

Living by Faith



SABBATH—MARCH 7

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Proverbs 28:4, 7, 9; Romans 1:16, 17; Galatians 3:24; Proverbs 28:5; 1 John 2:15–17; Proverbs 29:13.

MEMORY VERSE: “If you are afraid of people, it will trap you. But if you trust in the LORD, he will keep you safe” (Proverbs 29:25, NIV).

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 the Holy Bible. We must learn to depend on God and to obey His law. The rest then will follow by itself.

Jesus told us this when He said to “seek [look for] first the kingdom of God.” Then all that we need will be given to us (Matthew 6:33, NKJV). We are to make trusting and following God our first duty. If not, we will make something else more important. This may be idol worship. And we can learn to trust God only by living a life of faith. The Christian walk is a *walk*. We have to make the choices to do the things that the Lord has told us to do. And then leave the results to Him.

KEEP THE LAW (Proverbs 28:4, 7, 9)

Out of the 13 times the word *torah* (“law” or “teaching”) appears in the book of Proverbs, four are in Proverbs 28 (verses 4 [twice], 7, 9). This use of the word *torah* in Proverbs usually means the “teaching” of a wise man (Proverbs 13:14). But according to Hebrew thinking, the word also has a spiritual meaning and points to God’s leading. The book of Proverbs also uses the word *torah* in that way. (Read Proverbs 29:18.)

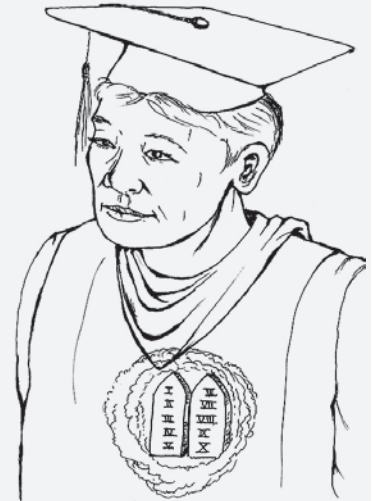
Read Proverbs 28:4, 7, and 9. What do these verses tell us about the importance of the law in how we live?

What made the people of Israel different from other nations was not their way of thinking or even their religious opinions. But what made them different was that the law of God affected their everyday choices about such things as food, rest, the natural environment, and their relationships with neighbors and family. These are what made them holy or “set apart” from all the other nations. Their choices centered on the law and the principles (important rules) found in the law.

After all, we humans cannot be wise by ourselves. We cannot always even tell the difference between good and evil (1 Kings 3:9). So, we need God’s law to help us to become wise. In other words, becoming wise does not depend on mental or religious study. It all depends on obedience to a law that is outside ourselves, our culture, our personal psychology, and our desires.

This law is God’s eternal law. And to follow that law is really an act of faith. “I am not ashamed of the good news. It is God’s power. And it will save everyone who believes. It is meant first for the Jews. It is meant also for those who aren’t [are not] Jews. The good news shows how God makes people right with Himself. From beginning to end, becoming right with God depends on a person’s faith. It is written, ‘Those who are right with God will live by faith’ ” (Romans 1:16, 17, NIV).

What troubles or problems have you been saved from because you made a promise to God to keep His law by faith? How different would your life be if you were not keeping it?



Wisdom depends on our obedience to God’s law.

SEEK (LOOK FOR) THE LORD (Galatians 3:24)



The law is a teacher that leads students to God.

DEFINITIONS

1. legalistic—following the law because it is believed that obedience will save you.

The law is very important to a life of faith. But the law (the torah) is not itself the author of life. Instead, the law points out sin, and sin leads to death. (Read Romans 7:7–13.) What makes the law work well is that it comes from God. Separate from God, the law would be a legalistic¹ rule that has nothing to do with God’s original plan. A life of obedience to the law of God is connected to a life *with* God. The law does not take God’s place. It is just a teacher that leads the students to God (Galatians 3:24).

Read Galatians 3:24. How does the law point us to Jesus, so that we can be made right with Him?

The book of Proverbs is not just a book of wisdom. It is first of all a book about the God who has shown us wisdom. When we obey the law, we find wisdom that helps us to be closer to the Lord. It also leads us to the salvation He freely offers us by faith in Jesus.

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

The word *understand* is used twice in verse 5. It is the same as the word *law* used in verse 4. The two verses are related. Keeping the law (verse 4) and seeking (looking for) the Lord (verse 5) belong together. But this activity is not just knowing and doing what is right (“justice” [verse 5, NKJV]). This understanding includes “all” things because it comes from the God of “all.” For Israel in Bible times, knowledge of all things was not separated from religious experience. Faith was closely tied to knowledge and understanding. It was not reasonable to have faith without thinking or thinking without faith. This is because God is the foundation of both religious faith and understanding.

Why does it make sense for us to have faith in God? Why is it more unreasonable to reject (refuse to accept) God than to believe in Him?

WORDS FOR THE RICH (1 John 2:15–17)

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

There are many ideas about what it means to be “rich.” But the book of Proverbs comes with some instructions on how to get “rich.” Then it teaches you how to deal with your “riches” once you get them.

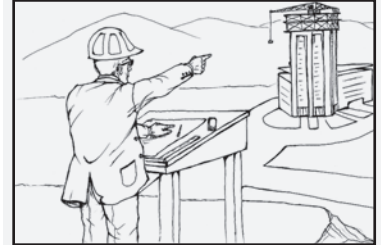
1. *Do not get rich by using the poor unfairly* (Proverbs 28:8). Your wealth is not “right” if you get it by using the poor unfairly. The Bible speaks very strongly against those who use the poor unfairly for their own profit.

