

Merciful Perfection

By Lynn Warner

“To Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.”

(1 Timothy 1:2)

What does a “true child in the faith” look like? The Bible states that “*you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect*” (Matthew 5:48b). What is perfection? The world describes it as “the condition, state, or quality of being free or as free as possible from all flaws or defects” – Google Dictionary.

By this definition, I am certainly not perfect in myself. Is this God’s definition of perfection? I assumed it was. I assumed I had to work at this perfection, but the more I lived, the more I realized how imperfect I was. I looked back at my life and saw how sinful and weak I had been in my heart, despite my attempts to be perfect. It has been a dark country at times. When I first began to realize this, I feared for my salvation because I saw that I kept wandering back into this dark country. I could identify with the hymn “Come Thou Fount” by Robert Robinson, which described my dilemma.

Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love...

But my desire was to call upon the Lord and cry:

Here’s my heart, O take and seal it, Seal it for thy courts above.

Many times when I was struggling to be perfect, God came after me saying, “Return to me, My daughter” or as Scripture says, “*Be reconciled to God*” (2 Corinthians 5:20b). It is then that Jesus, “*the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man*” (John 1:9), shines His Light into my heart and shows me I have wandered. In so doing, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, shows me His kindness (John 10:11). We know that the kindness of God leads to repentance (Romans 2:4). Just so, His merciful kindness leads me to repentance and reconciliation (peace) with Him beyond my attempts to be perfect. He carries me back like a lost lamb to His New Country, the Heavenlies.

The stunning revelation to me has been that my straining to be perfect is sin, and here I have stumbled around in the spiritual night of seeking perfection by following the laws of commandments. Here we act as if we are in the day when we are truly in the dark and thus prove ourselves hypocrites (or actors). It isn’t the overt, scandalous sin that easily comes to light. It is hidden sin in the land of the heart, but God sees it. In His mercy and kindness, He sheds His Light on the dark country of every heart, because only God can expose the hypocrite. Jesus exposed the hypocrite and the inner heart’s sinfulness when He explained to the Pharisees, “*You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: ‘THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME’*” (MATTHEW 15:7-8). As an example, He taught that “*everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart*” (Matthew 5:28). Regardless of the outward appearance, the hypocrite is exposed when the intentions of the heart become clear. Here, the outward image of perfection is laid bare for the sin it truly is.

How many times God has come after me, exposing my hypocrisy, saying, “Where are you?” I look around suddenly as His Light illuminates the dark country nearby. I believe He allows me to wander at times because He is so intent to show me my weakness, dependence, and desperate need for Him in His grace, mercy, and peace. For a while, I lived in great fear and dread because I was becoming more and more aware of my dark heart, my wandering, and my imperfection. What was I to do to be perfected? Paul asks the Galatians, “*Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?*” (Galatians 3:3) We cannot perfect ourselves. We cannot be perfected by the flesh, but we can confess our sins, for “*if we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” (1 John 1:9), for “*if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin*” (1 John 1:7). Only God can perfect us by His grace and mercy. Because God forgives us, loves us, and perfects us, we have no fear in the day of judgment, for “*there is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love*” (1 John 4:18). Therefore, perfection comes only by the love of God as a gift of grace and mercy through our repentance of our sins and acceptance of the blood of Jesus Christ which covers us and makes us perfect in the eyes of God, reconciling us to Him.

This is what growth looks like for a true child in the faith. We ARE “to be perfect” as our Heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48), but this perfection is spiritual perfection, gifted only to those who believe in Jesus Christ. Perfection, then, as a Christian definition, is to be covered by the blood of Jesus Christ. By His sacrifice, we are never separated from the grace, mercy, and peace that streams to us from God the Father. We are to be perfected in love, to walk in the true Light of Jesus, Who enlightens our darkened hearts and shows us our hypocrisy and wanderings away from Him. Jesus, in His kindness, leads us as the Good Shepherd to repentance and reconciliation (peace) with Him. As Believers, we are being perfected in His love and mercy.