

Acts 20:21

A Faithful Ministry Solemnly Testifies All Truth to All People

Saturday, April 29, 2023 • Read Acts 20:21

Questions from the Scripture text: To what sorts of people did the apostle minister (v21)? What two categories make up the whole of what is helpful? Unto Whom is this repentance? Unto/into Whom is this faith? Whose is He?

What does a faithful ministry declare to whom? Acts 20:21 looks forward to the morning sermon on the coming Lord's Day. In this verse of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that **a faithful ministry declares all of God's Word to all of God's people.**

We began considering, in v20, how an apostolic shepherding ministry is first and foremost a ministry of the Word preached and taught, in public and from house to house. That thought is completed in v21 as the apostle reminds the Ephesian elders of the tone of his message, the audience of his message, the content of his message, the aim of his message, and the focus of his message.

The tone of his message: solemn testimony. "testifying." The word used here is a derivative of the word for "witness" or "testify" from which we get the word "martyr." It has a prefix attached to it that increases the solemnity of its meaning. His preaching and teaching to them was always weighty, never light.

The audience of his message: every sort of person. "to Jews, and also to Greeks." Here are the bookends of humanity. People of every sort. From within the church and from without. Those who have had the Word and those who are new to it. Those who grew up in the faith, and those who had to be converted to it. Of every linguistic background, national background, and religious background. Once these have come into the church, they became objects of his special, ministerial attention. He didn't stick to "favorites" in the church, or avoid those that were less pleasant to deal with. Anyone whom the Lord added to the flock received a full ministry.

The content of his message: the whole of Scripture. "repentance and faith" is another one of those "bookends" type statements that covers the whole. "Faith and repentance" is another way of saying "what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man." It is what the Scriptures principally teach. In other words, the apostle had taught them the whole Bible. This will be covered again when we come to v27. But the "whole counsel of God" can be summarized as "repentance and faith." Everything in the Bible falls into one of those two categories.

The aim of his message: personal response. The apostle was not just telling them the duty that God required; he was calling them to set their entire minds toward God in doing that duty. Each man's mind is set either upon God or upon a creature. All unrighteousness and ungodliness of men is a function of suppressing the truth about God in unrighteousness. All righteousness and godliness is a turning back toward God, a change of mind to live not just by truth but by THE truth, rather than the lie (cf. Rom 1:18–25). Personal response in repentance. That is the aim.

But it is not just the truth of God's divinity that requires a response of godliness in repentance. The truth of God's salvation requires a response of faith. Faith is toward Jesus Christ—Yahweh Savior, Who came as the Christ. Faith is not just agreement but dependence. Not just agreement with Who Jesus is, but dependence upon Him to be that. Not just agreement with what Jesus has done, but dependence upon what He has done for us. Not just agreement with how His Spirit applies it to us, but dependence upon His Spirit to apply Him to us. Personal response in faith. That is the aim.

The focus of his message: God Himself. Repentance and faith are personal responses. Even more than that, they are responses *to a person.* Though every detail of how we are to obey is important, the point of the commandments is that they are applications of the implications of the character of God. Repentance is not merely repentance in the abstract. It is repentance toward God.

Similarly with faith. Our Lord Jesus Christ is not merely a collection of ideas and benefits upon which we depend, but a Person upon Whom we depend. Indeed, this vital connection, this union, that we have by this dependence is behind the pronoun "our." For those who believe, He is "our" Lord Jesus Christ. Faith is not merely faith in the abstract. It is faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

How has your application of God's commands responded to the reality of Who He is? How has your dependence upon Christ responded to the truths of what He has done to save? What ministry has God given you to keep giving you repentance and faith? What use are you making of it?

Sample prayer: Lord, we thank You for Your sufficient, complete Word. Grant that by Your Spirit we would live in repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, which we ask in His Name, AMEN!

Suggested songs: ARP119W "Lord, Let My Cry before You Come" or TPH170 "God in the Gospel of His Son"

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(The following is a machine-generated transcription. PLEASE BE AWARE of—and patient with—transcribing errors. If there is something confusing or obviously erroneous, you are invited to listen to the audio recording via hopewellarp.org)

Acts 20 verse 21. These regards words. Testifying to Jews and also to Greeks. Repentance toward God. And faith. Toward our Lord, Jesus Christ.

