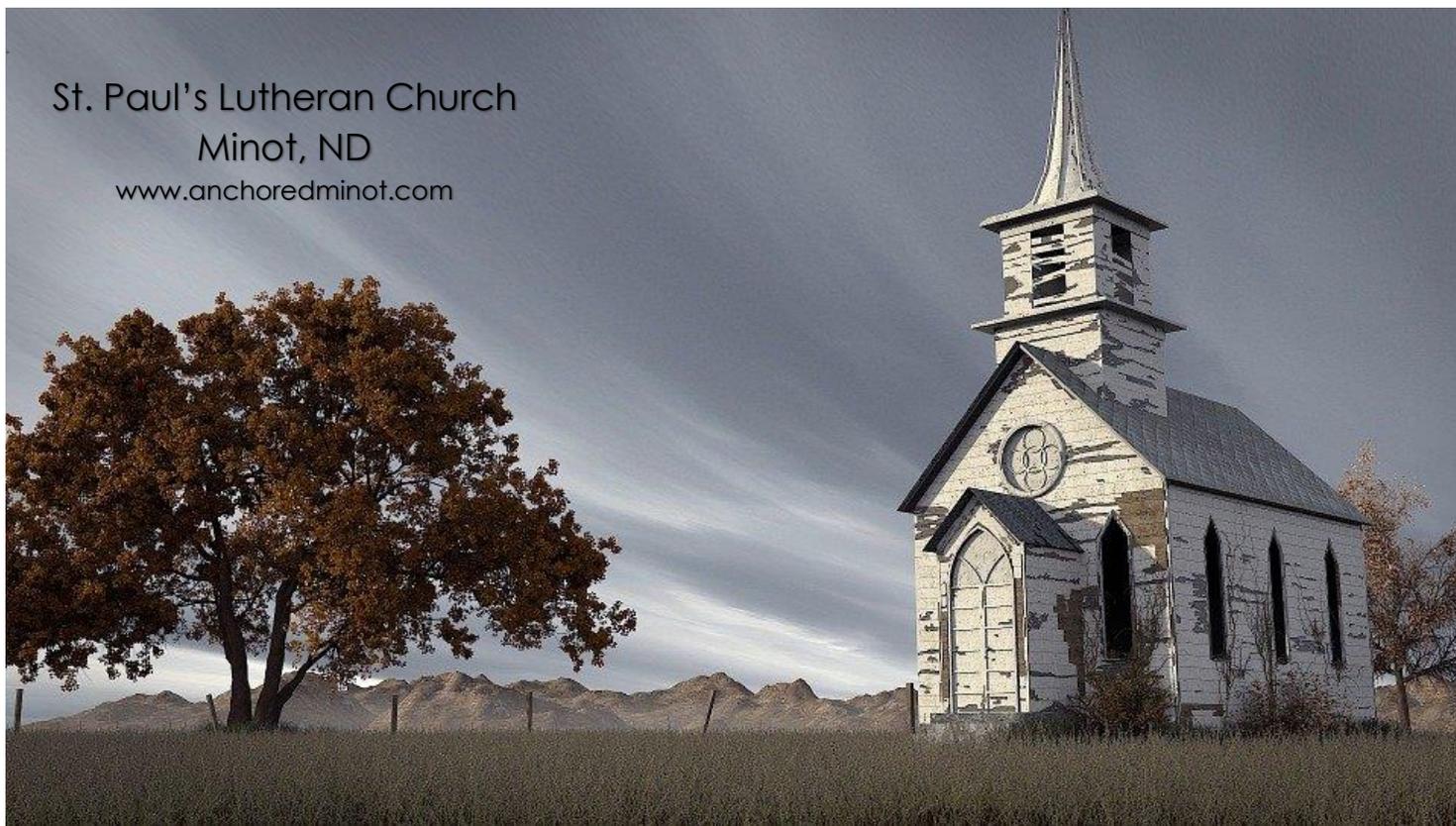


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# The Acts of the Apostles

The Ministry of the Gospel in a Messy Church & Conflictive World

Acts 15:1-21

Acts 15 is a very important chapter to consider. This is the first major conflict in the church. And what was that conflict about? Simply stated, Christians from Judea came into conflict with Christians from Antioch over the Law. The Christians from Judea stated, *"unless you are circumcised according to the customs of Moses, you cannot be saved."* In other words, they were misusing circumcision to confirm their error that the keeping of the Law is essential for meriting one's salvation.

