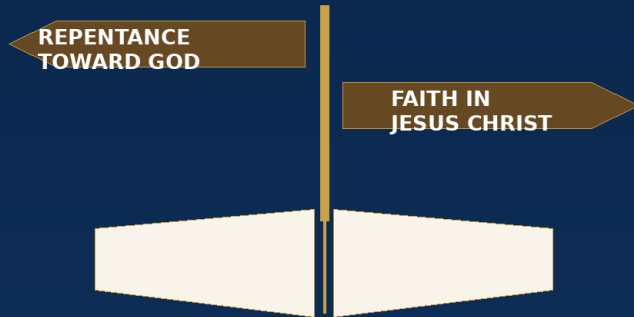


THEMATIC AND TEXTUAL BIBLE STUDY

ACTS 20:21

REPENTANCE TOWARD GOD AND FAITH IN OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST



“...repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.” — Acts
20:21

Ruperto Bravo Benavente (R.B.B.)

ACTS 20:21

REPENTANCE TOWARD GOD AND FAITH IN OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

Ruperto Bravo Benavente (R.B.B.)

Declared bibliographic reference: Reina-Valera 1960 Bible and Francisco Lacueva's Greek-Spanish Interlinear New Testament. Interlinear glosses are not quoted verbatim without direct verification.

Purpose of the study

This study gathers and organizes the principal biblical texts that support the message summarized by Paul in Acts 20:21: repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The goal is not to build a religious formula, but to hear Scripture in context and to show how the gospel confronts human self-sufficiency and directs trust toward Christ.

Two groups are distinguished. Direct Texts explicitly present repentance, turning, faith, forgiveness, or justification in the proclamation of the gospel. Complementary Texts explain the sinner's condition, the function of the Law, Christ's substitutionary death and resurrection, grace, the relationship between faith and works, and the assurance of eternal life.

The attached base document uses legal and didactic expressions such as “debt,” “sentence,” “currency of exchange,” and “validation.” They are retained when useful, but are not presented as literal biblical phrases when Scripture itself does not use those exact formulations.

Reading method and use of sources

The primary biblical reference is the Reina-Valera 1960. Francisco Lacueva's Greek-Spanish Interlinear New Testament is listed as a bibliographic reference requested by the compiler. This edition does not attribute to the interlinear an exact gloss that has not been directly verified in its text.

When the Greek noun *metanoia* or the verb *metanoō* is mentioned, it is only to identify common New Testament repentance vocabulary. Doctrine is established by the context of the passages and by the whole of Scripture, not by an isolated etymology.

Each central passage is approached through four steps: brief biblical citation, textual explanation, doctrinal relationship, and application. Quotations are kept brief; most content is presented through paraphrase and reference.

1. Central passage: Acts 20:17-21

Acts 20 places Paul at Miletus, where he summons the elders of Ephesus and reviews his ministry. Verse 21 is not an isolated slogan: it summarizes the substance of his public and private testimony. Paul says that he did not shrink from declaring what was profitable and that he testified to Jews and Greeks alike.

Brief biblical citation: “repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21).

Textual explanation: the sentence contains two directions of one gospel response. Repentance looks toward God: a person abandons self-sufficient judgment and turns to Him. Faith looks to Jesus Christ: it rests in the person and work of the Lord as the ground of salvation.

Doctrinal relationship: repentance and faith can be conceptually distinguished, yet the New Testament keeps them closely joined. Repentance that never leads to trust in Christ is incomplete; a “faith” that leaves self-sufficiency and rejection of God untouched does not match the apostolic pattern.

Application: the center is not what the sinner can offer, but whom the sinner hears and trusts. The pastoral question is not “Have I accumulated enough merit?” but “Have I accepted God’s diagnosis and placed my confidence in Jesus Christ?”

2. Direct texts: the proclamation of repentance and faith

Mark 1:14-15

Brief biblical citation: “Repent, and believe the gospel.”

Textual explanation: Jesus announces the kingdom and joins repentance with faith in the good news.

