

RELATIVITY

(Discourse below by Bill Ostrander. Given at the Bellingham all-day gathering, Oct. 12, 1980.)

The term “relativity” often brings to mind Einstein’s theory of relativity. And it is Einstein’s theory of relativity that we hope to draw a spiritual lesson from. We are going to note some of the effects that are predicted by this theory. We will not, however, attempt to explain why, according to his theory, Einstein predicted these effects. So there is no need to understand his theory to appreciate the lesson we will draw from it.

When discussing relativity one phrase needs explanation. That phrase is “frame of reference.” Relativity is the study of relative motion; how one object moves in relation to another one. To observe and measure such motion we use a frame of reference. The frame of reference is considered stationary or constant. The object’s motion is then measured relative to this stationary frame of reference. It is very important to choose carefully the constant frame of reference.

To illustrate: let’s use a rather unusual example. Let us imagine a train built in such a way that an automobile can be driven through each car of the train for the full length of the train. Furthermore, assume the train track is very smooth and the auto is well insulated so we hear no noise or feel no bumps inside the auto. We find ourselves sitting in the back seat of the auto inside a train car with no windows and no lights. Can we tell if we are moving? Since it is so dark, the only thing we know is that inside the auto we are sitting very still. So perhaps we are not moving at all. But then in front of us a door opens and our auto rolls into the next car of the train. This car is well lit, but there are still no windows. Now we know we are moving and a quick glance at the speedometer tells us we are moving ahead at 10 mph. Sure enough, soon we roll through this car and the door opens to the next one, which has windows. Looking out these windows, we are surprised to discover we are actually moving backward! You see, our auto was moving toward the rear end of the train. The train was moving forward at 60 mph. So actually, we were moving in the opposite direction that we were facing at 50 mph. Thus relative to the auto, we were not moving; relative to the train we were moving 10 mph one direction, and relative to the ground we were moving 50 mph in the opposite direction. So it is important which frame of reference one chooses.

Einstein’s theory of relativity is built around light as a constant. According to his theory, the speed of light is always constant. Einstein goes on to make some rather startling predictions based upon this constant nature of light. He predicts that certain distortions will be observed by one who is traveling at speeds approaching that of light. Physical dimensions will become distorted. For instance, to one traveling at such speeds, straight telephone poles would appear to bend over. Also colors will become altered. As one

approaches a white building, at such speeds, the building will appear pink. After passing by and looking back, the building will now have a bluish cast.

One of the most intriguing predictions, however, is that even the passing of time will become distorted for one traveling at light-like speeds. You may ask: “How can time become distorted?” Well, let us consider a short example. We have a man and wife who are both 35 years of age. The husband makes a trip out into space, traveling at $1/3$ the speed of light. According to his on-board time-keeping instruments, it has taken him exactly five years to complete the round trip. So he is now 40 years old. But when he arrives home, he finds his wife is now 50 years old. And his son, who had just turned 5 when he left, is now a young man of 20.

This is exactly what Einstein predicted would happen. One who is traveling at light-like speeds will mature at a slower rate than others who choose not to accelerate themselves to such high speeds. So, if one neglects this constant frame of reference that is, consistency of the speed of light, they will experience distortion and their growth will be inhibited.

Our Spiritual Constant Frame of Reference

We will now look to the Scriptures to see if we can develop our own theory of relativity. First of all, we will need a constant frame of reference. It is interesting to note that as Einstein used light as an absolute constant in the universe, so Jehovah appears to men in the form of a brilliant light. Consider the Shekinah Glory in the Tabernacle. (Exod. 40:34, 35 and Exod. 25:22). At times this shining was so bright that none could even enter the Tabernacle. Again consider how Jehovah appeared to Moses in the Mount. (Exod. 33:18-23 and Exod. 34:29, 30). Here the glory of Jehovah was such that Moses had to be hidden in the cleft of a rock. Even after viewing the back side of the Heavenly Father, the radiance was so tremendous that the very molecules in the skin of Moses' face were excited to the point of luminousness. When the people saw the effect upon Moses of Jehovah's presence, they were afraid, and Moses had to veil his face.

