

MERCY AND TRUTH HAVE MET TOGETHER

(Discourse by Bro. Ralph Gaunt at Fort Worth, Texas convention March 19, 1970)

Psa. 85:10-13, “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed. Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven. Yea, the Lord shall give that which is good; and our land shall yield her increase. Righteousness shall go before him; and shall set us in the way of his steps.” “Mercy and truth; righteousness and peace”—precious qualities, God-like qualities—just what do they mean to us? They are far more than high ideals! They are far more than traits of character! Mercy and truth, righteousness and peace, should be a way of life!

Think for a moment of our Heavenly Father. We usually think of him as having four attributes—justice, wisdom, love and power. But, interwoven through these four attributes, we find, time and again, these qualities of mercy and truth, righteousness and peace. But why this particular combination? Why is mercy linked with truth? Why is righteousness linked with peace? Think for a moment of all God’s dealings with his human creation. Think of his dealings with Adam, with the patriarchs, with Moses, with the Israelites, with the church—never does he violate his principles of truth! It is impossible for God to lie. Yet, time and again in his dealings with fallen and imperfect man, God has tempered his principles of truth with mercy. Because he knows the weaknesses and imperfections of man, he makes allowance for it, and carries out his principles of truth with an abundant supply of mercy. Think of the times when God would have destroyed the Israelites in the wilderness—but instead, he showed mercy. Think of David, and his violations of God’s law. David was guilty, and God knew he was guilty, but without violating his principles of truth, God had mercy on David.

The qualities of mercy and truth are lacking in the human heart because of the fall, Adam was created in the image and likeness of his Creator—possessing the qualities of mercy and truth. But man fell from his original perfection. With the centuries of falling and imperfection of mind and body, and with every interest pressing for self-gratification at the expense of others, these principles of mercy and truth have become largely erased from human hearts. The natural man cares little for truth, except as it personally becomes to his advantage. The natural man cares little for mercy, except as he desires it to be expressed toward himself. Is the consecrated child of God any different? He should be! He has to be! We call ourselves “truth people.” Is this just a title, or does it describe a way of life? Truth comes in several categories—there is the truth of God’s Word and plan—God’s truth! Then there is truth regarding ourselves and our standing with the Lord and our dealings with our brethren and our fellow man. Then there are truths regarding others, and regarding events.

To the natural man, truth tends to become relative—relative to what one cares to believe. We've heard it said, that if you really believe a thing, then, to you, it is true. Do we deal with God's word this way? Do we deal with our own characters this way? And do we deal with our brethren and our fellow man this way? If so, then we are not really "truth people" are we? Have we ever listened to a rumor or a report about another brother, and then put two and two together in our own mind and say to ourself, "it's just like him to do a thing like that—I wouldn't put it past him." And so, we proceed to believe it to be the absolute truths because it squares, in our fallen minds, with what we had thought the brother to be capable of. We have not only violated the principles of truth, but mercy has been totally lacking!

Solomon said, "Let not mercy and truth forsake thee; bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart." We may think these are easy qualities to link together, but in reality they are not. We have learned to put up such a strict defense for truth, that it is sometimes very difficult to have mercy on anyone who cannot see it. It is especially difficult to have mercy on those who once believed the truth, and since have rejected portions of it, and set up their own ideas in the place of it. Do we think mercifully of such individuals, or do we condemn them and say they are going out of the truth? We realize that it is entirely possible for one to reject so much truth as to leave it entirely—and this has been done. We should realize in such cases that only the Lord is capable of judging. Our condemnation of such is completely out of order, and only serves to harden our own hearts. To bind mercy and truth about our neck, would be to let it show in all our dealings with our brethren and with our fellow man. But it cannot be shown unless it is also being written upon the tables of our hearts.

