

God's Rules for Fellowship Discussions



Robert's Rules of Order help Christian meetings be productive and democratic, but maybe discussion rules from the Bible would help Christians develop their love. These rules are offered as a starting point for Bible study for use in existing church meetings.

As with Robert's Rules of Order, it isn't necessary for every participant to know these Scriptures. If a few know them, that will make them available when there is a need.

At the end of these rules, a kind of Christian meeting that may not yet exist, but which needs to exist, is described which is especially in need of God's rules for fellowship discussions.

1. We need rules that keep discussion orderly, productive, sensible and friendly.

Titus 1:10 For there are many unruly [insubordinate, disobedient] and vain [Gr: senseless, or mischievous] talkers and deceivers... 11 Whose mouths must be stopped,

1 Peter 5:5 ...Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility:...

Luke 22:26 But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger;...he that is chief, as he that doth serve.

"Rules" help the "unruly" become productive. "Law is...made...for the lawless", 1 Timothy 1:9.

But it isn't just "the other guy" who is in need. We need help, ourselves, developing our ability to reason with others even when we disagree, in Christian love.

Our culture provides a school for these relationship skills which The Darkness has nearly destroyed: Family. God offers another school of skills able to heal families and other relationships: the 1 Corinthians 14 Fellowship we seek to re-establish. As conflicts arise, we need to continually meditate on the Word of God for solutions.

Jesus established a new measure of authority, which has become the foundation of Western Civilization: service. People choose authority which they judge will best serve them.

Our groups may choose a moderator, or to only have rules and to mutually share the function of moderating, depending on the size and personality of the group. The group needs to make a decision its members can honor.

2. The Bible is our rule book.

Isaiah 1:18 Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; ...

Acts 17:2 And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures,

Luke 2:46 And it came to pass three days after, that they found him in the Temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions: 47 And all that heard him, were astonished [astonished] at his understanding and answers.

We should search the Bible for how to reason together in Christian love, because the Bible, as in no other religion, is where we find Reason and Truth the ultimate weapons against evil, with the sword raised only in self defense.

God begs us to reason together, which was Paul's "manner", or way of presenting the Gospel. It was how Jesus began His ministry at age 12, and it is the manner in which God presents the Four Gospels: out of the 146 situations in which Jesus taught in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, only 20 – 1/7th – were *not* verbal interaction with others. And Jesus never discouraged verbal interaction.

In fact, neither Jesus nor Paul nor anyone else in the Bible are recorded as ever giving an uninterrupted "sermon" which no one could question or clarify. Reasoning is the Bible rule, so the Bible must surely show us how to reason in love.

Secular meetings from courts to legislatures to corporate board meetings to Parent-Teacher Associations have rules that are some adaption of Robert's Rules of Order. Such rules aim for civility and productivity, but not for Christian love. Roberts' introduction says his goal was "a set of rules for conduct at meetings, that allows everyone to be heard and to make decisions without confusion." Which is a goal given in 1 Corinthians 14:40. That is certainly a goal of love. But perhaps people reasoning with each other would *feel* more love if their rules were clearly based on and related to Scripture.

Roberts' contribution certainly merits our consideration as we search the Scriptures. Links to Roberts' as adapted to churches close this article.

3. Whoever speaks needs to let others interact.

1 Corinthians 14:29 Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. 30 If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. 31 For ye may all

prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted.

So when God reveals something to someone else, let him stand to speak, and let the current speaker wrap up his point with no further redundancy and sit down.

This rule summarizes the whole purpose of Robert's Rules of Order.

4. Our forum invites all to challenge, correct, and comfort each other.

1 Corinthians 14:3 But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.

John 14:26 But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

2 Corinthians 1:3 Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; 4 Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

ALL. Seven times in this chapter, "all" are urged to "prophesy". (Verses 1, 5, 12, 24, 26, 31, 30) The general meaning of the word is to bring a message from God. Verse 3 explains the sense of the word meant in this chapter.

CHALLENGE. "Edification" means "architecture", "help them grow", "upbuilding", and "building up", according to Strong's and the GW, ISV, and TLV translations. To "challenge" captures its sense.