Doctrinal relationship: The order shows two aspects of one response: leaving unbelief and trusting God’s good news.

Application: Do not reduce repentance to emotion or faith to intellectual agreement.

Luke 24:46-47

Brief biblical citation: “repentance and remission of sins should be preached”.

Textual explanation: The risen Christ places repentance and forgiveness within the worldwide mission beginning at Jerusalem.

Doctrinal relationship: Christian proclamation includes both the diagnosis of sin and the offer of forgiveness in Christ’s name.

Application: Preach the gospel clearly, hiding neither human need nor divine grace.

Acts 2:37-41

Brief biblical citation: “Repent...”

Textual explanation: At Pentecost the crowd is confronted by the proclamation of Jesus crucified and risen. Peter calls for a concrete, public response.

Doctrinal relationship: Repentance arises when the testimony about Christ is received as true and leads to a new identification with Him.

Application: Do not confuse the public sign of response with a merit that purchases salvation.

Acts 3:18-19

Brief biblical citation: “Repent... and be converted”.

Textual explanation: Peter calls for a change of direction in light of Israel's rejection of the Messiah and announces the blotting out of sins.

Doctrinal relationship: Repentance includes turning toward God in recognition of the truth revealed in Christ.

Application: Grace does not trivialize sin; it provides a real way of escape through the Messiah.

Acts 5:30-31

Brief biblical citation: “to give repentance... and forgiveness of sins”.

Textual explanation: The apostles attribute repentance and forgiveness to the exalted Christ.

Doctrinal relationship: Repentance is not a work of self-salvation; it belongs to a response made possible by God's testimony and grace.

Application: Respond humbly to God's initiative.

Acts 11:17-18

Brief biblical citation: “repentance unto life”.

Textual explanation: The conversion of Cornelius confirms that Gentiles also receive life by the same grace.

Doctrinal relationship: Life is not an ethnic or religious reward, but God's gift received in believing response.

Application: Reject spiritual superiority based on background or tradition.

Acts 13:38-39

Brief biblical citation: “by him all that believe are justified”.

Textual explanation: At Pisidian Antioch Paul proclaims forgiveness and justification in Christ where the Law of Moses could not provide it.

Doctrinal relationship: Faith rests in Christ's sufficiency to justify.

Application: Do not place on the conscience a burden the gospel places on Christ's work.

Acts 16:30-31

Brief biblical citation: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ".

Textual explanation: The jailer asks what he must do to be saved. The apostolic answer directs his trust to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Doctrinal relationship: When the issue is salvation, the object of faith is Christ Himself, not the sinner's moral capacity.

Application: Rest in Christ and receive the Word that explains who He is and what He has done.

Acts 17:30-31

Brief biblical citation: "commands all men everywhere to repent".

Textual explanation: In Athens Paul confronts idolatry and announces coming judgment confirmed by Jesus' resurrection.

Doctrinal relationship: Repentance is universal because God's judgment is universal.

Application: Abandon false images of God and receive His revelation in the risen Christ.

Acts 20:20-21

Brief biblical citation: "repentance toward God... faith toward... Jesus Christ".

Textual explanation: Paul summarizes his ministry before the Ephesian elders without distinction between Jews and Greeks.

Doctrinal relationship: The apostolic gospel calls people to turn to God and trust Christ.

Application: Measure preaching by faithfulness to this center, not by spectacle.

Acts 26:17-20

Brief biblical citation: "repent and turn to God".

Textual explanation: Paul recounts his commission and adds that converts should do works consistent with repentance.

Doctrinal relationship: Works appear as fruit corresponding to the change of mind and direction, not as the price that produces justification.

Application: Pursue a life consistent with faith without making that consistency the ground of acceptance before God.

3. Complementary texts: the doctrinal framework

The following passages do not necessarily repeat the formula of Acts 20:21, but they explain why repentance and faith are necessary, what Christ accomplishes, and what the believer receives.

The universal condition of sin and the function of the Law

References: Ecclesiastes 7:20; Isaiah 53:6; Romans 1:18-32; 2:1-11; 3:9-23; 7:7-13; Galatians 3:19-24; James 2:10.

