

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 unforgiving 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?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Proverbs 28:4, 5, 7–9; 29:13*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Recognize the value of the practical counsel of Proverbs, which is grounded in the fear of the Lord.

Feel: Appreciate the value of God’s practical counsel, recognizing its fundamental orientation and worth and the blessing of obedience.

Do: Be motivated to walk in the divine precepts, praising God for His love in providing such clear counsel for living in a sinful world.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: The Exceptional Quality of God’s Commandments and Laws

A Why do some Christians think of divine laws as restrictive to freedom?

B Why is it hard to think of God’s laws as a blessing? How can we retool our thinking to see them as the blessings they truly are?

II. Feel: Recognizing Modern Culture’s Error in Seeking to Bypass God’s Laws

A How can the Decalogue be shared so that it is treasured and honored?

B Some Christian traditions assert that the law was done away with at the cross. What is the best way to counteract this misunderstanding?

III. Do: Having a New Motivation to Joyfully Live by God’s Instruction

A “Do not withhold Your tender mercies from me, O LORD; let Your lovingkindness and Your truth continually preserve me” (*Ps. 40:11, NKJV*). How can I acquire the attitude of the psalmist, who understood that God’s mercies and His truth are not contradictory?

B Where can I find the courage and stamina to hang on to my faith when everything in life seems to be against me?

► **Summary:** God’s laws and wisdom are linked together in the book of Proverbs as the guide for life. The highest wisdom, in the quest for discernment, comes by submitting to God’s will.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Proverbs 28:4, 5*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Much modern thinking suggests that being a realist means advancing (progressing) beyond the ancient outdated constraints of the Word of God. King Solomon would disagree. He insists that the only real progress a person can make in life is by accepting the counsel of Scripture and, with God’s help, living by it.

Just for Teachers: The book of Proverbs is a book of instruction about critical issues in daily life, couched in the fundamental premise that the fear of the Lord is the highest wisdom—that the quest for discernment begins by submitting to God. For anyone bored with religion and theology, this book gives a detailed dose of real life.

Opening Activity: Discuss why God’s Word is needed for wisdom when there are so many self-help books available.

Consider This: God’s Word is the source code for health and happiness, the template on which life is constructed for the creatures made in His image. Thus, life operates best in harmony with it. Review the number of verses in Proverbs that enshrine health principles.

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: Study *Proverbs 28:4, 5, 7–9; 29:13*.

Bible Commentary

I. Importance of the Divine Law (*Review Proverbs 28:4 with your class.*)

Against modern sentiments, which claim and offer wisdom independently of God, the book of Proverbs regularly decries the limitations of human knowledge, even warning against trusting one’s own wisdom. Instead, it insists on the human need for divine revelation.

“The hard facts of life, which knock some of the nonsense out of us, are God’s facts and His appointed school of character; they are not alternatives to His grace, but means of it; for everything is of grace, from the power to know to the power to obey. ‘The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the Lord has made them both’ (20:12). . . .

“All go to God’s school, . . . for the knowledge which He aims to instil [*sic*] is the knowledge of Himself; and this, too, is the ultimate prize. In submission to His authority and majesty (that is, in the fear of the Lord) we alone start and continue our education; and by the diligent search for wisdom ‘as for hid treasures’ we shall find our prize in a growing intimacy with the same Lord. . . . For the goal is: ‘Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God’ (2:5).”—Derek Kidner, *The Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1964), p. 35.

Consider This: How can God’s law teach us that God is love? Why does the law more often seem like a straitjacket? Perhaps, if we would memorize the entire Decalogue, including God’s first words (“ ‘I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage’ ” [*Exod. 20:2, NKJV*]), we would be reminded that salvation comes before the law! We don’t keep the law to be saved! God gave the Decalogue to people He had already redeemed from slavery.

God’s speaking the law from Mount Sinai Himself should enlarge our understanding of His concern for our well-being. Moses suggests this: “ ‘ “The LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, *for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day*” ’ ” (*Deut. 6:24, NKJV; emphasis supplied*). No wonder the psalmist sang, “Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day” (*Ps. 119:97, NKJV*).

II. Seeking the Lord (*Review Proverbs 2:1–9 with your class.*)

Those who spurn or reject God’s law will lose companionship with Him. Since we are created in His image, the law is a valuable guide for our relationship with Him and for maintaining healthy, happy families and friendships, because it provides far-reaching principles of right and wrong. There is no validation of human wisdom in Proverbs. There is no allowance for doubting divine absolutes. God knows absolutely because His knowledge is comprehensive.

Human knowledge is enriched by meditating on divine matters. God has made Himself known in His Word and through Jesus Christ. Bible writers regularly praise the perfection and reliability of God’s revelation:

- **David:** “The words of the LORD are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. You shall keep them, O LORD, You shall preserve them from this generation forever” (*Ps. 12:6, 7, NKJV*). “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is

pure, enlightening the eyes” (*Ps. 19:7, 8, NKJV*).

- **Moses:** “ ‘For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. . . . But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it. See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply’ ” (*Deut. 30:11, 14–16, NKJV*).
- **Jesus:** “ ‘He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him’ ” (*John 14:21, NKJV*). “ ‘Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth’ ” (*John 17:17, NKJV*).

Consider This: If a person does not accept the knowledge of God, what other sources of knowledge are there? The alternative is being dependent on depraved, finite human understanding. According to Proverbs, the starting point of real wisdom is God’s revelation: “For with You is the foundation of life; in Your light we see light” (*Ps. 36:9, NKJV*); “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (*Prov. 1:7*); “Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh, and strength to your bones” (*Prov. 3:7, NKJV*); “The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe” (*Prov. 29:25, NKJV*).

III. Loving the Truth (*Review Proverbs 14:34 and Proverbs 1:2–5 with your class.*)

The book of Proverbs applies divine counsel in different situations, ultimately a book of true education. Human knowledge or culture is not exalted, for true wisdom comes from God. If He is obeyed and honored, families, businesses, and governments will do well: “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (*Prov. 14:34, NKJV*).

The book of Proverbs gives practical instruction on how to best live a disciplined and prudent life in this confused world. Many, however, jeer at the possibility of absolute truth. Solomon, the wisest man, recognized this: “To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding, to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, . . . a wise man will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel” (*Prov. 1:2–5, NKJV*). And submission to the Lord is the starting point: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (*vs. 7, NKJV*).

Consider This: Just like the book of Proverbs, the book of Deuteronomy gives a great deal of practical guidance along with its invitation to love and fear God. What does that teach us about the true Author of the Bible?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: In secular societies today, lack of faithfulness to God causes huge problems. Moreover, gloating over disobedience and violence is everywhere. Discuss why this is happening. Is there anything a person, and a Sabbath School class, can do to counteract these prevalent trends?

Thought Questions:

- ❶ How can our devotion to God and His Word counteract such strong negative trends in society?
- ❷ How does the modern media subtly glorify questionable lifestyles?
- ❸ Why do we need to be reminded that how family members are treated is the true mark of the genuine believer?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Remind class members that to pray in the name of Jesus is something more than a mere mention of that name at the beginning and the ending of a prayer. It is to pray in the mind and spirit of Jesus, while we believe His promises, rely upon His grace, and work His works.

Activity: What is the real reason Jesus hasn't returned yet? It is often said that it is because the gospel hasn't been preached around the world yet. Ellen White gives a different perspective: "If we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful, there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one. But, though professing to be converted, we carry around with us a bundle of self that we regard as altogether too precious to be given up. It is our privilege to lay this burden at the feet of Christ and in its place take the character and similitude of Christ. The Saviour is waiting for us to do this. . . ."

" 'Learn of Me,' Christ says, 'and ye shall find rest unto your souls.' Matthew 11:29. Why do we not learn of the Saviour every day? Why do we not live in constant communion with Him, so that in our connection with one another we can speak and act kindly and courteously? Why do we not honor the Lord by manifesting tenderness and love for one another? If we speak and act in harmony with the principles of heaven, unbelievers will be drawn to Christ by their association with us."—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, pp. 189, 190.

Think of practical ways you can model the kindness and courtesy of Christ more fully in your daily interactions with others.