



John Owen's *Rules for Walking in Fellowship* Introduction and Rules 1-2



- ✧ **Introduction:** John Owen, “*Eshcol: A Cluster of the Fruit of Canaan, brought to the borders for the encouragement of the saints traveling thitherward, with their faces towards Zion, Or, Rules of Direction for the Walking of the Saints in Fellowship According to the Order of the Gospel.*” (See Num.13:23-24).
- ✧ **22 Rules for Walking in Fellowship:** 15 duties for fellowship between members of the congregation and 7 duties of the congregation to their pastor.
- ✧ **Structure and Goal of Class.**



Westminster

Confession 26.2:

“Saints by profession are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification.”

1. How would you define “fellowship”? See Gal.2:9, 1Jn1:7, Acts 2:42

The Foundations of Walking in Fellowship

“There are, Christian reader, certain principles of Church affairs generally agreed to by all men who seek the reformation of the Church and its furtherance in the power of godliness ... [These] are the foundation of this following collection of rules for our walking in the fellowship of the Gospel:

First, That particular congregations, or assemblies of believers, gathered into one body for a participation of the ordinances of Jesus Christ, under officers of their own, are of divine institution.

Secondly, That every faithful believer is bound, by virtue of positive precepts, to join himself to some such single congregation, having the marks by which a true church may be known and discerned.

Thirdly, That every man's own voluntary consent and submission to the ordinances of Christ, in that church to which he is joined, is required for his union with it and fellowship in it.”

2. Owen says these three basic “principles of Church affairs” are the “foundation” of “walking in the fellowship of the Gospel.” Can you put each of them into your own words?
3. Which of these basic principles do you think are most called into question by Christians today? Why do you think that is?

Why we Need these Rules for Walking in Fellowship

“Every day ... I see men for the most part spending their strength and time more in opposing those things wherein others differ from them, than in the practice of those things which they and others agree are most necessary. To recall the minds of men ... from the entanglements of controversies about Church affairs, and to encourage them towards serious, humble performance of those duties which are, by the express command of Jesus Christ, incumbent on them in how they should walk, these are pages designed.”

4. These are Owen's reasons for writing this book. Can you give examples of how you've seen these very issues in your own day?

RULE I – Affectionate, sincere love in all things, without hypocrisy towards one another, like that which Christ bore to His church

Proof-texts for Rule 1:

John 13:34-35; Rom.12:10; 1Pet.1:22.



5. What do these verses teach us about:
 - a. The *source* of our love for fellow-believers?
 - b. The *selflessness* of our love for fellow-believers?
 - c. The *sincerity* of our love for fellow-believers?

Explanation of Rule 1:

“Love is the fountain of all duties towards God and man (Matt.22:37), the substance of all rules that concern the saints, the bond of communion, “the fulfilling of the law,” (Rom.13:8-10), the advancement of the honor of the Lord Jesus, and the glory of the gospel ...

It was common among the heathens to say concerning the early Christians, ‘See how they love one another!’ because of their readiness to lay down their lives for their brethren ... Nothing will make the doctrine of the Lord Jesus more eminent than this mutual, intense, affectionate love amongst His followers; for which He gives them innumerable precepts, exhortations, and motives, but, above all, His own heavenly example ...

May it be plainly affirmed, that if there were no other cause of reformation and walking in fellowship but this one, it would be abundantly enough to give encouragement to undertake it, notwithstanding any oppositions.

Now, this love is a spiritual grace, wrought by the Holy Ghost, (Gal.5:22), in the hearts of believers, (1Pet.1:22), whereby their souls are carried out (1Thes.2:8) to seek the good of the children of God as such (Eph.1:15), uniting their hearts with the object so beloved, and attended with joy, delight, and complacency in their good.”

6. Why does Owen say that “*love is the fountain of all duties towards God and man*”?
7. Explain why a local congregation walking in love is such a powerful witness to the world. Can you think of examples you’ve experienced where this was the case? Can you think of examples where it was *not*?
8. What does such love require, and how is it attainable?

Motivations for Rule 1:

- ☞ The command of God, and nature of the whole law, of which love is the accomplishment, (Lev.19:34; Matt.19:19; Rom.13:9,10)
- ☞ The eternal, peculiar, distinguishing, faithful love of God towards believers, and the goal He aimed at by it: (Ezek.16:8; Deut.7:8, 33:3; Zeph.3:17; Rom.5:8; Eph.1:4).
- ☞ The intense, inexpressible love of Jesus Christ, in his whole humiliation and laying down his life for us, specifically declared to be an example for us (Song 3:10; John 15:13; Eph.5:2).
- ☞ The status of the people between whom this duty is to be exercised: we are (a) Children of one Father (Mal.2:10) (b) Members of one body (1Cor.12:12,13) (c) Partakers of the same hope (Eph.4:4) (d) Objects of the same hatred of the world (1Jn.3:13).
- ☞ The impossibility of performing any other duty without this grace (Gal.5:6; 1Thes.1:3; 1Jn.4:20).
- ☞ The great sin of lack of love, with all its aggravations (Matt.24:12; 1Jn.3:14,15).

"A Church full of love is a Church well built up. I had rather see a Church filled with love a thousand times, than filled with the best, the highest, the most glorious gifts and parts that any men in this world could be partakers of. Could they go beyond and exceed all we aim at or desire - could they 'speak with the tongues of men and angels' - it is ten thousand times more for the glory of God and our own comfort, to be a company of poor saints, who are filled with love, than to be of those with the highest attainments without it." (Owen)

9. Which (if any) of these motivations to love your fellow church members strikes you as most compelling?
10. Which of them do you think is most overlooked in the Church today, and why?
11. Discuss the quotation in the box. Do you agree? Which do you think characterizes Reformed Churches more?

RULE 2 – Continual prayer for the prosperous state of the church, in God's protection towards it

Proof-texts for Rule 2:

Psalms 122:6; Rom. 1:9; Eph. 6:18;

12. What do these verses suggest about:

- ☞ The *content* of your prayers for fellow-believers?
- ☞ The *frequency* of your prayers for fellow-believers?
- ☞ The *opposition* to your prayers for fellow-believers?

Explanation and Motivations for Rule 2:

"Prayer, as it is the great engine whereby to prevail with the Almighty, (Is.45:11), so it is the sure refuge of the saints at all times, both in their own behalf, and also of others. It is a benefit which the poorest believer may bestow, and the greatest potentate has no power to refuse. This is the beaten way of the soul's communion with God, for which the saints have many gracious promises of assistance (Rom.8:26); innumerable precepts for performance, (1Thes.5:17); with great encouragements to the work (Js.1:5); with precious promises of acceptance (Ps.50:15) – by all which, and various other ways, the Lord has abundantly testified His delight in this sacrifice of His people. Now, as the saints are bound to pray for all men, of whatever sort (1Tim.2:1-2) ... so most especially for all saints (Phil.1:4), and peculiarly for those with whom they are in fellowship (Col.4:12) ... He is not worthy of the privileges of the church who continues not in prayer for her. Prayer, then, for the good, prosperity, flourishing, peace, increase, edification, and protection of the church is a duty every day required of all its members."

13. What Biblical encouragements to intercessory prayer does Owen mention? Which would you find personally most persuasive when you don't feel like praying, and why?
14. How does *Epaphras* model this Rule for Christian fellowship (Col.4:12-13)? How does *Jesus* model it? Why are the pastors and elders of the congregation especially responsible for this (Acts 6:4; 20:28)?
15. List some practical ways available to you in this congregation for putting this rule into practice. To what extent are you taking advantage of these? How might you improve in this area of walking in fellowship?

