

# PROVERBS

## Chapter 28

The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion. 2 When a land transgresses, it has many rulers, but with a man of understanding and knowledge, its stability will long continue. 3 A poor man who oppresses the poor is a beating rain that leaves no food. 4 Those who forsake the law praise the wicked, but those who keep the law strive against them. 5 Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the LORD understand it completely. 6 Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity than a rich man who is crooked in his ways. 7 The one who keeps the law is a son with understanding, but a companion of gluttons shames his father. 8 Whoever multiplies his wealth by interest and profit gathers it for him who is generous to the poor. 9 If one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination. 10 Whoever misleads the upright into an evil way will fall into his own pit, but the blameless will have a goodly inheritance. 11 A rich man is wise in his own eyes, but a poor man who has understanding will find him out. 12 When the righteous triumph, there is great glory, but when the wicked rise, people hide themselves. 13 Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy. 14 Blessed is the one who fears the LORD always, but whoever hardens his heart will fall into calamity. 15 Like a roaring lion or a charging bear is a wicked ruler over a poor people. 16 A ruler who lacks understanding is a cruel oppressor, but he who hates unjust gain will prolong his days. 17 If one is burdened with the blood of another, he will be a fugitive until death; let no one help him. 18 Whoever walks in integrity will be delivered, but he who is crooked in his ways will suddenly fall. 19 Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty of poverty. 20 A faithful man will abound with blessings, but whoever hastens to be rich will not go unpunished. 21 To show partiality is not good, but for a piece of bread a man will do wrong. 22 A stingy man hastens after wealth and does not know that poverty will come upon him. 23 Whoever rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than he who flatters with his tongue. 24 Whoever robs his father or his mother and says, “That is no transgression,” is a companion to a man who destroys. 25 A greedy man stirs up strife, but the one who trusts in the LORD will be enriched. 26 Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered. 27 Whoever gives to the poor will not want, but he who hides his eyes will get many a curse. 28 When the wicked rise, people hide themselves, but when they perish, the righteous increase.

**Chs 28–29** Additional advice for kings. (TLSB)

**28:1** *wicked flee*. See Lev 26:17, 36; Ps 53:5. (CSB)

“Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,” wrote Shakespeare. Those who do not know God’s grace must live not only with the awareness of their sin, but also with the nagging awareness of judgment. (PBC)

*bold as a lion*. Like David in 1Sa 17:46; cf. Ps 18:33–38. (CSB)

Those who trust in the Lord will be vindicated. (TLSB)

When he wrote this line, Solomon may have been thinking of father David. Armed with a slingshot and the strength of the Almighty, David had boldly challenged and defeated the giant Goliath. In Psalm 18:32, David declared, “It is God who arms me with strength.” (CSB)

**28:2** *it has many rulers.* Israel’s rebellion often brought rapid change in leadership (see 1Ki 16:8–28; 2Ki 15:8–15). (CSB)

Following Solomon’s time, the northern kingdom of Israel changed dynasties nine times in a little more than 200 years of existence. Because of the sinfulness of its rulers, each dynasty (except the first) began with the destruction of the previous one. As God said of them, “All their kings fall, none of them calls on Me” (Hosea 7:7). In our day, we continue to see constant turnover of wicked rulers who invite rebellion and overthrow. (PBC)

*man of understanding.* A wise ruler will be successful (see 8:15–16; 24:5; 29:4). (CSB)

*knowledge – yaw-dah'* A primitive root; to *know* (properly to ascertain by *seeing*); used in a great variety of senses, figuratively, literally, euphemistically and inferentially (including *observation, care, recognition*; and causatively *instruction, designation, punishment, etc.*):—acknowledge, acquaintance (-ted with), advise, answer, appoint, assuredly, be aware.(QV)

The southern kingdom of Judah, however, had only one dynasty during its almost 350 years; that was the family of righteous King David. In our time God continues to bless godly countries and their rulers. (PBC)

**28:3** *who oppresses the poor.* Kings need to be mindful not only of the wealthy and influential but also of those unjustly treated and neglected among the poor. (TLSB)

As an NIV footnote indicates, this verse might also be translated, “A poor man...” This seems preferable. When greedy poor people seize power, they can be more ruthless than anyone in oppression other poor people. (PBC)

*beating rain.* Describes the destructive power of Assyria’s army in Isa 28:2. The gentle rain is compared to a righteous king in Ps 72:6–7. (CSB)

They destroy everything in sight. Solomon in his Messianic psalm states: “He will be like rain falling on a mown field, like showers watering the earth” (Psalm 72:6). (PBC)