If Einstein's theory is true, and by traveling at light-like speeds time appears to speed up or slow down, we begin to get just a glimmer of understanding of the timelessness of Jehovah. Consider Psalm 90:2. Here is the scripture statement that Jehovah has no beginning. He is not bounded by the constant passing of time as are we. Jehovah is the source of, and has supreme control over all sources of energy, including that of light. Thus, He must be able to transcend this constant frame of light that was such a boundary to Einstein. So the passage of time for Jehovah is quite different than it is for us. For in our limited realm, we can only relate to the constant passage of time. Every event for us has a beginning and an end. Psalm 90:2, “Before the mountains were brought forth, or

ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.”

Let us now consider how Jehovah is our spiritual, absolutely constant frame of reference. We will find many scriptures that tell us of the constancy of Jehovah. Consider Exod. 3:14, 15. Here we find the very name of Jehovah implies constancy. “And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations.”

“I AM THAT I AM,” the self existing One, implies a set purpose, a constant course of action. Another translation renders it: “I will become whatsoever I will become.” Rotherham summarizes it thus: “... we know that the divine resources are infinite, and that God will please to become to His people only what is wisest and best... The Name is at once a revelation, a memorial, a pledge. To this name, God will ever be faithful; of it He will never be ashamed; by it He may ever be truthfully proclaimed and gratefully praised.” So His very name is a pledge of consistency.

Another beautiful text ties together for us these two aspects of Jehovah. First, He is the source of all true light. Secondly, as that source, He is absolutely constant, not even a hint of variance. Just listen to Jas. 1:17: “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness neither shadow of turning.”

There are many scriptures that tell us of Jehovah’s consistency. 1 Sam. 15:28, 29; Psa. 89:34, 35; 2 Tim. 2:13; Titus 1:2; Isa. 55:8 to 11; Num. 23:19; Heb. 6:17-20. Let us examine the last three of these texts. Isa. 55:8-11: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.”

Here we again have the promise that the Word of God is set in purpose. These texts should greatly multiply our confidence in the Word of God even though it seem to tarry in fulfillment.

Num. 23:19: “God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent, hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath spoken, and shall he not make it good? There is absolutely nothing for which God needs to repent. Everything He says will not fail, even in the least detail, to come to pass.”

Heb. 6:17-20: “Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us; which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest forever after the order of Melchisedec.”

Note the terms used here that convey the thoughts of consistency and constancy: “immutability” and “stedfast.” Here we are told this constancy of Jehovah provides for us a strong consolation, a refuge, an anchor of the soul. What more could we ask?

We now have our spiritual constant frame of reference. Let us go on in the development of our theory and consider the possibility of—Distortions: Einstein forecast that one who neglected to take into account the effects of traveling at speeds approaching light would suffer from the distortions that would be experienced. Can we expect similar distortions if we neglect our spiritual frame of reference? In the Scriptures we find examples of some who have failed to respect Jehovah as the constant force of the universe, the source of all things.

In Isaiah 14:12-15 we find the prime example of total disregard of Jehovah. Note how the one in these texts not only neglects Jehovah’s position in the universe, but even worse, seeks to set himself up in a like position—of competition. His concern is only for his own position, his own frame of reference. Then he is like the one in the train car with no lights and no windows. Except he has chosen to pull the shades and turn off the lights. Thus he cannot judge his relative course of action. Isa. 14:12-15: “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.”

We can see here how Satan sought only for himself. He wanted all else to be measured relative to him. He neglected who was the source of his life, and all life in the universe. Did Satan experience distortion? John 8:44 answers, “Yes, indeed.” As we read the verse, note how total is the distortion for Satan. John 8:44: “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and

abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar, and the father of it.” Notice Satan had not even a little truth left in him. So he experienced total distortion as a result of failing to observe, respect and maintain his position in the universe relative to that of the heavenly Father.