The Greek word is οικοδομη. It combines οικια, meaning house, and δομα, meaning gift.

CORRECT. "Exhortation", KJV, ranges from comfort to encouragement to "persuasive discourse" to "stirring address" to "admonishment" (correction), to "powerful hortatory discourse" (ie. a "fire and brimstone" sermon) according to Thayer's Greek dictionary. These phrases describe correction that inspires, persuades, and comforts as well as warns. The Greek word is παρακλησις.

Yet in this American generation, "correct" is in disrepute, either the noun or the verb, so the following translations fall back to the politically correct "encouragement": Berean, CEV, Darby, ERV, GNB, GW, Holman, ISV, NET, NIV, NLT, TS2009, and Weymouth translations.

ASV, Geneva, JUB, NAB, Webster, WEB and YLT stick to the rather obscure "exhortation".

COMFORT. The "comfort" we are called to give each other is almost the same word as the Holy Ghost which Jesus sent us. The former is the feminine gender of the word, and the latter is the masculine gender.

The particular comfort described in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 is the comfort of martyrs who are suffering for their faithfulness.

5. We should talk about what we are going to DO...

Titus 3:8 This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.

That is, "We don't want empty talk. We await action, and expect results." "Profitable" = "gives results".

"Good works" in this verse is contrasted with "foolish questions" in the next as if they are opposites: "good works" are "profitable", while a lot of empty talk is "unprofitable".

Our faith is not so weak that we are satisfied to merely declare how dark the Darkness is. Our faith is strong enough to plan a very bright Light.

Our courage is not so shallow that we barely dare to *name* the Dragon slaying our family, friends, churches, and nation. Our mission is to *face* it, and *slay* it.

Our trust in the promises of Jesus reaches beyond merely complaining about how high the Mountain of Evil is that destroys all we love, all the way to plotting how to make it jump in the lake.

This is personal. This is not about some sterile idea of "politics" – judging right and wrong for some authority remote from our daily lives. This is about destruction that has touched us personally and hurt those we love.

We have found a cure for our depression and despair for all the evil in the world: heal it! Neutralize it so it can never hurt anyone else, ever again!

We aren't just fighting until Evil leaves *us* alone. Our "revenge" will be total victory over evil, with good.

5b. ...Not about what we can't do anything about, or even document.

Titus 3:9 But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain.

That is, we shouldn't waste time on rumors, theories, or esoteric doctrinal disputes that only raise unanswerable questions and don't lead to action. We have too much faith to stop at talk that goes nowhere. We have enough to strategize for, and expect, results.

6. "Tough love" - criticism difficult to receive – is welcome if it is (a) true, (b) respectful, (c) needed, (d) meek. Talk to people with whom you disagree as respectfully and with as much love as you talk to your own children when they are disagreeable.

*Hebrews 10:24 And let us consider one another to **provoke** unto love and to good works: 25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but **exhorting** [Gr: correcting] one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*

Galatians 6:1 Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

James 5:16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.

Psalms 23:4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Nothing can make criticism so meek as to serve it with confession of one's own like mistakes. Which we can all do, if we remember from Matthew 5 that desire to sin makes us as guilty before God as if we commit sin.

A shepherd's rod is his long heavy stick he uses against predators. His staff, with its hook on the end, is what he uses to pull a straying sheep back to safety.

"Comfort" is indispensable to Christian fellowship where there is any "correction". But not some shallow comfort that fades in proportion to disagreement. The love God calls us to reaches to our enemies.

Few of your enemies can ever hurt you, or cost you, as much as your own children, yet you still love your children. So your enemies should be *easy* to love.

7. Don't stir up division. Get over yourself. Serve your neighbor as yourself. Be honest. Watch your temper. Make yourself useful. Don't let your words tear down, but build up. Be kind. Forgive as Jesus forgave you – forgive as you want God to forgive you.

Philippians 2:3 [Do] nothing in rivalry [Greek: intrigue] or vain-glory, but in humility of mind one another counting more excellent than yourselves— 4 each not to your own look ye, but each also to the things of others. (YLT)

Ephesians 4:25 Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another. 26 Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: 27 Neither give place to the devil. 28 Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may

have to give to him that needeth. 29 Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers....31 Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: 32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

8. "Personal attacks" - clever insults timed to draw attention from the credentials of the message to the sins of the messenger – divide us from our purpose and from each other.

