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1 Corinthians 13:12—Through a Glass Darkly

In 1 Corinthians 13:12, Paul muses on our relative ignorance of the spiritual realm compared to what will become clear in the future: “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.”

The 1611 King James Version renders the first phrase of this verse, “For now we see through a glass, darkly,” and that translation would be picked up in numerous literary allusions. To “see through a glass darkly” means to be ignorant of things that are simply beyond knowing—no amount of education or experience will remedy the situation.

Ingmar Bergman (1918–2007): The phrase was used as the title of a 1961 Swedish film by Ingmar Bergman. *Through a Glass Darkly* presents the stories of family members who essentially serve as mirrors for one another: the dominant theme is failure of human communication. Like Paul, Bergman believed that people know themselves and others only in part and, so, relationships must be based on something that transcends the inadequacies of knowledge.

Philip D. Dick (1928–82): The phrase “Through a glass, darkly” also inspired the title of a 1977 science-fiction novel by Philip K. Dick, *A Scanner Darkly*, on which a 2006 film of the same name was based.

The novel portrays a dystopian future in which narcotics agents use surveillance equipment (scanners) to combat the spread of a new, lethal drug. Again, judgments based on “partial knowledge” become a dominant theme.

Lewis Carroll (1832–98): Some have speculated that the English novelist Lewis Carroll might have had 1 Corinthians 13:12 in mind when he crafted *Through the Looking Glass*, an 1871 sequel to *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. In this volume, Alice passes through a mirror to discover an alternative reality that exists on the other side. She realizes that those on either side of the glass know only “in part,” unaware of the alternative reality that they have never experienced.