

The Eyes of a Fool Are in The Ends of The Earth

Proverbs 17:24

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“Wisdom is before him that hath understanding: but the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth.” - Proverbs 17:24.

Solomon often spends time speaking of the contrast between the wise and the fool. Many times, he speaks of focus and result of what the two pursue. In particular he ties wisdom with proper and full understanding of the world around us. Set against this is often set the differing and contrasting aspects and results of the actions and perceptions of what he calls fools.

Here he ties together the gaining or possessing of wisdom with the having of understanding. “...him who has understanding” is a single word in the Hebrew text. It is “*mēbīn*” (mee beuhn) which speaks of the basic idea of seeing, perceiving or arriving at a conclusion as a result accurate perception. The idea that Solomon is seeking to get us to “perceive” is that there is a difference between the world view of the wise and that of the fool.

This is what he means when he adds such a broad statement after the two definitions:

- He says, first, that “wisdom” is in the “eyes” of the one who understands.
 - We’ve looked several times before this at the basic idea of wisdom as Solomon uses it. It refers basically to technical skill or the basic to work through a thing and accomplish a goal properly and effectively. In other places it speaks of shrewdness or experience, both of which lend the ability to do a thing, or accomplish one’s goal or desire effectively.
 - “Eyes” of course refers to the capacity to see; and, in this context the mental perception and understanding that is a function of that seeing. In this case the implication is that this “seeing” is both accurate and proper.

That is why Solomon says that “understanding” is the result of it. The individual in view has understanding and, because of that understanding, he/she realizes and is able to make use of God’s wisdom. It is this that enables them to view all that is around them in a godly fashion.

By contrast, Solomon sets a contrast with the world view of the fool. Notice that this second part of the verse begins with a “contrastive” conjunction, one that contrasts the two sections of the verse against each other. He refers to their “eyes” as well and in this context, this speaks of the same basic idea as it did earlier in the verse. This idea is here connected with the perceptions and realized knowledge; but in this case, it is those of a fool and not a wise person.

“The ends of the earth...” refers to the fool’s roving fixations in the absence of wisdom. His interest and convictions wander around and fix on what seems

attractive or whatever captures his interest. The implication is that it make little difference whether it is righteous thing or not; or whether it is rooted in wisdom or not. He grabs onto it because it seems good to him/her.

In the greater context, it is easy to see that verses 23 and 26 speak of perversions of justice. Verse 24 speaks of the fool who wastes his life chasing unattainable goals (**the ends of the earth**), and v. 25 speaks of the fool who gives distress to his parents. Folly and injustice have this in common, that they both fill life with grief and vexation. The point here is v24 is that wisdom is easily accessible to the discerning man, but the fool keeps looking to other interests and never finds wisdom. It seems that it is implying that Wisdom is not a natural quality but must be pursued. **Sensible people** persistently cultivate wisdom, but **a fool's eyes** cannot stay focused.

Just to rehearse our interpretation,, it seems that Solomon is say that:

“The man of understanding keeps steadily before him wisdom as his object in life, the mark to aim at, the rule to walk by. Whereas, the eyes of the fool are anywhere but on wisdom, roaming hither and thither, with no definite aim or object in view.”

And this holds good in regard both to things temporal and. spiritual.

As always there are a couple illustrations:

- Nehemiah, through fixedness of purpose, his eyes being upon God, achieved a great and good work in his day, and built up a character which has served ever since as a model to men of business.
- Contrast the Athenians, ready to give ear to any idle news from whatever quarter of the globe, yet rejecting the good news of salvation, with the Apostle who preached to them, himself a man who had wisely looked the truth in the face, and ever after adhered to it, to his soul's countless gain.

Application.—We have only to look around to see the characters depicted by these words. The countenances of two men will oftentimes reveal them—the steady, thoughtful, concentrated expression of one, the garish, wavering, roaming eyes of the other. Consort with them, and you will remark that one has an aim in life, while the other's mind is filled with roving fancies which have assumed no definite form. There is a steady principle and rule of action in this man, but that man veers about with every last notion presented to his mind. Make them your fellow-travellers, and you will be struck by the way in which the first will bring knowledge to bear on all he sees, and continually be adding to his store. His comrade will gape listlessly in the midst of associations of which he is willingly ignorant, and be always looking forward to fresh and more distant scenes, by which he will as little profit. Close with them on questions of moment, whether as regards this world or the next, the most marked contrast will soon appear between the sound, judicious investor of his time and money, and the wild, visionary schemer; and far more painfully between him who has

deliberately chosen the one thing needful, and him who is vaguely preferring to it all sorts of things that are needless. In the house of God should both be found, while the one is intent on his devotions, both thoughts and eyes of the other are wandering far and wide. Alas! on the bed of death the same contrast will hold good—firm, substantial, unwavering faith on the one hand; dreamy hopes and changeful opinions on the other. Thus, the man of understanding is distinguished from the fool.

*O God, “turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken
Thou me in Thy way”!*
