



Acts 5.²⁹⁻³²

²⁹Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, "We ought to obey God rather than men. ³⁰The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. ³¹Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give [to gift, endow, grant] repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. ³²And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.

Excuse me for feeling, sometimes, that the principal role religion plays in many individuals' lives is that of masking insecurities and establishing a (false) sense of superiority over others. This psychology is certainly seen in the Zoramites' obscene prayer. We can sometimes be a little like that parabolic Pharisee who, looking down his nose at the Publican, prayed: "Granting that I sinned, I thank thee, O God, that I was wise enough to repent, unlike so many others who either will not grant that they sinned or will not repent." It is, almost, as if, having repented, we come to think that we invented and initiated our repentance. As if our repentance were our own creation.

Now, we all know, or at least should, and readily and humbly acknowledge that God's act of forgiving us is an act of grace. It is a divine gift. God invented the possibility. He did this through Jesus, who brought it into being. We do not create it, we are gifted it. Neither can we "buy" it. We do not possess sufficient resources.

But we do sometimes forget that not only is forgiveness, the result of repentance, a gift from God, but that the very possibility of repenting is itself a Divine gift. Without God's gifting us repentance, we would not be able to repent even if we wanted to. We need God to open the door to the possibility of repentance before we can pass through that door. Indeed, God must bring us to the door, otherwise we never know it even exists.

But there is more. Repentance means "to change one's mind (*noûs*)," which, in view of the many senses of *noûs*, might mean 'to adopt another view,' 'to change one's feelings'.... "If the change of mind derives from recognition that the earlier view was foolish, improper or evil, there arises the sense 'to regret,' 'to feel remorse,' 'to rue.'"¹ Of course, such changes in view and feelings along with the sense of regret, often lead to a change in behavior. We often like to take credit for this change in attitude and behavior. After all, did we not exert our own personal will-power? A little. Maybe.

But again such an attitude reveals our blindness. How did we come to see an alternative to our previous world view? Did we create the better world view? Did we imagine it out of the recesses of our finite mind? No, of course not. Someone, God. Himself, or a someone ultimately enlightened by God,

¹ *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*

suggested a better way. Without the Divine introduction of a better way, we would go right on thinking, viewing, feeling, and acting as we did before.

Lent is a time of repentance with an eye toward forgiveness. To whatever humble degree we may “succeed,” by far, the greater share of the credit goes to God the Father, His Son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. They are authors and finishers of our faith.² The story is theirs, not ours. They, not us, are the heroes of the story of repentance and forgiveness.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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² See Hebrews 12.²