

Psalm 85:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

Analysis

Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. This magnificent verse employs poetic personification to describe God's redemptive work—attributes that seem contradictory embrace in harmony. The Hebrew chesed ve-emet nifgashu (חסד ואמת נפגש) literally means "lovingkindness and faithfulness have met." Nifgash (נפגש) suggests encountering, meeting face-to-face—like long-separated friends reuniting.

"Mercy" (chesed, חסד) and "truth" (emet, אמת) represent two aspects of God's character that human thinking often perceives as contradictory. Chesed is loyal love, compassion, grace—the inclination to forgive and show favor. Emet is truth, faithfulness, reliability—the commitment to justice and righteous standards. How can God be both merciful (forgiving sin) and truthful (punishing sin)? The verse proclaims they meet and embrace in God's redemptive plan.

"Righteousness and peace have kissed" (tzedeq ve-shalom nashaku, צדק ושלום נשאקו) intensifies the imagery. Tzedek (צדקה, "righteousness") is ethical uprightness, justice, moral rectitude. Shalom (שלום, "peace") is wholeness, wellbeing, harmonious relationship. These too seem contradictory—perfect righteousness requires judgment on sin; peace requires mercy that overlooks transgression. Yet they "kissed" (nashak, נשאך)—an intimate greeting expressing affection and unity. The verb suggests not mere proximity but passionate embrace.

This verse poses theology's central problem: How can holy God maintain justice

while forgiving sinners? How can righteousness coexist with mercy? The Old Testament hints at the answer through sacrificial system—the innocent suffering for the guilty. The New Testament reveals the full answer: at the cross, God's mercy and truth met, His righteousness and peace kissed. Christ satisfied both justice (bearing sin's penalty) and mercy (providing forgiveness). Romans 3:25-26 explains God demonstrated His righteousness by passing over former sins, "that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."

Historical Context

The Problem of Divine Justice and the Cross of Christ

Ancient Near Eastern religions generally portrayed their gods as either just (punishing sin rigorously) or merciful (forgiving easily), but rarely both. The tension between justice and mercy troubled philosophers and theologians throughout history. If God is perfectly just, how can He forgive? Forgiveness seems to compromise justice by letting guilty parties escape deserved punishment. Yet if God is perfectly merciful, why does anyone suffer? Mercy seems to contradict justice by showing favoritism.

Old Testament sacrificial system provided partial resolution. Atonement sacrifices demonstrated that sin required blood payment (Leviticus 17:11), yet God accepted substitutionary death of animals in place of human sinners. This maintained justice (sin was punished) while extending mercy (sinners lived). However, Hebrews 10:4 clarifies: "it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins." Animal sacrifices were temporary, repetitive, and ultimately inadequate—shadows pointing toward ultimate sacrifice.

Psalm 85:10 prophetically anticipated the cross. There, mercy and truth met: God's love (mercy) sent His Son; God's holiness (truth) demanded sin's punishment. There, righteousness and peace kissed: God's justice (righteousness) was satisfied by Christ bearing sin's penalty; God's reconciliation (peace) was accomplished by removing enmity between God and humanity. Isaiah 53 foretold this: "the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all... he shall bear their iniquities... he bare the sin of many" (v. 6, 11, 12).

Paul's theology centers on this reconciliation. Romans 5:1 declares: "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Justification (righteousness) produces peace—not despite each other but through each other. God's righteousness demanded payment for sin; Christ provided it. God's mercy desired reconciliation; Christ accomplished it. At the cross, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19). Divine attributes that seemed contradictory united perfectly in Christ's redemptive work.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does the cross demonstrate that God's mercy and truth, righteousness and peace, are not contradictory but complementary?
2. Why is it insufficient to view God as simply forgiving sin without addressing justice, and what problems would this create?
3. How does Christ's substitutionary atonement satisfy both God's justice (righteousness) and His love (mercy) simultaneously?
4. In what ways should believers reflect this harmony of mercy and truth, righteousness and peace, in how they treat others?
5. How does understanding Psalm 85:10's fulfillment at the cross deepen appreciation for the gospel's theological beauty?

Interlinear Text

חֶסֶד	תְּבִרְכָּה	וְאֶתְבָּרְכָה	נִגְשָׁה	שָׁוֹרֶת	אֶל	וְמִ	וְשָׁלֹחַ	בְּשָׁלֹחַ
Mercy	and truth	are met together	righteousness	and peace			have kissed	
H2617	H571	H6298	H6664	H7965			H5401	

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 3:3 (Grace): Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart:

Psalms 89:14 (Grace): Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face.

Psalms 100:5 (Grace): For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.

John 1:17 (Grace): For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

Psalms 72:3 (Righteousness): The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness.

Romans 5:21 (Grace): That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Isaiah 45:24 (Righteousness): Surely, shall one say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed.

Hebrews 7:2 (Righteousness): To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace;

Micah 7:20 (Grace): Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old.

Romans 5:1 (Righteousness): Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: