

Living *by* Faith



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Prov. 28:4, 7, 9; Rom. 1:16, 17; Gal. 3:24; Prov. 28:5; 1 John 2:15–17; Prov. 29:13.*

Memory Text: “The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe” (*Proverbs 29:25, NKJV*).

So many voices call to us from so many directions. How do people know what is right and what is wrong? The answer is found in God and His written revelation. We must learn to rely on God and to obey His Law. The rest then will follow by itself.

Jesus told us this when He said to “‘seek first the kingdom of God,’ ” and then all that we need will be supplied (*Matt. 6:33, NKJV*). We are to make trusting and following God our first priority; otherwise, we will make something else that priority, which is idolatry, pure and simple. And we can learn to trust God only by living a life of faith. The Christian walk is just that, a walk; we have to make the choices to do the things that the Lord has told us to do, and then leave the consequences to Him.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 14.

Keep the Law

Out of 13 occurrences of the word *torah*—“law” or “teaching”—in the book of Proverbs, four are in Proverbs 28 (*vss. 4 [twice], 7, 9*). Although this use in Proverbs applies normally to the “teaching” of the wise man (*Prov. 13:14*), in the Israelite tradition the word has a spiritual connotation and refers to divine revelation, as attested in the book of Proverbs itself (*Prov. 29:18*).

Read Proverbs 28:4, 7, and 9. What do these verses tell us about the importance of the law in how we live?

What made the people of Israel different from other nations was not so much their way of thinking, or even their “spiritual” and abstract theological views. It was their concrete choices in life about, among other things, food, rest, the natural environment, and their relationships with neighbors and family that made them “holy,” or “set apart” from all the other nations. And, ideally, those choices were to center on the law and the principles found in it.

After all, we humans cannot be wise by ourselves; we can’t always even distinguish between good and evil (*1 Kings 3:9*). So, we need the divine law to help us to acquire discernment. In other words, the acquisition of wisdom does not depend on intellectual or spiritual exercises; it is essentially related to obedience to a law that lies outside ourselves, our culture, our personal psychology, and our desires.

This law is, of course, God’s eternal law. And to follow that law is indeed an act of faith. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith” (*Rom. 1:16, 17*).

What troubles and problems have you been spared because you have made a commitment by faith to keep God’s law? How different would your life be were you not keeping it?

Seek the Lord

No matter how crucial it is to a life of faith, the law (the torah) is not itself the source of life. On the contrary, the law points out sin, and sin leads to death (*see Rom. 7:7–13*). Instead, what makes the torah effective is that it comes from God. Apart from God, the torah would be a legalistic creed that has nothing to do with His original intention. A life of obedience to the law of God is related to a life with God. The torah does not replace God; it is just a teacher that (according to Paul’s analogy) leads the students to their Master (*Gal. 3:24*).

Read Galatians 3:24 in context. How does the law point us to Jesus, so that we can indeed be “justified by faith”?

The book of Proverbs is not just a book of wisdom; it is, first of all, a book about the God who has *revealed* wisdom. Seeking wisdom by obeying the law will draw us nearer to the Lord and to the salvation He freely offers us by faith in Jesus.

Read Proverbs 28:5. What is the key for us to “understand all”?

The word *understand* is used twice in verse 5, just as the word *law* is in verse 4. The two verses are related: keeping the law (*vs. 4*) and seeking the Lord (*vs. 5*) belong together. The scope of this activity, however, is not just knowing and doing what is right (“justice” [*vs. 5, NKJV*]). This understanding concerns “all” simply because it derives from the God of “all.” For ancient Israel, knowledge of all things was not separated from religious experience. Faith was closely tied to intelligence and rational understanding. It was inconceivable to have faith without thinking or thinking without faith, because God was the foundation of both domains.

Why is faith in God such a rational position to hold? Why is it more illogical and irrational to reject God than to believe in Him?

Words for the Rich

Read 1 John 2:15–17. What are we being warned against here, and how can we protect ourselves from the danger these verses talk about?