Avoiding Distortion

Now that we have seen how distortion can occur, we ask: How can we avoid such distortion? How can we properly respect Jehovah as the supreme, spiritual, constant frame of reference? For our answer, let us look to another example. And since we have considered the prime example resulting in total distortion, let us now consider the prime example of how all distortion is avoided. We will read Phil. 2:6-11. This is an account of how our Lord Jesus had total respect for his Father. Notice how his course is opposite from that of Lucifer. Phil. 2:6-11: “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Let us emphasize the first part of this verse that is rather poorly translated in the King James version. The margin rendering is that Jesus “counted not equality with God a thing to be grasped at.” It was the farthest thing from our Lord’s mind—to elevate himself in any way. But always he acknowledged his Heavenly Father as the source of all that he had. And he wants all around him to thus honor the Father and not himself.

We notice many places in the scripture where the church is urged to take special note of this manner in which our Lord kept the proper position relative to that of his father, Jehovah. Consider, for example, the very verse that just precedes the ones we just read. Phil. 2:5: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” “Let this mind be in you” must mean then this mental awareness that our Lord Jesus had of the Father as the provider of all that he had, and his mental attitude of willingness, always, to keep himself totally subservient to the will of the Father. So, too, we as adopted children of God, should strive to have this same mental awareness of, and attitude toward, our Heavenly Father.

Again, in Matt. 11:29 Jesus himself asks his followers to observe and study his approach to his ministry on earth. He wants his followers to look to him as an example of maintaining a proper relative heart attitude. Does he ask them so they can learn to speak as fluently as he? No. Well, then maybe to learn how to heal the sick? No. The reason

is quite different from these. Listen: Matt. 11:29: “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”

When we are beyond the veil, then, we will speak the truth with fluency and power as never before. Then the sick will be truly healed through the operation of the New Covenant. But we cannot reach that mediatorial position unless our hearts are in the proper condition. They must be meek and lowly as was our Lord.

Different Frames of Reference

In our example of the hollow train, we learned that there can be more than one frame of reference to consider at any given time. So far we have discussed only Jehovah as a constant frame of reference. There are other frames of reference which can be used to help us measure our relative spiritual progress. Remember, we could not get a true idea of our motion until we could look out the window of the auto, and out of the window of the train and see the ground outside. So, as we spiritually observe other frames of reference, we still must always keep a proper perspective in regard to Jehovah.

We will discuss three frames of reference. We will try to bring out how these should be viewed and the benefits to be accrued by so viewing them. First, we will again consider Jehovah and touch on some additional aspects of His constant frame of reference. Next, we will consider how the brethren can serve as a frame of reference for us. And thirdly, we will look at our own personal frame of reference.

Isa. 57:15 gives considerable insight into Jehovah that perhaps we have overlooked so far in our discussion. Isa. 57:15: “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”

We have discussed how constant Jehovah is. And it is true, but He is also capable of great sympathy. He revives the hearts of the contrite ones. How versatile is our Father in heaven. He is high and lofty. Yet He is able to touch and mend and revive the lowly broken heart.

Through Psalm 123:1, 2 we gain a lesson as to what our attitudes should be in order to keep ourselves in proper relative position, spiritually. “Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens. Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until that he have mercy upon us.” So, as a devoted servant looks up to his master and waits for direction—being eager to serve; so with us—we should be as servants, wanting to please Jehovah, waiting for and faithfully expecting

providential leadings. With such an attitude, one can properly reverence and respect Jehovah as his constant frame of reference.

James 4:5-7 emphasizes God as our source of grace; but He only gives that grace to those who properly reverence Him. “Do you think that the scripture saith in vain, the spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” So if we have a proper respect and reverence for Jehovah, we will gladly submit ourselves to His will. We will recognize Him as the true source of every good thing.

The Brethren

The brethren can also serve as a frame of reference. By interacting with the brethren and observing their growth and development, we can gain greater insight into our own heart condition. Phil 2:3 points out, however, that we must take care to view the brethren from the proper relative perspective. We will quote it from the Diaglott. “Doing nothing from party-spirit, or vain-glory; but in humility esteeming others as excelling yourselves.”

