

Making *Straight* (Rows or) *Paths*

I am aware that the word “*strait*” (KJV) in Matt.7:13 is translated from the Greek word *stenos*, and refers to being “narrow” or “constricted” rather than “straight” or “without curves or bends.” Obviously, such should influence our interpretation of Jesus’ description of the *path* “*that leads to life.*” But the Hebrew writer does use the word “*straight*” in Heb.12:13 when he writes that we should, nonetheless, “*make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint.*” Here the Greek word is *orthos*, which means exactly what you think it means – “without crooks.” But let’s set these things aside for a moment...

Have you ever tried to plow a perfectly straight row with a tractor? Long before of GPS, there were no satellite links or computers on our tractors. Plowing a field of “straight” rows took some “know how,” dedicated attention, and devoted effort. Aside from these, a few specific “do’s” and “don’ts” are involved in **plowing “straight” ... and are easily transferable to making/walking a “straight” spiritual path:**

- **You can spend too much time *looking back*.** Oh sure, you had to glance back occasionally to make sure you hadn’t broken a plow point or tripped a shank and that everything was working right. But no one ever plows “straight” rows/furrows by looking backwards. Jesus words ring true, “*No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom,*” Luke 9:62. Which is exactly why Paul said he did (and we must also do) “*one thing*” in these regards – “... *forgetting what lies behind...*” Phil.3:13.
- **You can look *too close to where you are*.** While some attention surely must be paid to immediate surroundings and circumstances (stumps, rocks, and in Texas, armadillo holes and wild hog wallows!), looking *too close* or *much* at the “up close” never produces “straight” rows/paths. Minor obstacles and temporary situations quickly become “major” obstructions and “permanent” problems if we dwell only on the immediate. Perspective is needed for “straight” rows in the field and paths in life. So, “*Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on the earth,*” Col.3:2. A *heavenly* and *eternal* point of view prevents us from concentrating too much on the *material* and *temporary*, cf. 2Cor.4:18.
- **You must “*fix your eyes on Jesus,*” Heb.12:2.** So, plowing straight requires us to shift our focus from what is *behind* and *immediate/up close* to what is perhaps *far off*, the *goal* if you will. To plow or mow rows without crooks and bends you have to pick a “marker” – a prominent and permanent visual reference; focus entirely on it, and steer as directly as possible toward it. Making (and walking) “*straight paths for our feet*” is much the same. Have you ever noticed that the Hebrews writer, after extensively listing great men and women of *faith* from the past, urged the reader(s) to “*fix our eyes on Jesus,*” Heb.12:2? *Looking back* at these past “heroes of faith” may inspire us; and *looking around* (circumspectness) is sometimes necessary, but to live the “straight path” of life we must “*fix*” (from the Greek *aphorao-* to *look away from* one thing and *to/at* another) “*our eyes on Jesus*”! He is that *permanent, visible, heavenly* point of reference that we need for “straight” living!
- **Constantly make adjustments.** Setting a course and “locking” the steering wheel does NOT achieve “Straight” rows. Back to plowing for one final comparison. While

not being overly concerned with what's *behind* or even *up close* is essential, and instead concentrating on a fixed distant point of reference is necessary, this does not mean that constant "course corrections" aren't required- they are! While plowing, muddy spots might cause one drive or steering wheel to slip, altering the course if corrections aren't made. Likewise, one side of the plow can hit a rock, root, or hard spot and pull you off course. These circumstances and obstacles occur in life as well as the field! When such things (or temporary lapses in attention!) pull you off the "straight" path, refocus on Jesus and (re)adjust your course, "*because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hopes of sharing the crops,*" 1Cor.9:10!

Perhaps these simple illustrations and comparisons can help us all to maintain the proper focus and to live "straight" lives that are pleasing to and glorify God - to Him be the glory forevermore! (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org)