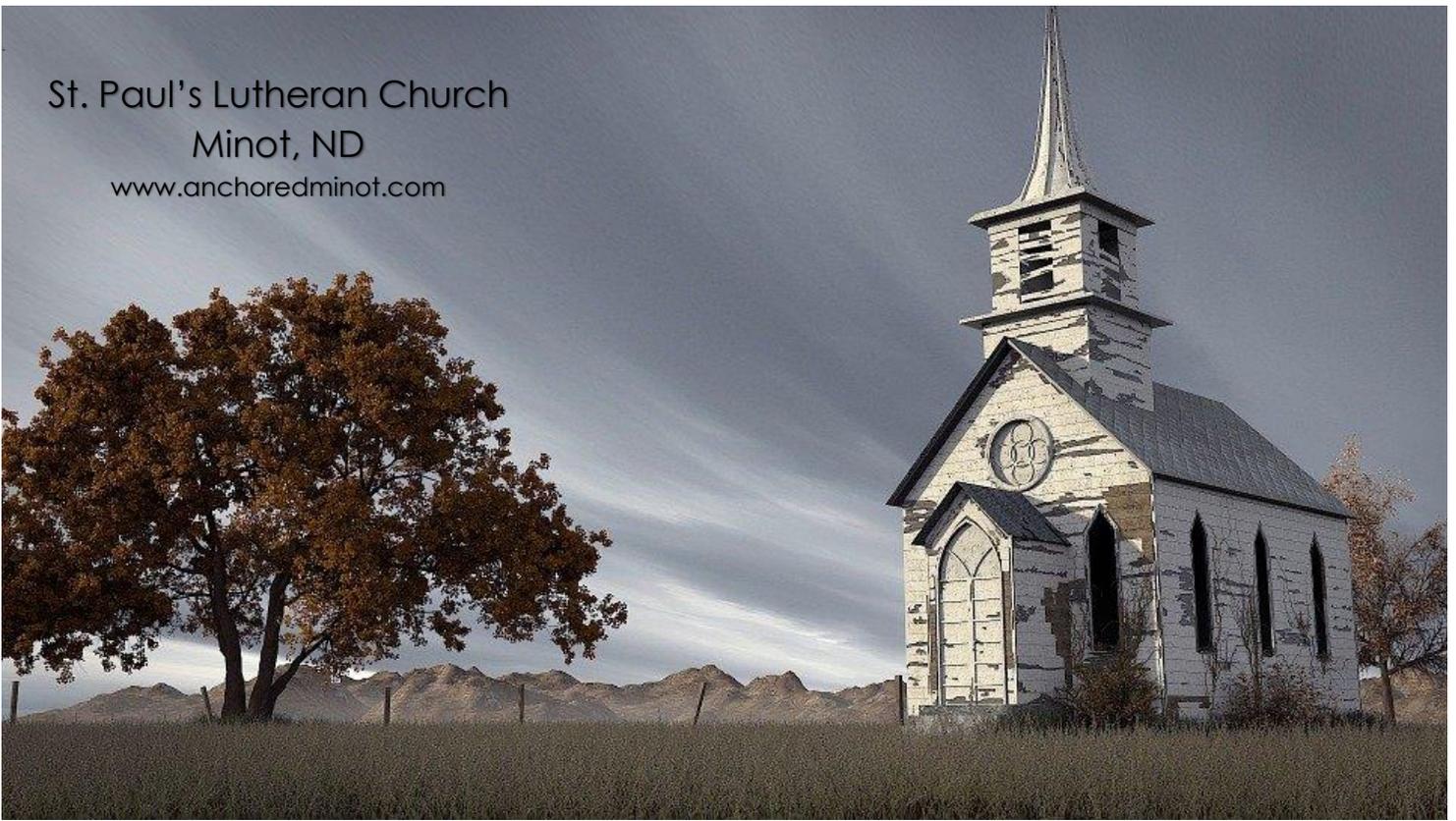


St. Paul's Lutheran Church
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The Acts of the Apostles

The Ministry of the Gospel in a Messy Church & Conflictive World Acts 17:10-15

Christians are often accused by pagans of being “closed-minded.” Frankly, this accusation is a lame attempt to attack Christian theology, and Christians should not even feel the need to respond to such foolish allegations. Some accusations are just too lame to respond to.

However, for the sake of Acts 17, let’s be a bit critical of ourselves and take notes from the Berean Christians. Let’s examine the assertions of *open-mindedness* and *closed-mindedness*.

First, let’s consider being open-minded. The idea of having an open mind is to be open to hearing and listening to other people. But what if the mind is *only* open? Well, only having an open mind allows things to fall out of the mind, or perhaps worse, it allows people to place harmful things into an open mind. People who only have an open mind are frankly naïve and foolish. They are easily manipulated by others. Having an open mind means that a person reacts in a temporary fashion – always changing, adjusting, and

moving. Having an open mind leads to a person being “tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people’s trickery, by [people’s] craftiness in deceitful scheming.” (Eph. 4:14) Being open-minded leads to a person being a reed blowing in the wind.

On the other hand, let us consider being closed-minded. The idea of having a closed mind is not being receptive to anything that is new or foreign to a person’s already held beliefs. Being closed-minded typically brings about stubbornness, intolerance, anger, and the need to always be right. Someone who has a closed mind does not allow for any conversation that they have not thought through themselves but often have cold indifference.

So, which one should the Christian be? Should they be open-minded or closed-minded? The answer: neither!

Take a look at the Berean Christians in Acts 17. Were they closed-minded or open-minded? How did they

receive the message of Paul and Silas? Well, they welcomed the message very eagerly. Aha! They were open-minded! Well, yes, they were. But not exactly. Yes, they welcomed the message of Paul and Silas, but they *also* 'examined' the scriptures to see if what they heard was true. Aha! They were closed-minded! Well, yes, they were.

Take a moment and look at the two words defined below from verse 11 of chapter 17:

Eagerness: *the readiness of mind, a mind leaning and rushing forward, the willingness of mind to consider.*

Examining: *to question, scrutinize, investigate, interrogate, discern, to make a careful examination, looking at things in a legal process.*

Perhaps a good way to think about this is like this – the Bereans had open ears *and* an open Bible. What does this mean, though? Consider the following examples.

The Liberal Lutherans in America tend to have open ears. They have a readiness of mind to lean forward and consider what they hear. Who can forget one slogan from one of these Liberal Churches, "Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Hands." However, contrary to the Bereans, Liberal Lutherans have closed Bibles. They do not criticize, question, or scrutinize, for that would be unloving (*according to their rationalization*). On the other end of the spectrum, many Legalistic Baptists tend to have open Bibles. However, contrary to the Bereans, their ears are closed. Their attitude is often harsh, mean, and angry to anyone not a part of their closed group. To the point, having open ears allows us to listen, converse, and talk to others about spiritual things. However, having an open Bible demands that we compare everything we think, say, hear, and do to the Word of God. Simply said, we should listen and converse with those around us, *but* we always reserve the right to interpret what we hear in light of Scripture! And that is the key! We do not interpret what we hear on the basis of our own opinions, feelings, or experiences but instead, we interpret life according to the Word. The Word reads us!

