

# Knowing Self

*Proverbs 27:19*

---

*From "The Counsels of the Wise King"*

---

*"As in water face answers to face, so the heart of man to man."*

*Proverbs 27:19.*

---

Solomon is famous for the word pictures that he uses to drive home the idea, often profound, that he wants his readers to grasp. These pictures are almost always common and easily visualized, but quite fully and dramatically drive home his point for us.

Here, we see one of the more obvious ones for us to consider - that of a man looking at his face in a brook or stream and seeing his own face "looking back" at him versus the personal and inner workings of a man's heart that cannot be readily or obviously discerned by another man, even (by implication) one that is close to him and can readily see the one that is the subject of the statement.

"As" is a preposition that sets up a comparison for the reader to ponder. It joins two things for consideration, here, two obvious things. We might translate it "In the same fashion as...". It calls to mind one thing that all people know and will recognize; namely the reflective nature of water. That sets up the actual comparison Solomon intends for us, at least the first aspect of this comparison.

Virtually everyone knows that water, especially still water, reflects pretty much anything that is placed (or places itself) over it. One key thought that helps with understanding just what Solomon intends, water reflects the outward appearance that is over it. It tells us nothing of the inward nature of the one being reflected. Here, Solomon speaks of the face as the thing being reflected. That underscores that it is outward appearance that he has in mind. The outer aspects of a man and his life are easily seen and understood.

The King goes one and refocuses our attention on something as obvious, once we think a bit about it. While a man's outer appearance is easily seen and discerned; his inner person is more difficult to figure. "Heart", in the OT, speaks of the mind, the will, or the emotions of a person, depending on the context in which it is used. Here, as we said, the reference to the face speaks of one's outer appearance and the heart of the less obvious characteristics of a man. Those inner characteristics. Solomon tells us are not discernable, even by the man himself. They can be discerned only by, what Solomon says, are other men.

It is, indeed interesting, that the implication here is that, unlike the ease of seeing our reflection in water, seeing our own faults and character is best accomplished as others are the speaker by which they are made known to us. This is NOT to say that we cannot look inward and genuinely see our own matters that need attention and work. We surely can, but the ability to do so is

quite difficult and often results in faulty conclusions and thus insufficient courses of action.

Another way to think of this is to understand that holds up to us that the more correct rendering makes the heart of others to be the instrument of reflection. And by the heart is to be understood in a general way the character, mental and moral. You may see yourself while looking upon others, especially those over whom you have influence. But it is equally true that you may know other men by getting a thorough knowledge of yourself. The oneness of human nature is here taught.

By way of illustration we might ask about how often may parents see their own faults or virtues reflected in their children:

- Jacob came to see his deceitfulness,
- David realized his voluptuousness,
- Hannah realized her prayerful piety.
- Solomon points out alter in Proverbs that a master can see things he needs to see in his servants (29:12), for if he “hearken to lies they all are wicked,”
- We might suggest that this is true only if he is like Cornelius, “*a devout man,*” one or more of them will probably reflect his devoutness (Acts 10:7, 33, 48).
- Often, throughout history, it has it been found that “like people like priest,” and the converse of this also is often true (Hos. 4:9).

---

*<sup>9</sup> And it shall be: like people, like priest.  
So I will punish them for their ways,  
And reward them for their deeds.*

---

- Do not David’s Psalms strike the same key-notes in our hearts now as vibrated in his heart when he sang them in his day?
- And were not the Apostles, however diverse in natural character as in their several experiences, one in heart and linked together (as, for instance, Philip and James), in that they loved the same blessed Master and devoted themselves alike to His service?

It seems likely that, if we pause and carefully think it over, we will find that what Solomon says is so here in this Proverbs is also very true in our lives and time.

By way of application this text is not a mere sentiment, but teaches us many lessons. We ought to learn from it the immense responsibility of influence, in that we must make others more or less like myself. We are taught, by way of acquiring self-knowledge, to study human nature, since what we can find in others exists more or less, latent if not developed, in our own hearts. Should, as the Scripture says, we not be more able to do to others as we would want they should do to me - if convinced that their expectations of what is due only correspond with my own? Would not my sympathies be more readily drawn out towards my fellow-men, if I recognize a kindred soul in each one? To see

myself as I am, would it not compel humility? To see others as I am, would it not beget brotherly love?

Moreover, how can I complain of *strangeness*-in my experiences if I realize that, from Adam to David, from David to Paul, from Paul to the present day, human nature and human experiences have been the same? One great writer has said: “*He who understands his own heart will have the key to all others.*” There is a correspondence between man and man which is common to all. But as the “*image of the earthy*” is borne by every corrupt heart, so is the “*image of the heavenly*” by every heart that has been renewed by grace. And thus true Christians are linked together in one spiritual brotherhood, which God’s Word has called “**the communion of saints.**”