

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor  
Swift Creek Baptist Church (swiftcreekbaptistchurch.com)  
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## Acts 14:19-23 “Two Primary Works of the Church”

Intro. If I were to ask the average person what the work of the church is, I believe I would get an answer something like this: “The church is to baptize me, marry me to the person of *my* choice, provide fellowship opportunities, visit me when I’m sick or bereaved, help me when I need food or clothing, teach my children some morals, and bury me when I die.” There is certainly a place for all those things in the work of the church, but that does not sum up the *primary* work of the church. So what is the primary work of the church? If we want to know the answer, we must look to the Bible, not tradition or personal opinion.

In my text today we have one of the best passages of Scripture for giving us a pattern for doing God’s work. Here we are told of some of the essential aspects of the Lord’s work. We must major on the essentials if we are to please God and do the work that God has called us to. So what is the work to which God has called us as a church to do?

Verse 21 gives us two of the primary works of the church: evangelism and discipleship. The word translated “preached the gospel” (*euaggelizo*) is a single Greek word, which means “to share the good news.” And notice also in v.21 that after they evangelized, they disciplined new believers. These are two of the primary works of the church. There are many other things a church can and should do. These include worship, prayer, fellowship, and ministry. Those are important, but I believe that evangelism and discipleship are foundational to the other ministries. So we need to make sure we giving priority to these two works of the church. If we were to measure how well we are doing as a church, we would have to be actively engaging in both evangelism and discipleship to be considered spiritually healthy. So I want to challenge our church to be stronger in these two areas of ministry. Now one major task of the church is:

### I. THE WORK OF EVANGELISM

A survey was taken some time ago of church members, and only 11% listed evangelism as a primary work of the church. But Jesus Himself said, “The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost.” Saving souls was a priority with Jesus, and it should be a priority for the church. It is such a joy to see people saved and baptized. So what must we do to carry out the work of evangelism? First,

A. Share the Right Message - V.21 should be translated, “when they shared the good news.” If you tune in to local or national news, he will hear a lot of bad news. But we have good news to tell! What is the good news? It is found in 1 Cor. 15:3-4, “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.” The good news is that God loves you, in Christ died for your sins. Then, the salvation that Christ provided can become ours by repentance of sin and faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21).

Do you know how to share the gospel? Have you ever done so? I challenge you to learn what the gospel is, and share it.

Furthermore, we should:

B. Take the Gospel *to* the People – Notice in vv.20-21 that Paul and Barnabas traveled to Derbe and “preached the gospel to that city.” Paul and Barnabas were missionaries. They knew that they had to travel from city to city, sharing the good news of Christ. That is why we send out missionaries. And here locally, we cannot expect unbelievers to come to our churches. By nature, they do not seek after God (John 3:20; Rom. 3:11). So we must penetrate society with the good news. That is one reason we started our TV ministry. We can now carry our gospel message right into the homes of thousands of people. If just ½ of 1% of the homes tune in, we can reach one to two hundred more people with the Gospel message. We also share the Gospel through the Internet. But we also must also personally go into people’s homes with the Gospel, and I have done that many times over the years.

I hope you will participate in our gospel outreach efforts. Make a gospel visit. Invite someone to your home to share a gospel witness. On Oct. 31 we are going to have a Trunk or Treat in the church parking lot. We could have 100-200 people show up for that. We will have an opportunity to share the gospel at least through gospel tracts to many people. Will you participate?

C. Share the Gospel in Spite of Opposition – You may recall that Paul and Barnabas had gone to Lystra to preach the Gospel (v.8). While there, the enemies of the Gospel gathered a mob together and dragged Paul out of the city and stoned him (v.19). This was the only time he was stoned (2 Cor. 11:25). They thought they had succeeded in killing him. They tried to put out the light of the gospel when they stoned Paul, but God lit it back up! V.20 says, “When the disciples gathered around him, he rose up.” They just couldn’t put out the light of the Gospel. We don’t know if Paul was raised from the dead or just healed.

I’m sure you have seen one of those trick birthday candles. You blow them out, and after a second or two they light right back up. You blow them out again, and they just light up yet again! That’s the way Paul was. They thought they had snuffed out his life, but God just raised him back up and then Paul went on to the next town to preach the gospel there. Nothing would stop his evangelistic work. Paul gave a positive example of the fact that we should continue to share the Gospel in spite of opposition.

