

The Book of Proverbs, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 12: The Wicked, the Righteous, and Trusting the Lord

Proverbs 28:1–29:27

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

The doctrine at stake in these chapters is the nature of genuine repentance and the object of our trust. Proverbs 28:13 is one of the clearest verses in the Old Testament on what it means to come clean before God: the one who conceals sin “will not prosper,” but the one who “confesses and forsakes” obtains mercy. Notice that two things are joined here, and the church must keep them joined. Repentance is not merely feeling sorry, and it is not merely admitting wrong while clutching the sin; it is confessing and forsaking. This is the consistent biblical pattern (1 John 1:9; Acts 3:19), and it stands against any teaching that reduces salvation to a one-time prayer or to “faith only” apart from a turning of the whole life toward God. We also guard against the opposite error, the idea that we earn mercy by our confessing; the verse promises mercy, an unearned gift, to the heart that finally stops hiding. Tie this firmly to 28:9 and 29:18: the repentant heart is also a listening heart, one that does not turn its ear from God’s word but treasures His revealed will. Where there is no prophetic vision, no submission to God’s revelation, people cast off restraint.

A second doctrinal thread is the contrast between the fear of man and trust in the Lord (29:25). Remember the nature of a proverb as you teach: these are general principles, not iron-clad guarantees, for the righteous can still suffer, as Job did and as the cross shows most fully. The boldness of 28:1 is not a promise that the faithful never face danger, but a description of the settled conscience that fears God rather than men (Matthew 10:28). Be careful here not to drift into a prosperity reading of 28:25–27; the point is the freedom and safety of a God-trusting heart, not a formula for guaranteed wealth.

The formational aim is to move people from hiding to honesty, from self-trust to God-trust, and from the fear of man to the fear of the Lord. We want every learner to leave able to name the sin they have been covering, to take a real step of confessing and forsaking it, and to identify one place where fear of people has been steering them away from obedience. Point them to Christ throughout: He is the one who never had to flee (28:1), who bore our concealed sin so we could confess it freely (1 John 1:9), and who frees us from the snare of man’s opinion by securing us in the Father’s. The goal is not merely better behavior but a heart in the light, listening to God’s word and resting its full weight on the Lord.

Question 1

Student Question:

In 28:1, the righteous are described as “bold as a lion” while the wicked “flee when no one pursues.” What does this proverb teach about the way a clear conscience before God produces courage, and the way unconfessed guilt produces fear, and how does this fit the rest of Scripture’s picture of a heart at peace with God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Chapter 28 opens the closing movement of the Hezekiah collection (begun at 25:1) with a vivid image of the inner life. “The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion.” The Hebrew paints the wicked as perpetually on the run, jumpy and haunted, while the righteous carry the unflinching confidence of a young lion. This echoes Leviticus 26:17 and 36, where covenant unfaithfulness leaves people fleeing at the sound of a driven leaf. Sin manufactures its own fear.

The proverb is not teaching that the righteous are reckless or that they never face real threat. It is describing a conscience at rest. The person who has nothing hidden from God has nothing to dread from exposure. Boldness here is moral, not physical; it is the steadiness that comes from being right with God. Compare Acts 4:13, where the boldness of Peter and John, unschooled men, astonished the council because they had been with Jesus.

Set against the larger passage, 28:1 functions almost as a thesis. Everything that follows, confession, listening to God’s word, generosity, trust in the Lord, feeds either the lion’s boldness or the fugitive’s fear. Teaching the chapter as a whole, you can keep returning to this question: is this verse describing the lion or the one who flees?

For the believer, the verse points beyond itself to the gospel. Our boldness is not self-generated. It rests on a clear conscience purchased by Christ, who himself never had to flee guilt (Hebrews 4:16; 10:19–22). The blood of Christ is what lets a sinner stand upright before God like a lion rather than cower like a fugitive.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Boldness here is the fruit of a clear conscience before God, not natural temperament or bravado.
- Guilt creates its own punishment; unconfessed sin makes the soul fearful even when no danger is present (compare Genesis 3:8–10).
- This is a general principle, not a promise that the righteous never face danger; the faithful can suffer (Job; the cross).
- Christian boldness ultimately rests on the cleansed conscience Christ provides (Hebrews 10:19–22), not on our own performance.
- Avoid reading this as a guarantee of worldly success; the contrast is inner, between fear and confidence before God.

Discussion Prompts

- Which of the two figures in 28:1, the bold lion or the fleeing fugitive, has described you most this past month, and why?
- How does an unconfessed sin create fear and unrest even when no one knows about it?
- Where does the New Testament locate the believer's boldness, and how does that free us from anxious self-protection?