It was said to the Israelites "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." There's a lot in those three things—and they cannot be separated. But the Christian is required to do more than this—he is required to sacrifice. To do justly, would be to know the truth and to live in harmony with it. To love mercy would be to put it into practice (not just love to have it for ourselves). To walk humbly with our God would be to be willing to follow his leadings, and not to try to run ahead of him. But how are we able to know the truth? What are the means that the Lord has used in our day to make truth known? We have the answer in Luke 12:37, 42, 43, "Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily, I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing." No one has found the truth through any other means during this harvest period, than through the meat in due season that the returned Lord provided. And how did he serve the food? He served it in the form of six volumes of Studies in the Scriptures.

Some say we should not place so much emphasis on the writings of Bro. Russell—“after all, he was just a man!” Let us give an illustration which we think will help in understanding Bro. Russell’s relationship to our understanding of the truth. Most of us have heard of Arturo Toscanini—the famous conductor of the N.Y. Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra, and in later years, conductor of the NBC Symphony Orchestra. He was a conductor without peer! Why was his flawless music so beautiful? One particular quality characterized his whole career as a conductor—he was absolutely faithful to the composer. He was not a conductor—arranger. He did not re-arrange the score to suit his own personal tastes—although he would have been very capable of doing so, for he was a great artist in his own right. He played the music exactly as the composer intended it!

Bro. Russell was not a conductor-arranger! He was merely a conductor. The composing and arranging had been done by our returned Lord. Bro. Russell merely conducted the symphony of the Divine Plan of the Ages—how beautiful the music!! How much we appreciate this beautiful symphony. But what about us? Do we try to be conductor-arrangers?! Do we try to change the music to suit our tastes? Or do we play it as it was composed? Divine truth does not change! If it was Divine truth when our Lord gave it to the church, then it is still truth.

This Divine truth that our returned Lord gave to the church in this harvest period is not relative—it is absolute. We cannot make it relative to what we care to believe. Finding absolute Truth and especially Divine Truth, and recognizing it, is not easy—but our Lord gave us six keys with which to unlock the treasure-house of truth. We do not say that the volumes contain all the truth on all facets of God’s plans and arrangements—however, these are the means by which our returned Lord has fed his church; and our lives have been blessed and inspired by dear brethren who we feel have been faithful to the Six Volumes and faithful unto death!!

Mercy and truth are to be co-mingled in our hearts and lives. It is necessary that we accept truth wherever it is found, and necessary that we have mercy on those who do not accept the truth as we see it. We have observed that it is sometimes easier to show mercy to those who are blinded in Babylon, than to show it to our brethren who may differ with us. We are reminded of the story of Joseph, and his attitude toward his brethren who had sought to kill him, Instead of killing him, they sold him as a slave, and he was taken to Egypt. While in Egypt, he was misrepresented, and evilly accused, and thrown into prison. He could have been thinking of the revenge he would like to mete out to his brethren for bringing this fate upon him. But the record reads just to the contrary. Joseph did not attempt to bring punishment upon his brethren for their wrongdoing—he left that up to God. He dealt with them mercifully, and assured them that they had nothing to fear. They thought he was only being nice to them for their father’s sake, and when Jacob died, they again feared that Joseph would try to get even with them. But Joseph assured them,

“Fear not... as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore fear ye not; I will nourish you, it and your little ones.” And he comforted them and spake kindly unto them. Do we have this kind of mercy toward our brethren, especially those who have hurt us?!! Or do we spread rumors which are uncomplimentary about them? Do we speak evilly of them behind their backs? Do we misrepresent their motives? Do we refuse to cooperate with them? Do we have both mercy and truth, or do we fight so tenaciously for truth that we forget all about being merciful toward those who differ? We speak from experience; we have traveled that road, and found that it does not lead in the right direction.

