

## MAIN POINT

*The church has to fight the natural tendency of relying on rules over the freedom of Christ's grace.*

## INTRODUCTION

What are some of the silliest rules you've heard of? (If there is time, use your smartphone to search for silly rules online.)

What were some rules your parents made you follow while growing up? What have been some extra-biblical rules you've been encouraged to follow?

**As Christians, we must be diligent to keep our focus on the main purpose we have—telling others about Jesus. If we aren't careful, our attention can be turned inward, whether that's inward to our Bible study group or to our fellow church members. And if our attention turns inward, we can quickly allow our focus to drift toward rule-keeping, too. After all, keeping rules is like having a score card. We can compare ourselves to others. We have something against which we can measure our "performance." All of a sudden, the attention is on us, and not on the main purpose we have in this life—to know Christ and make Him known. This was a problem that the first-century church faced, too.**

## DISCUSSION

### > READ ACTS 15:1-35.

Why do we find comfort in following rules?

Why might the well-meaning Jews have wanted to impose a set of rules on new believers? If you were one of the Gentiles who heard the rules you were supposed to follow, how would you feel about your new faith?

Paul disagreed sharply with the rule-imposing Jews. What was the main issue as Paul saw it?

Based on these verses, how would you describe Peter's struggle with this issue? How does Paul's teaching in Galatians 2:15-16 show its influence on Peter in this passage?

Knowing Paul's background as a Pharisee himself (Acts 26:5) and Peter's desire to keep the law (Acts 10:14), how would their testimony carry the day?

What is the significance of James's decision and that of the council, in light of Acts 1:8?

Why were the conditions of Acts 15:20 added (see 1 Cor. 8)?

What is the tone of the letter in verses 23-29? What are the main points of the letter? How might the letter have been encouraging to Gentile believers (v. 31)?

## APPLICATION

**How have you been tempted to focus on your good works instead of God's grace? What needs to change this week?**