

Rules for Walking in Fellowship (John Owen)

READ Part 1 - Pastor and People

DISCUSS

1. God has delegated authority to his ministers to be his stewards. In this authority they preach his Word and administer his ordinances. (a) Do you consciously respect the authority of God in what your pastor preaches? What about the sacraments? (b) Look at the motivations Owen provides. Which of them do you find the most compelling to help you attend to your pastor's ministry? (Chapter 1).
2. In what ways is your pastor exemplary? Do you follow his example in these ways? (Chapter 2).
3. What are some specific things you should pray about when you pray for your pastor? Why is it so vitally important to pray for these things? (Chapter 3).
4. What does the pastor's work involve? Why is this a reason to respect him? (Chapter 4).
5. How does your pastor get paid? Does he get a fair wage? (Chapter 5).
6. Is your pastor experiencing (or at risk of experiencing) persecution for the sake of the gospel? (Alternatively, can you identify what sacrifices your pastor has made or is making for the sake of pastoring your congregation?) How has your congregation supported him in these difficulties? (Chapter 6).
7. What proportion of the services do you attend? Is this about the same as the other members of your congregation? How does turning up for worship demonstrate and strengthen your fellowship with your pastor? (Chapter 7).

READ Part 2 -Duties to One Another

8. Owen makes lack and loss of love amongst Christians a cause for reformation. Is anything more important than love among believers? What are the obstacles to overcome? How do we make it clear within congregational life that love is practical not just verbal? (Chapter 8).
9. Owen says it is a daily duty to pray for 'the good, prosperity, flourishing, peace, increase, edification, and protection of the church.' What specific requests could you make to the Lord for your congregation? (Chapter 9).
10. How do loving Christ and loving His Church go together? How closely do you identify with the church of Christ? Of the three ways Owen suggests of standing up for the church, which are you currently comfortable with doing, and which do you need to pay more attention to? (Chapter 10).
11. What are the three manifestations of unity? What are some reasons why we should prioritise unity? What practical steps can we take to preserve unity? How does Owen show that prevention of disunity is better than cure? (Chapter 11).
12. What is meant by separation from the world? What does separation from the world not mean? What are the dangers of failing to separate from the world in the right way? (Chapter 12).

- “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”

13. Not everyone is called to preach or pastor. But anyone can help to build up another believer. How intentional are you about involving the Lord in your conversations with other believers? Do your topics of conversation reflect your care for the souls of your brothers and sisters in Christ? (Chapter 13).
14. How do you respond to the faults and failings of believers? Does your response make you a partner in their wrong, or will it help them? (Chapter 14).
15. Some people respond to the needs and burdens of others with embarrassment and awkwardness, as if they are barriers to fellowship instead of an opportunity for fellowship. What is the attitude of your congregation towards the burdens that its members are struggling with at the moment? How do we actively bear the burdens of others in a way that goes beyond superficial platitudes? (Chapter 15).
16. What spare resources do you have (money, skills, etc) that other believers may need? (Chapter 16).
17. Would you notice if someone was spreading false teaching in your congregation? What would you do in this situation in the interests of fellowship? (Chapter 17).
18. Now that we have benefited from Christ’s ordinances (including preaching and the sacraments), it would be backsliding to drift away from keeping them. How does fellowship suffer when we succumb to pressures to backslide such as the lure of social success or the threat of public disapproval? (Chapter 18).
19. Members of Christ’s body have different roles and callings corresponding to their strengths and gifts. How then should these differences impact on the manner and fellowship we have with each other? (Chapter 19).
20. God sometimes spares the whole church from an affliction but sends that affliction to just one of the members. Yet this one is a member of the whole. Why is humble prayer from the whole church an appropriate response to the affliction of one member? (Chapter 20)
21. Look at Owen’s description of ‘fraternal admonition.’ What are the prerequisites for speaking to someone in this way, and how should it be done? Can you think of a time when you were involved in this form of fellowship, either by challenging another believer or being challenged yourself? What features of this incident made it a helpful, healing encounter instead of a recipe for strife and contention? (Chapter 21)
22. Holy hearts and holy lives. What is (a) the beauty and (b) the value of holiness in the Lord’s people? How is the holiness of church members an essential part of the congregation’s evangelistic activities? (Chapter 22).

“Most (if not all) of them ought to be the constant practice of all Christians in their daily lives”