So far the words. Of God.

The apostle pulls continuing here. Summarizing to the efficient elders, what? It looks like when a ministry keeps back nothing. Helpful. That there is the duty. Ministers and elders. And the ministry of the gospel. To keep back. Nothing helpful and That there are therefore. He's various components. And so, He preached and taught.

But there was both the pressing home of the claims of God pressing home of the comforts of the gospel. In Jesus Christ. In the proclaiming. And there was the instructing. The teaching of the truths, people claim to talk in public and from house to house. That this was done both generally.

To the church. Open to all. And also, according to households, specifically. Uh, with heads of households of households. Now, as the various truths. Uh, touch their family. In particular. And now he adds at the beginning of our verse, A word that reminds us. How solemn? How serious? This preaching, and teaching was.

Uses the word testifying. It is. The same as the word from which we get the word martyr. Those, whose deaths. Or a testimony. Uh, to the lordship of Jesus Christ, and the fullness of his atonement and the blessedness. And eternity. Of that, which he has gained for all who are in him.

And how worth worthy he is even. Of dying. And all of these things are true. Not only When a martyr dies, but when a preacher preaches, The great worth of Jesus Christ. The perfection of his work. The fullness of his sacrifice. Perfection of his righteousness. The infinite blessedness and Permanent eternity.

Of that, which he has gained. For those who are against. The dread curse. From which he has saved them. And so the minister and elder must speak in such a way as a man who testifies, who witnesses Unto Christ. That he did both as he pressed home, the claims in the proclaiming And also, as he instructed in the doctrines, And built up the theological knowledge.

The scripture and theological knowledge. With which God's people's minds are to be stored. Testify. There is a particular tone that belongs. To faithful ministry. And just as it is incumbent upon the minister to preach. With that seriousness with the, the infinite and eternal and And weighty tone. Uh, so we need to hear him.

That way. If we are not receiving the word of God, The law of God about his character and what his regard of us and even more. And most of all the gospel of God, The grace and mercy. Uh, which is the favorite part of the display of his glory, as we hear in the Exodus passages, if we are not receiving those things, as the weightiest things in life, The things that that not only outshine.

Every other thing. But only those things that are waiting in light of the law and the gospel of God, have any true weight? Then if We are not listening that way. Then we are not giving. God and Christ, and the gospel. Their proper place. So there's the tone of the message just in that very first word in our English translation, testified But there's also the audience of the message.

To justice. And also to Greeks. No, this is something that we are expecting. Uh, from At least when God tells Abraham that in his seed, all of the families of the earth will be blessed. Yes, at Uh, at babble the Lord. For the restraining of men's sin. Divided earth into 70 groups of families.

And yet. Now, as he was bringing the seed of the woman, The Lord Jesus Christ into the world, through Abraham. Through Isaac. Through Jacob, through David. And did indeed. Um, Come in the sun, send the sun. To be that seed who would crush the serpent's head? It was for all of the families of the earth.

And here they are summarized under this phrase. To justice and also to Greeks. This is God's plan of salvation. And therefore, he teaches us that he is redeeming every sort of person. All without exclusion. Although not every last person does. Um, does get saved, does not all without exception.

But it is all. Without exclusion. And so the ministry of the gospel must reflect the God of the gospel. There are those who are more difficult to minister to. And yet. The, the minister, the elder. Um, the brother Her sister in their Duties in the congregation as well. Must not.

Leave anyone out those who are harder. To love and to serve. And in this case to love, and to serve with the ministry of the work, Uh, that just requires more effort, they're not allowed. Uh, to leave. To leave them off. It is to justice and also to Greeks.

The Jews. And Greeks, both need. The gospel. They both, need the preaching. They both need the teaching. They both need it to be done. And it's solemnly, they both need it in public, they both need it from house to house. That both need repentance toward God and faith. Toward Jesus Christ.

None of us are ever in a place. Where we are no longer needing. Of the Lord's appointed ministry. For applying to us. The help that he gives to Christians. And so, if you were a Jew in, The church and Ephesus. And the apostle was, Coming to your house to proclaim and teach.

Solemnly to your household, you wouldn't say well why is he coming here? We're not like those Greeks who don't have Bible and theology knowing he has He has that duty that obligation to all. Whom the Lord has brought into that congregation and it reminds us that we all need.

