

Spiritual Mirrors

A sermon by Rev. Jeff Smith

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Mirrors. They reflect light. There's this observer. The observer looks at a reflection in the mirror. The reflection shows an image of an actual object. The reflection in the mirror, of course, isn't the object itself. In fact, absolutely nothing of the original object is present in the reflection. The reflection is merely a two-dimensional image of the three-dimensional object. These characteristics of natural mirrors and reflections are quite obvious and maybe not terribly interesting, but it gets quite a bit more profound when we start looking at spiritual mirrors.

There are a number of things in this world that act like spiritual mirrors—providing two-dimensional images of a three-dimensional higher reality—so, let's jump right in.

The first spiritual mirror for our reflection is the Lord's Word. Its reflective surface is made up of the stories within its pages, along with the Divine truths that we learn from them. New Church teachings often refer to these reflective units as *correspondences*—each one a natural vessel that communicates a spiritual ideal. The truths that we can learn from these reflections are about God Himself, what heaven is like, how to achieve a heavenly state, and how to avoid a hellish one. In and of itself, the letter of the Word is dead. The stories are just words on a page—a reflection in a mirror. The true power of this mirror comes from the light that is being reflected from the source and then into our minds. The Lord's Word shows us what the Lord is like and what heaven is like, but it is not the Lord, and it is not heaven. By reflecting the nature of the heavenly reality, it provides us with a model—a blueprint for how we ought to live, and when we live according to it, we invite the Lord in so that He can build us into a heaven in its smallest form.

An obvious question that arises is this: how can we peek into this magical mirror that offers this amazing reflection? And the obvious answer is ... we look at the mirror. We read the Lord's Word. The first psalm instructs us to meditate in His Word day and night. In Joshua also, we find these words: "This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it" (1:8). We see that the purpose of reading it—the purpose of looking in the mirror—is so that we may observe to do according to all that is written in it.

One of the cool things about the Lord's Word is that it can kind of show us two different reflections. When we first pick it up and read it, we notice the stories and the words on the page. As we continue to look in that reflection, we can compare it with our own thoughts and actions—*our* literal story. For example, we recited the Commandments today, we can look at ourselves and say, Have I murdered anybody today? No. So far, so good. And in the teachings of Jesus, have I loved others the way that I want to be loved? Hmm, maybe I could do better there. But as we continue to seek the Lord's help in our lives by looking in that mirror, we start to see another reflection that shows us our heart and our intentions. Why did I do the things I did today? Was it really out of charity, or was it partly/mostly because I want people to think I'm a nice guy? I didn't yell at that person, but was it because I saw the humanity of that person, or was it just because I didn't want people to see me acting crazy? Want to really know how you can see that second

reflection? In *True Christianity* it says, “the mirror is made of truths that they learn from the Word and become steeped in through living a life according to them” (6.2). It just makes so much sense: the more you live a life that leads you to heaven, the more the Lord shows you what heaven is like.

In summary of this first spiritual mirror: we can use the Lord’s Word to reflect on ourselves. It’s a self-help tool, not a spiritual judgment tool.

The next spiritual mirror we are going to look at is all of creation. I know, it’s literally all-encompassing, but we’ll just take a few examples from the Lord’s creation to focus on.

In our earlier reading from the book *Divine Love and Wisdom*, it says, “since [creation] is from God, His image is in it like the image of a person in a mirror.” So, if we look with just a little effort, we are able to see the Lord in everything in this universe. A great example of this we read from Matthew 6: “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin.” In this floral vignette, we catch a reflection of how the Lord cares for us, that the hairs of our heads are numbered and accounted for. And we can get reflections like this from *all* of His creation! How gravity works, how plants grow, how electrons buzz around the elements, how frozen water floats, and light is kind of a particle, but also moves like a wave. It’s all a reflection of the Lord, and it’s all awesome.

Another example of God’s creation that we read from Genesis is the creation of *Adam*, or people. It says that male and female were created in God’s image. In this way, people are a two-dimensional finite reflection of the three-dimensional infinite God. Another way to think of this image is as a picture or a photocopy—take, for example, a picture of a loved one. The pictures gives you a basic idea of the person’s attributes—eye and hair color, face shape, maybe an idea of their height, what kind of clothing they like to wear, are they smiling or not. And yet, even with all that information, it’s hardly a minute fraction of who that person is, and there is absolutely nothing of the actual person in that picture. You can’t hug the person in that picture. You can’t talk to that loved one in the picture.

