pills. There are fancy psycho-medical terms to describe this person. And there are ads on the evening news about this kind of person. In our society when we **find** someone who *"fearful always,"* it is often in the tavern drinking himself to death. The man who is *"fearful always"* might be the one who drives too fast on ice roads, base jumps, and takes extreme drugs, trying to cover up his fears with fearful risks. *"Blessed is the man that feareth always?????"*

Our initial confusion, and the world's misunderstanding of this statement, begins in the mis-definition of *"happy."* This isn't speaking of the gaiety and gladness which comes from positive circumstances – happenstance. This Hebrew word is most often translated *"blessedness."* *"Blessed is the man that feareth always."* This happiness is a result of the blessing of God, not from the gift of government or powerful medications. Not only is this **happiness** a gift of God's grace, but so is the **fear**. (I'll have to come back to that.)

"Happy is the man that feareth always." This is not talking about the fear of other men. Some people, because of their position in life, deserve a degree of respect – but none should be feared. I saw a picture the other day of three men on their knees with their backs to other men who were holding automatic weapons. The kneeling men were described as Christians, and the inscription said that they were slaughtered shortly after the picture was taken. None of the three appeared to be in fear of either death or the men behind them. The fear that most people would have in those circumstances enslaves. That kind of fear might have kept those Christians from worshiping the Lord in the first place. But it was because they had no fear of the terrorists that they were in that predicament. Their fear of the Lord lead them to fearlessness before God's enemies. Human fear is not the fear to which this verse refers. This is not *"the fear of man, which bringeth a snare."*

Considering the source of the statement – this talking about the fear of God. While we may understand that idea, the

unregenerated heart doesn't. This fear of God is **not servile** – it is not the fear or even the respect that a servant or slave might have. This fear is **filial** – it is the respect that a child has for his Heavenly Father. It isn't the fear which distrust might create. ***“GOD hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” – II Timothy 1:7.*** There is no reason to question or wonder about God's grace, or His love toward us, or whether His promises might fail. Consider who our Father is; He is the God who cannot lie and who cannot fail, because He is omnipotent. And in fact, it is He who gives us this blessed fear – ***“And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.” – Jeremiah 32:40.***

The fear of God in this verse has nothing to do with potential judgment when we come to the end of life. This is the God who sent His Son to provide us with eternal life. ***“He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” – Romans 8:32.*** ***“Praise ye the Lord. Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord...” – Psalm 112:1.***

But why does the Bible use the word **“fear?”** Is the Holy Spirit trying to confuse us? Most modern people rarely use a dictionary, particularly the older dictionaries which take us nearer to the language used by King James and the translators of our Bible. Both my little etymological dictionary and Webster's 1828 dictionary, give this as the second definition of **“fear”** – ***“To reverence; to have reverential awe; to venerate.”*** What Solomon is saying is – ***“Happy is the man who lives in reverential awe of the Lord his God.”***

Besides this lesson – that the word **“fear”** means **“to have in reverence”** – there is a secondary lesson – Happy is the man who lives in fear of offending His heavenly Father. As Christians we ought not to fear of the Lord, but we should have a fear of disappointing Him. The child of God cannot be separated from God's love which is in Christ Jesus his Saviour. No saint of the Lord needs to fear the loss of his eternal salvation. The life God gives is eternal. So ***“happy is the man that feareth alway”*** because he hath nothing to fear in that regard. But we can, and often do, still sin and in this we damage the fellowship we might have with the Lord. While we cannot loose our salvation, we can loose the joy of our salvation, and this should be something to concern us.

A moment ago, I quoted part of **Psalm 112:1**, in conclusion let me share the rest of it – ***“Praise ye the Lord. Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord; that delighteth greatly in his commandments.”*** He that feareth Lord will not harden his heart against God's will, and thus will not fall into mischief. He that feareth the Lord will delight in God's Word, including His commandments, keeping his heart soft and supple. He that feareth the Lord will not walk down that dark alley toward sin and mischief, because He listens to and obeys the will of his loving Heavenly Father. This soft heart helps to protect him, and it is instrumental in the Christian's happiness.