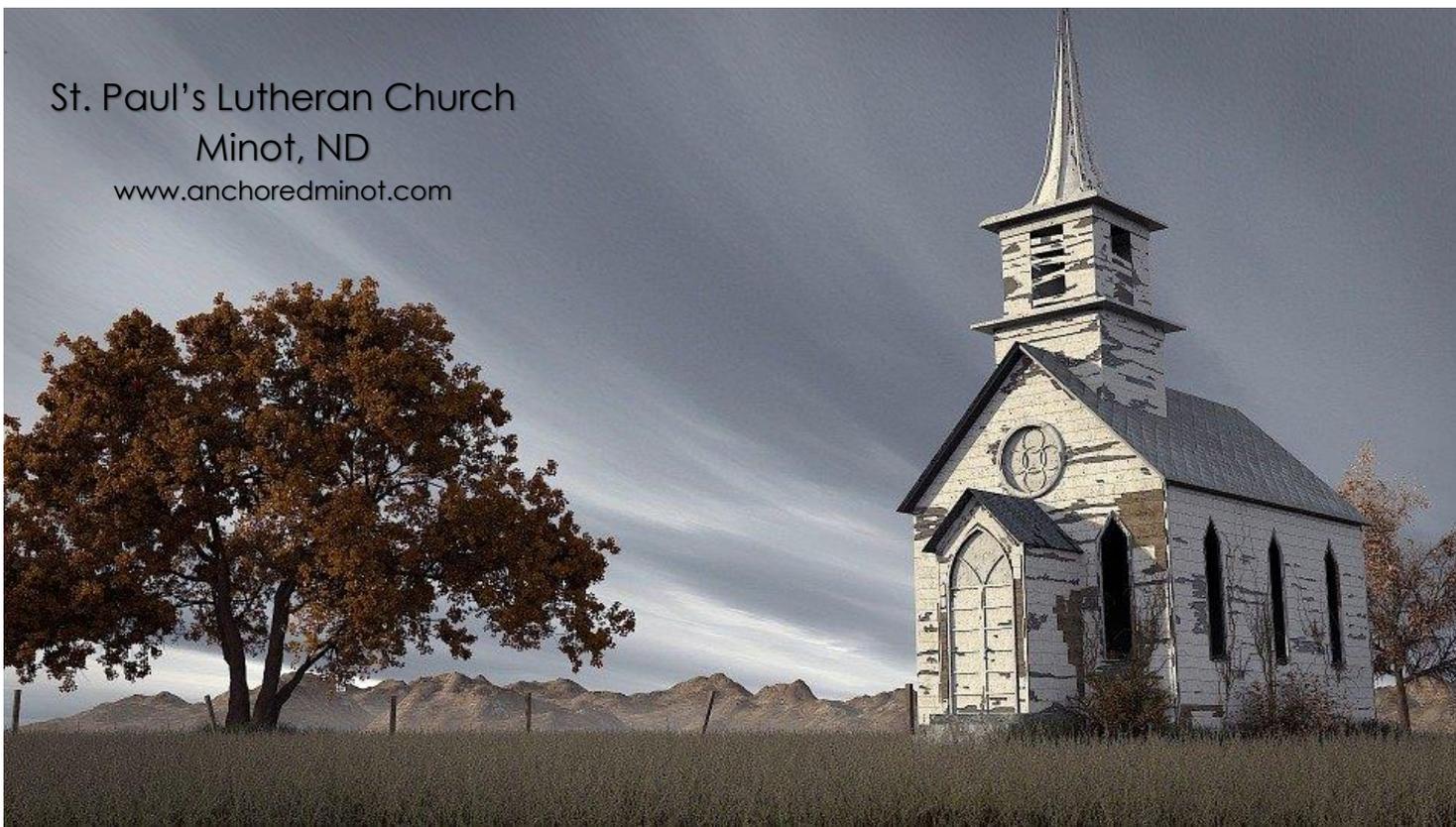


St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
Minot, ND  
www.anchoredminot.com



# The Acts of the Apostles

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

Acts 16:1-5

It is easy to read over these five verses quickly and not notice the profound thing that it is happening here. Remember Acts 15? In Acts 15, the Judea Jews were insisting that a person could not be saved, unless they were circumcised. And now in Acts 16, what did Paul do with Timothy? The answer, he had him be circumcised. What gives? To make things even more interesting, several years later, Paul would not allow Titus to be circumcised in Galatians 2:3. Again, what gives?

In the church, for the sake of the Gospel, we are to treat and respond to people differently with love for the sake of faith. For example read how Martin Luther (Taken From: The Freedom of a Christian) describes the difference between Legalists and Weaker Brothers:

**Legalists:** *Inflexible and obstinate ceremonialists. Deaf rule keepers who are not willing to hear the truth of liberty. Having no faith, they stubbornly insist on their own ceremonies as a means to have a right relationship with God. Legalists must be resisted. In fact, even the opposite should be done, in bold and shocking ways, so*

*that their ungodly views do not lead more people into error. In the presence of these people, one should feel free to eat meat, break fasts, and in the spirit of liberty given by faith, do things they consider to be the greatest of sins. (According to this principle, Paul would not circumcise Titus, in Galatians 2:3, when some of the leaders insisted that he should.)*

Luther goes on to say:

**Weaker Brother/Sister:** *Simple-minded, ignorant and young Christians that are not able to grasp the meaning of the freedom given in faith—even if they wished to do so. These are the ones we must take care not to offend. We ought to defer to their weakness until they have had the opportunity to become more fully instructed in the faith. They act the way they do only because their faith is weak. Therefore, fasts and other ceremonies they might think are necessary should be observed in order to avoid upsetting them. In this way we follow the command of love, which seeks not to harm but to serve. After all, they are not to be blamed for their weakness. It is their pastors who have used tradition to take them captive. (According to this principle, Paul circumcised Timothy, in Acts 16:3.)*

In other words, people who are legalistic simply have no faith in the Gospel due to placing all their confidence in their own means of acquiring salvation. With Legalists the church cannot be hard enough on them. The reason being, their false foundation needs to be shaken, destroyed and usurped for the sake of them seeing their folly. This is obviously the loving thing to do. The church must exercise its freedom to the utmost degree around Legalists, in order to differentiate their works-centered view of salvation with the Biblical view of the Gospel (i.e. by grace through faith). This is clearly how Paul is handled things in the Galatia church.

However, with the Weaker Brother the church is also called to love but with a completely different response. In other words, the church is called to go to great degrees of laying down freedom in order to support Weaker Brother so as not to damage their faith; one cannot be gentle enough with them. The reason being, they do have faith, even though it is weak. The church needs to be gentle with them because they are on a journey and they need continual instruction in the faith. Certainly one would not want to be responsible for destroying their tender faith by exercising freedom. This is clearly what Paul is communicates in Romans 14:1-23.

In summary, Paul in Galatians 2:3 would not circumcise Titus because he was lovingly opposing the legalists of Galatia. However, in Acts 16:3 Paul had Timothy circumcised because he was loving the Jewish people with gentleness. So what gives? Faith is the key. The church is to lovingly exercising freedom in the face of Legalists and to lovingly lay down freedom for the Weaker Brother.

Questions to Ponder:

- 1) What happens when one treats a Legalist as if they are a Weaker Brother?
- 2) What happens when one treats a Weaker Brother as if they are a Legalist?
- 3) What happens when one lovingly exercises freedom in the context of a Legalist?
- 4) What happens when one lovingly lays down freedom in the context of a Weaker Brother?

