



John Owen's
Rules for Walking in Fellowship
Rules 11-13



RULE 11 – *Cheerfully to share the lot and portion of the whole church, in prosperity and affliction, and not to draw back upon any occasion whatsoever.*

Proof texts for Rule 11: Matt.13:20-21; Heb.10:32-39; 2Tim.4:10,16.

1. What is “backsliding”?
2. What sources of backsliding are mentioned in these verses?
3. What role might the local congregation play in preventing backsliding among its membership?

Explanation of Rule 11:

“To backslide from practicing any of Christ’s ways or using any of His ordinances that you are convicted He has instituted, is in no small degree an apostasy from Christ Himself. Apostasy, of whatever degree, is greatly aggravated by its renunciation of a tasted sweetness and goodness from God for transitory things instead. Seldom are backsliders without excuses ... but yet we see, without exception, that such things universally tend to more ungodliness. Every unrecovered step backward from any way of Christ makes a discovery of falseness in the heart, whatever former pretences have been. Those who, from motives of any sort, will look for and embrace excuses for declining from any Gospel duty for things that are seen and temporal, will certainly not lack them when tempted.

The beginnings of great evils are to be resisted. That the neglect of the duty we are discussing – which is always accompanied with a contempt for the communion of saints – has been a main cause of the great dishonor and confusion into which most churches in the world have fallen, has been touched on already. It is a righteous thing with God to allow the sons of men to become vain in their imaginations, in whom neither the love of Christ nor the terror of the Lord can prevail against their fear of man.”

4. What is apostasy?
5. What are its first symptoms?
6. What makes it such an aggravated sin?

Motivations for Rule 11:

“Let this, then, along with the danger and abomination of backsliding, make such an impression on the hearts of the saints, that with full purpose of heart they might cleave unto the Lord, and follow hard after Him in all His ordinances; so that if persecution arise, they may cheerfully follow the Lamb wherever he goes; and, by their close adhering one to another, receive such mutual assistance and support, that their joint prayers may prevail with the goodness of God, and their joint sufferings overcome the wickedness of men. So then, let us be about a close adhering to the congregation in which we walk in fellowship, in all conditions whatsoever, remembering the eminency and excellency of the ordinances enjoyed, the danger of backsliding, and the scandal, confusion, and disorder of the churches by neglect of them.”



7. How is apostasy to be resisted?

**RULE 12 – In church affairs to make no difference of persons,
but to condescend to the humblest persons and services for the use of the brethren.**

Proof texts for Rule 12: Js.2:1-6; Rom.12:16; John 13:12-16

8. What is forbidden, what is commanded, and what is to motivate our obedience?

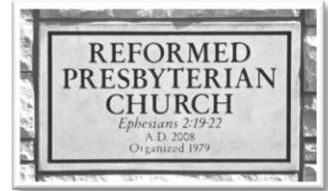
Explanation of Rule 12:

“Where the Lord has not distinguished, neither should we. In Jesus Christ there is neither rich nor poor, high nor low, but a new creature. Generally speaking, ‘God has chosen the poor of this world to confound the mighty’ (1Cor.1:27-28). Experience shows us that not many great, not many wise, not many mighty after the flesh, are partakers of the heavenly calling.

Not that the Gospel of Christ in any way opposes or takes away those many differences and distinctions among the sons of men, caused by power, authority, relations, enjoyment of earthly blessings, gifts, age, or any other eminency whatsoever, according to the institution and appointment of God, along with all that respect, reverence, duty, obedience, and subjection due to persons in those distinctions. Much less does it pull up the ancient bounds of propriety and interest in earthly things; but only declares, that in comparison to things purely spiritual, these outward things, which for the most part happen alike unto all, are of no value or esteem. Men in the church are considered as saints, and not as great or rich. All are equal, all are naked, before God.

Free grace is the only distinguisher, all being brethren in the same family, servants of the same Master, employed about the same work, acted by the same precious faith, enjoying the same purchased privileges, expecting the same recompense of reward and eternal abode. Whence should any difference arise?

Let, then, the greatest account it their greatest honor to perform the meanest necessary service to the meanest of the saints. A community in all spiritual advantages should give equality in spiritual affairs. Not he that is richest, not he that is poorest, but he that is humblest, is accepted before the Lord.”



Motives for Rule 12:

1. Christ’s example; 2. Scripture precepts; 3. God’s not distinguishing of persons; 4. Joint participation of the same common faith, hope, etc; 5. The unprofitableness of all causes of outward differences in the things of God.

9. Owen says the Gospel makes *no* distinctions. What does he mean?
10. Then Owen says the Gospel *does not remove* distinctions. What does he mean?
11. What will be the practical results in a local congregation when its members come to see that “Free grace is the only distinguisher”?
12. “Account it the greatest honor to perform the meanest necessary service to the meanest of the saints.” What are some less glamorous tasks in the life of *this* congregation? How might you enlist your services to help?

**RULE 13 – If any be in distress, persecution, or affliction, the whole church is to be humbled,
and to be earnest in prayer in their behalf.**

Proof texts for Rule 13: Rom.12:15; 1Cor.12:26-27; Acts 12:5,7,12;

13. What is the logic of Paul’s argument for mutual support in trials, illustrated by Peter’s escape?

Explanation and Motivations for Rule 13:

“This duty being in general made out from, and included in, other former rules, we shall speak less to it ... God delights in the fervent prayers of His churches as much as their thankful praises; therefore, He variously calls them, by several providential dispensations, to the performance of these duties. Now, often times, to spare the whole church, He does this by the afflictions of some one or other of the members of the congregation; knowing that the near relation which is between them, by His institution and Spirit, will make their distress common and their prayers closely combined.

Spiritual union is more noble and excellent than natural; and yet in this it would be monstrous if any particular member, or the whole congregation in general, did not both suffer with and care for the distress of every part and member. Such a member is rotten and ready to be cut off, for fear of infecting the body, which does not feel the pains of its associates.

*If, then, any members of the church do lie under the immediate afflicting hand of God or the persecuting rage of man, it is the duty of every fellow-member, and of the church in general, to be aware of it, and to consider themselves so sharers in it as to be instantly before God in earnest prayer, and helpful to them by suitable practical assistance, in order that their spiritual concern in that affliction may be clear, and that because – **First**, The will of God is thereby fulfilled. **Secondly**, The glory of the Gospel is thereby exalted. **Thirdly**, The preservation and deliverance to the whole church is thereby procured. **Fourthly**, Conformity with Christ’s sufferings in His saints is thereby attained. **Fifthly**, An inestimable benefit of church-fellowship is thereby enjoyed.”*

Westminster Confession 26.1

“All saints, that are united to Jesus Christ their Head, by His Spirit, and by faith, have fellowship with Him in His graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory: and, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man.”

14. In your own words, how does God bring a congregation together to keep this rule?

15. What is your duty as a member of this congregation to your fellow members, and what does the author say should motivate you to perform it? (See also Westminster Confession 26.1)

16. How can you personally, practically put this rule into action this week?

