

Represent

BELIEVERS REPRESENT CHRIST WELL BY HONORING CIVIL LEADERS
AND LOVING THEIR NEIGHBORS.

Romans 13:1-14

1 Let everyone submit to the **governing authorities**, **A** since there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are **instituted by God**. **B** **2** So then, the one who resists the authority is **opposing God's command**, **C** and those who oppose it will bring judgment on themselves. **3** For rulers are **not a terror to good conduct**, **D** but to bad. Do you want to be unafraid of the one in authority? Do what is good, and you will have its approval. **4** For it is **God's servant** **E** for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because it does not **carry the sword** **F** for no reason. For it is God's servant, an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong. **5** Therefore, **you must submit**, **G** not only because of wrath but also because of your conscience. **6** And for this reason you pay taxes, since the authorities are God's servants, continually attending to these tasks. **7** **Pay your obligations** **H** to everyone: taxes to those you owe taxes, tolls to those you owe tolls, respect to those you owe respect, and honor to those you owe honor. **8** Do not owe anyone anything, **except to love one another**, **I** for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. **9** The commandments, Do not commit adultery; do not murder; do not steal; do not covet; and any other commandment, are summed up by this commandment: **Love your neighbor as yourself**. **J** **10** Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Love, therefore, is the fulfillment of the law. **11** Besides this, since you know the time, it is already the hour for you to **wake up from sleep**, **K** because now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. **12** The night is nearly over, and the day is near; so let us discard the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. **13** Let us walk with decency, as in the daytime: not in carousing and drunkenness; not in sexual impurity and promiscuity; not in quarreling and jealousy. **14** But **put on the Lord Jesus Christ**, **L** and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires.

Exploring Key Words

- A** "Higher powers" (KJV). For Paul and the Romans, the highest human authority was the emperor. Many authorities would be skeptical, or even adversarial, toward Christianity.
- B** No human authority rules apart from God's sovereign rule.
- C** Since God established rulers, rebellion against them without cause is like rebelling against Him.
- D** Along with family and the church, government is one of the primary institutions established by God. Government protects civil order in society.
- E** God even used pagan leaders like Nebuchadnezzar (Hab. 1:6), Cyrus (Ezra 1:1), and Augustus (Luke 2:1) to fulfill His plans.
- F** Part of the government's role is punishing those who do evil. Ideally, it is "an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong."
- G** Submission does not mean obeying authority when it is wrong. But God does expect His people to serve as agents of peace.
- H** Civic responsibility includes paying taxes that are due (v. 6), but also showing respect and honor to those in positions of authority.
- I** Scripture often equates debt with slavery (see Prov. 22:6). However, the debt of love will never be repaid fully.
- J** Both the Mosaic law (Lev. 19:8) and Jesus (Matt. 22:39) affirmed this truth. Loving others fulfills the spirit of the Ten Commandments.
- K** When living with a heavenly perspective, believers should shake off spiritual lethargy and remain alert to God's leadership.
- L** Jesus provides the only true pattern for Christian living. Believers should reject "deeds of darkness" (vv. 12-13) and reflect Christ.



NOTES

Honor Authorities (Rom. 13:1-7)

- Paul directed his readers to submit themselves to the governing authorities because those authorities had been established by God.
- Christians are to pay taxes to whom they owe taxes, give respect to whom they owe respect, and show honor to whom they owe honor.

Honor Each Other (Rom. 13:8-10)

- As believers, we owe a debt of love to others.
- The teachings of the Ten Commandments can be summarized in the call to love others. Since love seeks the best for everyone, loving our neighbors fulfills the law.

Honor Christ (Rom. 13:11-14)

- As the end of the age approaches, believers should “wake up from sleep” as our salvation is “nearer than when we first believed” (v. 11).
- We should avoid sins like spiritual lethargy, drunkenness, sexual impurity, quarreling, and jealousy. Instead, we are called to display Christlikeness outwardly in our daily lives.

Summary Statements

Believers represent Christ well by honoring civil leaders and loving their neighbors.

- Believers should honor civil authorities.
- Believers are to love our neighbors.
- Believers are to display Christlikeness so that their lives reflect Jesus.

Memory Verse

Romans 13:14

Key Doctrine

Religious Liberty

Civil government being ordained of God, it is the duty of Christians to render loyal obedience thereto in all things not contrary to the revealed will of God.
(See 1 Timothy 2:1-2; 1 Peter 2:13-17.)



For additional commentary,
see the Leader Guide
or Adult Commentary,
available for purchase at
goExploreTheBible.com.

ENGAGE

How have the expectations you grew up with shaped the choices and relationships in your adult life? (PSG, p. 100)

- Live up to your family name. It's a charge many parents give their sons and daughters early in life, and over time it becomes ingrained in their children.
- As those children grow into adults, that calling shapes their decisions and guides their relationships. In the same way, believers have been entrusted with the responsibility of honoring the name of Jesus.

Bonus: What is the story behind your name? How is it related to your family's history?

EXPLORE

HONOR AUTHORITIES (ROM. 13:1-7)

Bonus: What are some privileges of living in a civil society? What are our responsibilities?

