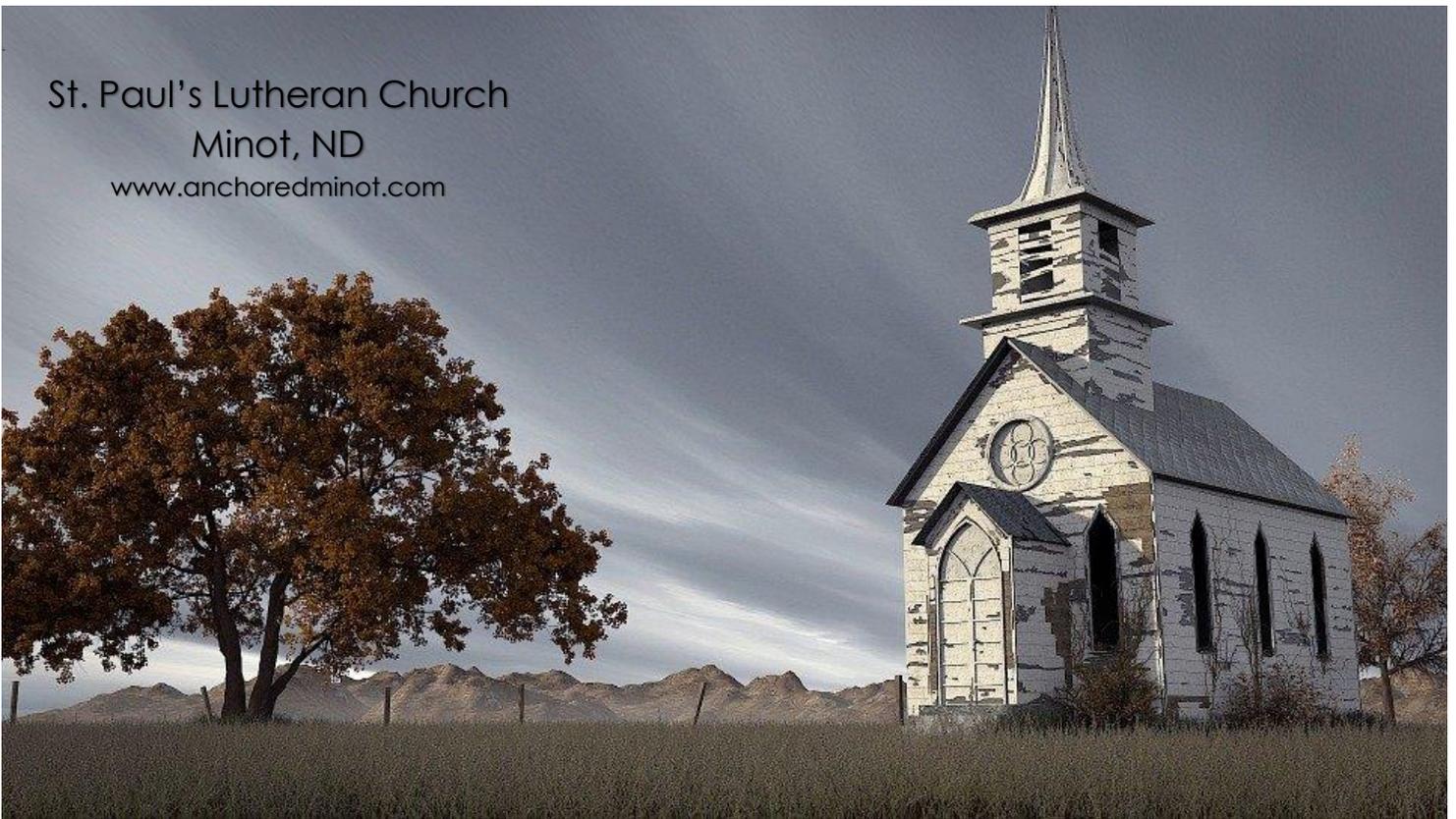


St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
Minot, ND  
www.anchoredminot.com



# The Acts of the Apostles

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

Acts 21:1-36

In the Gospel of John, every time that Jesus drew near to Jerusalem – conflict seemed to break out. The same is true for Paul in Acts 21. In fact, a man named ‘Agabus’ told Paul that he would be bound and handed over to the Gentiles in Jerusalem. But Paul said, “*I am ready not only to be bound but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.*” After this, Paul traveled to Jerusalem.

Once in Jerusalem, Paul was immediately met by fellow Christians. It was a warm welcome. Furthermore, Paul learned more news that many Jews were converted in the city of Jerusalem. There were most likely thousands or perhaps even tens of thousands who believed in Jesus as the Redeemer. However, this addition of believers in Jerusalem had several hang-ups. More specifically, the new converts in Jerusalem continued to abide and uphold the ceremonies of the Law of Moses. Now, it is important for us to keep in mind that there is nothing wrong with this. There is nothing wrong with a Jewish Christian retaining a Jewish way of living. No one

was forbidding them to live in this way. (*Note: the Apostles and Paul regarded the Jewish way of living in the realm of adiaphora - things neither commanded nor forbidden by God*). In other words, the Jewish way of living only became problematic when it was regarded as ‘necessary’ for salvation.

So, what was the hang-up? Quite simply, the Jewish converts in Jerusalem heard through the grapevine that the Apostle Paul *supposedly* taught others Jews that they should turn away from Moses. Furthermore, these reports about Paul were also greatly exaggerated. They were so exaggerated that they became untrue. Please keep in mind that Paul *did teach* that the Greeks did not have to become Jews to be Christian. But he was *not* teaching that the Jews had to stop being Jews to be Christian. But this did not matter. The misguided reports went circulated to Paul’s detriment.

So, what happened? While it is tough to know the exact details, most likely converts living outside of Jerusalem shared reports about the Christian faith with poor

words. They stated things in a way that was not precise. Secondly, these reports from the converts outside of Jerusalem became *distorted* by other people. In summary, converts misspoke, and the message was also distorted as they passed it on. This is a classic example of the old telephone game where children sit in a circle, and they whisper a message into each others' ears. And by the time the message goes around the circle, it gets all messed up.

We can learn a lot from this as a church and even as citizens. When a report reaches your ears about someone or some circumstance, it is important to ask the following questions: 1) Did the person actually say XYZ, *OR*, was it repeated to you that a person said XYZ? 2) Are you sure the information you got about a person or situation was communicated with the best possible construction, *OR*, was it distorted in a way to support another agenda or ideology?

Frankly, it is so very important to make sure that information is passed along accurately and in the kindest way. The reason is, not doing so can assassinate a person's reputation and create unnecessary drama. And an assassinated reputation can cost a person a substantial amount of loss, including, but not limited to: job loss, loss of income, jail time, loss of friends, and even death. Character assassination is no small matter. In the court system, we call this slander, defamation, and libel.

Back to the Apostle Paul. Obviously, his reputation was already injured, which ultimately injured the proclamation of the Gospel. And so, it was decided that he should partake in the Jewish rite of purification as a way to make a gesture that he was not urging people to forsake their Jewish heritage. In other words, the actions of Paul were to be done to offset and oppose the false narrative/bad reports about him, as well as a way to restore his reputation.

In the end, and briefly stated, Paul's actions were very short-lived, as we hear in verse 27 that Jews from Asia falsely accused Paul and then stirred up the mob. And the mob then seized Paul and took him out of the temple area to obviously bloody him up (*they did not want to bloody up their temple*). However, Roman troops intervened, and instead of arresting the leaders of the mob, the Romans arrested Paul. Alas, the true instigators went free, and the victim was punished.