As people who are made in the image of God, we can learn something about God by looking at ourselves, and yet, we might also be misled about certain Divine attributes if we base our idea of God on ourselves. We can love, and that from God. We get angry ... but God doesn’t. We are male and female, and yet our gender is simply a derivation of the Divine qualities of love and wisdom—a two-dimensional human facsimile of the perfect and original Human. It’s almost like thinking a person is made of paper because the picture is.

The thing is, that the true image and likeness in which God created us is not about feelings or bodily configuration. No, the true image and likeness that we are as God’s creation is the truth and goodness that we have in our minds and hearts that accurately reflect the image of Gods wisdom and love.

At home we have an antique mirror on our medicine cabinet. At the edges, some of the reflective backing has worn away, and the glass is a little bit wavy. If we stand in the right, or wrong, place, it distorts facial features, and the worn away bits don’t reflect at all. An imperfect mirror provides an inaccurate reflection. There are many who look at this world or look at their lives and struggle to see the hands of Jehovah in His creation. And frankly, when *we* get upset, angry, disappointed, or hateful—when we roll our eyes, or think someone is dumb because of one affiliation or another—when we think this world is unfair—it’s

because we are not, in that moment, seeing the reflection of the Lord in His creation, and we, as well, have some work to do in becoming a less corroded, less wobbly, and more accurate mirror that reflects the image of the Lord.

So, how do we become better reflections of the image of the Lord?

The first thing to do is to look in the mirror. Read the Lord's Word. If you don't know what the blueprint looks like, and if you don't know what it even means to be a good person, and if you don't have any true ideas in your external memory, then there's no reason to go to the next step. If you don't know that life could be better, then there's no reason to try. And by the way, life can be so much better.

And now, with some idea that your life can be better than it is and some ideas of how to do that (#10Commandments), the next thing to do is to compare yourself with that heavenly reflection. So, you know how there are big mirrors that hang on the wall, and then there are compact mirrors that fit in a pocket or purse? God gifted you with a little spiritual compact mirror—it's a higher thought process that can look down on your regular daily thoughts. It allows you to think about your thoughts to see how they are doing. This higher thought process allows us to examine ourselves. What did I do: was that in line with what the Lord wants? What was I thinking: were those heavenly thoughts or hellish thoughts? What were my intentions: was I looking out for others or for myself?

The Lord's Word is a mirror for us to learn from. Use it as such.

All of creation is a reflection of its Creator. The Lord invites us to see Him in it. Take a look!

And ultimately, our goal in this world and to eternity is to have our lives and our hearts better reflect the image of the Lord. With the ability to discern and understand, and with the ability to love, we are indeed created in His image, but the accuracy of that reflection depends on us and our willingness to look in the mirrors He gave us.

Amen.

Readings:

Gen 1:26-28

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Psalm 1:1-2

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful;
But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.

Matt 6:25-30

"Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?

"So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?"

Divine Providence 278

It is for this self-examination that we have been given discernment, a discernment separate from our volition, so that we can know, discern, and recognize what is good and what is evil. It is also so that we can see what the real nature of our volition is--that is, what we love and what we desire. It is to enable us to [examine ourselves] that our discernment has been given both higher and lower thought processes, both more inward and more outward thought processes. It is so that we can use the higher or more inward thoughts to see what our volition is up to in our lower or outer thoughts. We see this the way we see our face in a mirror.

True Christianity 6.2

Although the inmost divine quality [of the Word] is covered over with elements adapted to the comprehension of both angels and people in the world, it nevertheless shines through like light through crystalline forms. Its radiance varies depending on the condition of mind that we have formed for ourselves either from God or on our own. For all those who have formed the state of their mind from God, Sacred Scripture is like a mirror in which they see God, although each in a different way. The mirror is made of truths that they learn from the Word and become steeped in through living a life according to them. A first conclusion from this is that Sacred Scripture is the fullness of God.

Divine Love and Wisdom 59

Divinity is present in absolutely everything in the created universe and the created universe is therefore the work of Jehovah's hands, as it says in the Word. That is, it is a work of divine love and wisdom, for this is what is meant by "Jehovah's hands." Further, even though Divinity is present in all things great and small in the created universe, there is no trace of intrinsic divinity in their own being. While the created universe is not God, it is from God; and since it is from God, His image is in it like the image of a person in a mirror. We do indeed see a person there, but there is still nothing of the person in the mirror.