

The Worship and Work of Church Membership

Duties of Fellowship in the Local Church

Series Review

As recipients of mercy in the gospel (Rom 1-11), the saints gladly give themselves to the Lord in worship as a living sacrifice (Rom 12-16). This worship is guided and directed by Scripture, and the Lord has graciously ordered his household with specific responsibilities to be carried out in the local church. These “duties of fellowship” as described by John Owen are to be carried out with joy and thanksgiving for the gospel.

Coming out of the Protestant Reformation, it has been the historic practice of churches to summarize the biblical responsibilities of church membership in *church covenants*, similar to how churches summarize biblical doctrine in *statements of faith*. A *statement of faith* is focused on what a church believes and teaches, while a *church covenant* is focused on how a church is to love one another.

We believe that summarizing our ethical obligations toward one another in a *church covenant* would be helpful for discipleship at OBC as we share life together in the local church. For more on this, we invite you to scan the QR code and listen to past lessons in the OBC media library on our website or app.



Schedule	
Feb 26	Series Introduction: A History of Church Covenants
Mar 12	The Duties of Assembly and Identification: Worship, Baptism, and the Lord’s Table
Mar 19	The Duties of Members to Elders
Mar 26	The Duties of Members to Members
Apr 16	The Duty of Guarding Church Doctrine
Apr 23	The Duties of Guarding the Unity and Holiness of the Church
Apr 30	The Duty of Partnership in the Gospel

Projected Timeline

February—April	Sunday School
May	Present draft covenant at the members’ meeting.
June—August	Collaborative revision and discussion with church membership.
September	Ratify at the members’ meeting.

Recommended Reading

- *The Duties of Christian Fellowship* by John Owen
- *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- *Devoted to God’s Church: Core Values for Fellowship* by Sinclair Ferguson
- *Caring for One Another* by Ed Welch
- *31 Ways to Be a “One-Another” Christian: Loving Others with the Love of Jesus* by Stuart Scott

The Duty of Guarding the Holiness and Unity of the Church

Believers are to walk in unity and holiness with one another, and these are intertwined (1 Jn 1:7). When sin interrupts fellowship and breaks unity, we are to call one another to holiness and reconciliation. When one repents, forgiveness restores fellowship and unity with one another.

Types of Unity inside the Church

1. Spiritual Unity – Adopted by the Father, United to the Son, Indwelt by the Spirit
2. Ecclesial Unity – Unity in Church Doctrine
3. Relational Unity – Fellowship Maintained by Grace

John Owen on preserving unity in the local church:

“Labor, by prayer and faith, to have your hearts and spirits thoroughly seasoned with affectionate love. Carefully observe, in yourselves or others, the first beginnings of strife; which are as the letting out of water, and, if not prevented, will make a breach like the sea. Diligently apply yourselves to the removal of the first appearance of divisions; and in case of not prevailing, to consult the church. Strike daily at the root of all dissension, by laboring for universal conformity to Jesus Christ.”¹

John Owen on breaking fellowship with the local church:

“Causeless separation from established churches, walking 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 walking, and separation from false unwarranted ways of worship . . . is to obey the precept of not partaking in other men's sins.”²

1. Walk in Unity

Phil 2:1-3; Eph 4:3-4; 1 Cor 1:10; 2 Cor 13:11; Rom 14:19; 15:5; 1 Cor 6:5-7; Acts 4:32

2. Walk in Holiness

Ps 24:3-4; Matt 5:16, 20; Matt 21:19; 2 Cor 7:1; 2 Tim 2:19; Titus 2:11-12, 14; 1 Pet 3:1-2; Heb 12:14; Eph 5:15-16

3. Call One Another to Holiness

Matt 18:15-17; 1 Thess 5:14; Heb 3:12-13; Heb 10:24-25; 12:13, 15-16; Lev 19:17; 2 Thess 3:15; Rom 15:14; James 5:19-20; Prov 29:1

4. Forgive One Another

Eph 4:32; Matt 18:21-22; Mark 11:25-26; Rom 14:3-4; 15:1-2; 1 Cor 13:4-7; Gal 6:1; Col 3:12-14

¹ <https://www.monergism.com/duties-christians-fellowship-ebook>

² <https://www.monergism.com/duties-christians-fellowship-ebook>

An Excerpt from *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Reproof is unavoidable. God's Word demands it when a brother falls into open sin. The practice of discipline in the congregation begins in the smallest circles. Where defection from God's Word in doctrine or life imperils the family fellowship and with it the whole congregation, the word of admonition and rebuke must be ventured.