You would think that after being stoned he would have quit and gone home. I don’t know about you, but if I were stoned almost to death for preaching the gospel, I must admit that I would evaluate whether or not I should keep doing that.

What does it take to put out your light? What does it take to keep you from witnessing of your faith? Well, with most of us, it doesn’t take much at all. Just the fear of opposition is enough. Just a little rejection is enough to keep us from witnessing. But we need to be more like Paul. He kept on witnessing.

Let me tell you what it takes to share the Gospel in spite of opposition. First, it takes courage. Paul did not allow fear to stop him. He faced his enemies with courage. Serving God is not for sissies! Courage comes from faith in God, who will either protect us or strengthen us. It also takes persistence. As we have seen, Paul was absolutely unstoppable.

Robert Morrison of England set his heart on going to China as a missionary. Preaching was illegal, but over the next months and years he gathered a little group of people around him, but never more than ten. In hiding behind closed doors he endeavored to instruct them. Seven years after he landed in Canton he baptized his first convert. Now that’s persistence! Finally working all day and all night, day after day and month after month, he finished translating the book of Acts into Cantonese and succeeded in having it printed. But an argument arose among the Christian craftsmen. Their fight was so blatant that the authorities found out about it and put

a stop to all the printing. All the effort of those months was halted. Morrison was forbidden from all future printing and preaching.

You say, “What did he do?” He persisted—just what he should have done. He stayed on the job because he believed God was in it. He mastered the language and translated the entire Bible into Cantonese—a massive work. He also completed a six volume Chinese-English dictionary so missionaries would not only have the Bible, but the dictionary to learn the language as well. All of that happened in the early 1800’s. After twenty-seven years of loneliness and self-sacrificing persistence, he paved the way for every missionary since then who has ever given the gospel to a person who spoke Cantonese. Today there is an academy in Taiwan called Morrison Academy. He never preached to big crowds, but he was persistent. [MacArthur, pp.44-45].

Not only has God called us to the work of evangelism, but He has also called us to:

## II. THE WORK OF DISCIPLESHIP

Note in v.21 that they not only “shared the good news”, but they also “discipled many” (*matheteuo*). The same verb is the primary command of the Great Commission (Mt. 28:19-20). Also, Eph. 4:12-13 says that the work of pastors is to equip the saints for ministry, and to help them grow up into the fullness of the stature of Christ. So we should do more than win people to faith in Christ. We should also make disciples.

In this passage we see how important follow-up discipleship was to Paul. He and Barnabas could have returned from Derbe straight back to Antioch. It would have been very easy for them to say, “They’re already saved, let’s forget them. They’re going to get to heaven.” But instead, they returned through almost every city they had visited, retracing their steps. As you read this chapter, you should be able to see how dangerous it was to return to those cities. But Paul was willing to risk his life, not only to win these people to the Lord, but also to disciple them. Both are important.

Paul and Barnabas give a great example to guide us in how we are to go about making disciples. The last v.21 down through v.23 tells us how to “follow up” on those who have been saved. So note first of all we should:

A. Strengthen New Believers - V.22 says that Paul and Barnabas were “strengthening the souls of the disciples.” The word (*episterizo*) literally means “to prop up or support.” It has come to mean “to make stable, to strengthen.”

In my previous house our kitchen floor was sagging. So I got a floor jack and some wood beams and propped up the sunken floor.

New Christians needs strengthening. Sometimes we need to prop them up when they are weak. *These* new believers especially needed it, for they faced persecution. All of us need strengthening, for the world, the flesh, and the devil are opposed to us. Without such strengthening, too many new believers will fall away, and fall back into their own lifestyles. We need much strengthening to help us become the good Christian that God wants us to be.