Though the idea of what it means to be “rich” varies greatly, the book of Proverbs comes with some instructions on how to get “rich” and then how to deal with your “riches” once you get them.

1. *Do not get rich at the expense of the poor (Prov. 28:8).* Your wealth is not justified if you obtain it at the expense of the poor. As we have already seen, the Bible speaks very strongly against those who exploit the poor for their own gain.

2. *Give to the poor (Prov. 28:27).* In contrast to the “greedy” of Proverbs 28:25 (*NIV*, literally, “broad of soul/appetite”), the person who is generous to the poor will be blessed.

3. *Work hard (Prov. 28:19).* Wealth should not come as the result of stealing or by chance, but as a reward for our hard work. What is obtained depends on the quality of our labor. If we are rich, we should deserve it.

4. *Do not try to get rich fast (Prov. 28:20, 22).* Our proverbs present two potential scenarios: (1) when we close an eye to some dishonest action and, as a result, become complicit in that action (*vs. 22*); (2) when we are so eager to enjoy the wealth of our parents that we rob them of what they need to live now (*vs. 24*). Even worse, those who do those things can justify the wrong deeds in their own minds until they convince themselves that they have done nothing wrong. Therefore, they say, “it is no transgression” (*NKJV*).

Money is a very powerful force in this world, which is why the Bible talks a lot about it. If, like pretty much everyone else, you desire money, how can you make sure that you are not falling into the trap of what Jesus called “the deceitfulness of riches” (*Mark 4:19*)?

Handbook for the Poor

Read Proverbs 29:13. What is being discussed here?

The poor and the rich are equal (Prov. 29:13, NKJV). The image of light used in this proverb places this issue in perspective of Creation. Both the rich and the poor have been created by God (*Prov. 22:2*). They both enjoy the gift of life, and the sun shines upon both. Just as the rich have been warned about how they treat the poor, the poor are to love even their oppressors, which could in some cases be the rich (*Matt. 5:44, 45*).

What is the message of Proverbs 28:3?

The poor have the same duties as the rich (Prov. 28:3). Poverty should not be an excuse for iniquity. The fact that you may have been oppressed does not give you license to oppress others. Jesus' parable of the unfor-giving servant who oppresses the one poorer than himself shows that this reaction, although unexpected on the part of the poor (whom one might think would be more sympathetic to other poor people), is not unusual (*Matt. 18:22–35*). In Proverbs 28:3, the image of the rain, which usually is a blessing, turns out to be a destructive torrent; this imagery illustrates the abnormality of that behavior and the disappointment it brings.

What is the message of Proverbs 28:6?

The righteous poor are better than the wicked rich (Prov. 28:6). According to traditional wisdom, the righteous person is not supposed to be poor, for poverty is supposedly the just punishment for the lazy (*Prov. 24:34*). Yet, the reality of life is more complex. The poor may be the victims of injustice or of circumstances beyond their control. This can often be the case. Nevertheless, the scale of values defended by the book of Proverbs is clear and unambiguous. Righteousness is more important than riches, and success is not a foolproof indicator of righteousness.

What can we do when tempted to compromise our values for material gain? How can we protect ourselves from doing something like this, which is easier to do than we realize?

Loving the Truth

Of all the things we could teach our children, our students, or anyone who is open to learning from us, perhaps the most important lesson can be found here in 2 Thessalonians, as Paul, who is writing about the lost, says that “they received not the love of the truth” (*vs. 10*). Of course, because Jesus is the Truth, teaching others to love truth is teaching them to love Jesus, and what else really matters?

“Whatever line of investigation we pursue, with a sincere purpose to arrive at truth, we are brought in touch with the unseen, mighty Intelligence that is working in and through all. The mind of man is brought into communion with the mind of God, the finite with the Infinite. The effect of such communion on body and mind and soul is beyond estimate.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 14.

Read Proverbs 29:15 (*see also vs. 19*). **What important principle is seen here, not just in education but in life in general?**

Though our example is important—especially with those whom we can’t reprove or punish—in some cases more is needed. This is especially true with our children. At times children need to be punished in order to be brought into line.

