

Wisdom in Conscience

Proverbs 28:1-10

Proverbs 28:1-10 - *"The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion.*

Because of the transgression of a land, many are its princes, but a man of understanding and knowledge will prolong right.

A poor man who oppresses the poor is like a driving rain that leaves no food.

Those who forsake the law praise the wicked, but such as keep the law contend with them.

Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the LORD understand all.

Better is the poor who walks in his integrity than one perverse in his ways, though he be rich.

Whoever keeps the law is a discerning son, but a companion of gluttons shames his father.

One who increases his possessions by usury and extortion, gathers it for him who will be kind to the poor.

One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.

Whoever causes the upright to go astray in an evil way, he himself will fall into his own pit; but the blameless will inherit good.

Background Notes

For background, let's consider verse 1: *"The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion."*

This proverb is just as meaningful today as it was in Solomon's day. In ancient Israel, a person who had a guilty conscience about not paying his land taxes, for example, or not supporting the king, would get out of town quickly if one of the king's taxmen came to town - even if he was merely passing through!

When we're driving, why do we slow down when we see a police car - even if we're not speeding? Is it possible that we've been guilty of speeding in the past? Another example: what is a person's emotional reaction when a letter arrives from the "Internal Revenue Service"? It may be just a form letter, but if the person is guilty of cheating on their income tax, you can be sure they want to flee!

On the other hand, the righteous person can be as bold as a lion. People who are living righteously can be confident. They don't have to live in fear because of wrongdoing. The person with a clear conscience doesn't have to look for the police in the rearview mirror, or worry about being tracked down by the IRS for tax evasion.

Doctrinal Point

The proverbs are wise advice for everyday living.

Verse 2: *“Because of the transgression of a land, many are its princes; but a man of understanding and knowledge will prolong right.”* When a nation is characterized by lawlessness, the turnover in rulers or administrations is generally frequent. In contrast, one wise, strong and godly leader can bring long years of peace and stability to a nation. How important it is for us to pray for godly leaders!

Verse 3: *“A poor man who oppresses the poor is like a driving rain that leaves no food.”* You would think that a poor man getting into a place of power would bring relief to the poor and needy, like refreshing rain, but this is not always the case. Give power to a poor man, and he may become the worst tyrant you can imagine. Rather than being like gentle rain that nurtures the crops, he may be like a driving rain that ruins the crops - and washes away the topsoil as well.

Verse 5: *“Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the LORD understand all.”* Evil people do not understand the meaning of justice and the need for the proper administration of law. They twist the legal system to serve them! Think of wicked King Ahab, who put Naboth to death so he could “legally” steal Naboth’s vineyard. But those who know and love the Lord understand the sinful nature of man, and why law is needed, and why justice must be maintained for a peaceful society to exist.

Verse 6: *“Better is the poor who walks in his integrity than one perverse in his ways, though he be rich.”* One way this verse could be paraphrased is, “A poor saint is better off than a rich sinner.” We all have to deal with money matters. If you always do the right thing with your finances, you will be blessed in this life - and in the life to come.

Verse 7: *“Whoever keeps the law is a discerning son, but a companion of gluttons shames his father.”* Not exercising control over one’s appetite was one of the kinds of sin that was typical of a rebellious son. The word translated “glutton” in this verse is the same Hebrew word that’s used in Deuteronomy 21:20. *“If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and who, when they have chastened him, will not heed them, then his parents shall bring him out to the elders of his city, to the gate of his city. And they shall say to the elders of his city, ‘This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.’ Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death with stones; so you shall put away the evil from among you, and all Israel shall hear and fear”* (Deuteronomy 21:18-21). Such a son was humiliated a good father. But what joy for parents when children choose their companions wisely, and are discerning and law abiding!

Verse 8: *“One who increases his possessions by usury and extortion gathers it for him who will be kind to the poor.”* Under the Old Testament Law, Israelites were not to charge interest to their own countrymen, and those who were rich were to help the poor. *“If one of your brethren becomes poor, and falls into poverty, then you shall help him, like a*

stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you. Take no usury or interest from him; but fear your God, that your brother may live with you. You shall not lend him your money for usury, nor lend him your food at a profit. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God.”(Leviticus 25:35-38).

Here in Proverbs 28:8 God says that those who break His Law in this area would have their wrongly-gained riches taken away and given to those who would distribute it to the poor. There are many applications of this general truth today. Think, for example, of how good governments have confiscated fortunes that are gained illegally and distributed the money through agencies that assist the poor and needy around the world.

Verse 9: *“One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.”* The question is often asked, “Does God hear the prayers of unbelievers? And what about the question, “Does God hear all the prayers of all believers?” The answer is found in Psalm 66:18: *“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear.”* And Isaiah 59:1-2: *“The Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.”*

In verse 9, we see that the situation of those who turn away from hearing God’s Word is even worse than the Lord not hearing their prayers. Their prayers are actually an **abomination** to the Lord! James 4:3 says, *“You ask and you do not receive because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.”* The Lord does not listen to the prayers of believers who are unwilling to receive His Word. Let’s ask ourselves: Is the Lord hearing my prayers?

Verse 10: *“Whoever causes the upright to go astray in an evil way, he himself will fall into his own pit; but the blameless will inherit good.”* This proverb reminds us of what the Lord said about the treatment of those who are young in the faith: *“Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me. Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:5-6).*

Do you see the two warnings for believers in Proverbs 28:10? One warning is obvious: don’t lead upright young believers astray with your behavior or lifestyle. You will lose out on the blessing that could be yours. The other warning is not so obvious: Be warned, because the upright can be led astray! You may be living an upright life now, so be very careful to stay there. Don’t become complacent. Don’t become proud. Don’t be led astray by deceptive false doctrine. Stick to sound biblical teaching and committed Christian living.

The proverbs are wise advice for everyday living.

Practical Application

Don’t give up moral absolutes.

Verse 4: *“Those who forsake the law praise the wicked, but such as keep the law contend with them.”*

We live today in a world of moral relativism. Most people still hold on to some kind of moral values in the way they live out their lives, but if you were to ask them, “Do you believe in moral absolutes?” they’ll probably say no. Why? Because believing in moral absolutes means you have to believe in a morally absolute Maker, and this moral absolute Maker has not only stated His moral absolutes, but He exists to ultimately enforce them! And many people don’t want to admit to that.

The Bible teaches that God has declared and revealed His moral standards, and there are serious consequences for ignoring these standards, or for trying to change them to be more compatible with this world’s constantly changing moral values.

Because they want to be more “relevant” and contemporary, many Christians have given up on the concept of moral absolutes, or tried to water them down. What happens when this takes place? Proverbs 28:4 gives us the answer. Those who dilute or forsake God’s Law “*praise the wicked*”! Whether we realize it or not, if we forsake God’s laws, including His moral absolutes, we end up **affirming sinful practices**. Adultery and fornication are no longer sin, but “affairs.” Homosexual practice is no longer sin, but an “alternative lifestyle.” That’s what happens when we give up moral absolutes.

But when we hold on to God’s moral absolutes, the rest of the proverb holds true. We will actually resist the wicked. We will denounce moral relativism and all the bad fallout that follows when God’s standards are ignored or abandoned. When we hold on to God’s moral absolutes, we speak out against sin. “*Those who forsake instruction praise the wicked, but those who heed it resist them*” (v4, NIV).

Don’t give up moral absolutes!