**28:4** *law.* Either the teachings of wisdom (3:1; 7:2) or the law of Moses (Ps 119:53). (CSB)

Hbr *torah*, “religious instruction”; not a specific canon of statutes and regulation such as the Ten Commandments, though it does not exclude such specific laws. (TLSB)

*praise the wicked.* Cf. Ro 1:32. (CSB)

At times believers become discouraged when they observe how the world praises the ungodly, while it ignores or persecutes the righteous. (PBC)

Wicked men are naturally inclined to take part with those who are, like themselves, against the righteous. (CB)

*strive against them.* See Eph 5:11; cf. Ro 1:32. (CSB)

**28:5** *understand it completely.* They know “what is right and just and fair” (2:9). (CSB)

Justice is not merely a human attribute; its source is God, whose “ways are just” (Deut 32:4). Ultimately, it is “from the Lord that man gets justice” (Proverbs 29:26). This justice includes compassion toward the fatherless, widows, and aliens (Deut 10:18, as well as God’s punishment of those who oppress His people (Deut 32:40-43). Only those who are connected by faith to the source of this justice really understand it. They seek God in His Word and reflect His justice in their lives. (PBC)

**28:6** *integrity.* When we see the word “blameless” here and else where in Proverbs, it is not synonymous with sinless. Everyone sins. The blameless are those whose sins are forgiven and who live sanctified lives. Some translations use the word “integrity.” (PBC)

**28:7** *who keeps the law.* A wise son listens to and keeps God’s Word. (PBC)

*companion of gluttons.* A wicked son is a disgrace. (PBC)

**28:8** *multiplies his wealth by interest and profit.* Prohibited in Ex 22:25; Lev 25:35–37; Dt 23:19–20; Eze 22:12. (CSB)

Usury or the charging of interest for profit was forbidden among the Israelites (cf Ex 22:25; Lv 25:35–37; Dt 23:19–20; Ezk 22:12). Those who gathered wealth in this way could have it confiscated. (TLSB)

This verse contains the only reference in Proverbs to usury. Several OT passages forbade Israelites charging interest of fellow Israelites (for example, Leviticus 25:35-37; Deuteronomy 23:19, 20). We see this attitude expressed in the laws given at Mt Sinai: “If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not be like a moneylender; charge him no interest. If you take your neighbor’s cloak as a pledge, return it to him by sunset, because his cloak is the only covering he has for his body. What else will he sleep in? When he cries out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.” (Exodus 22:25-27) (PBC)

*gathers it for him who is generous.* God’s judgment on those who take advantage of the poor is that their wealth will eventually end up in the hands of those who use it to help the poor! (PBC)

**28:9** *law.* Those who disregard right religious instruction and still pray perform an idolatrous act by addressing an ill-conceived god. “If your faith and trust is right, then your god is also true. On the other hand, if your trust is false and wrong, then you do not have the true God” (LC I 3). “Even if [or: Even if we were to concede that] all people outside Christianity ... believe in and worship only one true God, they still do not know what His mind toward them is and cannot expect any love or blessing from Him. Therefore, they abide in eternal wrath and damnation. For they do not have the Lord Christ, and, besides, are not illumined and favored by any gifts of the Holy Spirit [1 Corinthians 2:9–16; Hebrews 6:4–6]” (LC II 66). (TLSB)

To “turn a deaf ear to the law” is literally to “turn one’s ear from hearing the law,” that is, refusing to listen. (PBC)

*his prayer is an abomination.* Like the sacrifice of the wicked in 15:8 (see Ps 66:18; Isa 1:15; 59:1–2). (CSB)

This proverb is about as blunt as can be. Since the wicked refuse to listen to God, God will not listen to the wicked! (PBC)

**28:10** *into his own trap.* In and of itself, sinning is bad enough. It is even more terrible to lead others into sin. The wicked are preparing their own doom, when they lead the upright into sin. Jesus talks about the severity of leading children into sin: “But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea” (Matthew 18:6). (PBC)

*blameless.* Those with spiritual moral integrity. This does not imply sinlessness. (CSB)

*goodly inheritance.* See Heb 6:12; 1Pe 3:9. (CSB)

Peter speaks of Christians inheriting a blessing (1 Peter 3:9). And Jesus says that on Judgment Day, He will declare to those on His right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world” (Matthew 25:34). Such is the “good inheritance” God has in store for His people. Unlike wages, which we earn, an inheritance is a gift – in this case, a gift of God’s grace. (PBC)