How do we go about strengthening new believers? Look at v.25, “Now when they had preached the word in Perga...” So we do so by teaching the Word of God. That is how we grow stronger. The word translated “make disciples” means to instruct so that the people learn. Learn what? Specifically, we are to help them learn the Word of God. For example, 1 Pet. 2:2 says, “as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.” And 1 Jn. 2:14 says, “...I have written unto you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides

in you....” That’s the key to spiritual strength. When Paul and Barnabas went back, they strengthened the believers by teaching them the Word of God. In Acts 15:32 we read, “Now Judas and Silas, themselves being prophets also, exhorted and strengthened the brethren with many words.”

Now our text says that another way we strengthen new believers is with exhortation. So that leads to another work of discipleship:

B. Exhort New Believers - Teaching people is not enough. Imparting doctrinal information is not enough. We must also make appeal to believers to obey the teaching, and live out the principles of the Christian life. So v.22 says that they were also “exhorting them....” The word “exhort” means literally “to call to your side,” and thus it means “to encourage, to console, to beseech, to appeal” for someone to do what they know to do. An example of this type of exhortation is found in 1 Th. 2:11-12, “as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, that you would walk worthy of God....”

Good preaching certainly includes application and exhortation. So I have a role in this aspect of discipleship. But every believer has a role to exhort other believers. Heb. 10:25 says that we should not be “forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another....” We need to encourage one another to live for the Lord.

So when you see a believer who is struggling and about to drop out from following Christ, reach out to them. Exhort them to stay true to Christ. Share some Scripture. Share a personal testimony of how you went through the same experience, and how the Lord helped you.

Now in v.22 there are two things that the believers needed to be exhorted to do.

1. To Continue in the Faith – Do you see that in v.22? One of the dangers of new believers is that the newness will wear off, and too many will fall away. So Jesus said in John 8:31, “If you continue in my word, then are you my disciples indeed.” But the ever-present tendency is for the new Christian to fade out. That’s tragic. If left alone, the average Christian will backslide from the Lord. Jesus’ parable of the sower also illustrates this (Mt. 13:5-7, 20-22). From God’s standpoint, salvation is eternally secured by His sovereignty; from the human viewpoint, it’s visibly secured by our continuance.

Now in order to continue in the faith, people need encouragement in another aspect of the Christian life. We need to exhort believers:

2. To Endure Tribulations – Paul told them in the last of v.22, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” Jesus was the first to tell His disciples similar words. In John 16:33 He said, “In the world you shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” That word “tribulation” literally means “pressure.” It refers to adverse conditions that cause stress. Becoming a Christian does not mean that all your troubles are going away. When a person is saved, he suddenly realizes that he is in a war. Satan is against you. Unbelievers will push back if you become a rebuke to their lifestyle and unbelief. You will likely face at least verbal persecution if not physical persecution. And just because you have become a Christian does not mean that you will not experience the tribulations that are commonly experienced in this fallen world. Christians still get sick, have accidents and experience financial setbacks. Christians can still experience family problems. You *should* experience less problems due to personal sin, but not all of your problems will go away now that you have become a Christian. As we have seen, you will experience some new problems.

A. W. Tozer wrote: “Christ calls men to carry a cross; we call them to have fun in his name. He calls them to suffer; we call them to enjoy all the ... comforts modern civilization

affords.”<sup>1</sup> What a contrast between what Paul says in v.22 and what the typical church teaches today.

Paul was speaking from personal experience. Doubtless many of these Christians were encountering opposition among kinfolk and neighbors because of their commitment to Jesus Christ. But you can't have victory without conflict. With the Lord's strength, we can win out over our trials.

So we see here that we have a responsibility to warn new Christians, not only of the possibility of tribulation, but the necessity of it. Notice that Paul said we “must” go through many tribulations. Learning to overcome trials is a necessary part of growing in Christ. When we go through suffering we tend to pray more, and we have to exercise faith in God. Christ suffered for us; we should be willing to suffer for Him. So we need to say, “Get ready my friend. Satan's coming, and he's going to unload on you.” I don't think we are being fair with new believers if we don't tell them that.

Now when Christians do suffer tribulation and persecution, we should minister to one another. Notice what happened when Paul was stoned. It says in v.20 that “the disciples gathered around him.” They did not run from Paul in his time of trouble, but ran to him. Even so, we should minister to hurting Christians. We are called upon to “weep with those who weep” (Rom. 12:15). We should minister comfort with our presence and our words.