This conflict rose to the level of a dispute that generated a very big debate. Now, this was not a small disagreement. It was not a debate of little proportion. It rose to the level of what we have come to call "The Jerusalem Council."

So, how can we understand this conflict in a contemporary fashion? Frankly stated, the conflict was over whether or not there was a period or a comma after Jesus. Or, maybe we could say it this way: is it Jesus + nothing or Jesus + something? As Christians, we can all agree that Jesus=Everything. However, why would we

even think about having the descriptive phrase "+nothing" added for clarification?

The reality is that we need to have the phrase "+nothing" because our sinful nature will always attempt to add to Jesus. Our flesh can't stand the idea of Jesus with a period. Rather we want to add a comma so that we can allow for mankind's will and abilities to have a subtle yet prominent role in our spirituality.

The idea of Jesus period is offensive because it undercuts our role and our narcissistic inclinations. On the other hand, a comma allows for us to be involved in our spirituality, even if it is 1% involvement.

Think about this for a minute how we subtly add to Jesus:

- Jesus + circumcision = saved
- Jesus + changed attitude = saved
- Jesus + obedience = saved
- Jesus + praying four times a day = saved
- Jesus + having perfect doctrine = saved
- Jesus + giving money to church = saved
- Jesus + our good works = saved

What makes legalism tragic and toxic is that man-centered prerequisites that are prescribed so that one might acquire salvation undercut the finished work of Christ. Equally as dangerous are man-centered codified responses that are prescribed so that one might legitimize salvation, for this also undercuts the finished work of Christ. The reason being, anytime mankind takes credit for acquiring or legitimizing salvation, the emphasis is taken off of Christ's atonement and placed on mankind; the accent mark is moved off of Christ. It is Christ and solely Christ that acquires and legitimizes salvation for us; anything less waters down or confuses the message of the Gospel and strips away assurance.

Back to the idea of a comma. What are the implications of having a comma after Jesus, even if it is constituted for only 1%? The harsh reality is that anytime that we add to Jesus, we end up subtracting from his work on the cross. A spirituality of .001% works righteousness is still works righteousness. Furthermore, when we use a comma after Jesus, Christ is only going to be as good as our addition is. In other words, how will we ever know if our sanctification, decision, religious endeavoring, obedience, repentance, prayers, devotion, good works, and right doctrine are good enough? We will always be vulnerable to doubt and lacking assurance when we use a comma. Has one been obedient enough? Has one made a good enough decision, and is it binding? Has one prayed enough and done enough good works? Has one repented and actually truly meant it?

The good news is that this Christian life is a 'period' kind of spirituality! The reformers of the 16th century knew this and fought for this against the synergistic and Pelagius spiritual climate of the day. That is the reason why we received the blessed "Solas" from them. The Word Alone; Christ Alone; Faith Alone; Grace Alone: For the Glory of God Alone! It is Jesus with a period for:

- Our Faith is a Gift (Ephesians 2:8 & Romans 10:17)
- Our Sanctification is a Work of God (Philippians 2:13)
- We did not choose Christ; He chose us (John 15:16)
- Repentance is a gift and a working of God upon us (2 Timothy 2:25)
- Prayer is a faith response to the one that was faithful to us. (Revelation 3:20)
- Good works are not prescriptive for our salvation but descriptive of faith. (James 2:18)

As a way of follow-up, consider what Peter states in verses 7-11. Consider the conclusion of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:19-20. What did Peter and the Council rest upon?