Scripture removes the ground for moral superiority. The Law gives knowledge of sin and leaves humanity without a basis for self-justification. Romans 3 culminates by declaring that all have sinned and that God's righteousness is manifested apart from works of the Law.

The call to repentance and turning to God

References: Isaiah 55:6-7; Ezekiel 18:30-32; Matthew 3:8; Luke 13:3,5; 15:7,10; Romans 2:4-5; 2 Corinthians 7:9-10; 2 Timothy 2:25.

These texts show that repentance is more than regret. It includes a change of judgment and direction before God. Sorrow may accompany it, but 2 Corinthians 7 distinguishes sorrow that leads to repentance from sorrow without that fruit.

Faith as the means of receiving

References: John 3:14-18; 5:24; 6:28-29,35-40,47; Acts 10:43; Romans 3:21-28; 4:1-8; 5:1; 10:9-13; Galatians 2:16; Philippians 3:8-9.

Faith does not appear as a work competing with grace, but as trust in God's promise and Christ's work. Romans 4 explicitly contrasts the logic of wages with the faith of the one who does not base acceptance on works.

Christ's death for sinners

References: Isaiah 53:4-6,10-12; Mark 10:45; John 1:29; Romans 3:24-26; 5:6-11; 2 Corinthians 5:19-21; Galatians 3:13; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18; Hebrews 9:26-28; 10:10-14.

Scripture presents Christ's death as sacrifice for sin, ransom, reconciliation, and substitutionary action on behalf of the unjust. The legal language of the base document finds support here, but must remain subordinate to biblical categories.

Resurrection and justification

References: Acts 17:31; Romans 4:24-25; 6:4-10; 10:9; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4,12-20; 1 Peter 1:3.

Christian faith does not rest in a dead Christ. The resurrection confirms God's victory, belongs to the gospel's content, and sustains the believer's hope.

Grace and works

References: Romans 4:4-5; 11:6; Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 3:4-7; 2 Timothy 1:9.

Salvation is by grace and not by meritorious works. Ephesians 2 also says the saved are created for good works. The sequence is decisive: works are fruit and purpose of new life, not its price.

Assurance and eternal life

References: John 5:24; 6:37-40,47; 10:27-30; Romans 8:1,31-39; Ephesians 1:13-14; 4:30; Hebrews 7:25; 10:14; 1 John 5:11-13.

Biblical assurance rests in God's promise, Christ's sufficiency, and the sealing work of the Spirit. First John 5 says these things were written so that believers may know they have eternal life.

4. Doctrinal exposition

4.1 Repentance toward God

In Acts 20:21, repentance means recognizing God's evaluation as true and abandoning human self-sufficiency before Him. Scripture may describe this movement as repenting, turning, converting, or leaving idols. It does not require manufacturing a certain emotion; it requires ceasing to resist the truth and turning to God. Remorse can exist without this turn.

4.2 Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ

Biblical faith has content and an object. It is not faith in faith, optimism, or confidence in one's sincerity. It believes God's testimony concerning His Son and rests in Jesus Christ—His identity, His death for sinners, and His resurrection.

4.3 The relationship between repentance and faith

They are distinguishable without being rivals. Repentance describes the changed orientation toward God and sin; faith describes positive trust in Christ. Some passages emphasize one because the other is implied by context. Acts 20:21 places them side by side and guards against both repentance without Christ and verbal faith that leaves self-sufficiency untouched.

4.4 The Law: mirror, not ladder

Romans 3:20 teaches that through the Law comes knowledge of sin. Its function is not to provide a ladder of merit by which the sinner reaches God. The Law exposes and condemns transgression and closes the mouth of self-justification. Galatians 3 shows how it points to the need for Christ.

4.5 The cross: grace, justice, and substitution

The gospel does not say that God simply ignores sin. Romans 3:24-26 joins grace and justice: God justifies freely while displaying His righteousness in Christ. Second Corinthians 5:21 and 1 Peter 3:18 express the representative and substitutionary character of Christ's work.