- Paul said Christians are responsible to submit to the governing authorities. Such submission reflected their recognition that all authority ultimately resides with God.
- Our Christian faith does not give us the freedom to flaunt the legal system. Anyone opposing governmental authority is, in effect, resisting the divine order established by God and will be held accountable by Him.
- At some point, we may be forced to choose between the rule of government and the principles of God. In those cases, we still are subject to the law and must endure the repercussions that accompany civil disobedience.
- God established government to provide an environment in which individuals could engage in good conduct and refrain from bad conduct. Within such an environment, citizens would have no reason to fear those in authority. However, authorities do wield a "sword" to administer justice against those who do evil.
- Believers demonstrate integrity as citizens by putting their conscientious convictions into practice. One clear expression of this is paying their taxes and tolls, along with showing honor and respect to those in authority.

How does Paul's teaching that rulers are God's servants for your good challenge or affirm your perspective on government? (PSG, p. 104)

HONOR EACH OTHER (ROM. 13:8-10)

Bonus: Who are the people you find most easy to love? Who can be difficult at times?

- Beyond taxes, Paul pointed to a larger debt believers owe—loving others. Unlike financial debts, the debt of love will never be paid in full. We are always under an obligation to love others.

- Loving others fulfills the Ten Commandments and other laws from the Old Testament. Love for others is a recurring theme throughout the New Testament. In fact, Jesus taught that His followers would be identified by their love for one another (John 13:34-35).

What are some ways you can practically show love to those around you? (PSG, p. 104)

HONOR CHRIST (ROM. 13:11-14)

Bonus: What are some things that keep you alert? Why are they so important?

- Paul turned his attention to Christ's return. While Paul did not know when Jesus would come again, he knew that the day was coming. So, he urged the Romans to wake up spiritually and to act properly because the day was near.
- Paul used "night" and "day" to contrast the darkness of the world and the light of faith. He challenged readers to shine as lights in their communities, discarding the deeds of darkness and putting on the armor of light.
- Paul shared examples of how some people attempt to dull their pain. The only remedy for this cycle of emptiness is Jesus. Those who "put on" Christ discover healing, genuine community, and lasting hope.

How aware are you of Christ's return, and how does that awareness—or lack of it—shape your daily choices? (PSG, p. 107)

CHALLENGE

As a group, discuss why submitting to governing authorities qualifies as a meaningful way to represent Christ.

Share the challenges you face as you try to show His love to the people around you. Pray for one another so that each will represent Him well. (PSG, p. 108)

Reflect on your relationships with people around you.

What significance do you place on honoring Christ by being a person who strives to live with integrity? Who's holding you accountable for behaving in ways that others can see Christ in you? (PSG, p. 108)

FURTHER DISCUSSION



Scan here for additional discussion questions for this week's study.

BIBLE SKILL (PSG, P. 107)

Identify the imagery in a verse or passage and discover what it communicates.

Compare Romans 13:11-14 with Ephesians 4:22-24 and Colossians 3:10-12. ***What does this imagery communicate to you about the old life before Christ and the new life in Christ? How does this imagery help you in understanding how God would want you to respond when you battle the flesh, the old person you were before you came to know Christ?***

Prior to the session, print some “before and after” pictures from the internet. During the session, show adults the pictures. Ask: ***What makes these images so powerful?*** Highlight the contrast between what was and what is (or could be). Direct adults to complete the Bible Skill activity on page 107 of the PSG. After a few minutes, discuss what kind of “before and after” images appear in these verses and why they are powerful ways to illustrate our life in Christ.

OBJECT LESSON: COIN

Encourage adults to pull out a coin and examine its primary features. Allow them to suggest what sticks out and record their responses on the board.

Note the words on each side of the coin. Point out that one sign suggests loyalty to country (“United States of America”), while the other highlights a loyalty to the Lord (“In God We Trust”). Lead a brief discussion on when those two loyalties might conflict.

Invite a volunteer to read aloud Mark 12:13-17. Discuss why the Pharisees were amazed at Jesus’s response. Compare Mark 12:13-17 to Paul’s words in Romans 13:1-7. Lead the group to reflect on how a believer’s response to civil authority serves as a testimony to his or her faith. Affirm that believers may face times when they need to choose loyalty to God over obedience to human authorities; but, in other situations, they are called to honor authority as a way to honor God.

JESUS’S RETURN

In Romans 13:11 Paul wrote, “Besides this, since you know the time, it is already the hour for you to wake up from sleep, because now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed.” Paul’s words remind believers that Christ’s return is a pressing reality, rather than some distant idea. The nearness of salvation refers not to conversion in the past but to the final deliverance when Christ returns. Every day that passes brings the church closer to that climactic moment.

The awareness of Christ’s imminent return requires urgency. Paul compared spiritual complacency to sleep and called the church to wake up. Sleep is comfortable, but it dulls awareness. Likewise, passive Christians risk losing sight of the seriousness of their calling. Christ’s return could come at any time, which should shake believers out of spiritual drowsiness.

Paul also contrasted the “deeds of darkness” with “the armor of light.” Darkness represents the sinful patterns of life before Christ, while light describes the holiness, transparency, and readiness that should

characterize God’s people. Putting on the armor of light is preparing for spiritual battle in daily life and expecting Christ to appear at any moment.

The heart of Paul’s command is summed up in verse 14: “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and don’t make plans to gratify the desires of the flesh.” Putting on Christ implies adopting His character and living in such close fellowship with Him that His presence shapes every decision. Rather than living as though we have endless time, believers should live each day as if Christ could return before the sun sets.

Christ’s return is not meant to foster fear but to inspire faithfulness. Knowing that the final chapter of God’s story is approaching motivates believers to holiness, service, and love. The certainty of His return calls the church to remain awake and alert, clothed in Christ. That way, when He does return, He will find His people ready.