

Vying for Unity in Divided Times

Start with Heaven's View of the Individual you Disagree With

- That person is not a strawman for an argument, but an image bearer.
 - They are an individual soul – a human of dignity, and incomparable value and worth.
- Christ shed his blood to save them, and if they are a Christian,
 - Then we are to be especially good to the household – you share eternity together!
- Words matter. Our words carry weight beyond this life. God hears.

*If your need to say it becomes more important to you,
than the person you're saying it to, then don't say it.*

Where Does this Disagreement Land in Respect to Theological Triage?

Tier One - Salvation essentials.

Gospel matters – the dying, the rising, the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Tier Two - Non-essentials for salvation.

Doctrinal matters which are important to us as a local church and part of our doctrinal distinctives, but not for us to be insistently dogmatic with other Christians about.

Tier Three - Disputable matters.

Doctrinal matters we may hold personal convictions about, but we are willing to be more “open-handed” regarding other interpretations with other Christians.

Tier Four - Personal opinions and preferences.

Although often presented as doctrinal matters, these are far from anything Biblical.

Rules to Be Observed by Those Who Walk in Fellowship, to Remind Them of Their Mutual Duties toward One Another

From John Owen, 1648

RULE 1 - Loving One Another - Show affectionate, sincere love in all things, without hypocrisy toward one another, like that which Christ showed to His church.

RULE 2 - Praying for the Church - Continually pray for the prosperous state of the church and God's protection toward it.

RULE 3 - Taking a Stand for the Church - Earnestly strive and contend in all lawful ways, by doing and suffering, for the purity of the ordinances, the honor, the liberty, and the privileges of the congregation, and work together against opposers and common adversaries.

RULE 4 - Preserving Unity - Zealously endeavor to preserve unity, both in particular and in general.

RULE 5 - Separating from the World - Separate from the world and men of the world and all forms of false worship, so that you clearly become a people dwelling alone, not reckoned among the nations.

RULE 6 - Engaging in Spiritual Conversation - Frequently engage in edifying spiritual conversation, according to the gifts God has given.



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RULE 7 - Bearing with One Another's Faults - Mutually bear with each other's infirmities, weaknesses, tenderness, and failings in meekness, patience, and pity, and assist those who are in need.

RULE 8 - Bearing One Another's Burdens - Bear each other's burdens by tenderly and affectionately participating in your various states and conditions.

RULE 9 - Helping the Poor - Freely contribute and administer material support to those who are truly poor, suitable to their necessities, needs, and afflictions.

RULE 10 - Being Wary of Those Who Divide the Church - Diligently mark and carefully avoid all causes and causers of divisions; especially shun seducers, false teachers, and inventors of heresies and errors, contrary to the form of wholesome words.

RULE 11 - Sharing the Church's Lot, No Matter What - Cheerfully share the lot and portion of the whole church, in prosperity and affliction, and do not draw back on any occasion whatsoever.

RULE 12 - Associating with the Lowly - In church affairs, make no difference of persons, but condescend to the humblest persons and services for the use of the brethren.

RULE 13 - Praying for the Afflicted - Humble yourselves as a whole church and pray earnestly for any who are in distress, persecution, or affliction.

RULE 14 - Keeping Each Other Accountable - Watch vigilantly over each other's lives, mutually admonish in cases of disorderly walking, and render an account to the church if the offending party will not be prevailed upon.

RULE 15 - Being Holy - Walk in all holiness and godliness of life, to the glory of the gospel, edification of the church, and conviction of those who are outside.

Four Directions for Christian Unity

1. Labor, by prayer and faith, to have our hearts and spirits thoroughly seasoned with the affectionate love rule1 requires.
2. Carefully observe, in ourselves or others, the first beginnings of strife, which are as the letting out of water and, if not prevented, will sweep over us like the sea.
3. Zealously apply ourselves to removing the first appearance of divisions, and in cases where we do not prevail, to consult the church.
4. Daily strike at the root of all dissension by laboring for universal conformity to Jesus Christ.

***“Union is the main aim and most proper fruit of love;
no duty of the saints in the gospel is pressed with more earnestness
and vehement exhortation than this.”***

