

Psalm 101:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me.

Analysis

I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me. David's commitment extends to what he allows to influence his mind and affections. "I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes" (lo-ashit l'neged einai d'var-b'liya'al) uses beliya'al (בְּלִיאָל), meaning worthlessness, wickedness, or destruction. The phrase literally means "a worthless thing" or "thing of Belial" (Satan).

The eyes are portrayed as gatekeepers of the heart. What we allow before our eyes shapes desires, values, and character (Genesis 3:6—Eve "saw that the tree was good for food"; Joshua 7:21—Achan "saw...coveted...took"; 2 Samuel 11:2—David "saw a woman washing herself"). David pledges vigilance over visual input, refusing entertainment, counsel, or pursuits that promote wickedness.

"I hate the work of them that turn aside" (saneiti ma'a seh setim, שָׁנֵא תִּמְאַשֵּׁה שְׁתִים שְׁתִים) expresses vehement rejection of apostasy. Setim (שְׁתִים) means those who turn away, deviate, or apostatize from God's ways. David doesn't merely disapprove but actively hates (sane, שָׁנֵא) their works—reflecting God's own hatred of evil (Psalm 5:5, Proverbs 6:16-19).

"It shall not cleave to me" (lo yidbaq bi, לֹא יַדְבַּק בִּי) uses dabaq (דַבָּק), meaning to cling, adhere, or stick. David refuses to let wickedness attach itself to his character or administration. This suggests both personal purity and administrative

vigilance—he will not tolerate corrupt officials or unjust practices in his government.

Historical Context

The eyes' role in moral compromise is illustrated throughout biblical narratives: Eve's visual desire for the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:6), Lot's choice to pitch his tent toward Sodom because the plain was 'well watered...like the garden of the LORD' (Genesis 13:10), Achan's coveting what his eyes saw in Jericho's plunder (Joshua 7:21), David's adultery beginning when he 'saw a woman washing herself' (2 Samuel 11:2).

Ancient Near Eastern royal courts often featured entertainment, art, and advisors promoting polytheism, sexual immorality, and political intrigue. David's pledge to set 'no wicked thing before his eyes' meant refusing pagan religious imagery, rejecting counsel from corrupt advisors, and maintaining moral boundaries despite cultural norms.

The concept of 'hating' evil reflects covenant theology. The Shema commands loving God with totality (Deuteronomy 6:5); conversely, loyalty to God requires hating what God hates (Psalm 97:10, Amos 5:15). This isn't vindictive malice but moral clarity—recognizing and rejecting what destroys human flourishing and defies divine order.

Jesus intensified this principle, teaching that adultery begins with lustful looking (Matthew 5:28) and commanding radical amputation of whatever causes sin (Matthew 5:29-30, 18:8-9). The issue isn't literal eyes but guarding the heart by controlling inputs.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does guarding visual input relate to maintaining spiritual purity in an image-saturated culture with pervasive digital media?
2. Is there biblical precedent for 'hating' certain works or ideologies, and how is this distinct from hating people made in God's image?
3. What practical strategies help prevent wickedness from 'cleaving' to us even when we must operate in corrupt environments?

Interlinear Text

לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה כָּל־יְלִלְךָ דָּבָר עַיְן יְלִלְךָ עַיְן יְלִלְךָ בְּלִלְךָ עַל־דָּבָר עַשְׂתָּה
H3808 I will set H5048 before mine eyes H5869 thing H1697 no wicked H1100 the work H6213

בְּלִלְךָ עַל־דָּבָר עַשְׂתָּה
H3808 I hate H8130 it shall not cleave H1692

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 119:37 (Parallel theme): Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way.

Job 31:1 (Parallel theme): I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?

Matthew 5:28 (Parallel theme): But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

Proverbs 6:25 (Parallel theme): Lust not after her beauty in thine heart; neither let her take thee with her eyelids.

Exodus 20:17 (Parallel theme): Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.

Psalms 40:4 (Parallel theme): Blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.

2 Peter 2:21 (Parallel theme): For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.

Jeremiah 22:17 (Parallel theme): But thine eyes and thine heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for to shed innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it.

Ecclesiastes 6:9 (Parallel theme): Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire: this is also vanity and vexation of spirit.

Romans 12:9 (Evil): Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.