

July 24, 2022

8. Adjusting to the Spirit's Ways — Acts 15:1–2, 6–21, NRSV

How do we make decisions on important matters? And what influences our choices? Nearly 20 years ago, when television was still king, I calculated that most of my senior undergraduate students had spent about four years of their lives watching television. Even more pertinent, they had spent nearly one whole year of that time watching television commercials. That seems like pretty heavy “conditioning” for anyone to undergo. Today, thanks to social media, such conditioning has nearly doubled to eight years of a senior undergraduate’s life (that is, nearly one-third of their actual existence—or just about as much time as they should have spent sleeping).

During COVID, I spent more time watching sports programs, including baseball, hockey, and basketball. I noticed how frequently alcohol and car companies sponsored these programs. Suppose that the average youngster starts watching such shows around the age of six. They can potentially be exposed to alcohol and car ads for 12 years before they reach the age of majority. Recently, the province of Ontario legalized online gambling, and its promotional advertisements are now an integral part of most sports programs. If a six-year-old watches an average of three televised games per week, they could be watching some 375 hours of gambling ads before they reach the age of 18.

The decision of the Jerusalem Council not to insist that Gentiles must undergo circumcision and keep the Mosaic Law was based on a combination of Hebrew Scriptures and Christian spirituality. First, Peter reminded the council of his experiences that led him to accept Christian Gentiles as brothers and sisters. Then Paul and Barnabas gave their narrative of signs and wonders worked through the power of God among the Gentiles. Finally, from a more conservative Jewish perspective, James related what was happening among the Gentiles at that time to several Old Testament prophecies (somewhat in the way Peter did at Pentecost). In conclusion, the Jerusalem Council wrote to Gentile believers at Antioch that “it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials” (Acts 15:28).

- How was the process used by the Jerusalem Council appropriate in this situation? What might have gone wrong with a different approach?
- Do you have a formal decision-making process that you regularly use, or do you prefer to “wing it”? Would you make exceptions for certain concerns and issues?
- What roles do prayer and Bible study play in the policies, plans, and programs of your congregation? What would be a good balance between following the leaders (as represented by the Jerusalem Council) and getting feedback from lay members?

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Resources for this session

URLs in the leader guide

An S&L Reproducible of Acts 15:23b-29, www.MennoMedia.org/salt-light-supplements

Members of the Family: Acts 15," Ted & Company,
<https://www.tedandcompany.com/product/members-of-the-family-acts-15/>

Salt & Light Videos are great for leader preparation or introducing each weekly session. **Megan Westra and Benjamin Bixlerr** are the presenters for unit 2. The videos are closed captioned, free, and available on [MennoMedia's YouTube channel](#).