Exodus 32:9 And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: 10 Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation. 11 And Moses besought the LORD his God, and [listed reasons to save Israel].... 14 And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.

Luke 4:41 And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God.... (See also Matthew 8:29, Luke 4:34, Mark 1:34, 3:11, Acts 16:17-18, James 2:19)

What man is so arrogant that he may regard *any* others as not worth listening to because of their sins, when God hears *his* prayers and offers to change history in response?

God listened to Moses and changed history.

Even devils "preach" what many of us would consider "the Gospel", proving *anyone* might say something valuable.

God offers to listen to all of us and change history to the extent our prayers have merit. Jesus listened to Satan in Job 1 and Matthew 4. In Job 1 He even answered Satan's prayer! How *dare* any of us not listen to each other because of our mere mutual guilt!

Certainly there is such a thing as trust earned. Honest researchers whose work we have verified in the past merit less suspicion and scrutiny in the future.

But we should trust no man so completely that we require of him *no* evidence or reasoning. Nor should we *mistrust* any man so completely that we will *not even listen* to his reasoning or evidence.

Although we may be justified in limiting the time we commit to listening to people with a poor reliability track record, when we do listen we need to weigh their words on their merits, not on their source.

If ever there was a messenger questionable enough to make his message not worth listening to, and a man so righteous that he shouldn't have had to listen to any sinner, it

was a tyrant telling the most righteous king in all Israel's history that the tyrant had a message for the king from God!

That's what the pagan foreign dictator, Pharaoh-Necho, a man normally not to be trusted according to Isaiah 30:1-3, told the most righteous king of Israel, Josiah, 2 Kings 23:25. Josiah died because he would not listen to Pharaoh-Necho's warning, through whom God had chosen, that time, to speak! 2 Chronicles 35:20-25. This is a sober warning to us not to dismiss *anyone* as not worth listening to.

But is there a Biblical argument saying we *shouldn't* listen to people whom we can successfully charge with sin? How about the rest of that verse quoted above: *Luke 4:41 And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God. And he rebuking them suffered them not to speak: for they knew that he was Christ.*

Why did Jesus silence their "preaching" of what most of us would consider the "Gospel"? Bible commentaries are divided. Patrick Gill says "for he needed not their testimony, nor did he choose to be made known by them". If Gill is right, that would be an argument for "personal attacks"!

Geneva agrees with Gill: "Satan, who is a continual enemy of the truth, ought not to be heard, not even when he speaks the truth."

But Albert Barnes speculates that it was the timing: "Jesus was not desirous at that time that that should be publicly known, or that his name should be blazoned abroad. The time had not come when he wished it to be promulgated that he was the Messiah..."

Matthew Henry offers a rather strange theory that the devils were tortured into their confessions – "they said it crying with rage and indignation; it was a confession upon the rack, and therefore was not admitted in evidence." (The "rack" was a device of torture that stretched people to death.) A more credible theory was "that it might appear, beyond all contradiction, that he had obtained a conquest over them, and not made a compact with them."

But I notice that the verses *don't say* Jesus stopped them from acknowledging Him. They say the devils *did* acknowledge Him! *Then* they say Jesus silenced them. Meaning, apparently, from blathering on indefinitely – Jesus wanted them out of there, and the people delivered.

Personal attacks find no justification here.

10. When claims contradict Scripture, Christians needn't censor, get mad, be rude – or accept them.

Titus 1:14 Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth.

"Turn from the truth" means both because such claims are untrue, and because even taking time for them turns us away from the time we need for issues we can document.

11. Don't avoid Truth because of its cost.

Titus 1:11 Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching

things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's [Gr: money] sake.

When dogged positions are taken that seem more costly than credible, maybe we need less talk and more courage.

12. A confusing message should be interrupted with a request to clarify, to keep the message from being interrupted by confusion.

1 Corinthians 14:8 For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? 9 So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air. Luke 1:34 Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?...45 And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.

