



John Owen's
Rules for Walking in Fellowship
Rules 19-22



RULE 19 – *Reverential estimation of the pastor, with submission unto him for his work's sake.*

Proof texts for Rule 19: 1Thes.5:12-13; 1Tim.5:17; Heb.13:17.

1. What verbs do these texts use to describe the attitude of a congregation to its pastor?
2. What reasons do they give for such a “reverential estimation”?

Explanation and Motivation for Rule 19:

“The respect and estimation required may be civil, but the motive sacred; the honor of the minister is a gospel duty acceptable to God in Christ (1Tim.5:17). Honor and reverence is only due because of a particular eminency: it is given to pastors by virtue of their employment, and is proved by the titles which are given to them in Scripture: They are called ‘angels’ (Rev.1:20; Heb.12:22); ‘bishops’ or ‘overseers’ (Ezek.3:17; Acts 20:28; Tit.1:7); ‘ambassadors’ (2Cor.5:20); ‘stewards’ (1Cor.4:1); ‘men of God’ (1Sam.2:27; 1Tim.6:11); ‘rulers’ (Heb.3:7,17); ‘lights’ (Matt.5:14); ‘salt’ (Matt.5:13); ‘fathers’ (1Cor.4:15), and by many more such-like terms they are described. If under these titles they honor God as they ought, God will also honor them as He has promised; and His people are conscience-bound to esteem them highly for their work's sake. But if any of them prove to be fallen angels, thrown-down stars, negligent bishops, treacherous ambassadors, lordly reveling stewards, tyrannical or foolish rulers, blind guides, unsavory salt, insatiable dogs, the Lord and His people shall abhor them and ‘cut them off in a month’ (Zech.11:8).”

3. What obstacles (legitimate and otherwise) might stand in the way of a congregation observing this rule of fellowship?
4. In light of Rule 19, do you think the common title “reverend” (Rev.) is an appropriate one for a pastor of the Church? Why or why not?
5. How can we reconcile Rule 19 with Jesus’ words in Matt.23:5-12?

RULE 20 – *Maintenance of pastors and their families, by the administration of earthly things suitable to the state and condition of the churches, is required from their flocks.*

Proof texts for Rule 20: 1Tim5:17-18; Gal.6:6-7; 1Cor.9:7,9-11,13-14.

6. What abuses is the Apostle Paul responding to in these texts? What lines of argument does he use against them? Why is the pastor’s salary often such a touchy subject?

Explanation of Rule 20:

“It is a promise to the church under the Gospel, that “kings should be her nursing fathers, and queens her nursing mothers” (Is.49:23). To such it belongs principally to provide food and protection for those committed to them. The churches in many ages have enjoyed the fruit of this promise; laws by supreme and kingly power have been enacted, giving portions and granting privileges to churches and their pastors. It is so in many places in the days in which we live. On this ground, where equitable and righteous laws have allowed such



economic support to the pastors of churches from those who receive spiritual benefit by their labors in the Gospel, it is thankfully to be accepted and embraced, as a fruit of God's providence for the good of His servants. Besides, our Savior warrants His disciples to take and eat of their things, by their consent, to whomever the word is preached (Luke 10:8). But it is not always thus; these things may sometimes fail. For this reason, the continual care, and frequently the burden, or rather labor of love, in providing for the pastors lies (as it says in the Rule above), upon the churches themselves. They are to do this in such a manner as is suitable to the condition in which they find themselves, and the increase given them by God. This is an obligation for the whole congregation in general, and each member in particular."

7. Owen begins with a scenario foreign to American ears, but applicable in 17th century England and nations today which still retain national established churches. What is this scenario, and discuss the Biblical rationale for it.
8. Do you agree with the parameters Owen suggests for the congregation's support of their pastor? Why or why not?

Motivation for Rule 20:

1. *"God's appointment as in the proof-texts cited above.*
 2. *The necessity of it. How shall he go into warfare if he is troubled about the necessities of this life? They are to "give themselves wholly to the work of the ministry" (1Tim.4:15), so other works will need to be done for them.*
 3. *The fairness of the duty. Our Savior and the Apostles plead it on the grounds of equity and justice, and all kinds of laws and rules of righteousness, among all sorts of men in Matt.10:9-10 and 1Cor.9:10. They call for integrity in the way of proportionate recompense, as with the wages of the laborer. To detain these is a crying sin (Js.5:4-5), the wretched endeavors of men of corrupt minds who would rob and spoil them of all that by the providence of God rightly belongs to them."*
9. How might the author's motivations to pay the pastor a salary imply harm to the congregation that falls short of this duty?
 10. How might this rule be abused by pastors?

RULE 21 – Adhering to him and abiding by him in all trials and persecutions for the Word.

Proof texts for Rule 21: 2Tim.4:16; 2Tim.1:16-18

11. Can you think of historical or contemporary examples of pastors facing "trials and persecutions for the Word", and how their congregation stood by them?
12. In what ways is Onesiphorus a good role model for today's church members?

Explanation and Motivation for Rule 21:

"A common cause should be carried on by common assistance. That which concerns all should be supported by all. When persecution arises for the Word's sake, generally it begins with the leaders (1Pet.4:17-18). The common way to scatter the sheep is by striking the shepherds (Zech.13:7-8). It is for the church's sake he is

reviled and persecuted (2Tim.2:10, Col.1:24); and, therefore, it is the church's duty to share with him and help to bear his burden. All the fault in scattering congregations has not been in ministers; the people did not stand by them in their trial. May the Lord not lay it to their charge! The captain is betrayed, and forced to poor conditions with his enemy, but when he presses ahead, with the assurance of being followed by his soldiers, instead he looks back in the face of danger, and finds they've all run away! In England, usually, no sooner had persecution laid hold of a minister, but the people willingly received another in his place, perhaps a wolf instead of a shepherd. Should a wife forsake her husband because he has come into trouble for her sake? When it is incumbent upon a church member in such a situation to perform a known duty, is the crime of a backslider in spiritual things any less serious? Whilst a pastor lives, if he suffers for the truth, the church cannot desert him, nor cease the performance of all required duties, without horrid contempt of the ordinances of Jesus Christ. This is a burden that is often laid on the shoulders of ministers, that for no cause whatsoever they must leave their charge, when those that lay the burden on them will often freely leave them and their ministry without any cause at all."



13. What Satanic strategy does Owen explain to us? How might a congregation thwart this strategy?
14. Explain the vivid metaphors and arguments used to describe the sin of abandoning the pastor in his hour of trial. How might a congregation be guilty of this in subtle ways when there is no overt persecution in the land?

RULE 22 – *Gathering together as a congregation when he has appointed, along with their families.*

Proof text for Rule 22: Acts 14:27

15. The Church was gathered when the Apostles summoned an assembly. Why do the elders “summon the congregation”, and how important is it to be at Church “whenever the doors are open?”¹

Conclusion of the Work:

“These are some of the rules concerning the church's duty towards him or them that are set over it in the Lord, by all means giving them encouragement in the work, and saying also to them, ‘Take heed to the ministry you have received in the Lord, that you fulfill it’ (Col.4:17). That which concerns the other officers of the Church may easily be deduced from these rules by analogy and proportion.

And so this concludes the rules required from those who have obtained grace, and which adorn their profession, to walk together in fellowship, according to the rule of the Gospel.”

16. Which rules (or subjects addressed in them) have you found most challenging in thus study? Which do you think this congregation most needs to work on?
17. Commit to pray regularly for your congregation and its pastors, that God might enable you to reflect His glory before a watching world!

¹ Owen provides no explanation or motivation for Rule 22.

