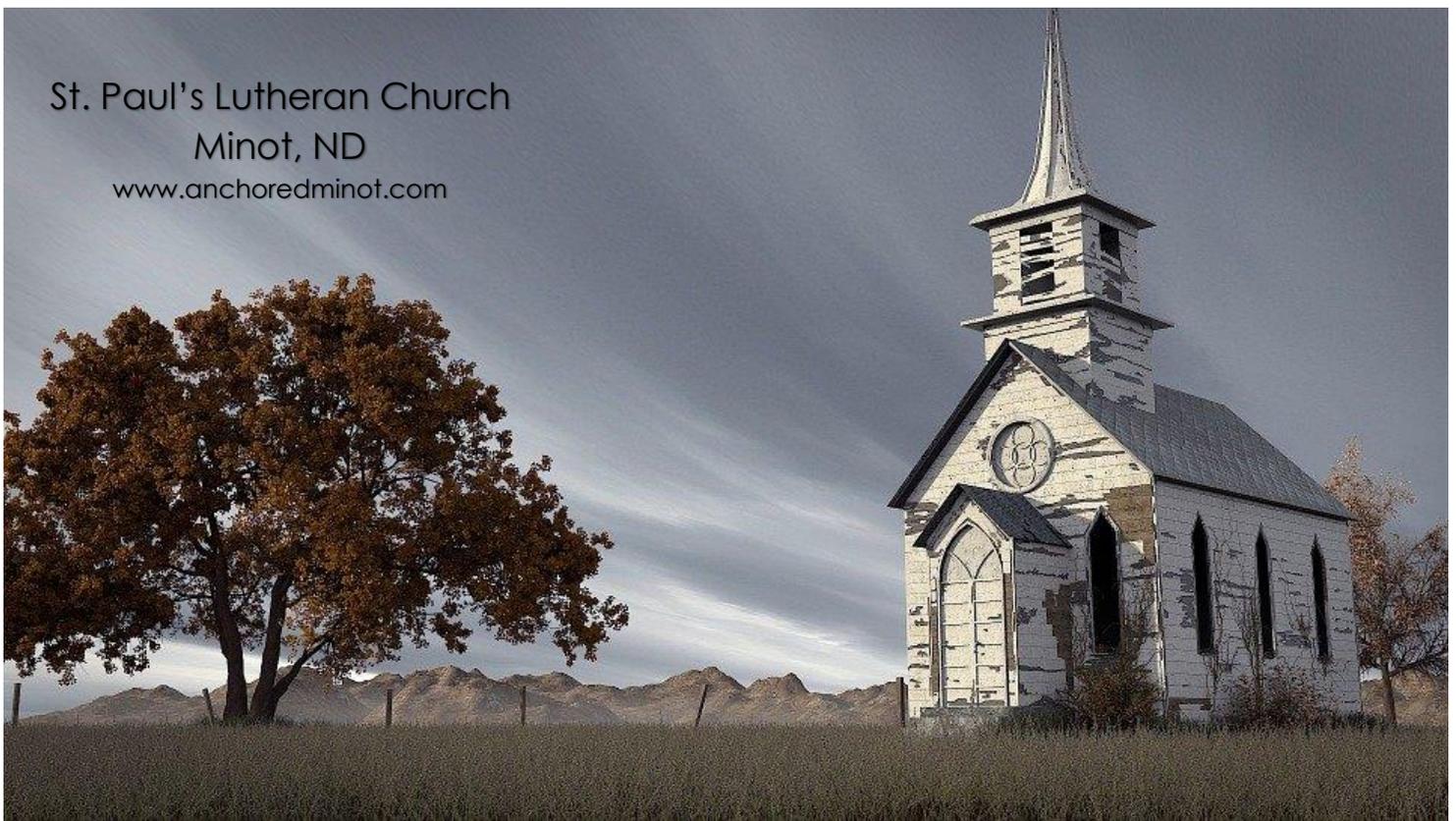


St. Paul's Lutheran Church
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The Acts of the Apostles

The Ministry of the Gospel in a Messy Church & Conflictive World Acts 9:32-10:48

In the end portions of Acts chapter 9, there are two brief stories of Peter. Both of these stories are intended to shift the narrative away from Paul and back to Peter. The two stories are intended to set the stage for the important event that happened to Peter in Acts 10 – the vision.