Nothing can be more cruel than the tenderness that consigns another to his sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe rebuke that calls a brother back from the path of sin

Ultimately, we have no charge but to serve our brother, never to set ourselves above him, and we serve him even when we must speak the judging and dividing Word of God to him, even when, in obedience to God, we must break off fellowship with him.

We must know that it is not our human love which makes us loyal to the other person, but God's love which breaks its way through to him only through judgment. Just because God's Word judges, it serves the person. He who accepts the ministry of God's judgment is helped.

This is the point where the limitations of all human action toward our brother become apparent: "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him (for the redemption of their life is costly, and it faileth forever)" (Ps. 49.7-8 A.R.V.). This renunciation of our own ability is precisely the prerequisite and the sanction for the redeeming help that only the Word of God can give to the brother.

Our brother's ways are not in our hands; we cannot hold together what is breaking; we cannot keep life in what is determined to die. But God binds elements together in the breaking, creates community in the separation, grants grace through judgment.

He has put his Word in our mouth. He wants it to be spoken through us. If we hinder his Word, the blood of the sinning brother will be upon us. If we carry out his Word, God will save our brother through us. 'He which converteth the sinner from the error of his ways shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins' (James 5.20).³

³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (Harper Collins: NY, 1954), 107-108.

An Excerpt from *Duties of Christian Fellowship* by John Owen

Whether you consider the glory of God and the gospel therein concerned, or the bonds of relation, with those mutual endearments wherein they stand engaged, and obligations that are upon them for the general good and spiritual edification one of another, this duty is of eminent necessity and usefulness. Not that we should curiously pry into one another's failings, much less maliciously search into doubtful unknown things, for the trouble or disparagement of our brethren, both which are contrary to that love which "thinketh no evil," but "hides a multitude of sins;" but only, out of a sense of the glory of God, the honor of the gospel, and care of each other's souls, we are to observe their walking, that what is exemplary therein may be followed, what fails may be directed, what is amiss may be reprov'd, that in all things God may be glorified and Christ exalted.

This, then, we assert as the duty of every church member towards them with whom he walks in fellowship, to admonish any from the word whom he perceives not walking in any thing with a right foot, as becometh the gospel; thereby to recover his soul to the right way. That much caution and wisdom, tenderness and moderation, is required in the persons performing this duty, for want whereof it often degenerates from a peaceable remedy of evil into fuel for strife and debate, is granted.

Let them, then, who are called to perform this duty diligently consider these things:

1. That in this he transgress not that rule of charity which we have, 1 Cor. 13:7, Gal. 6:2.
2. Let him have peace at home, by an assurance of constant laboring to cast out all beams and motes from his own eye, Matt. 7:5.
3. Let him so perform it that it may evidently appear that he hath no other aim but the glory of God and the good of his brother reprov'd, all envy and rejoicing in evil being far away.
4. Let him be sure to draw his admonitions from the word, that the authority of God may appear therein, and without the word let him not presume to speak.
5. Let all circumstances attending time, place, persons, and the like, be duly weigh'd, that all provocation in the least manner may be fully avoided.
6. Let it be considered as a command whereunto Christ has special regard.
7. Let him carefully distinguish between personal injuries unto himself,—whose mention must have far more of forgiveness than reproof,—and other offences tending to public scandal.
8. Lastly, let self-examination concerning the same or the like miscarriage always accompany the brotherly admonition.

These and the like things being duly weigh'd, let every brother, with Christian courage, admonish from the word every one whom he judges to walk disorderly in any particular whatsoever, not to suffer sin upon him, being ready to receive content and satisfaction upon just defense, or promised amendment; and without this, in case of just offence, a man cannot be freed from the guilt of other men's sins.

Let also the person admonished, with all Christian patience, accept of the admonition, without any more regret of spirit than he would have against him who should break the weapon wherewith he was in danger to be slain.⁴

⁴ <https://www.monergism.com/duties-christians-fellowship-ebook>

Responding Biblically to Offenses

There has been an offense. Have you been sinned against?
 By what standard have you been offended (violation of Scripture or unmet expectations)?

