

First Baptist Church of Progress Village
Wednesday Bible Study
Acts of the Apostles – Chapter 15
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Key Phrase: Church **RULES**, The ones we need and the ones we don't.

Webster's Dictionary: What is a rule?

Rule (noun)

1a: a prescribed guide for conduct or action

1b: the laws or regulations prescribed by the founder of a religious order for observance by its members

1c: an accepted procedure, custom, or habit

- a usually written order or direction made by a court regulating court practice or the action of parties
- a legal precept or doctrine
- a regulation or bylaw governing procedure or controlling conduct

Rule (verb)

1a: to exert control, direction, or influence on the passions that rule our minds

1b: to exercise control over especially by curbing or restraining

example: rule a fractious horse, ruled his appetites firmly

2a: to exercise authority or power over often harshly or arbitrarily

example: the speaker ruled the legislature with an iron hand

2b: to be preeminent in : dominate

Most of the definitions of rules is about control

I. The misapplication of rules in the early church.

A. Misapplication of rules can cause **confusion**.

Acts 15:1 (KJV) *And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.*

1. Some Jews wanted to exert **traditional** Jewish customs onto Gentile Christians. Remember deception is a device of Satan.

1 Corinthians 14:33 (KJV) *For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.*

Mark 16:15-16 (KJV) *And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*

2. Jesus made clear before he left the only **rule** for salvation.

John 3:16 (KJV) *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

B. Misapplication of rules can create **division**.

Acts 15:2 (KJV) *When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.*

Matthew 22:34-40 (KJV) *But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*

C. Misapplication of rules can **divert** attention from what is **important**.

Acts 15:5 (KJV) *But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.*

D. Misapplication of rules can **alienate** people who need **fellowship**.

Acts 15:6-9 (ASV) *And the apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider of this matter. And when there had been much questioning, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Brethren, ye know that a good while ago God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, who knoweth the heart, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Spirit, even as he did unto us; and he made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith.*

E. Misapplication of rules can **prohibit** believers from spiritual **growth**.

Acts 15:10 (ASV) *Now therefore why make ye trial of God, that ye should put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in like manner as they.*

F. Misapplication of rules can **distract** us from recognizing the glorious work of God in our **testimonies**.

Acts 15:12-13 (ASV) *And all the multitude kept silence; and they hearkened unto Barnabas and Paul rehearsing what signs and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles through them. And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Brethren, hearken unto me:*

II. Proper application of rules in the church

Rules should never harm people or nature and should never be arbitrary

- A. Should have parameters (timeframe, people impacted),
- B. Should have purpose (intended result), and
- C. Should have context (reason required).

Only three written rulesets for a New Testament Church:

- 1. Scripture (Spiritual),
- 2. By laws (Legal), and
- 3. Covenant (Social)

The last two may not under any circumstances conflict with or overrule the first.

A. Scriptural guidance is profitable / helpful to believers in the church.

2 Timothy 3:14-17 (KJV) *But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*

B. Unnecessary rules are unprofitable / unhelpful to believers in the church.

Titus 3:8-9 (KJV) *This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men. But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain.*

“That’s the way we’ve always done it” is **NOT** a RULE, it’s an EXCUSE to make **you** more comfortable at **someone else’s** expense.

II. The benefit of the association of churches.

Acts 15:19-20 (KJV) *Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.*

A. Peter, Paul, Barnabus, James with the guidance of the Holy Spirit write to encourage believers.

Acts 15:22-29 (KJV) *Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren:*

23 And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia:

24 Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment:

25 It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

26 Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

27 We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth.

28 For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things:

B. The association of churches **relieved** burden to the local assemblies by **reassuring** and **reinforcing** Jesus' teachings.

29 That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.

Acts 15:29 (MSG) Be careful not to get involved in activities connected with idols; avoid serving food offensive to Jewish Christians (blood, for instance); and guard the morality of sex and marriage. These guidelines are sufficient to keep relations congenial between us. And God be with you!

C. These were guidelines about protecting the **unity** and fellowship of the people between cultures, not express **prohibitions**.

1 Corinthians 8:7-9 (KJV) Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled. But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.

1 Corinthians 8:12-13 (KJV) But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.

D. Liberty does not mean we have no rules. The ultimate rule is Love **God** and Love **others**.

III. Summary of Paul's 2nd Missionary Journey

5 years AD 50-54 Approximately **3,000** miles

1) Lystra

2) Troas

3) Philippi

4) Thessalonica

5) Berea

6) Athens

7) Corinth

8) Ephesus

Next Week Finish 15, 16, 17, 18:1-22