In Acts 10, we read about a vision that Peter received. A sheet/blanket/bundle was lowered before Peter with every kind of animal, reptile, and bird. Then a voice came: “Go to it, Peter – kill and eat.”

So, what is exactly happening in this text and this sheet full of food? Before we can answer this, we must understand that the Law in the Old Testament, which was applied to the nation of Israel, is found in three different contexts. The political/civil Law is the Law of the left-hand kingdom which is set forth to curb and keep good order. Then there is the ceremonial Law which regulates the religious ethos of Israel. Then there is the moral Law which focuses on mankind’s relationship to God and neighbor. And so,

when we consider these three contexts of the Law, we must understand that portions of the Law are political/civil and apply to Israel as a nation-state. Do they apply to the modern church and modern state? Not necessarily for the North Dakota is not ancient Israel, and ancient Israel is not the church.

But what about the moral Law? It is applied to both non-Christian and Christian alike – and it is for all time and all contexts. The moral Law remains.

Now, how are we to understand the ceremonial/Mosaic regulations? R.C.H. Lenski helps us in stating, “*All the old Mosaic regulations were to make Israel a separate people and prevent their intermingling with the pagans who surrounded them. They all served to preserve Israel, and it treasured promises lest these latter be dissipated and lost. This was done, of course, in the interest of Israel but equally in the interest of the Gentile world. After the fulfillment [of the promises] had been wrought through Christ, its blessings were to go out to all nations. Israel’s separation had served its purpose.*”

As a way of examining this a bit more – and before we can return to Acts 10 – let us examine Leviticus 19:27-28. In these verses, the Israelites are forbidden from trimming the hair on the side of their heads and on their beards. They are also forbidden from putting tattoo marks on their bodies. Now, many naïve and foolish Christian antagonists will pull these very weird passages out and attack Christians, saying, “So, why are you still eating shellfish? Why are you cutting *your* hair? Don’t you follow all the Bible?” Alas, they fail to realize the context! In other words, the reason why the Israelites were forbidden from cutting their hair and getting tattoos was that the pagans did this. And why did the pagans cut their hair and get tattoos? The pagans would mutilate their bodies, cut their hair, and put markings on their bodies as a way of having ancestor worship – they were signs of the cult of the dead. And so, since the Israelites belonged to life, why would they participate in symbols that mixed with the darkness of death? They were separate – they were not a part of the darkness. God wanted to protect them from slipping into darkness because God was working through Israel to bring forth redemption for all.

To the point, the ceremonial/Mosaic regulations were intended to keep Israel special/separate for the sake of preserving the promises of God and bringing forth the promised Messiah. However, in the New Testament, since Christ was and is the fulfillment of the Old Testament Promises, the ceremonial/Mosaic regulations are no longer needed. The distinction between clean and unclean food is no more because the fulfillment of Christ has occurred (See also Matthew 15:11).

And so, the application is quite profound. The distinction of clean and unclean not only does not apply to food, but it is also no longer a valid distinction between Jews and Greeks. Furthermore, Peter does not have the right to label something profane that God has cleansed. And finally, Peter is called to go into the houses of Gentiles and can freely eat non-kosher food with Gentiles! Through the vision, the Lord opened the door to the Gentiles and essentially pushed Peter right through the door.

Questions/Reflections:

- 1) What is the mistake of applying Peter’s vision to the moral Law instead of the ceremonial?
- 2) What is the problem with calling something profane that the Lord does not call profane?
- 3) Is there still a dividing line between good/evil, light/dark? If so, where? (See 1 Corinthians 10)

