

BENEDICT’S RULE*

The numbered paragraphs below refer to sections in the Rule

5. OBEDIENCE

The first step of humility is to obey without delay. This is proper for those who — because they have promised holy subjection, or because of the fear of hell, or the glory of life everlasting — hold nothing more precious than Christ. The moment the Abbot commands anything they obey instantly as if commanded by God Himself. As the Lord says, “At the hearing of the ear he has obeyed me” [Ps 17:45]. This obedience, though, will be acceptable to God and men, only if it is done without hesitation, delay, lukewarmness, grumbling or complaint, because the obedience, which is given to Abbots is given to God. For he himself says to the teachers, “Anyone who hears you hears me” [Lk. 10:16]. Disciples must obey with good will, “for the Lord loves a cheerful giver” [2 Cor. 9:7]. If they obey with ill will, and murmur with their lips and in their hearts, even if they fulfill the command, it is not acceptable to God, who sees the heart of the murmurer. Such action deserves punishment rather than reward.

20. REVERENT PRAYER

If we would approach men who are in power with humility and reverence, when we want to ask a favor, how much more must we beseech the Lord God of all things with all humility and pure devotion? Remember that it is not for many words, but for the purity of our heart and tears of remorse that we are heard. For this reason, prayers ought to be short and pure, unless they are lengthened by the inspiration of divine grace. At the community exercises, however, let the prayer always be short, and the sign having been given by the Abbot, let all rise together.

33. POSSESSIONS

The vice of personal ownership must by all means be cut out in the monastery by the very root, so that no one may presume to give or receive anything without the command of the Abbot; or to have anything whatever as his own, neither a book, nor a writing tablet, nor a pen, nor anything else whatsoever, since monks are allowed to have neither their bodies nor their wills in their own power. They must look for all necessities from the Abbot, and have nothing without his permission. Let everyone have all things in common, as it is written, no one kept anything as his own [Acts 4:32].

* The Rule of St Benedict Trans. Rev. Boniface Verheyen, OSB. Abridged, modernized and introduced by Stephen Tomkins. Edited and prepared for the web by Dan Graves. Retrieved from <https://www.christianhistoryinstitute.org/study/module/benedicts-rule/>

“Keeping every rule for the love of Christ.”

Benedict of Nursia (ca. 480—ca. 547) Organizes Monks

QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

1. The Rule demands absolute obedience from monks to their Abbot. What do you think the reason for this is? How would you cope in such circumstances yourself? What happens if the person in power is not godly, or is given to fads? Is accountability like this needed in the Church today? Why or why not?
2. What are Benedict's instructions about prayer? Do you think the kind of regularity he talks about would be regimented, or merely a good discipline? Do you think such a system would make you personally more worshipful or more ready to say a few words and go to bed?
3. How do you think Benedict's attitude toward possessions compares to what was taught and done in the New Testament? Does the New Testament forbid possessions? What can we learn from Benedict's attitude toward possessions for our own lives?