**28:11** *rich man may be wise in his own eyes.* Like the fool (26:5) or the sluggard (26:16). (CSB)

Wealth is not always a sign of wisdom. (TLSB)

Wisdom is no respecter of rank. (PBC)

*will find him out* – Finds out his folly. (CB)

**28:12** *righteous triumph.* Upright rulers are the glory and strength of a nation; and wicked men its shame and ruin. (CB)

*people hide themselves.* Obadiah hid 100 prophets during the reign of Ahab (1Ki 18:13), and Joash was hidden for six years while the wicked Athaliah ruled (2Ki 11:2–3). (CSB)

**28:13** *He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper.* Note the physical and psychological pain referred to in 3:7–8; Ps 32:3. (CSB)

1 John 1:8-9, “<sup>8</sup>If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup>If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

*who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.* Note the joy of forgiveness in Ps 32:5, 10–11. (CSB)

Written for rulers and their subjects. The passage describes sincere repentance. *mercy.* Forgiveness given by God to those who acknowledge their sinfulness. (TLSB)

There is but one way to escape the ruinous consequences of sin, which is by confessing and forsaking it. (CB)

**28:14** *fears the LORD*. St. Bernard of Clairvaux: “The fear which I wish to inspire [in you] is not that which falls into the nets of desperation, but which brings to us the hope of blessedness” (SLSB, p 99). By fearing and trusting in God, we receive His promises by faith. Today, the Lord, our King, calls us to live by His promises received at Baptism, when we hear His Word, and when we partake in His Supper. (TLSB)

The fear spoken of in this verse is not the reverent fear usually associated with fearing the Lord. Rather, a different Hebrew word is used. The idea is one of fearing sin and its consequences. Along with godly fear, the Christian has a healthy fear of sin. We know what it can do. (PBC)

*who hardens his heart*. Like Pharaoh (Ex 7:13), and the Israelites who tested the Lord at Horeb (Ex 17:7; cf. Ps 95:8; Ro 2:5). (CSB)

Develops a stubborn rebelliousness and lack of repentance. (TLSB)

The ungodly couldn't care less. He hardens his heart, boldly jumps into sin, and sooner or later faces the terrible consequences. (PBC)

Hardens his heart against God's authority. (CB)

**28:15** *roaring lion*. Full of rage and murderous intent (cf. 19:12; Mt 2:16; 1Pe 5:8). (CSB)

*wicked ruler*. The wicked ruler roars and confidently charges forth when he knows he can dominate others. The devil is like that, too. (PBC)

**28:16** *a ruler who lacks understanding is a cruel oppressor* – In his blind fury, the tyrant rashly oppresses the poor. In doing so, he sows the seeds of his own downfall. History is full of examples of tyrants who abused their power and were overthrown. (PBC)

As in v 15, the nature of such overbearing and tyrannical rulers, whose ways can only keep their people poor and impoverished, stands in stark contrast to those who stamp out the unjust treatment of the poor and oppressed. (TLSB)

*he who hates unjust gain will prolong his days*. Unlike those who love such gain (see 1:19). (CSB)

The highest wisdom of a prince is to seek the welfare of the people committed to his care, for in their property lie his own quiet and security. (CB)

**28:17** Either the weight of a guilty conscience or the pressures felt by the pursuit of the authorities. (TLSB)

*will be a fugitive till death*. Cain was a “restless wanderer” in fear of his life (Ge 4:14). Murder was punishable by death (see Ge 9:6; Ex 21:14). (CSB)

In the OT, murder was punishable by death. Those guilty of murder were destined to be on the run until caught by “the avenger of blood,” a near relative of the victim. (PBC)

That the murderer shall die, is a divine ordinance. All who seek to set it aside, oppose themselves alike to the wisdom of God and the welfare of the community. (CB)

**28:18** *integrity...crooked*. Contrasted also in v. 6; 19:1. (CSB)

Outside of God's path, there is no real safety. (PBC)

*will suddenly fall*. Cf. 11:5. (CSB)

Whether their fall comes in this life or in the hour of death, it will come. (PBC)

**28:19** *whoever works his land will have plenty of bread* – Our work is the channel through which He blesses us. (PBC)

*follows worthless pursuits will have plenty of poverty*. Schemes for making easy money. (CSB)

While we might joke about investing in swamp land in Florida (or anywhere), many have found out the truth of this proverb by gambling away their money on countless other fantasies. (PBC)

**28:20** *will abound with blessings*. With God's gifts and favors (see Ge 49:26; Dt 33:16). (CSB)

Both God and fellow human beings will bless a trustworthy person. Those who are in a hurry to obtain wealth and riches do so at the expense. (TLSB)

