

MEDITATION ON MERCY AND TRUTH

One cannot be a reader of Scripture without noticing how often the Holy Spirit inspired the words “mercy and truth” to be linked together, especially in the Old Testament where this coupling is found 22 times. The incidence almost doubles when the original Hebrew word “chesed,” usually translated mercy, but also translated lovingkindness, kindly, goodness, mercies, etc. is found to be linked to “emeth” (truth). The word, “chesed,” is found in 241 verses in the Old Testament. Indeed, it is a most important word. Incredibly, however, it is linked with the word “emeth” in 38 of those verses; an incidence of 18%. If English readers notice the repeated joining of these words, readers in the original language would certainly detect the extraordinary frequency.

For several months I have pondered the meaning of this pairing but have remained dissatisfied, believing there to be something here just beyond my reach. It is like having a splinter in your finger and you keep attempting to remove it, but it keeps breaking off. Each time you try you get a piece, but the remaining portion continues to worry you.

At this point it may be necessary to give a scriptural definition of these two words. Mercy is equated with love (Eph 2:4), with compassion (Lam 3:22), and with pity (Jer 13:14). The first mention of mercy in the Bible is found when the angels saved Lot from certain destruction by physically snatching him from the city of Sodom. This act was attributed to the mercy of God (Gen 19:16). One significant component of God’s mercy is that it is exercised to any or all according to His purpose. He is under no obligation to show mercy but sovereignly chooses to do so. It is noteworthy that His mercy falls on those who are in misery or distress. Somewhere in the far reaches of God’s inscrutable character lies a heart of the most tender love imaginable; the love that would allow His only-begotten Son to die for the sins of a God-hating humanity. God’s provision of a Saviour is the epitome of mercy. As for the meaning of truth, there are three basic facts to recognize: 1) it is reality (2) it is reliable (3) it is pure; containing nothing that is untrue. God’s Word is truth (Jn 17:17).

What immediately comes to mind as we examine the pairing of these two words is that God’s mercy, while encompassing and far-reaching, is always bounded by truth. For example, the Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet 2:9). If mercy ruled, universal salvation would be the result. But, truth declares, “No man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (Jn 14:6). Pr 16:6 says, “By mercy and truth iniquity is purged.” It takes both.

This week I was able to extract another piece of the “splinter.” This happened while meditating on Micah 7:20: Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old. When God made the covenant promises to Abraham He was under no obligation. They were made entirely from His mercy. However, as soon as He uttered the words, they became truth. Thus, when the covenant was confirmed to Jacob, it issued from the truth of God, not His mercy. This has great application for me. I can pray that God’s mercy may extend to me; indeed He may bless me out of His lovingkindness and compassion, but He is under no obligation to do so. He is, however, obligated to deal with me on the basis of truth. I can be assured that every promise given in His Word to me, as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, is already accomplished.