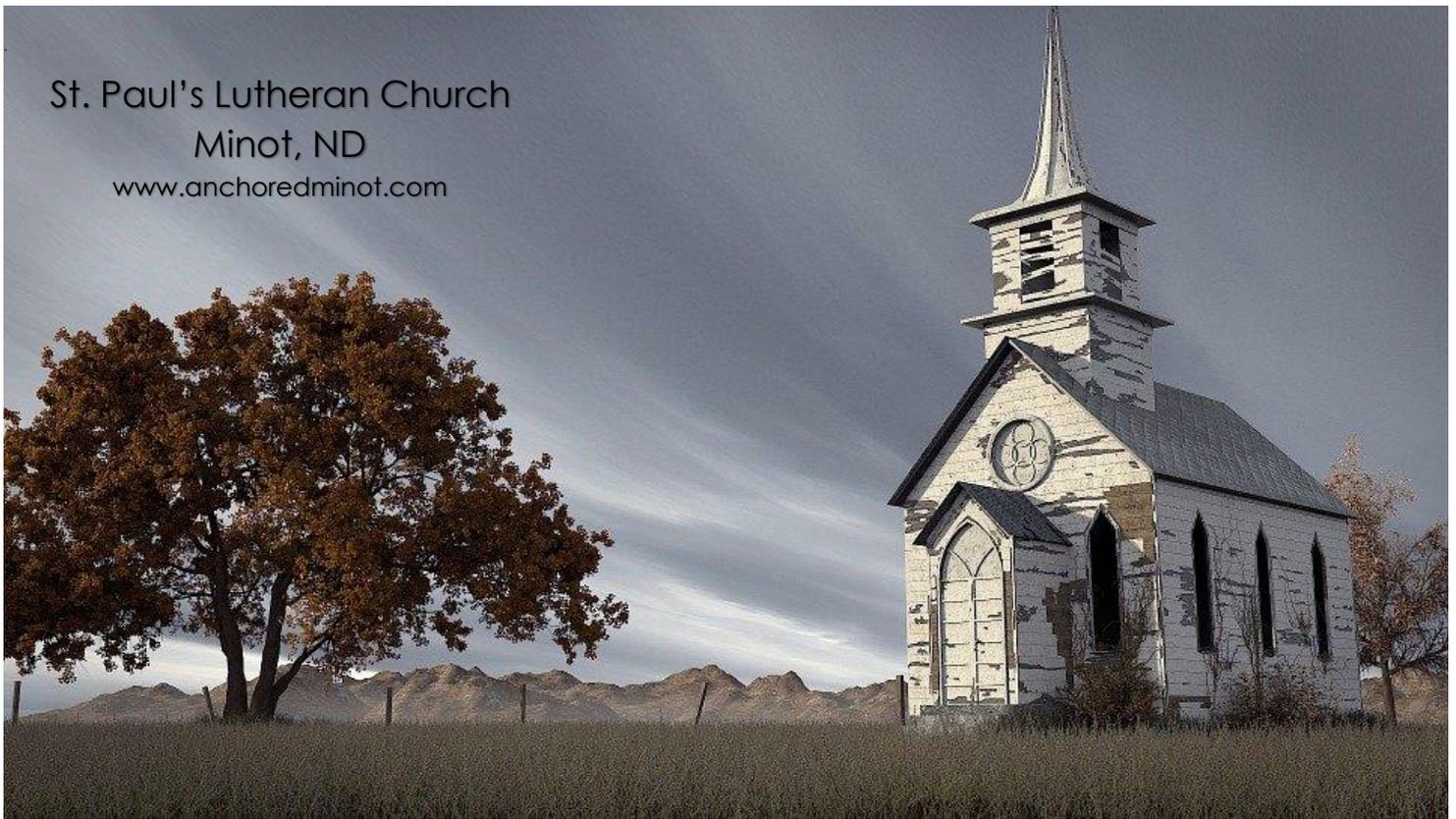


St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Minot, ND
www.anchoredminot.com



The Acts of the Apostles

The Ministry of the Gospel in a Messy Church & Conflicting World Acts 18:12-28

The Jews gathered together again and made a mad rush at the Apostle Paul. This time they brought Paul before a proconsul named Gallio. A proconsul is an officer of the Roman Empire that discharged the duties of Rome. He was either a governor or a military commander of a Roman Province.

And so, it is interesting to see that the Jews did the same thing to the Apostle Paul, as they did to Jesus - they ran to the State. They brought Paul before Gallio and indicated that Paul was starting an illegal religion. Keep in mind that according to Roman ways, it was completely fine for Jews to convert and influence other Jews. But it was not o.k. for Jews to convert Roman Citizens. In other words, the Jews were pushing the idea that Paul was pushing an illegal religion - something that would be a threat against the Roman Empire!

Ah, but Gallio recognized very quickly that Paul was not violating any Roman Laws! Gallio pushed back against the Jews and told them that they needed to see to this issue themselves.

This would be a good time to review the three estates of church, state, and family. Each of these realms is important and functions for the sake of good order in this life under the sun. But unfortunately, these estates can not only encroach on each other, but people can also appeal to one estate to make a ruling in another estates' realm. With respect to the State, the State typically rules on issues pertaining to the 2nd Table of the Law (i.e., Commandments 4-10). In other words, the State is restricted only to the 2nd Table of the Law; whereas, the church leans heavily upon the 1st Table while also speaking to the 2nd Table. In the case of Gallio, he was very wise to know his limitations - that he did not have the authority to speak to issues of the 1st Table of the Law.

We have witnessed the abuse of the State in most recent years regarding Covid-19. That is to say, the State has absolute zero authority over the church regarding public worship services. Fortunately, in the State of North Dakota, Governor Burgum's Executive Orders specifically omitted the realm of the church. Governor

Burgum rightly followed in the shoes of Gallio and removed himself from being a judge on the matters of the church during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. In other states, though, many Governors overstepped into the realm of the 1st Table of the Law – many Governors were not disciplined but allowed the Estate of the Government to encroach on the Estate of the Church by mandating the closing of churches.

Now, the point that we can take note of is this: some people in society will run to the State to fix problems, problems that the State has no business otherwise fixing. And civil magistrates sin grossly when they do not go the way of Gallio but instead dip their toes into the realm of the church.

Acts 18 has a way of bringing to our memory the old sentiment, Separation of Church and State. Simply stated, the Separation of Church and State has more to do with keeping the State out of the church than the church out of the State. According to a historian named Noll, *“During the Revolutionary period, more and more Americans came to affirm that religion was a matter of conscience between God and the individual and should be exempt from the meddling of the government at any level. This is due to the potential of governmental tyranny so common to the era.”* Noll goes on to say that the sentiments of the founders were that *“the federal government should keep as far away from contested religious questions as possible.”* However, Noll states that *“None of the founders interpreted the First Amendment as prohibiting religiously grounded arguments for general public policies. Nor did they seem to worry about incidental benefits accruing to religious institutions from government measures designed for the benefit of all citizens. On the other hand, they also clearly indicated their belief that the federal government could not support “religion in general” without edging toward the legal establishment of something like a ‘church.’ Such an establishment they had experienced under Britain. At least for the nation as a whole, they would have none of it in the new United States.”*

In summary, Christianity is not disruptive of proper authority (See the 4th Commandment). And so, the State should never need to pass edicts upon the church. The church and Christians are the first to follow and support proper authority.