*whoever hastens to be rich will not go unpunished*. Cf. similar warnings in 20:21; 23:4. (CSB)

Those who try to bypass God's Word on this matter will end up empty-handed. (PBC)

**28:21** *To show partiality is not good*. The Bible emphasizes that Christians are "to do nothing out of favoritism" (1 Timothy 5:21). When it came to our salvation, God showed no partiality; Christ died for all. (PBC)

The elevation of selfish and unprincipled men to office is a great public calamity; they will pervert justice and sacrifice the highest interests of the people for private gain. (CB)

*for a piece of bread a man will do wrong*. Perhaps a reference to a bribe, however small (cf. Eze 13:19). (CSB)

**28:22** *stingy man*. Warning against corruption. (TLSB)

*hastens after wealth*. A warning to him is given in v. 20 (cf. similar warnings in 20:21; 23:4). (CSB)

He is greedy of gain, and uses unlawful means to procure it. (CB)

*poverty will come upon him*. Because it is the generous man who prospers (see note on 11:25). (CSB)

The biblical principle is that generosity, not stinginess, leads to wealth. At times this wealth may be of a material nature, often it comes in the form of other blessings. (PBC)

**28:23** *whoever rebukes a man*. See Gal 2:14; cf. 15:31; 25:12. (CSB)

Making guilty persons feel good about themselves will not earn the respect and fear required for good authority-subject relationships. (TLSB)

In the long run, the person who rebukes gains respect, while the flatterer is dismissed as being insincere. This rebuke, of course is not to be confused with purely negative, heartless criticism. (PBC)

*flatters with his tongue.* Honest dealing with offenders is the way to secure their respect. (PBC)

**28:24** *who robs his father or mother.* In Jesus' day, the Jews had a tradition that allowed them to get out of supporting their aged parents by giving a gift to the temple instead (Mark 7:9-13). Today many children neglect the care of their parents – selfishly getting whatever they can but never returning any love nor visiting them. (PBC)

*who destroys* – A dissolute spendthrift. (CB)

A vandal. (TLSB)

**28:25** *stirs up strife.* Greed of course, is nothing other than a lack of trust. Since this person doesn't believe that God will provide, he needs to store up more and more possessions. In the end, the greedy man has caused a lot of trouble and still not found that peace which only the Lord can bring. (PBC)

*will be enriched.* As does also the generous person (11:25) and the one who is diligent (13:4, lit. "the desires of the diligent prosper"). (CSB)

The wisest of all investments. Trust in wealth is faith in temporal things, rather than the eternal—the Lord. True and lasting riches can only be found in that which truly lasts. (TLSB)

**28:26** *whoever trusts in his own mind* – The line literally says, "He who trusts his own heart is a fool." (Since the heart represents the entire inner life of man, the translation "himself" is appropriate. By nature, the human heart or self is full of sin. (PBC)

Defines precisely what a fool is: someone who trusts in his or her own abilities rather than God's wisdom and promises handed down to human beings in the Scriptures. (TLSB)

*who walks in wisdom.* Equals "who trusts in the LORD" in 29:25; cf. 3:5. (CSB)

hokmah – The most frequently used word for wisdom and refers to practical wisdom. Practical wisdom is the chief concept in Proverbs. (PBC)

Those who trust in the Lord are the wise ones. Rather than looking within themselves for guidance along life's way, they look to God's Word. God keeps His people safe. With His angels watching over us, He delivers us from harm in this world and brings us safely to our heavenly home. (PBC)

**28:27** *will not want.* Generosity is the path to blessing (see 11:24 and note; 14:21; 19:17). (CSB)

As we give to the needy, God blesses us. Conversely, when we are stingy, we suffer. This is a truth of God's Word that we must take on faith. God challenges us, as He challenged the OT believers to test Him by bringing their tithes and offerings: "Test me in this, says the Lord Almighty, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it" (Malachi 3:10). (PBC)

*hides his eyes.* Fails to see the needs of others. (TLSB)

From their wants. (CB)

**28:28** *people hide themselves.* Good men retire into obscurity, that they may avoid the persecution of the wicked. (CB)

Under a wicked regime, people contribute less to the common good. They fear that a corrupt government will use the fruits of their labor for its own purposes, and not for all people. (TLSB)

*righteous increase.* When the number of the wicked decreases, the righteous thrive (literally increase). So the population of a land is not static. The righteous and the wicked are increasing and decreasing according to what the other side is doing. (PBC)