This ministry. This is Jesus's plan. For bringing to faith for growing in faith for growing us and holiness, growing us, and grace the ministry of the word. Not only the ministry of the word that is conducted in the home. By the husband and the father. But the ministry of the word that is conducted in public and according to households, By those who the Lord Jesus has saved, and gifted and called to that.

And so it's to every sort of person. In the congregation. And now, It's not just to every sort of person. In the congregation. But it is the whole of scripture. When he says repentance toward God, And faith towards Jesus Christ. He is using another one of these couplets. Remember, we we had four couplets and this is the fourth of them.

And each of them Take two words that function as bookends. Uh, to describe the fullness. Of ministry that the Lord Jesus gives through ministers of the gospel. And so the first was proclaimed and taught, and the second couple was publicly and from house to house, and the third couple was Jews and Greeks and the fourth couplet now.

Is repentance. Repentance and faith. Or faith and repentance, these are bookends that cover, the whole of what scripture teaches. Saying that he preached to them. And taught them testifying. Faith and repentance. There's another way of saying. He taught them. What man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man?

The duty that God requires a man is our repentance our turning. From ourselves from our sin. To God. The mind, directing the whole, man. Uh, repentance being a word that in its most basic most simple. Uh, meaning or origin of its meaning. Um, Is a change of mind. And it is turning the direction.

Of the man from himself from sin. From creatures to God. When we send an atom, when we fell in him, what did we do? We suppressed the truth in unrighteousness even though the truth about God was visible in the creation. We push down on that truth and unrighteousness and we gave up the glory of God for which we're created and unto whom we are to live.

Uh, for that of the creatures. Um, Animals and birds and men, creaturely. Uh, things. In repentance toward God. We leave off. That way of thinking, that way of leaving that, aims our life that aims our self. Uh, act ourselves or earthly pleasures or earthly things and return back to God.

We come back to loving the Lord. Our God, with all our heart soul, mind and strength. But how? Can we who sinned an atom? How can we, who fell? An atom? How can we who turned to ourselves and became slaves of sin? We died. And we became slaves of sin, how can we?

Repent towards God. And the answer wonderfully praise God, is faith toward Jesus Christ. What man is to believe concerning God does include, of course, all of

the glorious truths about god's character. But the great way that he has displayed himself and his character is in his son. Through the redemption of his son.

So that Jesus comes not like John. Merely proclaiming repent for the kingdom of God as a hand, but he comes proclaiming himself. The king Proclaiming himself, the king who gives repentance proclaiming himself? The king who seeks and saves that which is lost, proclaiming himself, the king who gives up his life for the world, that that The bread that he would give for the life of the world, would be his flesh and he would give himself on the cross, and he would spill his blood to wash us from our sin.

And he would die the death in which those who trust in the Lord. Jesus Christ are not only counted righteous and forgiven of sin, but are now dead to sin and sin is no longer their master. He wins for us, not only forgiveness, but life and repentance. So that we who died to sin, maybe also alive to God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

And this is the great thing that man is to believe concerning God. We must of course, believe all the truth about who God is and what God is like But the greatest display. Of who God is and what God is like is in his actions in history his providence and especially the crowning and focal providence of all his actions which is redemption.

In the Lord, Jesus Christ. This is the core. Of who God is and what God has done and faith toward our Lord. Jesus Christ says Christ, is my righteousness Christ is my sacrifice Christ. Is my death that's in Christ. Is my resurrection to be alive unto God? Christ is the goodness and life from which I can love God.

Christ is the goodness and life from which I can obey God and that love Christ is my everything. And when we say, What man is to believe, concerning God. We are, especially to believe. That God is Jesus Christ. Who came to save us? That that Jesus is the display of the Trigon God towards us and so Over the content of the mess of Paul's message, is the whole of scripture we'll come to that.

More in verse 27. But wherever you are in scripture. There are two great things there. And you can summarize them like the catechism. Does What man is to believe concerning God. And what did he God requires of man? The reason the catechism puts it in. That order is because you can't fulfill your duty until you belong to God in Christ.