Not all interruption is rude. Some interruption prevents interruption, and is for the benefit of the speaker.

13. A speaker repeating himself should finish his point and sit down.

Matthew 6:7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

Ecclesiastes 5:1 Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. 2 Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few. 3 For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words.

14. Back up your claims.

John 10:34 Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? 35 If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; 36 Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?

Acts 17:28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.

Matthew 23:31 Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets.

Jesus and New Testament writers cited the Old Testament for authority 63 times, beginning “It is written”. If even *they* accepted the need to back up what they said, so should we! [More [Scripture](#)]

When you can, back up your claims with sources respected by the people you are trying to persuade, as Paul did on Mars’ Hill.

The strongest evidence that someone is guilty is his own words, whether or not he intended to admit guilt, as Jesus demonstrated with the Pharisees’ admission that they were descended from the murderers of prophets.

15. Skepticism helps when it identifies assumptions that need to be checked, if it comes with a Berean commitment to research facts, and if it is equally vigilant to check one’s own prejudices. Suspicion without this, suspicious of evidence, stoked for its entertainment value, starts wars, keeps America divided, unable to heal, and resistant to revival, keeping out salvation and the Kingdom of God.

Acts 17:11 These [Bereans] were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

Proverbs 18:13 He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.

Revelation 12:10 And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.

Titus 2:3 The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things;

Proverbs 18:13, applied to discussion, says it is a “folly and a shame” for a group to adopt a position on a controversy before it has heard all the evidence for and against from concerned members.

And even then, all positions must be regarded as tentative enough to leave open the door for future evidence, since we are human and are hardly omniscient.

Also: an accusation against someone must not be believed before his defense has been patiently and fairly heard.

A new kind of Christian meeting especially in need of God’s rules

What if Christians aren’t satisfied to *preach* about evil, and want to go outside the Matthew 5:13-17 bushel and *slay* evil with God’s Sword of Truth and Light?

In war, either physical or spiritual, individuals can be amazing “watchmen”, starting whole movements! But *wars are won by groups*, not individuals.

Before *groups* can “march” together, their members have to agree where to march. They have to agree who, or what, the enemy is. That requires discussion.

But American churches have so little faith in their members to be able to reason with each other in love when they disagree, that they censor discussion that smells the least “controversial” (meaning, so important that disagreement is upsetting) and limit discussion to topics that stir little passion. That leaves little *need* for God’s discussion rules, or for relationship skills.

And, “We wouldn’t want to offend a cross-dressing abortionist with verses about sodomy and life from conception,” it is explained, “because we want him to stay in church to hear (what’s left of) The Gospel.”

So Christians who want to “put feet to” their pastor’s occasional sermons about government-promoted Darkness are asked to do it away from “church”, away from the friends they have made there, to work with strangers inspired by different sermons, creating greater need for God’s discussion rules and relationship guidelines.

Except that God’s rules are not sought outside either. “We wouldn’t want to offend an unbeliever with Bible verses,” we learn, “because we want him to stay in our group to help us oppose sodomy and abortion. If you want to quote the Bible, go to Church.”

So Christian “activists” leave their Swords back in their pews, hardly ever quoting Scripture to publicly explain the real reason for their positions because that would hurt their “credibility”, and virtually never discussing Scripture with each other to (1) make sure their goals are as Biblical as they assume and to (2) wash all their words and relationships in love.

Where can Christians go who don’t *want* to leave their “swords” in their pews when they go out against Darkness? Who *want* the power of God with them when they march against evil? Who want more productive discussion than anonymous online posts poisoned with personal attacks, with no coordination of action?

Until our discussions are allowed in existing forums, we must create new ones.

But where can we find discussion rules that will help people reason and act together in Christian love? Surely there are such Bible studies somewhere.

But until we can find them, here is a starting point for discussion. Please add your own ideas and verses.