Question 2

Student Question:

Read 28:1 again and search your own life: where have you felt that nervous, over-the-shoulder fear that has no outward cause, and what might it be telling you about something unsettled between you and God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Proverbs 28:9 is a startling verse: "If one turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination." Solomon ties two things we often keep separate, our listening to God and our speaking to God. The person who refuses to hear God's word forfeits the right to expect God to hear his requests. The relationship runs both ways.

The word "abomination" is strong; it is the same kind of language used for idolatry. This is not God being petty about attendance. It exposes the absurdity of asking God for favors while deliberately ignoring what He has plainly said. Prayer is meant to flow from a heart submitted to God's revealed will, not from a heart that has shut its ear (compare 1 Samuel 15:22; Isaiah 1:15; John 9:31).

Notice the verb: he "turns away his ear." This is deliberate, an active refusal to listen, not an honest gap in knowledge. The danger is not imperfect understanding but a chosen deafness, the kind that hears God's clear command and walks the other way.

For the church, this verse guards against a religion of asking without obeying. We cannot treat prayer as a way to enlist God in plans He has already spoken against. A heart open to God's word and a prayer life God receives belong together; you cannot have the second while refusing the first.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Hearing God's word and having our prayers heard are bound together; refusing one corrupts the other.
- "Abomination" signals how seriously God regards prayer offered by a heart that deliberately ignores His revealed will.
- The problem is willful refusal to listen, not honest ignorance or weakness.
- This affirms the authority and necessity of Scripture; we approach God on His terms, not ours (John 4:24).

- Prayer is not a tool to recruit God for what He has forbidden; it flows from submission to His word.

Discussion Prompts

- Is there an area where you have quietly stopped listening to God's word while still bringing Him your requests?
- Why would God call the prayer of a willfully disobedient heart an "abomination" rather than simply unanswered?
- How does a daily habit of hearing Scripture shape and purify the way we pray?

Question 3

Student Question:

In 28:9, Solomon says that if one "turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer is an abomination." What does this teach about the link between a heart that listens to God's word and a prayer life God will hear, and why can we not separate the two?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Proverbs 28:13 is the doctrinal heart of the lesson: "Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy." It lays out two roads. One is the road of concealment, the exhausting work of covering, excusing, and hiding, which never prospers. The other is the road of confession and forsaking, which ends in mercy.

Watch the two verbs carefully: confesses and forsakes. Both are essential. Confession without forsaking is mere admission, and forsaking without confession can become self-reform that never humbles itself before God. Genuine repentance owns the sin out loud before God and turns away from it. This is exactly the pattern the church proclaims (Acts 3:19; 8:22; 2 Corinthians 7:10–11). It guards against any notion that a quick prayer or a vague "I'm only human" covers the matter while the sin continues.

The promise attached is mercy, not merit. The verse does not say the confessor earns forgiveness by the quality of his confession. It says the one who stops hiding obtains mercy, an undeserved gift. David lived both halves of this verse in Psalm 32: while he kept silent his bones wasted away, but when he acknowledged his sin God forgave the iniquity.

This proverb points unmistakably toward the cross. The New Testament restates it almost exactly: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). The mercy Solomon promises is the very mercy purchased at Calvary and offered to every honest, repentant heart.

Pastorally, this is the most freeing verse in the chapter. Many people are still running like the fugitive of 28:1 precisely because they are concealing something. The way out is not to run

faster or hide better but to stop hiding. Confession and forsaking are the door to the mercy God is eager to give.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Genuine repentance is both confessing sin and forsaking it; neither alone is the full biblical picture.
- Mercy is a gift to the one who stops hiding, not a wage earned by the act of confessing.
- This refutes “faith only” and the idea that a one-time prayer apart from turning from sin secures forgiveness.
- It also refutes mere reform without humble confession before God; both directions matter.
- The verse anticipates 1 John 1:9 and the mercy secured at the cross of Christ.
- Concealing sin is presented as fruitless toil; honesty before God is the path to relief (Psalm 32:1–5).
- Be careful not to make confession a meritorious work; it is the open hand that receives mercy.

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between merely admitting a sin and actually forsaking it, and why does God require both?
- Is there something you have been concealing that this verse invites you to confess and forsake today?
- How does seeing mercy as a gift, not a reward for good confessing, change the way you come to God?

Question 4

Student Question:

Think honestly about your own habits of hearing God’s word (28:9). Is your ear genuinely turned toward Scripture, or have you quietly stopped listening in some area while still expecting God to listen to you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Proverbs 28:26 cuts against one of the most flattering ideas of our age: “Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered.” The world tells us to follow our heart and trust our instincts. Solomon calls that folly, not because the mind is worthless, but because a mind cut off from God’s wisdom is an unreliable guide.

