

From the December 3, 2007 Issue

## **Repentance and God's Love**

*Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are. (Matt 23:15 NIV)*

Our concept of repentance begins at a new place once again with a deeper understanding of how God reached out for us first. With a savior who boldly announces to the world that "It is finished", what does it mean to 'bring forth fruit meet for repentance'?

It has to do with our attitude about who God is and how we are intended to relate to Him. The miracle is and always has been at His end. He alone grants faith in Jesus. He alone can unveil the truth of who we are in Him which was planned before the beginning of the world. He has always included us, but we stumble along in blindness until we believe - see Him as He is in Jesus - put on a new set of glasses and meet the God who has always loved us.

Like the prodigal son who had squandered his inheritance and then remembers that he still has a Father, we don't need a self tabulated "to do" list BEFORE God will meet us "half way". As authors Robert Capon and C. Baxter Kruger share from the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15, the younger son has practiced a penitent and rather flowery prepared speech to deliver to his father. "Oh Father! I have sinned against heaven and earth. I am not worthy to be called your son". (OK, Is this the same kid who just maxed out his visa card at every bar, strip joint and gambling casino in Vegas? - my own version of 'far country' slipping through here.)

I think Dr. Kruger rightly points out that the younger son was 'practicing' religion because He doesn't really know his Dad yet either, but He knows He has one, and He knows where to find Him! The younger son's crafted self loathing fits with what he believes his Dad's expectations are of him. (They also probably fit what Jesus' accusatory audience was expecting of the lad as they listened to the story come from the lips of a man they did not really know.)

But, as Eugene Peterson captures it in THE MESSAGE, "Dad wasn't listening". What the son thought of Himself in his darkness was not really important or relevant to Dad's activity! Dad was already telling his servants to get the robe, put the family ring on his finger, get some sandals for his battered feet, and a nice grain fed calf with the Barbeque coals ready! The Father had run out to meet him, hug him, "and kiss him and Kiss him, and kiss him" (New American Standard Bible) All this before the son utters of word of his well rehearsed speech! "My son has come home and we're celebratin!"

How often would we (I) step in here and say, "Now wait a minute, it might be a good idea to hear out the boys self-deprecating ranting." Similar to the way the church developed the concept and mechanics of "confession" which stuck and hung around like Holy Water in the foyer.)

You can almost hear the siren voices of religious experience whispering words of wisdom to the father: "Hey Dad, you may want to record his entire speech for posterity just in case the boy ever forgets how low he can go! You know, guide him through the correct verbal posturing, then play it back to him once in awhile as he works off his family debt at minimum wage for the next 30 years

along side your entry level farm hands."

Baxter Kruger describes the expected antithesis of the Father' behavior in Luke as "a list checking hangin' judge who yells 'String him up boys!'" Too often we misplace our own new set of glasses and see that kind of Dad as our Father as well. "Yes sir, Tough-Love exemplified! Don't make it too easy on the kid to get back into your good graces or he'll disappoint you again!"

Which Dad do we really want to serve with our mind, our heart, and our being?

*~ Steve Schantz*