



John Owen's *Rules for Walking in Fellowship* Rules 3-5



RULE 3 – *Earnest striving and contending, in all lawful ways, by doing and suffering, for the purity of the ordinances, honor, liberty, and privileges of the church, working together against opposers and common adversaries*

Proof texts for Rule 3: Jude 3; Gal.5:1,13; 1Pet.3:15

1. List the verbs in these verses which call Church members to defend the Church. What do they have in common?
2. The “Puritans” got their nickname from their fervent desire to see the Church “purified”. What four things does Owen say we should fight to keep pure in our churches, and how might each of them be threatened in our day?
3. The degree to which we prize something will determine the degree to which we’re willing to sacrifice for it. To what extent are you willing to “do and suffer” for these four elements of Church purity?

Explanation and Motivations for Rule 3:

“The former rule (i.e. continual prayer for the prosperity of the Church) concerned our dealing with God on behalf of the Church; this rule concerns our dealing with men on behalf of the Church. To the right performance of this rule many things are required, for example:

- ☞ *Diligent laboring in the Word, with fervent prayer, to acquaint ourselves with the mind and will of God concerning the way of worship which we profess, and the rules of walking which we desire to practice, so that we may be able to give an account to interested inquirers, and stop the mouths of stubborn opposers. According to our knowledge, such will be our valuation of the ordinances we enjoy.*
- ☞ *Realizing that all the aspersions cast upon, and injuries done to the Church are really Christ’s, and also our own – Christ wounded through the sides of his servants - and if we are His people, though the blow may not fall immediately on us, we still feel the pain.*
- ☞ *Just vindication of the church against insults and false imputations. Who can endure to hear his earthly parents falsely slandered? And shall we then be senseless of reproaches upon her who bears us unto Christ?*
- ☞ *Joint refusal of subjection, and all Gospel opposition, to any persons or things which, contrary or in addition to the Word, under whatever name, do labor for power over the Church, to deprive it of any of those liberties and privileges which it claims as part of the purchase of Christ. To them that would beguile us we are not to give place, no not for an hour.”*

4. Summarize each point in your own words, and where applicable, suggest practical ways you could apply them in your own life and congregation.
5. Read the quote from our Confession of Faith. In the light of Owen’s rules, what is at stake when the Church’s purity is compromised?

Westminster Confession 25:3: *“Unto this catholic visible Church Christ hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life to the end of the world: and doth, by His own presence and Spirit, according to His promise, make them effectual thereunto.”*

RULE 4 – Zealous care and endeavoring for the preservation of unity, both in particular and in general

Proof texts for Rule 4: Phil.2:1-3; 1Cor.1:10; Rom.14:19.

6. According to these passages, what are the *enemies* of Church unity?

Explanation of Rule 4:

“Union is the main aim and most proper fruit of love; neither is any duty of the saints in the Gospel pressed with more earnestness and vehemence of exhortation than this. Now, unity is threefold:

First, Spiritual Unity, by the participation of the same Spirit of grace; communion with the same Christ, who is one Head to all. This we have with all the saints in the world, wherever they are; even with those who have departed and are sitting down in the kingdom of heaven with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Secondly, Ecclesiastical Unity, or church communion in the participation of ordinances, according to the order of the Gospel. This is a fruit and branch of the former. It is opposed to schism, divisions, rents, evil-suspensions, self-practices, causeless differences in judgment in spiritual things concerning the kingdom of Christ. It is opposed to whatever prevents our closeness of affection, oneness of mind, consent to “the form of sound words” (2Tim.1:13), and conformity of our practice to this rule...

Thirdly, Civil Unity, or living in harmony about the things of this life, not contending for them nor about them, but rather every one seeking the welfare of each other. Striving is unseemly for brethren. Why should they contend about the world who shall jointly judge the world?”

7. How is “spiritual unity” a vital basis for the other two?
8. What is meant by “civil unity” and how does this area often lead to divisions in the Church?

Motivations for Rule 4:

- ☞ *The remarkable earnestness of Christ and His apostles in their prayers for, and precepts of, this duty.*
- ☞ *The certain dishonor of the Lord Jesus, scandal to the gospel, ruin to the churches, shame and sorrow to the saints, that accompanies the neglect of it (Gal.5:15).*
- ☞ *The gracious results and sweet heavenly consolation which attend a right observance of this duty.*
- ☞ *The many fearful aggravations which attend the sin of dividing the body of Christ.*
- ☞ *The sad contempt and profaning of ordinances which a lack of this unity has brought upon many churches.*

9. Which of Owen’s motivations do you find most convicting and why?

RULE 5 – Separation from the world and men of the world, with all ways of false worship, so that we clearly become a people dwelling alone, not reckoned among the nations.

Proof texts for Rule 5: John 15:19; 2Cor.6:14-18; Rev.18:4

10. Read the proof texts and answer the following:
- a. What exactly is “the world” that is described in these verses?
 - b. What are the dangers of the Church becoming like the world?



Explanations and Motivations for Rule 5:

“‘Separation’ is not generally well-received in the world, and yet there is a separation suitable to the mind of God. He that will not separate from the world and false worship is separate from Christ.

Now, the separation commanded here is not in respect to our spiritual care for the good of their souls, (Rom.9:3); nor in respect of duties of family relations (1Cor.7:13); nor even in the obligations of love and civil conversation, (1Cor.5:10; 1Thes.4:12); much less in not seeking their good and prosperity, (1Tim.2:1-2), or not communicating good things unto them, (Gal.6:10), or not living profitably and peaceably with them, (Rom.12:18). Rather, it refers to separation from—

- 1. Their manner of walking and lifestyle, (Rom.12:2; Eph.4:17-19);*
- 2. Delightful converse and familiarity where enmity and opposition should be, (Eph.5:3-4,6-8,10-11);*
- 3. Their ways of worship and ordinances of fellowship (Rev.18:4).*

For these three, and similar expressions of the will of God, are most explicit, as the proof-texts above show; and your spiritual profit and edification, also demand it.

Causeless separation from established churches which walk according to the order of the gospel (though perhaps failing in the practice of some things of small concernment), is no small sin; but separation from the sinful practices, and disorderly walkings, and false unwarranted ways of worship in any, is to keep the command of not partaking in other men’s sins. To delight in the company, fellowship, society, and converse of unsavory, disorderly persons, proclaims a spirit not endeared to Christ.”

11. In your own words, what *is* Biblical “separation” and what is it *not*?
12. What examples have you witnessed where this distinction becomes confused?
13. What are some practical ways that fellow Church-members at Southside could help one another in this area?