Roberts' Rules of Order Links

Official Roberts site: www.robertsrules.com

Downloadable summary handouts and charts:

www.jimslaughter.com/handouts.cfm

Overview of basic principles and their application to meetings of different sizes: www.jimslaughter.com/Meeting-Myths.cfm

Summary of rules for application in church: www.churchleadership.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=41880&columnid=4544

Rules for church, summarizing Roberts and adding Christian principles, in 3 pages: <https://gabaptist.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/pdf-Christlike-church-conf.pdf>

8 minute tribute to the historical contribution: <http://faculty.washington.edu/jwj/doc/robert.mp3>

Some of the Limits of Roberts' Rules of Order without Scripture

From www.johnny-lin.com/papers/rules.pdf

The language is formal and devoid of personal warmth; it seems strictly business and oddly mechanical. Old members schooled in parliamentary procedure dominate discussion, while new members struggle even to compose a proper question. Or is it a motion? Or a point of order?

And this can be your experience even if Robert's Rules are being used respectfully and honorably: all bets are off if some members succumb to the temptation to use Robert's Rules to manipulate the meeting.

Clearly, no one, especially in a church, wants to be part of such a meeting. The question is why, if Robert's Rules are being followed, does a meeting feel that way? Why do members feel excluded? Why does relationship-building seem hindered rather than nurtured?

Here are a few possible reasons.

....Robert's Rules cannot produce relational wholeness because its primary purpose is to enable meetings to arrive at decisions, not the building up of a body.

Granted, Robert's Rules does well in helping groups (including churches) made up of fallen individuals to make decisions as efficiently and competently as fallen individuals have a right to expect. But they do not guarantee your brother or sister will be built up, encouraged, or respected, and following them does not ensure your brother or sister will not be offended, discouraged, or hurt by your words.

....when Parliamentary Procedure rules are either too strictly enforced, or enforced to advance the agenda of only one side in a debate, they can be the most destructive tool imaginable. It is therefore recommended that the rules of Parliamentary Procedure always be accompanied by two basic attributes:

1. A strict adherence to fairness.

2. Simple, basic, common sense.

....Robert's Rules is, for almost all people, a foreign language. It has its own special syntax, meanings, and rhythms. Speech patterns using Robert's Rules are not the same as normal speech.

....Especially when the topic is a potentially divisive issue, in normal conversation we would spend a substantial amount of time prefacing and carefully preparing our comments to help prevent misinterpretation or hurt. We might use the "sandwich method," interspersing critical comments in between positive comments.

None of this happens in a meeting using Robert's Rules. Indeed, the rapidity of discussion itself can cause offense, and be misinterpreted as disrespect from the speaker.

....when you're limited to motions and points, there is not much room for body language. But certain rules in Robert's Rules further limit the secondary clues that produce rich dialogue.

For instance, when you speak during a debate, you are supposed to address the chair, not other members of the meeting.

....pretend you want to make a decision about when to hold the church picnic. Under Robert's Rules, strictly speaking, you cannot say "let's discuss when to hold the church picnic," and then have everyone throw out different dates. Instead, a member has to make a formal motion, such as, "I move that the church picnic be on Memorial Day," and then discussion occurs on that motion.

....Long-time users of Robert's Rules avoid a number of these pitfalls because they understand the rules prescribed by Robert's Rules are artificial. Through repeated use, they have become able to view Robert's Rules governed meetings as something like a game, and words spoken following those rules as separate from heartfelt words that occur normally in informal discourse. They don't take the brusqueness and coldness of the proceedings personally.

For most churches, however, it is unreasonable to expect members to interact with Robert's Rules governed meetings in this way.

....members can get into the habit of trying to have as many difficult conversations outside of a large church meeting as possible. Outside of a meeting governed by Robert's Rules, you can talk slowly, with great care, and with an eye to relationship building. So take advantage of those opportunities.

If a meeting will address a contentious issue dealing with a specific individual, talk to that person one-on-one, before the meeting; avoid gossip however you can.

If a meeting will address a contentious policy issue, talk to key members of the assembly, especially those that you disagree with, outside of and before the meeting. In doing so, you decrease the possibility of personal offense being taken when controversial issues are discussed in the large group setting.

While Scripture does not give a specific command saying "have conversations outside the meeting to defuse misunderstanding," such a principle reflects the spirit of the injunctions dealing with reconciliation with your brother or sister.