This is the same warning sounded back in 3:5–7, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.” Self-trust feels like strength and independence, but it leaves us steering by a compass that does not point true north. The wise person is not the one with no thoughts of his own but the one who submits his thoughts to God’s revealed wisdom.

The contrast is between trusting and walking. To “walk in wisdom” is a way of life, a steady, daily dependence on God’s word and counsel, not a single decision. Deliverance is promised to that path, again as a general principle, not an absolute guarantee against all trouble.

For the church, this verse is a warning even to mature, capable people. The danger is not only the obvious fool but the competent believer who quietly stops consulting God because he is sure he can handle it. Christ himself, fully wise, modeled perfect dependence on the Father (John 5:30). Walking in wisdom means letting His mind shape ours (Philippians 2:5).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Trusting our own mind apart from God is folly; wisdom means submitting our thinking to God’s revealed will.
- This echoes 3:5–7 and stands against the cultural creed of “follow your heart.”
- Self-reliance is a subtle danger especially for capable, mature believers.
- “Walking in wisdom” is a daily way of life, not a one-time choice.
- Deliverance here is a general principle, consistent with the nature of a proverb, not an absolute promise.

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you most tempted to trust your own judgment without seeking God’s wisdom?
- What practical difference is there between trusting your own mind and walking in God’s wisdom day by day?
- How does Jesus’ own dependence on the Father reshape what godly confidence looks like?

Question 5

Student Question:

In 28:26, “whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered.” What is the difference between trusting our own judgment and walking in the wisdom God supplies, and how does this proverb expose the danger of self-reliance even in good people?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Proverbs 28:27 and 29:7 turn the lesson outward to the poor: “Whoever gives to the poor will not want, but he who hides his eyes will get many a curse” (28:27), and “A righteous man knows the rights of the poor; a wicked man does not understand such knowledge” (29:7). For Solomon, how we treat the poor is not a side issue; it is a measure of righteousness itself.

Notice the contrast in 28:27 between giving and hiding the eyes. The opposite of generosity is not theft but willful blindness, refusing to see the need that is right in front of us. The generous

“will not want,” a general principle of God’s provision, while the one who looks away invites trouble.

Proverbs 29:7 goes deeper: the righteous “knows the rights of the poor.” The wicked cannot even comprehend such a concern. There is a kind of knowledge, a moral attentiveness, that only a heart shaped by God possesses. To know the poor is to see them as persons with real claims to justice, not as an inconvenience to be ignored.

This thread runs all through Scripture and straight into the gospel (Deuteronomy 15:7–11; Psalm 41:1; Luke 14:13–14; James 1:27). Jesus identified himself with the poor and the needy (Matthew 25:40). For the church, caring for the poor is not optional charity; it is part of the righteousness God works in His people. The God-shaped heart sees what the hardened heart cannot.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- How we treat the poor is treated as a true measure of righteousness, not an optional add-on.
- The opposite of generosity is willful blindness, hiding the eyes from need we could see (28:27).
- “Knowing the rights of the poor” is a moral attentiveness that flows from a heart shaped by God (29:7).
- This anticipates the New Testament’s call to pure religion that cares for the vulnerable (James 1:27).
- Generosity’s reward here is a general principle of God’s provision, not a prosperity-gospel formula.

Discussion Prompts

- Whose need have you been able to “hide your eyes” from, and what would it mean to truly see them?
- What does it mean to “know the rights of the poor” rather than merely feel occasional pity?
- How does caring for the poor express the very righteousness God is forming in us?

Question 6

Student Question:

Where are you currently leaning hardest on your own mind, your own plan, your own read of a situation (28:26), and what would it look like this week to walk in God’s wisdom there instead?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Proverbs 29:15 and 29:17 address the loving discipline of children: “The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother” (29:15), and “Discipline your son,

and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart” (29:17). Solomon presents corrective discipline as an act of love that shapes wisdom, not as harshness.

The two verses together hold the balance. Discipline that combines “rod and reproof” is not mere punishment; it joins correction with instruction, action with explanation. A child simply “left to himself,” indulged and uncorrected, is not being loved but neglected, and the result is shame. Love that refuses to discipline is not really love.

