

Turn Not to The Right Hand nor to The Left

Proverbs 4:25-27

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.*

As is seen in a number of other passages in Proverbs, this particular couple of verse is one of the more familiar and well known bits of what Solomon had to say to his readers. Of course, this is particularly true of verse 27.

Verse 25 starts with the idea of “letting” our eyes look straight ahead. I have seen much application and regular application of this idea in my own practical life. I noticed a while ago that if, while driving, a look down to press a button or some other part of the interior of the car, the car tends to start, slowly drift in the same direction, slowly and not dramatically, but it happens never the less. Needless to say I have taken to being certain that my eyes are forward at all times. As I pondered this couple verses, I could see the real and necessary application to spiritual matters. For one thing, it stands as a real challenge for us to be firm in our resolution about remaining in the right way. Metaphorically, it suggests that when a person turns his eyes away from the path, he is apt to stumble.

Solomon’s reference to eyes and eyelids in verse 25 are really a double statement of the same thing, repeated for emphasis. Notice also the beginning of the verse, with the word “Let”. There are two ideas here.

1. First it speaks of the deliberate actions involved. Solomon’s advice is for us to see to it we are taking what action or effort tis needful to be sure that the vision and attention is where it ought to be.
2. Second it speaks of the possibility or temptation to allow our emphasis and focus to wander, even a bit. We must see to it that this does not happen, and take what steps are needed to resist or protect against this possibility.

Of course, we might also note that there is the possibility that, in our normal vision, we might accidentally or, perhaps purposely allow our vision, our “eye” to drift away from being “ahead”. We note also that Solomon tells us to see to it that our “sight” is “straight” forward. The word is only used a relatively few number of times in the OT. It is translated as “against” 10 times, “before” nine times, “directly” once, “for” once, “on” once, and “over” once.

All of those can speak of the basic idea of looking at that which is in front of. Of course, as with most verbs and adverbs in the OT, depending on the context in which it is used, it can also refer to a variety of other aspect as well.

For instance, it can cause of thing of looking at that which is opposite to a thing, or that which is somewhere in the sight of, or underscore what is being looked right upon. If it is used of look at one thing which is a part of a group of things, it would speak of that which is towards the front of that group, or what is at the in front of the group.

The second phrase is joined to the first with a conjunction that completes the first thought, adding to it and adds to the first, completing it. The word eyelids is a form of the first word, eye, in the first phrase. What the first phrase said, the second phrase completes and enlarges upon. Likewise, the verb for “look” in the second phrase is a form of the same verb in the first. The finishing of this second phrase essentially says the same thing that was said in the first. Repeated, it emphasizes what was said in the first.

To understand what has led up to what the 3 verses are telling us, we need to remember that this entire Chapter. It is portrayed as a father’s counsel to his son, designed to help him to avoid (not merely get out of) the troubles conducive to growing up into adulthood. Interestingly, the verbs in this few verses are in what is called the “Jussive” voice which refers to a third person expression of volition; that is, a wish or desire, expressed in the third person (“let him worship!”, “let them worship!”, “let it worship!”). Note that the jussive is also used to express a negative command in the second person (as in the second person jussive form; “do not walk!”). The point is that Solomon is, all but commanding his children to do what he is saying. Let’s call it... “urging strongly” that his children do as he is counseling them to do. The summary of this entire first 27 verses in the chapter is that we must be warned of what is lurking around for us and we must take care to be sure that we can avoid them, for they will not simple shy away from us as we live and walk through our living.

Note that verse 26 tells us to “ponder” meaning to think deeply in order to see a thing thoroughly and rightly. This “pondering” is facilitated by our seeing via the keeping of by the being aware of what evil is lurking and also knowing what is right and good. It is this knowing and pondering that will allow us to do as Solomon counsels...namely to “let all your ways be established” and to keep our “way” meaning the path which we follow in life. This is accomplished by means of the 5 things mentioned for us:

1. Being extremely certain that we are concentrating our attention on what is before us and needs us to evaluate and make decision (positive or negative) concerning.
2. Seeing to it that this attention is especially focused on the “path” immediately before us, not necessarily in the long run (though there is nothing wrong with thinking in terms of what might be a long way for us).
3. We must also “ponder”, that is we must think deeply and seeking to discern what it is that God desires us to do or to avoid in the way and manner of our walking.

4. We must also make choices based on that pondering as well as on the content of the Word of God and our prayer life and the counsel of others. (The second two are drawn from other places is Proverbs that tell us to make good and profitable use of them).
5. Be aware of the temptations to allow our “path” to deviate in whatever “direction” life seeks to draw us. We MUST not allow ourselves to turn to the right OR to the left. Note that the language of verse 27 seems to indicate that we have both the choice and the ability to see to it that our pursuit of our path remains straight and right.
6. Further, there WILL be times when we find ourselves taking that first “step” along an evil aspect of this walk of ours. At that point Solomon urges his readers to “remove” our foot from that wicked deviation of the right fashion which had our path. Note once again that there is the implication that this is a thing that we are able to do. We are not prisoners to it, even after we have taken that first step.
7. It is interesting that Solomon speaks of even this first step taken away from our right and godly path as “evil”. The word is not the same as wicked (except perhaps in its effect) but rather should be understood as that which is of small or poor worth. There is also the sense of what is contemptible or despicable. It is also in the sense of being “absolute” meaning that it has that one thing, a bad “step” in life in mind as opposed to a more general idea of what one thinks or a course that is pursued. Solomon is speaking of a single decision that leads to a single part of the course we take. We must cease to head in that direction by “removing” our foot from such an undesirable and unprofitable (in terms of benefiting us spiritually) course.

Just to summarize our 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); and 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.

Just a couple Biblical illustrations -

- 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 we 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?

A word by way of application - Straight forward lies the path of spiritual safety. But 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!*
