



## Model of Collegial Decision-making from the Early Church

*At the first Great Council of the Church, a conflict was presented, debated, and resolved --- largely through what appears to have been a spirit-led compromise. To set the stage, some Jerusalem-based believers were going out to Gentile churches and requiring that the men be circumcised to signify that they were followers of the Mosaic Law first and followers of Christ second. A church disturbance ensued, and the problem was brought back to church headquarters.*

### *The Council at Jerusalem*

*Acts 15:1-29*

#### *The core of the argument is laid out...*

<sup>1</sup>Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved."

<sup>2</sup>This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.

<sup>3</sup>The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad.

<sup>4</sup>When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and elders, to whom they reported everything God had done through them.

<sup>5</sup>Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses"

#### *The apostle Peter adds an opposing view...*

<sup>6</sup>The apostles and elders met to consider the question.

<sup>7</sup>After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe.

<sup>8</sup>God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us.

<sup>9</sup>He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.

<sup>10</sup>Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear?

<sup>11</sup>No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."

#### *Barnabas and Paul describe their experience...*

<sup>12</sup>The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them.

*James, the  
“senior  
pastor”  
offers a  
compromise...*

<sup>13</sup>When they finished, James spoke up: “Brothers, listen to me.

<sup>14</sup>Simon has described to us how God at first showed his concern by taking from the Gentiles a people for himself.

<sup>15</sup>The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: “

<sup>16</sup>*“After this I will return and rebuild David’s fallen tent.*

*Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it.*

<sup>17</sup>*“That the remnant of men may seek the Lord., and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things*

*<sup>18</sup>that have been known for ages.”*

<sup>19</sup>It is my judgement, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.

<sup>20</sup>Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from the meat of strangled animals and from blood.

<sup>21</sup>For Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath.”

*A decision is  
made...*

<sup>22</sup>Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas (called Barsabbas) and Silas, two men who were leaders among the brothers.

<sup>23</sup>With them they sent the following letter:

The apostles and elders, your brother,

To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia:

Greetings.

<sup>24</sup>We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said.

<sup>25</sup>So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul---

<sup>26</sup>men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>27</sup>Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing.

<sup>28</sup>It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements:

<sup>29</sup>You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.

#### **Question for Discussion:**

1. Who made the decision?
2. What is the significance of that for our process?
3. Describe the divine and the human elements of the decision-making process.
4. What is the significance of that as we work together?