4.6 The resurrection: the work does not end at the cross

Paul includes resurrection in the gospel of 1 Corinthians 15 and links it with justification in Romans 4:25. Resurrection confirms who Jesus is, announces death's defeat, and guarantees future hope. The faith of Acts 20:21 is faith in the living Lord Jesus Christ.

4.7 Grace, faith, and works

Ephesians 2:8-10 holds together two truths that must not be confused: salvation does not come from works, and saved life produces works prepared by God. James 2 attacks an empty claim of faith without life; Paul attacks the claim to be justified by works. Read in context, they do not contradict each other.

4.8 Assurance of salvation

Christian assurance is not built on flawless conduct, but on God's truthfulness and Christ's sufficiency. John 5:24 speaks of present possession of eternal life; Romans 8 excludes condemnation for those in Christ; Ephesians 1:13-14 presents the Spirit as seal and guarantee; 1 John 5:13 says believers may know they have eternal life.

5. The didactic flow of Acts 20:21

1) God speaks and reveals truth. 2) The Law and gospel expose the human condition. 3) Repentance renounces self-sufficiency and turns to God. 4) Faith rests in Jesus Christ and His work. 5) God justifies by grace the one who believes. 6) New life produces fruit, obedience, and witness. 7) Assurance rests in God's promise, not in accumulated merit.

This order is didactic, not a spiritual stopwatch. Scripture does not require repentance and faith to be separated into two distant experiences. In genuine conversion they are inseparable aspects of the response to the gospel.

6. Common objections and questions

Does repentance mean becoming completely sinless before believing?

No. If total absence of sin were a prerequisite, no one could come to Christ. Repentance involves a change of judgment and direction before God; a new relationship to sin follows, while sanctification is the progressive work after salvation.

Is repentance a work that earns salvation?

It should not be treated as merit. Acts 11:18 speaks of “repentance unto life” as granted by God. Repentance is the surrender of the claim to self-save, not a work that purchases grace.

Is saying “I believe” enough?

The New Testament distinguishes verbal profession from real trust. Saving faith receives God’s testimony about Christ and rests in Him. It is not measured by emotional intensity, but by its object and reality.

Does Acts 2:38 teach that baptism purchases forgiveness?

Acts presents baptism as the normal public response of a disciple. Yet the same book proclaims forgiveness and justification through faith in Christ (Acts 10:43; 13:38-39; 16:31). Baptism should not be isolated from Luke’s complete pattern or turned into human merit.

Does James 2 contradict Paul?

No. Paul denies works as the basis of justification before God; James exposes a “faith” that exists only as a claim and has no fruit. True faith is not earned by works, but neither does it remain barren.

Are the works of Acts 26:20 required as the price of acceptance?

The order is repentance, turning to God, and then works consistent with repentance. The works correspond to the change; they do not purchase it or replace faith in Christ.

Can believers base assurance on today’s conduct?

Conduct affects fellowship, witness, and discipline, but Christ is the ground of justification. Biblical assurance is nourished by God’s promise, Christ’s work, and the Spirit’s seal—not a daily merit audit.

Does Acts 20:21 teach two gospels, one for Jews and another for Gentiles?

No. Paul explicitly says that he testified the same message to both Jews and Greeks. The same need and the same Savior are announced to both.

7. Summary of foundational texts

Theme	Texts	Summary
Repentance and faith	Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21	The gospel response includes turning to God and trusting Christ.
Universal repentance	Luke 24:47; Acts 17:30; 26:20	The call reaches all nations and classes of people.

