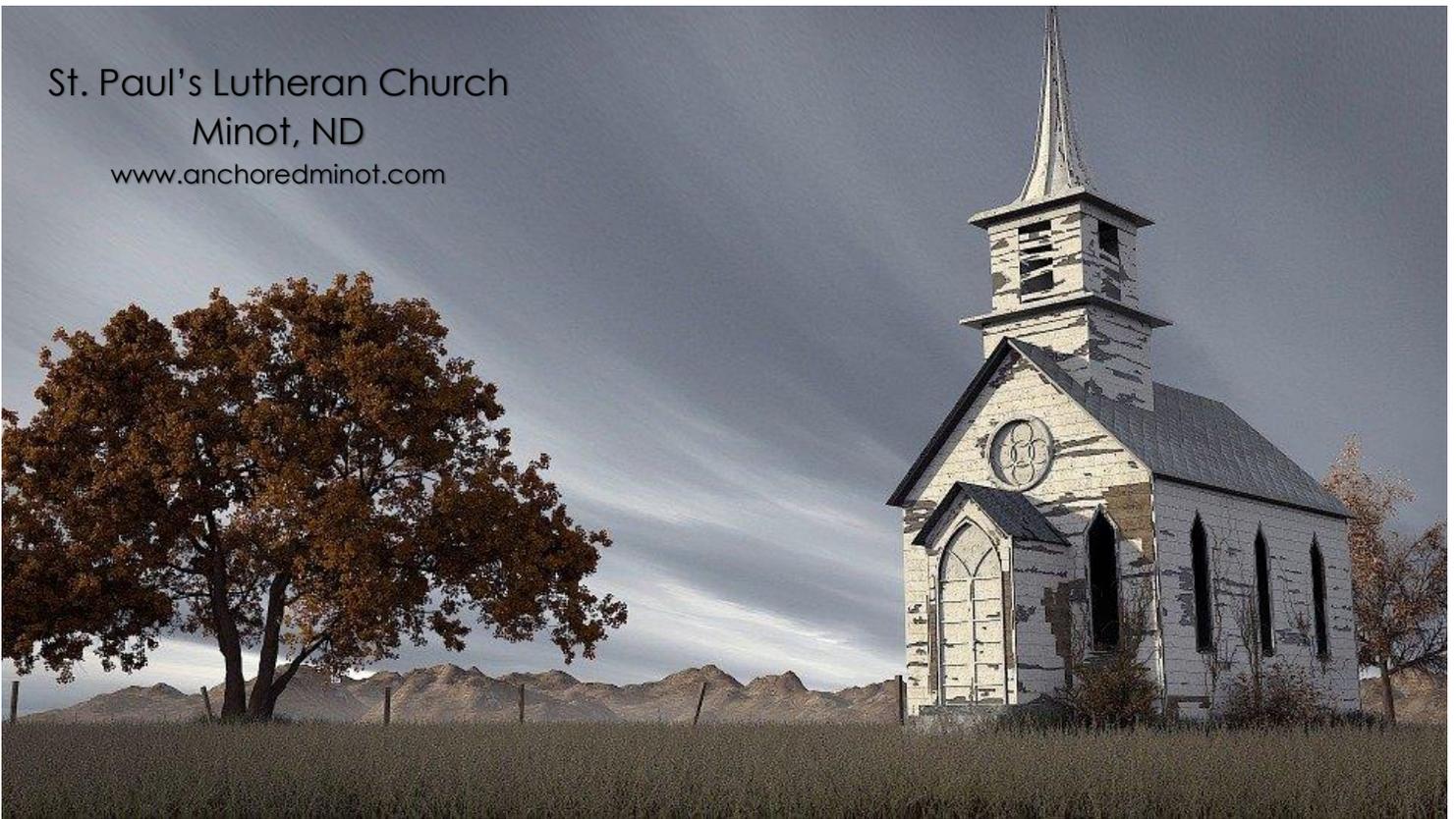


St. Paul's Lutheran Church
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The Acts of the Apostles

The Ministry of the Gospel in a Messy Church & Conflicting World Acts 4:32-5:11

As previously stated, the early church did not adhere to some sort of communistic or socialistic ideology. Communism and socialism involve the 'State' and 'compulsion.' Here in Acts, though, the members of the early church gave spontaneously and freely to others as they had need. In other words, the Christians in the early church did not claim the right of absolute possession, keeping their possessions private and out of reach of others in need. Instead, their possessions and property remained underneath the proper stewards but were made available to those in need. Practically speaking, this would be like a person making his snowblower available to those who did not have a snowblower. A person is 'not' mandated by these scriptures to give their snowblower away to someone who doesn't have a snowblower. However, out of Christian love, they do need to

allow their snowblower to be used by other Christians as they have need. It would be wrong for the Christian to keep their snowblower privately to themselves when another Christian brother or sister can't afford a snowblower and are trapped in their house behind a 7-foot snowdrift.

When it comes to possessions, we must always understand that we are stewards of possessions. A steward is a manager. The money, house, cars, and resources that we have in our possession are to be managed well for the blessing of our families and neighbors. As they say, "we can't take stuff with us to the grave."

As mentioned in previous studies, the early church gave to people as they 'had need.' There is no doubt about it that those in need received money and possession from others due to love. And there is no doubt about it that those in need also received

the ability to use the property and possessions of others as they had need, and then returned the property and possessions when they were finished. Keep in mind, though, that the Christians were not forced to distribute their equity equally, and they are not commanded to give resources to those who are lazy and slothful.

Consider Ecclesiastes chapter 10:18, *“Through sloth, the roof sinks in, and through indolence the house leaks.”* In other words, clay roofs in ancient times needed constant care. A little energy was always needed to keep a house maintained. However, many times roofs leaked. Why? If a handicapped person’s roof leaked and their family/church did nothing – shame on the family and church! However, if a person’s roof leaked due to them being lazy, shame on the lazy person for their laziness. Laziness leads to human destruction. Life under the sun is hard – it takes work and pain to keep going in this life under the sun. Being lazy and playing a victim is not only sinful but destructive to the person.

What do we make of Ananias and Sapphira, though? In a word – hypocrisy. The problem with Ananias and Sapphira is not that they withheld their property (something that they had the absolute right to do) but that they pretended to give all their property to the church while secretly withholding a portion of it for themselves. This was a grievous sin – the first record public sin in the early Church in Acts. They played. They wanted the accolades of being generous while still lining their pockets. Tragically this happens way too often in the church, as well as with non-profits. We see way too often people giving sums of money to help an endeavor, but secretly they are doing it for a large tax-write-off. Or, generosity can often be done for the sake of getting political pull. To the point, Ananias and Sapphira deceive and disturb the church through hypocrisy. What evil to disguise evil with garments of goodness; what evil to pervert good deeds with hidden agendas of darkness. These kinds of stunts grieve the Holy Spirit, hurt the flock, and sow deception. They have no place in the church. (Contrast their actions with Barnabas in 4:36-37).