Joseph gave us another lesson also. When his brothers were going to return to tell their father that Joseph was safe in Egypt, Joseph gave them a warning before they left. He said “fall not out of the way.” Joseph was evidently a very keen observer of human nature. You would think that the eleven brothers would be so anxious to return to their father with the good news that they would be knit together in one overpowering purpose—to return as quickly as possible and be the bearers of this wonderful news. But Joseph knew his brothers better than that, and so he warned them “fall not out by the way”—in other words—don’t get angry with one another and dispute and fight, but hurry to your home and tell the good news. We like Joseph’s brethren, have good news to tell, The telling of this good news should knit us together with a common purpose. But unfortunately many have fallen out with their brethren along the way. Perhaps our brethren don’t tell the good news just the way we think it should be done, and so we refuse to cooperate with them; and even more, we spread rumors about them, and even say they are going out of the truth. Now this doesn’t sound very nice when we spell it right out. But have you observed it in actions? We have! How good it would be if we could all take heed to Joseph’s admonition: “see that ye fall not out one with another by the way.”

It is the way planned for us by the Lord. It is a narrow and difficult way, full of adversities to the flesh, and trials and tests to the spirit. Proportionately, there should be love and sympathy, cooperation and helpfulness.

During the harvest period we have seen many brethren and groups of brethren serving the Lord to the best of their ability and with all the means at their command—good, sincere, honest, humble service, out of a pure desire to spread the good news of the kingdom. Some of these brethren have worked through an organization, and some have worked individually, still others have worked through ecclesias. All have the same good news to tell. But have they fallen out of the way? Looking back over the harvest we see murmuring against anyone who is not serving the Lord in just the particular way in which we are doing it. Brethren, this should not be! There is no such thing as competition in serving the Lord! If that were the spirit, then the service would not prosper. Anyone who accuses anyone of competing in the Lord’s service has the wrong attitude toward his own

privileges in that service. Truth and mercy—mercy and truth—are they met together in our hearts? They have to be!

There is a trend in the world today which seems right to many. It is a trend toward complete individuality—toward free-thinking. The younger generation today seem to be caught up in a current of thought which says “we can do, and speak and dress, and order our lives according to our own desires.” This attitude leads to a dissatisfaction with any pre-arranged avenue of thinking. People today say they want their “liberty” to think and act and dress according to their own desires. Such liberty in itself sounds good. But unfortunately the term liberty is mistaken for “license,” and instead of the trend of free-thinking being for man’s good, it has worked out just the other way around. We must be very careful that this present trend in the world does not creep into the church. We must remember that we have not the right to our own opinion! Does that sound biased and harsh? Paul admonishes us “let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” Does this scripture give us the right to our own opinion? NO! We made that decision at consecration—we said we would do the Lord’s will and sacrifice our own! So our wills are dead, or should be. We don’t have the right to be free-thinkers—we have put on the mind of Christ—we have only the right to think and do as he would have us, in harmony with the principles of truth and righteousness as he has set before us. Remember—Satan was the first free-thinker! The old saying that “the ship is safe in the ocean as long as the ocean is not in the ship” is still good, because the present trend of the world leaks in among the consecrated saints, and we have the continual battle to keep the “ocean out of the ship.”

Another attitude of the world which we are in danger of is the Ecumenical Spirit. This has really caught on in Christendom. Their Philosophy is that you can believe anything you want, no matter how God-dishonoring, but let us all get together and unite—put our money in one pot, forget our doctrines, present a common front, and we will be strong. Brethren, the precious doctrines which were given to us by our returned Lord are not to be laid aside in the interests of unity. Yes, we should have mercy and love for those who have laid aside some of these harvest truths, but our text says “mercy and Truth are met together.” We cannot throw out truth for the sake of mercy, just as we cannot throw out mercy for the sake of truth. “Let not mercy and truth forsake thee, bind them about thy neck, write them upon the tables of thine heart.”

Let’s go back now to our original text in Psa. 85:10-13 and notice some other very important aspects of this scripture. It is really a beautiful scripture, and in its fullest sense, is the condition of the perfected earth. It also is a beautiful word-picture of our walk as Christians. We have heard it said that even though we are living in a sin-filled earth, yet, in our minds and hearts we can “play kingdom.” I think we all do this. We live as though we were living in the kingdom. These principles of mercy, truth, righteousness and peace should be the principles upon which all our actions are based.