2. *Give to the poor* (Proverbs 28:27). If we are generous (kind) to the poor, we will be blessed.

3. *Work hard* (Proverbs 28:19). Wealth (riches) should not come as the result of stealing or by chance, but as a reward for our hard work. What is received depends on how hard and honest we do our work. If we are rich, we should deserve it.

4. *Do not try to get rich fast* (Proverbs 28:20, 22). Our proverbs offer two scenes. First, suppose we close an eye to some dishonest action. Then, as a result, we become involved in that action (Proverbs 28:22). Second, suppose we want to enjoy the wealth of our parents now while they are still alive. This would mean that we would rob them of what they need to live on now (Proverbs 28:24). To make it even worse, sometimes people make excuses for their wrong actions until they believe that they have done nothing wrong. So, they say, “It’s [it is] not wrong” (verse 24, NlrV).

Money is very powerful in this world. This is why the Bible talks a lot about it. If you desire money, how can you make sure that you are not falling into the trap of what Jesus called the “false promises” of wealth (Mark 4:19, NlrV)?



Wealth should come as a reward for hard work.

HANDBOOK FOR THE POOR (Proverbs 29:13)

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

The poor and the rich are equal (Proverbs 29:13, NKJV). The image of light used in this proverb brings us back to Creation. Both the rich and the poor have been created by God (Proverbs 22:2). They both enjoy the gift of life. And the sun shines upon both. The rich have been warned about how they treat the poor. And the poor are to love even the people who use them. In some cases, those people the poor are called to love could be the rich (Matthew 5:44, 45).

What is the message of Proverbs 28:3?

The poor have the same duties as the rich (Proverbs 28:3). Being poor should not be an excuse for sin. The fact that you may have suffered does not permit you to treat others unfairly. Jesus' parable² of the unforgiving servant who unfairly uses the one poorer than himself shows that this unfairness is rather common. One probably would think that the poor would show more mercy to other poor people. But this is not always true. (Read Matthew 18:21–35.) In Proverbs 28:3, the description is of the rain, which usually is a blessing but turns out to be a destructive (harmful) flood. This description shows us how harmful it is when poor people mistreat other poor people. It is not supposed to happen and is very disappointing.

What is the message of Proverbs 28:6?

The righteous (holy) poor are better than the wicked rich (Proverbs 28:6). We often think that the righteous person is not supposed to be poor. This is because poverty is supposedly the just (fair) punishment for the lazy (Proverbs 24:34). But real life is more complicated (harder to understand). The poor may be the victims of injustice or of events beyond their control. This can often be true. However, the book of Proverbs makes it very clear that it is better to be poor and righteous (holy) than rich and wicked. Righteousness (holiness) is more important than riches. And success does not prove that a person is righteous.

What should we do when tempted to surrender right choices for riches? How can we protect ourselves from such temptations (the desire to sin)?

DEFINITIONS

2. parable—a very short story that teaches a lesson or truth.

LOVING THE TRUTH (Proverbs 29:15)

We should teach our children and our students the most important lesson found in 2 Thessalonians. Paul, who is writing about the lost, says that “they are dying because they refuse to love the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:10, NIV). Of course, Jesus is the Truth. So, teaching others to love truth is teaching them to love Jesus. What could be more important?

“Whatever we are investigating and studying to find truth, we are brought in touch with God, who is working in and through all. The mind of man is brought into connection with the mind of God. The limited human connects with the unlimited God. The result of such a connection on body and mind and soul cannot be measured.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Education*, page 14.

Read Proverbs 29:15 (read also Proverbs 29:19). What important principle is described, not just in education but in life in general?

Our example is important, especially with those whom we cannot directly rebuke (correct). But in some cases more than our example is needed. This is very true with our children. At times children need to be punished so that they can be brought under control.

Our natures are all fallen and sinful. This includes even those cute little ones whom we love, our children. We do not do our children or ourselves any favors by letting them do whatever they want. Children need discipline, and *they want it*. They need to know what the limits are. They also need to stay within the limits. 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 finally bring “shame” (Proverbs 29:15) to herself and sorrow to her children. Sometimes this does not happen until later, when the children become adults.

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



Teaching others to love truth is teaching them to love Jesus.

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “The laws of God have been established so well that they will bring happiness for those who keep them. . . . Religion brings man into a personal relationship with God, but it does not end there. The principles of heaven are to be lived out, so that they may help and bless the world.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, page 267.

“Failure to train children for God has caused evil to continue and thrown many onto the enemy’s side. They might have been workers for Christ if they had been properly raised by their parents. False love and ideas have created traits³ which have made the children unlovely and unhappy, have made the lives of the parents bitter, and have continued their sad 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. . . . Parents who have neglected their duty and spoiled their children close to them the gates of the city of God.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*⁴ for the Church, volume 5, pages 325, 326.

DEFINITIONS

3. traits—the things or qualities that make you who you are.

4. *Testimonies*—the writings of Ellen G. White.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① Russian author Leo Tolstoy was raised in a Christian home. But he left his faith for many years. When older, he faced a crisis: *What did life mean, especially a life that will certainly end in death?* He looked for answers in all areas of knowledge. But he found none there. So, he understood that the only answer to the question of life and its meaning had to be found in faith. It was something that went *beyond* human reasoning itself. Tolstoy’s reasoning told him to go beyond human reasoning, into the world of faith to find answers to the meaning of life. So why is faith in Jesus really the most reasonable choice we can make to find 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, we must first know it. How do we come to a knowledge of truth? And how can we be sure that we do not let anything stand in the way of our loving truth above all other things?