

Turn Not to The Right Hand nor to The Left

Proverbs 4:25–27

Pastor Bill Farrow

²⁵ *Let your eyes look straight ahead,
And your eyelids look right before you.*

²⁶ *Ponder the path of your feet,
And let all your ways be established.*

²⁷ *Do not turn to the right or the left;
Remove your foot from evil.*

Verses 20-27 of this chapter speak (and not for the first time) about the matter of **wisdom practiced** and tells us that this, in our experience is that which is productive of life, health and personal integrity. **4:25**, as we see it here, advances the idea that the **eyes should look directly forward** and in doing so, suggests resolution about remaining in the right way (as if we are, in the process of looking, taking in a path in which we are walking. Metaphorically, it suggests that when a person turns his eyes away from the path, he is apt to stumble.

This would seem to upheld when we consider what went immediately before this. In verses 21-23 see reference to the “heart”, which, as we have seen in other studies, commonly refers to the mind as the center of thinking and reason (3:3; 6:21; 7:3), but also includes the emotions (15:15, 30), the will (11:20; 14:14), and thus, the whole inner being (3:5). The heart is the depository of all wisdom and the source of whatever affects speech (v. 24), sight (v. 25), and conduct (vv. 26, 27).

It would seem clear that, here in verse 25, Solomon’s intention is to direct our thinking toward the natural way that people make their way down a pathway or street, while seeing to it that there is nothing there for them to stumble over or to cause them to fall and injure themselves. This seems to be a perfectly natural and even normal habit for someone to undertake. We might suggest that this is the clear way to understand at least this first phrase because of the use of “let” meaning “allow” and seeing that it suggests that we are talking about something normal. How many people walk a path, even what they might know is a clear and straight path without “letting” their eyes scope out the path in which they are walking - I suspect that the answer here is virtually none!!

The second part of the verse is intended simply to underscore the first phrase. The reference there to “eyelids” speaks of the function of the eyelids, namely, to obscure the vision of the eye. With the exception of when we sleep, our eyelids are closed only very, very briefly and, in total, for a very, very short amount of time in comparison to the amount of time they are open.

The idea that Solomon is suggesting is that we must focus our attention of our “path”, where our lives are headed, and not allow our attention to wander or drift any more than is emphatically necessary. We must take great effort to see to it that we strive, energetically, to pay the needful attention and take in

anything and everything might be a hindrance to our effective and beneficial gaining of progress in the “path” we are walking.

Notice that they last phrase says we are to look “right before you”. “Right” speaks of being straight, level, upright, of being just, lawful, or smooth. It seems obvious that Solomon chose his word carefully and used one that can be applied to any number of contexts. We must see to it that our “looking” must be diligently applied to see to it that this idea applies to whatever context is in view.

We should also, likely keep in mind that Solomon, again and again, in his book here, reminds us that God, in His Word, gives us what information we need to be able to do this “looking straight ahead” and seeing to it that our eyelids are able to “look right before you”. It is in the reading and studying, taking in and pondering God’s precious Word that we are armed and enabled to walk the right path safely and without wandering or being distracted to one side or the other. Vital to keeping the heart formed in wisdom is the need to recognize and stay on the path that will shape it further in the way of righteousness.

By way of rehearsal of the interpretation - A single eye, as contrasted with one that squints, is a good eye morally as well as physically. To such our Lord alludes (Matt. 6:22 - 23 *“The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light”*). So here the wise man speaks of an eye that looks straight out. Only in connection with such an eye is straightforward progress possible. In other words, he only whose heart is honest, whose motives are upright, will take the safe and right course through life, avoiding every false and wrong step.

As always, there are a couple illustrations we can look to for helping our understanding:

- Balaam is an example of a man whose moral eyes did not both “look right on,” but one, at least, askew. He had some thoughts and desires towards God, made some movements towards doing His will; but, on the other hand, could not help casting a longing look at “the wages of unrighteousness.” And so he turned out of the plain path of duty, did not remove his foot from evil, and his ways were not established; on the contrary, he fell away altogether.
- Paul, whose conversion many commemorate, is an example of the single aim and the single eye. God had counted him “faithful” even when he was an unbeliever in Christ, because his honest aim was to do God’s will. No sooner had his question been answered, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” than he obeyed. This was straightforward walking, and who can doubt the end?

Thinking of the matter of application - We, of course, remember that straight forward lies the path of safety. We’re forced to ask ourselves... do my eyes look right on? This is the real question. My aim - the end proposed - is it to please God or self? If the former, and I seek His guidance, and ponder my path by the conscientious, prayerful study of His Word, then the way of duty

becomes too plain for me to miss it. But if I am secretly still more desirous of something else, of pleasure, gain, man's praise, or ease and comfort, then my steps will obey my mind's eye, and pursue an indirect course. Is my eye single? In other words, am I *able* to look straight before me, and not, through some moral imperfection, such as a habit of quibbling or of nursing prejudices, only able to see obliquely? When a certain line of action plainly lies before me as *the* path of duty, can I see my way to taking it?

*May my eye be "single," and so may my feet be kept from evil—
never to depart from God's ways, nor attain an evil end
circuitously! O God, draw me daily nearer to Thyself in constant
well-doing!*