But exhortation includes encouragement, and Paul reminds them of the fact that after tribulation we enter the kingdom of God. Friend, as the song says, “It will be worth it all, when we see Jesus!” Heaven and the Kingdom of God will be so wonderful. As A. W. Tozer also said, “We can afford to suffer now; we'll have a long eternity to enjoy ourselves.”

Another aspect of discipleship is to do this:

C. Organize Believers in Churches with Godly Leadership - Edification was not the only purpose of this return journey. Organization was also needed. The Lord expects things to be done decently and in order in the church (1 Cor. 14:40). The Jews by in large rejected Christ, and so new believers had to be organized outside the synagogue structure. This organization was effected through the selection of “elders” in each church. Notice in v.23 that “they had appointed elders in every church...” (cf. Titus 1:5). “Appointed” (*cheirotoneo*) is from a word that originally meant to vote by show of the hands, and thus to appoint with the approval of an assembly. Though Paul and Barnabas had an important role in the selection of the elders, the church had a part as well. Here we see that the Lord has designed that the church be led by men who are here called elders.<sup>2</sup> That term is used interchangeably with “bishops” or “overseers” (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7). Elsewhere we also see that they had a pastoral role, including teaching God's Word. Little is accomplished in God's work without effective leadership and good followers. And the selection of the right leadership is so important. This could be indicated by the fact that they prayed with fasting. Fasting is done when something really important is going on.

The reason Paul saw to it that elders were selected in each church was because new believers need the teaching ministry of pastors and other leaders. They need the support of a local church. Most of our Christian growth takes place in community with other believers. So you need to make sure that you are actively involved in a local church that has godly leaders.

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<sup>1</sup> A. W. Tozer, *Born After Midnight* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Christian Publications, 1959), p.141.

<sup>2</sup> While it is true that one person must emerge as the key leader in a group, biblical leadership operates in the context of a team (Fernando).

D. Commend New Believers to the Lord - That's what they did in the last of v.23, "they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed." The word "commend" (*paratithemi*) literally means "to place along side." Thus, it came to mean "to entrust or deposit", as in a bank. Pastors, elders, and others can only do so much. So we must also entrust people to the care of the Lord. Ultimately it is true that if a person becomes a strong Christian, it will be because of the work of the Lord in their lives. Paul said in 2 Th. 3:3, "But the Lord is faithful, who shall establish you, and keep you from evil."

Notice *how* we are to place people in the care of God. Literally v.23 says "having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord." Thus, they commended them before the Lord in prayer. In the closing words of the epistle to the Romans (16:25), Paul commends them to the Lord with the following words, "Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel." When you have done everything you should do, you should be sure to lift up new believers to God in prayer and place them in His hand. Listen, I can't be by your side every time you face a temptation. I can't be there all the time to help you along the way. Your Sunday School teacher or deacon cannot always be with you. But God has promised to be with you always. So even though pastors and teachers have a responsibility in discipleship, we do not do it alone! We can bring these new Christians to God in prayer, and place them in His hands.

Will you make a commitment to pray for new believers by name? Any new believers are published in the newsletter. Their pictures are on the new member board. Commend them to God by prayer.

By the way parents and grandparents, this is what you need to do for your children and grandchildren. You cannot always be with them when they face temptation and difficulties. So commit them to the Lord in prayer, trusting God to be with them to strengthen them, to protect them.

Conclusion: Are you involved in the Work of the Church as I have described it to you? Are you involved in evangelism? Are you helping us to reach people for Christ? Are you helping to make disciples in the ways that we have talked about today? If we are not doing these things, then we are failing as a church.

Sources: F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954); H. Leo Eddleman, *An Exegetical and Practical Commentary on Acts* (Dallas: Books of Life Publishers, 1974); Ajith Fernando, *The NIV Application Commentary: Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998); Everett F. Harrison, *Acts: The Expanding Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975); John MacArthur, Jr., *The Qualities of a Great Missionary: Study Notes on Acts 13:1-13, 14:1-28 and Matthew 10:5-23* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1984); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible [Ver. 5:30]* (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); A.T. Robertson, *New Testament Word Pictures*, Vol. IV (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931); Curtis Vaughan, *Acts: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). McGee & Ironside read, but not used.

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