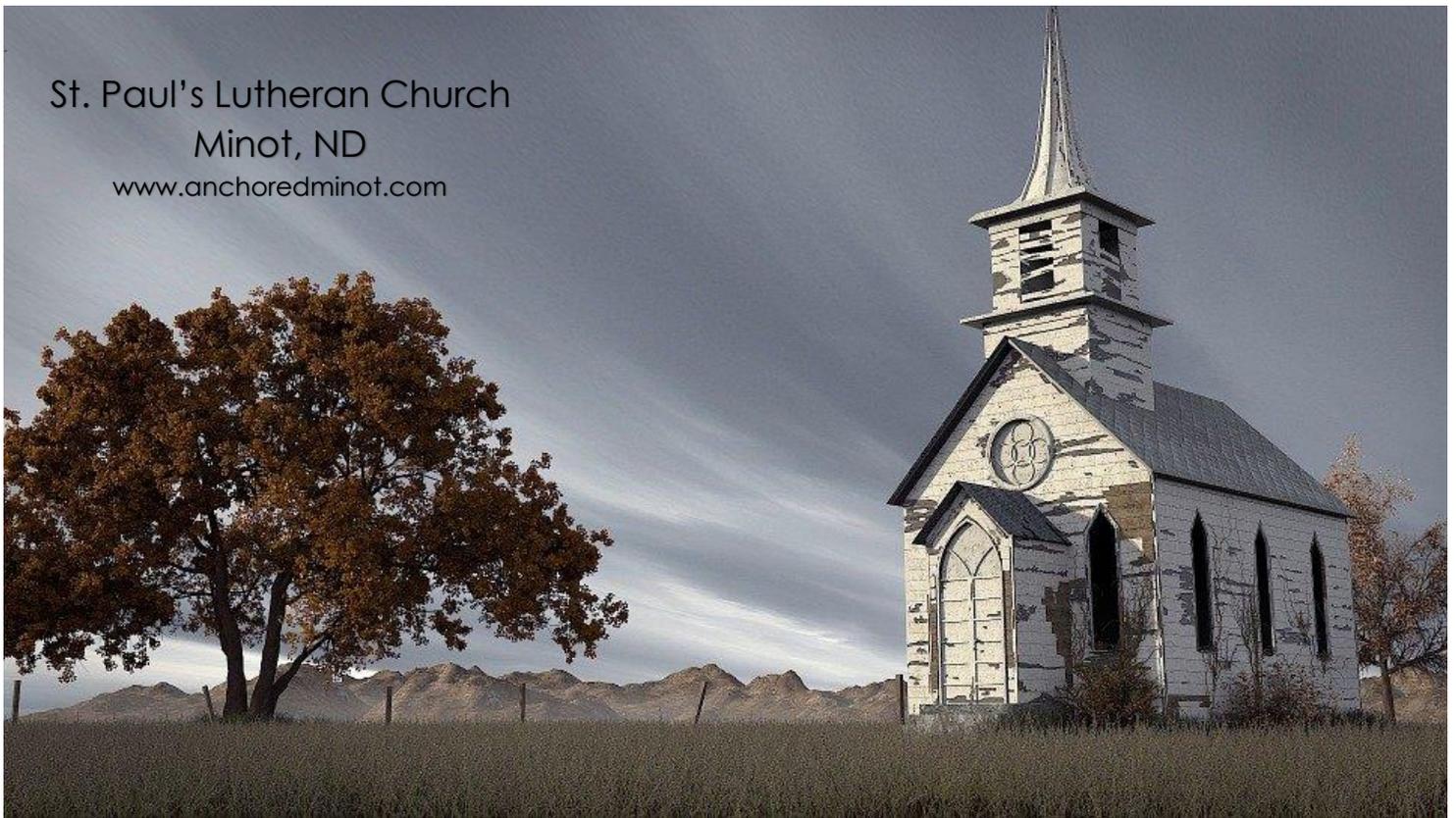


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# The Acts of the Apostles

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

Acts 28:7-31

When Paul finally arrived in Rome, he encountered the local Jewish leaders. The local Jewish leaders had heard about Christianity; however, what they had heard about Christianity was that it was a wicked sect. They heard that it should be detested and abhorred by everyone. Christianity's reputation had been damaged.

Regardless of the negative reputation of Christianity, though, the Jewish leaders were fair and agreed to hear Paul's story regarding Christ. And so, Paul explained from morning to evening with them about Christ from the Old Testament.

Now, it is important to note that Paul did not refer to the books of the New Testament, for not all of them had been written by this time. Instead, Paul persuaded and convinced them on the basis of the Law of Moses and the Prophets. Paul appealed to historical books of the Old Testament for his confession of Christ.

It is important to understand that New Testament Christianity is not a diversion away from the Old Testament, but rather, it is a fulfillment. The Holy Bible is one coherent book that centers on God's narrative of sending Christ to redeem mankind.

And so, the Old Testament looks forward to Christ – it anticipates and prophesies to Christ. And the New Testament? The New Testament writers deliberately connect their writings to the Old Testament. Depending on the criteria used, the number of quotations of the Old Testament in the New Testament ranges from 250-600, and the number of allusions from 650-4,000. Furthermore, the New Testament authors carried forward countless concepts from the Old Testament. They clearly saw the Old Testament as the book of God's promises, which find fulfillment in Christ. Simply stated, the Old and New Testaments are not two books but one. What this means is that every message in the Old Testament must be seen in the light of Christ.

Therefore, one cannot understand the Old Testament without the New Testament, and one cannot really understand Jesus until one knows the Old Testament. (Examine: “Tracing the Promise through the Old Testament.”)

As a way of summary, after Paul confessed Christ in the Old Testament, some were convinced while others refused to believe. This is the nature of what typically happens with Christ. Either a person rests upon Christ as a cornerstone – trusting in His Word. Or, Christ becomes a stumbling block – they trip on him and go their own way.

In the case of Paul, after some were persuaded and others were not, the meeting naturally seemed to break up, and people went on their way. However, before leaving, Paul made a statement to those who rejected the message of Christ. Paul quoted Isaiah 6:9-10. The significance of this passage is quite clear. Paul was essentially saying that those who rejected his confession had hard hearts. His comment was a condemnation.

But does the Lord harden hearts? Yes and no. Technically, God does not harden hearts, but instead, He surrenders the godless pagan to their evil will. He withdraws His Spirit from them. By his withdrawal – hearts are hardened. This is consistent with what Paul says in Romans 1:24-28. In Romans, we read that God’s wrath is displayed not by his action but by his inaction – by His pulling away. Indeed, the harshest wrath a person can receive is when the Lord gives us what our sinful natures want. Terrifying!

Even though some of the Jews rejected Paul’s message, some received it. Furthermore, Paul states that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles. As a result, many Gentiles will hear the message of Christ-crucified.

Indeed, the ministry of the Gospel in Acts was messy, and it was in a very conflictive world.