We have learned the proper relative attitude in regard to Jehovah is lowliness, as that of a servant. We thus set Jehovah high above us, as that of the ultimate benevolent master of the universe. Now, as we are still looking up toward Jehovah, we superimpose our brethren. Thus, we are looking up to our brethren as well, esteeming them as excelling ourselves. From this vantage point, we are able to see their new creature and how God is developing them. This viewpoint will help us keep in mind that God is the source of all grace for them as well. Keeping this in mind, we can properly esteem their good traits and talents; and we will thus be drawn up higher as we seek to thus develop our own characters.

If, on the other hand, we place the brethren below ourselves, we get an improper perspective. Notice, by having to look down, our vision is directed away from Jehovah. We then begin to dwell upon the faults and failings of others. This makes us forget the areas in our own characters that need attention. Thus our growth and development slows. So, in our spiritual theory of relativity, like Einstein's, failure to properly respect our constant frame of reference will cause one to mature at a slower rate.

We would like to bring out two quotes from Pastor Russell's writings along this line: “Lowliness of mind, humility, is a mental quality which enables its possessor to look up with appreciation, not only to God, but also to earthly beings, recognizing their good qualities. The Apostle urges that this lowliness of mind should be in all of God's people; this fact proves it to be a quality that demands careful cultivation.” (R5842-10) “In all persons there are certain qualities that may be esteemed and appreciated; even as the old

lady said that she could wish that others had as much *perseverance* as Satan. We are to appreciate good traits whenever we see them in others. We do not know whether in the Lord's sight they may not be more noble, more self-sacrificing, more lowly in mind than ourselves. Our duty is plain. We are not able to read the heart, and hence we are to think kindly and generously of all those whom God has brought into His family. 'Love beareth all things, ... endureth all things.' 'As we have opportunity, therefore, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them of the household of faith.'—1 Cor. 13:7; Gal. 6:10." (R5843-3)

So, to sum up: our spiritual theory of relativity can be summed up in one word—humility. To maintain a proper relative position, our attitude must be humble; lowly, as that of a servant. For are we not preparing ourselves to serve the world of mankind in the Kingdom—the blessings of the New Covenant?

1 Tim. 3:6 and James 3:1 address a special class who need extra awareness of their relative position. The elders need to be especially humble. The very nature of this office lifts them into a more responsible and vulnerable position. Thus the warnings of these two texts: 1 Tim. 3:6: "Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil." James 3:1: "My brethren, be not many teachers [margin] knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation."

Ourselves

As we consider ourselves, monitoring our own progress and development, we must then, too, keep in mind our position relative to Jehovah. For, of our ourselves, we are nothing. All that we have and are come to us from God, and we need to always acknowledge Him as that source. Consider Eph. 2:8-10 along this line: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God. Not of works. lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

1 Cor. 1:26-29 shows how we are nothing, but God, not us, turns our nothingness into something glorious. So we should want all glory to belong to Jehovah. "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are; that no flesh should glory in his presence."

In Prov. 3:7 the proper attitude is contrasted with the improper attitude: "Be not wise in thine own eyes; fear the Lord, and depart from evil."

Heb. 6:10 points out that we should not seek recognition for any service we may have been able to render unto any of the brethren. We merely should desire to be used of the Lord and have all praise go to Him: “For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.”

Conclusion

To summarize: we have been considering how humility is an attitude of relativity. We considered Einstein’s theory of relativity and developed our own spiritual theory. We showed how failure to properly respect Jehovah as the constant frame of reference will result in distortion and slower growth and maturity. We’ve learned that Jehovah is honored by those who recognize and credit Him as the true source of every good and perfect gift.

Jehovah can deal only with those who thus submit themselves to His influence. And He will greatly reward those who demonstrate such submission, as our final two texts show. 1 Pet. 5:6: “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.” Matt. 5:5: “Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth.”