Or you can summarize it the way. The apostle does here, repentance toward God and faith toward Jesus Christ. So that If we ever had the catechism question, what do the scriptures principally teach? And you said repentance toward God and the scriptures principally. Teach repentance toward God and faith. Toward our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Um, Hopefully whoever is giving the quiz will acknowledge that, that is a Correct answer. Although it is good to learn the same form as everyone else and you can then say, What man is to believe, concerning God. And what did he God? Requires a man. And so the content of his message is the whole scripture, the aim of his message.

Um, However, is our response. Right. When you say, what man is to believe concerning God. That sounds like a set of ideas, but if you say, I'm going to teach you what man is to believe. Concerning God. That that's that sounds like I'm going to teach you a set of ideas but if I say I'm going to teach you to believe in Jesus Christ.

That is the response that is required of you. The response to that set of ideas. If I say, I'm going to teach you what duty? God requires a man. That's a set of ideas. Okay, now I know what do these God requires a man? But if I put it this way, I'm going to teach you to repent towards God.

That focuses more on. Uh, or aims more act, the response. To knowing the duties. They that you learned the duties so that you will do. The duties. And so this is how that proclaiming and teaching couplet from verse 20. Um, Comes out here. Not just teaching the content. Of what we are to believe, concerning God and the duty that God requires of us, But proclaiming to us urging pressing upon us the response of repentance toward God.

And faith. Toward Jesus Christ. And the reason why it's requires a personal response, is because it is. A personal message, the focus of the message. As God himself. Repentance is a response. Faith is a response. But both of them are responses to a person. It's not just a set of actions.

It is. A way of living toward God himself. It's not just agreeing with and depending upon ideas or Um, the provision of righteousness, or the provision of atonement or the provision of spiritual life. It is dependence upon the person. Who gives us that righteousness, who gives us that attendant, who gives us that spiritual life?

So that when you hear the and sit under and are a beneficiary of recipient of the ministry of the word, you need to be responding to God himself. That's what Paul is saying. Saying I didn't keep back anything helpful. But in everything I did. I urge you to respond to God himself, I urge you to respond to Christ himself.

Was never about me and you. There's always about God and you. There's always about Christ and you That is God himself. Who has the great focus? The great subject. Of the ministry. Of the word.

When that comes out. Even in the word hour. Faith toward God, and Sorry, repentance toward God and Faith toward our. Lord Jesus Christ. Not just that you would know that there is salvation in him. But that you would have him himself. This is why. To whatever extent. You only know about the Lord Jesus.

You want to be crying out with from your heart? For the Holy Spirit to help you. That you would know the Lord Jesus himself. That you would have him. That you would know. That he has, you That you would know, not just that he loves sinners. But that you would know that he loves you.

That he would produce in you. Not just, uh, Desire to do. What is pleasing to him? But a desire to please him. A love for him. Desire to bring him. Praise Um, desire to For himself.

Spray and ask the Lord would give us. Both just sort of ministry of the word. And, That we would respond in kind. To the sort of ministry that he has designed. In the church and in our homes, okay.

Father, I thank you. As one whom you have called to this ministry. That you have spoken, so plainly. So that I might not be. Turked around by Desire to minister it away that fulfills men's expectations. So I pray that you would Press your claims upon me. That my repenting would be towards you that my faith.

Would be towards you and your son. Our lord jesus. And that this would come out. A ministry that is shaped by what you command.

And pray that you would do this for our elders as well. And then, in every home, That you would. The grip, the mind and heart. Of the head of the household. In his home. Pray. Oh lord that this would be the case in. The churches and households. In our Presbytery, in our sinid.

In the visible church more, broadly. That you would restore us or go out to A season and the life of your providential working in your church. In which there is a full ministry of the word. In which nothing is kept back. That is helpful. And lord i pray for me.

I pray for My wife for prayer for my children. That each of us would receive your word. With the seriousness. That each of us would. Know that we need this ministry of your word every bit as much as anyone else. That we would see the wisdom of your design for the church.

How you are pleased to gather from. All nations into a congregation. Into your church, generally. Uh, but also into our congregation and gather, all sorts of people Lord, there are people that It has more difficult to us for us to obey the One, another commands. We pray that you would give us a heart that is towards Then for the sake of there, being identified with you, That we might be enabled to.

To love them and to serve them who are the hardest for us. We pray that you would, Give us to read your word personally and responsibly to you. And that the great things that you would make us to see and hear wherever we are. In your word would be repentance towards you and faith.

Towards jesus christ. And his name, we asked these things. Amen.