

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 Church Doctrine

The church is a pillar and buttress of the truth (1 Tim 3:14-4:11).

While shepherds have a specific responsibility to protect the flock from wolves (Acts 20:28-31), the entire congregation bears the responsibility to stand firm in the gospel (Gal 1:1-9; 1 Pet 5:12).

In *Duties of Christian Fellowship*, John Owen writes: “Believers ought to note watchfully and avoid carefully all causes and causers of divisions; they are particularly to shun seducers, false teachers, and those who spread heresies and errors that are contrary to the word of God.”¹

Practical Ways to Guard Church Doctrine²

1. Know the truth and continue growing in sound doctrine (2 Tim 1:13; Heb 5:14).
2. Exercise wisdom in curating who you listen to, and test the teaching that you hear (Acts 17:11).
3. Remember the corrupt nature and the marks of those who would harm the church (Matt 7:15; Rom 16:17-18; Matt 24:24; 2 Thess 2:2).
4. Avoid those who have been expelled for divisiveness or false teaching (Titus 3:9-11).
5. Do not receive unknown or self-appointed teachers, but those who have been rightly called and approved by the church (Acts 9:26; 1 Cor 16:3).
6. Put away any interest in novelties, controversies, and all teachings which do not accord with godliness (Titus 3:9; 2 Tim 4:3; 1 Tim 6:3-5).

What should a church member’s relationship to the *Statement of Faith* look like? What about an elder?

What if your convictions change and you find yourself in disagreement with the *Statement of Faith*?

How should you respond if someone speaks or teaches contrary to the *Statement of Faith*?

- Is this a sheep or a wolf?
- Is this an Apollos situation (Acts 18:24-27) or a Paul and Peter situation (Galatians 2:11-14)?

What is theological triage?³

1. First-Order Doctrines
2. Second-Order Doctrines
3. Third-Order Doctrines

¹ John Owen, *Duties of Christian Fellowship* (Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburg, 2017), 68.

² Adapted from rule ten in Owen’s *Duties of Christian Fellowship*

³ <https://albertmohler.com/2005/07/12/a-call-for-theological-triage-and-christian-maturity>