Condition of sin	Romans 3:9-23; James 2:10	No one can sustain moral superiority or self-justify.
Law and knowledge of sin	Romans 3:20; 7:7; Galatians 3:19-24	The Law reveals transgression and the need for Christ.
Justification by faith	Acts 13:38-39; Romans 3:24-28; 5:1; Galatians 2:16	God justifies by grace through faith, not works of the Law.
Christ's work	Isaiah 53; Romans 5:6-11; 2 Corinthians 5:19-21; 1 Peter 3:18	Christ dies for sinners, reconciles, and brings the unjust to God.
Resurrection	Acts 17:31; Romans 4:25; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4	The gospel includes resurrection and rests in the living Christ.
Grace and works	Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 3:4-7	Works do not buy salvation; they follow salvation as fruit.
Eternal life and assurance	John 5:24; 10:27-30; Romans 8:1,31-39; 1 John 5:11-13	Assurance rests in God's promise and Christ's work.
Seal of the Spirit	Ephesians 1:13-14; 4:30	The believer is sealed as a guarantee of the promised inheritance.

8. Expanded reference index for personal study

Old Testament: Ecclesiastes 7:20; Isaiah 53:4-12; 55:6-7; Ezekiel 18:4,20,30-32. Gospels: Matthew 3:8; Mark 1:14-15; 10:45; Luke 13:3,5; 15:7,10; 24:46-47; John 1:29; 3:14-18; 5:24; 6:28-29,35-40,47; 10:27-30. Acts: 2:37-41; 3:18-19; 5:30-31; 10:43; 11:17-18; 13:38-39; 16:30-31; 17:30-31; 20:17-21; 26:17-20. Epistles: Romans 1:18-32; 2:1-5; 3:9-28; 4:1-8,24-25; 5:1,6-11; 6:4-10,23; 7:7-13; 8:1,31-39; 10:9-13; 11:6; 1 Corinthians 15:1-4,12-20; 2 Corinthians 5:19-21; 7:9-10; Galatians 2:16; 3:13,19-24; Ephesians 1:13-14; 2:8-10; 4:30; Philippians 3:8-9; 2 Timothy 1:9; 2:25; Titus 3:4-7; Hebrews 7:25; 9:26-28; 10:10-14; James 2:10,14-26; 1 Peter 1:3; 2:24; 3:18; 1 John 5:11-13.

9. Conclusion

Acts 20:21 is one of the most compact formulations of the apostolic message. Paul does not offer a program of moral self-improvement. He testifies to a response toward God and Christ: repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Complementary Scripture shows why that response is necessary. The Law reveals sin; God's grace provides what humanity cannot produce; Christ dies for sinners and rises again; justification is received by faith; new life produces fruit; and assurance rests on God's promise.

The pastoral power of the passage lies in turning the eyes away from self-merit. Repentance abandons self-defense; faith rests in Jesus Christ. Thus all glory for salvation belongs to God.

10. Questions for study and discussion

1. What does Paul summarize in Acts 20:20-21 about his ministry?
2. What is the difference between remorse and biblical repentance?
3. Why does Acts 20:21 direct repentance “toward God” and faith “in our Lord Jesus Christ”?
4. How do Romans 3:20 and Galatians 3:19-24 explain the function of the Law?
5. What does Acts 13:38-39 contribute to justification by faith?
6. Why is resurrection indispensable to the gospel according to 1 Corinthians 15?
7. How does Ephesians 2:8-10 harmonize grace and good works?
8. How should James 2 be read without turning works into the price of salvation?
9. Which texts support assurance of eternal life for the believer?
10. How can a church preach repentance without moralism and faith without reducing it to a verbal formula?

Compiler profile



RUPERTO BRAVO BENAVENTE (R.B.B.)

Senior project developer and process-engineering expert with more than 40 years of experience in the technical and financial structuring of industrial, agro-food, and critical-infrastructure complexes. Specialist in modernization of investment models and implementation of advanced technologies, with a focus on economic feasibility under international standards.

Compiler and editor responsible for biblical and didactic study materials.

Resident in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

In this work he serves as promoter, compiler, and person responsible for the editorial presentation. The doctrinal content is grounded in the cited biblical references and should be examined in the light of Holy Scripture.

Editorial note: only professional background relevant to a public publication is included; sensitive personal information is omitted.

Bibliographic references

- Reina-Valera 1960 Bible.
- Lacueva, Francisco. Greek-Spanish Interlinear New Testament.
- Attached base document: “SOBRE HECHOS 20 vers. 21”.