Our natures are all fallen and corrupt, and this includes even those adorable little beings whom we love, our children. We don’t do our children or ourselves any favors by letting them do whatever they want. Children, in fact, not only need discipline—they *want it*. They need to know that boundaries exist, and that they need to stay within them. A mother who believes that she has to respect her children’s freedom and lets them do whatever they want without ever saying No to them, will ultimately bring “shame” (*vs. 15*) to herself and, no doubt, sorrow to the children—if not now, then certainly when the children become adults.

What are some of the lessons you learned as a child that have stuck with you as an adult? How has that knowledge helped to make your life better now?

Further Study: “The laws of God have their foundation in the most immutable rectitude, and are so framed that they will promote the happiness of those who keep them. . . . Religion brings man into personal relation with God, but not exclusively; for the principles of heaven are to be lived out, that they may help and bless humanity.”—Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 267.

“The utter neglect of training children for God has perpetuated evil and thrown into the ranks of the enemy many who with judicious care might have been co-laborers with Christ. False ideas and a foolish, misdirected affection have nurtured traits which have made the children unlovely and unhappy, have embittered the lives of the parents, and have extended their baleful influence from generation to generation. Any child that is permitted to have his own way will dishonor God and bring his father and mother to shame. . . . By neglecting their duty and indulging their children in wrong, parents close to them the gates of the city of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 325, 326.

Discussion Questions:

- ① Russian author Leo Tolstoy, though raised in a Christian home, abandoned his faith for many years. When older, he faced a crisis: *What did life mean, especially a life that will certainly end in death?* Though he sought answers in all areas of knowledge, he found none there. He eventually realized that the only logical answer to the question of life and its meaning had to be found in faith—in something that went *beyond* logic itself. That is, his logic told him to step beyond logic, into the world of faith, in order to get answers to the meaning of life. Why, then, is faith in Jesus really the most logical choice we can make regarding the meaning and purpose of life?
- ② What is your understanding of what it means to love the truth? How do we love truth? To love truth, of course, would mean that we would have to know it first. How do we come to a knowledge of truth? And how can we be sure that we don't allow anything to stand in the way of our loving truth above all else?

Kindness Always Comes Back

Miranda Starr, principal and teacher at Parkersburg Academy in West Virginia, wanted to do an experiment with her first- and second-grade students.

“In Bible class, we were studying about kindness, and how it is contagious,” she says. “We wanted to see if it really works.”

Then Miranda had an idea; why not go to Eagle Pointe, a local nursing home, where the students could practice their reading skills and make friends with the residents? “This was something I had always wanted to do,” she admits. “We like to sing, but [I wondered] what else could we do for them to make relationships.”

The idea was a hit, and by January the students were reading well enough to read on their own.

“We go to Eagle Pointe every other Friday,” explains eight-year-old Ben. “We sing to the whole group, and we read to our partners.”

“It wasn’t hard to pick our partners,” chimes in seven-year-old Reagan. “We saw them, looked at their faces, and then chose one because we liked them!”

The students also get to choose the book or books that they want to read to their partner and are welcome to exchange books with other students if they finish their own.

As the students read, they are also developing friendships. “My partner’s name is Miss Jane,” says six-year-old Sophia. “I was reading about animal tracks, and I read about a red fox. She told me that she once had a red fox as a pet!”

The residents clearly enjoy the visits and comment on what good readers the students are. “I like seeing my partner smile,” Ben adds.

The students in grades three through eight also participate. “I really like going there,” says nine-year-old Ryleigh. “There’s one man I read to—Mark. He’s always happy to see me, and says, ‘God loves you.’ I really like him and wish we could go more often.”

In appreciation of the students’ visits, Eagle Pointe held a banquet in their honor and presented Miranda with an award plaque: “Junior Volunteers of the Year—Parkersburg Academy. You’ve warmed the hearts of many by the caring that you show. Volunteers are Shining Stars.”

Reflecting on their kindness experiment, Miranda knows it was a success. “Kindness did come back. We tried to give them joy, but they gave more to us.”