The promised fruit in 29:17 is rest and delight. Faithful, patient discipline is hard work in the moment, but it yields a peace and joy that indulgence never can. This is the same logic Hebrews 12:5–11 applies to God’s discipline of His own children: painful for the present, but it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

Teach this with care for a mixed audience. The point is loving, formative correction, not anger or abuse. The aim is wisdom in the child and rest in the home. Parents who shape their children this way are imaging the patient, loving discipline of God Himself, who corrects those He loves (Revelation 3:19; Ephesians 6:4).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Discipline is presented as loving formation that gives wisdom, not as harshness or venting anger.
- “Rod and reproof” joins correction with instruction; discipline includes teaching, not only consequences.
- A child “left to himself,” uncorrected, is neglected rather than loved (29:15).
- Faithful discipline yields rest and delight, paralleling Hebrews 12:5–11 on God’s discipline.
- Apply with pastoral care; the model is God’s loving, patient correction, never abuse (Ephesians 6:4).
- Loving formation aims at wisdom in the child, not mere compliance.

Discussion Prompts

- Why is consistent, loving discipline an expression of love rather than its opposite?
- How does Hebrews 12:5–11 help us see God’s discipline of us the way these verses describe parenting?
- Where might you be tempted either to neglect correction or to discipline in anger, and how can you find the balance?

Question 7

Student Question:

Compare 28:27 and 29:7: the generous will not lack, and “the righteous knows the rights of the poor.” What do these verses teach about how a heart shaped by God notices and cares for the poor, and why is this treated as a mark of righteousness rather than an optional extra?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Proverbs 29:18 is often quoted and often misread: “Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law.” The “vision” here is not human ambition or dreaming big; the Hebrew refers to prophetic revelation, God’s word spoken to His people. The second line makes this plain by setting “keeps the law” in parallel.

The verse describes what happens when a people loses God’s revealed word: they “cast off restraint,” running wild without moral boundaries. This is exactly what Judges describes, where everyone did what was right in his own eyes. Without God’s revelation to guide and restrain, society and the soul both unravel.

The blessing falls on the one who “keeps the law,” who treasures and obeys God’s word. This ties directly back to 28:9: the heart open to God’s word is the heart that flourishes and the heart God hears. Revelation is not a cage; it is the guardrail that keeps us on the road.

For the church, this verse underscores the necessity and sufficiency of God’s revealed word. We are not left to invent our own morality. God has spoken, supremely in His Son (Hebrews 1:1–2), and blessedness comes to those who keep that word. A culture or a Christian that drifts from Scripture will not find freedom but the chaos of cast-off restraint.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- “Vision” means God’s revealed word, not human ambition; the parallel “keeps the law” makes this clear.
- Without God’s revelation people lose moral restraint and unravel (compare Judges 21:25).
- God’s word is not a cage but a guardrail; blessing comes to those who keep it.
- This affirms the necessity and authority of Scripture, fulfilled supremely in Christ (Hebrews 1:1–2).
- Ties directly to 28:9: a heart open to God’s word is the heart that flourishes.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it look like, in a life or a culture, when people “cast off restraint” for lack of God’s word?
- Why is the popular reading of this verse, as being about human ambition, a misreading?
- How does keeping God’s word actually produce freedom rather than restriction?

Question 8

Student Question:

Examine your own attentiveness to people in need around you (29:7). Whose “rights” or needs have you been able not to see, and what would genuinely knowing them require of you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Proverbs 29:23 states a principle that runs all through Scripture: “One’s pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor.” The way up is down. Pride, which grasps for honor, ends in humiliation; humility, which does not grasp, ends in honor. God Himself enforces this order (compare 16:18; 18:12).

This is not a trick or a technique, humbling yourself in order to get honored. It is the moral grain of the universe as God made it. The proud set themselves up for a fall because they refuse to live in reality; the lowly in spirit live truthfully before God and so are lifted up in His good time.

The verse looks ahead to the New Testament’s clearest statements of the same truth: “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you” (James 4:10; see also 1 Peter 5:6). The pattern is woven into the gospel itself, where the path to glory ran through a cross.

Supremely, Christ embodied this proverb. He humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, and therefore God highly exalted him (Philippians 2:8–9). The disciple who would be formed into Christ’s likeness walks the same downward road that leads, in God’s hands, upward to honor.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Pride leads to humiliation; humility leads to honor, the moral grain of God’s world (16:18; 18:12).
- This is not a technique for self-advancement but living truthfully before God.
- The New Testament restates it directly (James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6).
- Christ supremely embodies the pattern: he humbled himself and was exalted (Philippians 2:8–9).
- Genuine humility does not grasp for honor; it leaves the lifting up to God.

Discussion Prompts

- Where is pride quietly setting you up for a fall, and what would lowliness of spirit look like there?
- How is humility before God different from a calculated strategy to get noticed?
- How does Christ’s downward path to exaltation reshape your idea of greatness?