These will be the principles upon which perfect mankind will act. These are the principles upon which God acts. Righteousness and peace have kissed! Have you ever thought how difficult this is? It is a beautiful phrase. But it has to be more than just a beautiful phrase. Have righteousness and peace kissed in our own hearts? Let's examine it for a moment and see. There are times when all of us have had experiences where we were involved in a situation and we followed by the Lord's grace, the course of righteousness and everything turned out good because of it; and consequently we had peace of heart and mind, and thankfulness that we had done the right thing. Thus righteousness and peace have kissed. It is a wonderful feeling. But do righteousness and peace always kiss? Unfortunately, serving righteousness does not always bring peace. Peter speaks about this very principle in 1 Pet. 2:20, but he puts it in slightly different terms—the meaning is exactly the same. “For what glory is it if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.” How many of us can take it patiently and have peace of mind and heart, when we have served righteousness to the best of our ability, and are caused to suffer for it? especially if the source of the suffering comes from our brethren—this is very difficult to take. Does it bring peace? Peter suggests that if it does bring peace, then it is acceptable with God.

We like the rest of what Peter has to say on this subject, because he compares our experiences of suffering for righteousness, with those of the Master. He says, “For even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow in his steps, Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously; who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness.” Did righteousness and peace kiss within the heart of the Master? We are most certain that they did. The good that he did was evil spoken of—personal insults were heaped upon him—rumors were spread about him, traps were set for him to take his life—through all of these experiences do you think he had peace? Most assuredly he had! He said, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

Paul was a good example also, of one who had peace and righteousness. Remember when Paul and Silas were put in prison because they preached about Jesus. They were chained between two guards, and they sang hymns. Remember when Paul was on a journey that would lead him to Jerusalem, and all the brethren along the way warned him that he would be killed if he went there. Paul knew it was the Father's will that he go to Jerusalem, so even though he knew that the Jews of that city were lying in wait to kill him, he said “none of things move me.” But how can we apply these principles to ourselves? How can we be sure that righteousness and peace have kissed in our hearts and lives? We'll give an example which we think will touch on the experiences of many

who have been faithful in the Lord's service. We have all felt the seriousness of the divine commission as was given to us in Isa. 61:1-3, "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified." Why do we joy in engaging in this work? "That he might be glorified..." We each have this divine commission, and we should each be seeking to carry it out. But what happens? A brother or an ecclesia engages in a certain type of witness work, and other brethren or ecclesias severely criticize the work, the motives, the spirit, and even the results. We heard criticism of a certain tract not long ago, and when we remarked that we knew of a sister who had come into the truth as a result of this tract, we were told "she would probably have come into the truth anyway." We know of another case where an ecclesia set out on a work which would greatly benefit many brethren—but when speaking of this to a brother of a different ecclesia, he said in a derogatory manner, "oh, they think they can do anything." Brethren, do we have peace in the face of such critic of our attempts at performing righteousness? It is not easy; but it is necessary!

Righteousness and peace must kiss; otherwise the value of the righteousness is impaired! This peace can be accomplished by thinking mercifully upon those who have given the criticism. We can also learn a personal lesson from this—not to speak evil of the manner in which our brethren live up to their consciences in serving the Lord. This is a matter that can only be solved BY PRAYER, BY SELF EXAMINATION AND REAL SELF DISCIPLINE!!

Truth and mercy, righteousness and peace are the very foundation of the Kingdom. These principles will be met together in perfect harmony when mankind is perfected. Isa. 26:9, "... when thy judgments are in the earth the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." We are learning righteousness now, under adverse conditions. It is harder for us to have both righteousness and peace. To the world, the learning of righteousness will automatically bring peace with it.

These principles of mercy and truth, righteousness and peace are inherent with God. They are met together in perfect harmony in his character. We are striving to be God-like now! Let us seek more diligently to have mercy and truth meet together in our hearts, and to have righteousness and peace kiss.

These principles will rule in the Kingdom—Isa. 32:16-18, "Then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field. And the work of

righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever. And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.”