

## **Reality Versus Realization**

**By Elder David Pyles**

Sometimes we describe things in terms of their appearance even though we know that reality may be different. A prime example is when we speak of a “rising Sun.” We know the Sun is actually stationary and that our place on the Earth is spinning toward the Sun, but we speak of a rising Sun because this is how it appears from our perspective. The same thing can happen in the Bible. One verse may describe a thing according to the appearance whereas another may describe it according to the reality. This could produce the appearance of a contradiction when in fact there is none. We would not even charge an astronomer with contradiction if he were to speak of a “rising Sun.”

A prime example where this phenomenon occurs in the Bible is in Paul’s description of his unregenerate state before the experience on the road to Damascus:

*For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. – Rom 7:9*

It is abundantly clear from other verses that Paul was in fact spiritually *dead* at that time (Eph 2:1-5, Col 2:13, Mt 8:22, Jn 5:25). When he here said he was alive, he was referring to how he perceived himself. He was alive in his own eyes when in reality he was dead in sins, and he came to realize this truth when God opened his mind and heart. His intent here was to show the purpose of the Law in God’s scheme of salvation. Its purpose was to show men their sinfulness and their need of salvation by grace in Jesus Christ. As he would later explain, “*But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful,*” (Rom 7:13).

A second example occurs in the famous verse:

*Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him. – Heb 5:8*

There is of course great mystery connected with the fact that Christ is both human and divine, but we can surely say that in His

divinity, He understood human feelings because He was the architect and creator of those feelings. He was also without flaw in both His natures. Notwithstanding, He was perfected *in our perception* when He shared in our sufferings, We now perceive Him to be one who can serve as a perfect High Priest to us because He can both empathize and sympathize with our case.

A third example was in Jesus' statement concerning Judas:

*While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled.* – Jn 17:12

The appearance was that Judas lost his salvation when he betrayed Christ. In reality he was a devil from the very outset (Jn 6:70).

A fourth example is in the important doctrine of justification. In some places the Bible says we were rendered righteous before God the moment Jesus died on the cross (Rom 5:10 & 25, Eph 2:4-6, Col 3:13-14), but in other places the Bible says we were justified when brought to faith. Again, one refers to the reality whereas the other refers to our realization. In reality, we were made righteous to God by the death of Christ alone, and all the elect family of God were rendered righteous this way the moment He died on the cross, but this was certified to us personally when we were brought to faith in Jesus Christ. This was when we came to *realize* what had in fact been *reality* long before.

A failure to draw this distinction between reality and realization has been a common source of error. One will never be able to make sense of the Bible without understanding this distinction.