Question 9

Student Question:

Hold together 28:13 (“Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy”), 28:9 (the closed ear whose prayer is an abomination), and 29:18 (“Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law”). What do these verses, taken together, teach about genuine repentance as both honest confession and the forsaking of sin, met by God’s mercy, in a heart kept open to His revealed word? How does this guard us against the idea that simply admitting

sin, or praying a prayer, is enough apart from turning from it and submitting to what God has said (compare 1 John 1:8-9)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Proverbs 29:25 gathers up the heart of the whole lesson: “The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe.” A snare is a hidden trap that catches you before you realize it. So it is with the fear of man. We rarely set out to compromise; we just want to be liked, to avoid conflict, to keep the powerful happy, and before we know it we are caught.

The fear of man and trust in the Lord are presented as rivals. Whenever we are gripped by what people will think, we are, in that moment, not resting our weight on God. The cure for the fear of man is not greater willpower but a deeper trust in the Lord, a confidence that His approval and protection matter more than anyone’s opinion.

This theme runs straight into the teaching of Jesus: “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28). The antidote to being controlled by people is to fear and trust God above them. Peter learned this hard lesson by a charcoal fire and later preached it boldly (Acts 4:19; 5:29).

Remember the nature of a proverb here. “Safe” does not mean the God-truster never suffers; Jesus, who feared no man, went to the cross. The safety is the deep security of the soul that belongs to God, kept by Him whatever men may do. For the church, this verse is a daily call to choose, again and again, the fear of the Lord over the fear of man.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The fear of man is a hidden snare that catches us before we realize we are compromising.
- Fear of man and trust in the Lord are rivals; one always crowds out the other.
- The cure is not willpower but deeper trust in God, valuing His approval above people’s.
- Jesus directs our fear to God alone (Matthew 10:28); the apostles obeyed God rather than men (Acts 5:29).
- “Safe” is the soul’s security in God, not a promise of no suffering; the faithful can still suffer (the cross).
- Many compromises and silences trace back to fearing people more than God.

Discussion Prompts

- What recent compromise or silence in your life can you trace back to the fear of man?
- How does trusting the Lord actually displace the fear of man, rather than just trying harder to be brave?
- What does it mean that we are “safe” in God even when trusting Him leads us into hardship?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking back across the whole passage, with its bold lion, its closed and open ears, its fear of man, and its mercy for the one who confesses and forsakes (28:1; 28:9; 28:13; 29:25), name one specific way Jesus is forming you right now into a person who stops hiding, stops fearing people more than God, and trusts the Lord enough to walk in the light.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

These two chapters keep turning to rulers and the people they govern: “When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, but when the wicked rule, the people groan” (29:2); a king gives stability by justice (29:4); a ruler who listens to falsehood corrupts his officials (29:12); and the righteous outlast the wicked in their downfall (29:16). Leadership and justice shape the life of a whole community.

The repeated point is that leaders are not neutral. Righteous leadership brings rejoicing and stability; wicked leadership brings groaning and decay. A ruler who listens to lies (29:12) breeds a whole court of liars, because people tell leaders what they want to hear. Character at the top spreads downward.

Yet the chapter also offers hope to those under unjust rule: “the righteous will look upon their downfall” (29:16). God’s justice is patient but certain. The wicked may multiply and transgression increase, but their reign does not have the last word. This is realism, not cynicism, about power.

For the church, these proverbs call us to value and pursue justice, to be the kind of people whose presence makes a community rejoice, and to trust God’s ultimate justice when leaders fail. Above all they point to the one perfectly righteous King, Christ, who reigns now at God’s right hand and under whose rule the people truly rejoice (Acts 2:36; Colossians 1:13). Earthly thrones rise and fall, but His kingdom, the church, stands.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Leaders are not neutral; righteous rule brings rejoicing, wicked rule brings groaning (29:2).
- Justice gives a community stability, while corruption at the top spreads downward (29:4, 29:12).
- God’s justice is patient but certain; the wicked do not have the last word (29:16).
- These verses call God’s people to pursue justice and to trust God when leaders fail.
- They point to Christ the righteous King reigning now over His kingdom, the church (Colossians 1:13).
- His present reign is not a deferred earthly throne but His rule from God’s right hand (Acts 2:36).

Discussion Prompts

- How have you seen the character of leaders, in any sphere, shape the people under them?
- What does it look like to be the kind of righteous presence that makes a community rejoice?
- How does trusting Christ's present, righteous reign steady you when earthly leaders fail?