



# Represent

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

**Scripture Passage: Romans 13:1-14    Memory Verse: Romans 13:14**

As a teen, I first noticed how politics can be toxic. Two gubernatorial candidates ran against each other, and the campaigning got ugly. Negative ads permeated the airwaves. Unkind things were said about both candidates. Smear tactics abounded. Then, the unthinkable happened. The state elected a different candidate, one representing a party that had been locked out of the governor's office for a century. Most voters I knew said they were influenced by the lack of respect by the other two parties.

The world of politics is not the only place that a lack of respect can happen. In fact, some churches even struggle with it. But as Christians, we owe a debt of love and respect to each other. Our greater obligation is to honor Christ—which means we must also honor others around us.

In Romans 13, Paul encouraged believers to honor leaders and love their neighbors. As you review the verses for this session, think about areas where you struggle to show respect to others. Ask God to sanctify those areas. Prepare to use these examples as you lead the adults in your Bible study time.



## **Weekly Podcast: Group Leader Training**

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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. (PSG, p. 100)

**How have the expectations you grew up with shaped the choices and relationships in your adult life?**



## Understand the Context (Romans 13:1-14)

To understand Paul's words in Romans 13, we must also understand the political climate that existed in his day. Prior to Jesus's birth, the Romans had ended Jewish independence in the region through the emperorship of Pompey. After Pompey's death, Julius Caesar became the ruler of the Roman Empire, and he continued to increase the power of the emperor.

While Julius faced opponents from within the Roman hierarchy, he still was granted the status of divinity and viewed as a god following his assassination. After a civil war in Rome, Caesar Augustus, the emperor at the time of Jesus's birth, gained control of the empire. He had absolute power and declared himself to be divine even while he was alive. Though he still allowed conquered people to worship their local gods, he demanded absolute authority for Rome.

Later, Tiberius became emperor. He was a much weaker ruler than his predecessors and allowed one of his generals, who was anti-Jewish, to set policy for the entire empire. Tiberius did not even attend Senate meetings in the beginning of his reign.

Tiberius was the ruler in Rome during the early days of the church. He was followed by Caligula, a leader who consistently experienced conflict with the Jewish people. During his reign, which ran from AD 37–41, Caligula also displayed signs of mental derangement. While he demanded divine honors, those were never awarded to him.

The next two emperors, Claudius (AD 41–54) and Nero (AD 54–68), provided the political framework in Rome at the time of which Paul wrote to the believers in that city. Both had acrimonious relationships with God's people. For example, Claudius expelled Jews from Rome, and Nero actively persecuted Christians in Rome.

The knowledge of the anti-Jewish (and, by association, anti-Christian) leanings of emperors makes Paul's words in Romans 13 seem incredible. On the surface, it seems illogical for Paul to call for Christ followers to honor rulers who considered themselves divine and were determined to persecute (and eliminate) people of faith. Yet, Paul believed that all humans were worthy of respect and honor because God had placed them in their positions for His purposes.

From God's perspective, honoring others (including those in authority) also honors Christ. That did not mean Christians had to agree with everything Roman rulers did, but it did mean they should respect them because of their position and because they were fellow human beings. Paul's words helped set a standard for the relationship between church and state that continues to resonate today.

**Read Romans 13:1-14 and pay close attention to each directive Paul gives. Which of these instructions describe practical, everyday ways for believers to live out their faith in Christ? (PSG, p. 101)**

# ENGAGE



**PREPARE:** On a focal wall, display **Pack Item 2** (Poster: Outline of Romans) and **Pack Item 7** (Poster: Showing Honor). Make copies of **Pack Item 9** (Handout: Praying Scripture in Romans).

**ASK:**

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

**READ:**

Enlist a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 100 of the PSG. Discuss the importance of families. Note that while the way we represent our families is important, how the world sees Jesus in our lives is even more important.

**ASK:**

**How faithfully do you represent Jesus?**

**CONTEXT:**

Point to “Exhortations for the Christian Life” on **Pack Item 2** (Poster: Outline of Romans). Remind adults that in Romans 12, Paul had talked about personal holiness and how believers should relate to one another. Share that in Romans 13, he turned his attention to those outside the church, especially how Christians relate to authority figures.

*While we are citizens of heaven, we also live as citizens of earth. Accordingly, we want to represent Christ well in our world so that others will be drawn to Him through our relationships with them. . . . God instituted government for the good of those who do what is right. In His grand scheme, they are God’s servants to dispense justice in the world (Rom. 13:1-7). (PSG, p. 101)*

**TRANSITION:**

*A tension has always existed between church and state, but our response to authority can have a powerful impact on our testimony for Jesus. As you examine today’s verses, determine ways you can do a better job of honoring the authorities God has placed in your life.*



## Group Activity Option

### Music

Distribute hymnals and direct adults to examine the lyrics of “Take the Name of Jesus With You” (*Baptist Hymnal*, 2008, No. 313). Enlist four volunteers to read each verse with the group singing the chorus between each verse. Ask: **How are you representing the name of Jesus?** Guide the group to pray silently, thanking God for the privilege of representing Jesus to others.

## Honor Authorities (Rom. 13:1-7)

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**1** Let everyone submit to the governing authorities, since there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are instituted by God. **2** So then, the one who resists the authority is opposing God's command, and those who oppose it will bring judgment on themselves. **3** For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, 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 for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, because it does not carry the sword 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, 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 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.

**(vv. 1-2)** In Paul's day, many leaders were despotic, immoral, and abusive. However, he also knew that government had a divinely-sanctioned role in society, so Christ followers had a responsibility to respect human leaders. They are called to **submit to the governing authorities**.

The Greek wording suggests a willing subjection. It described the mutual honor among people in a variety of settings (Luke 2:51; Eph. 5:21-22; Titus 2:9; 1 Pet. 2:18; 5:5). This did not imply agreement with all the other party's actions. Rather, it was a recognition of rightful authority.

God **instituted** authority to stem human chaos, and Paul did not distinguish between Christian and non-Christian authorities. Certainly, believers may face a choice between God and other humans (Acts 5:29), but we should honor human leaders unless the two are in conflict. God is sovereign over all authority, and no authority exists apart from Him.

Since all **authority** is instituted by God, the one who refuses to show honor is **opposing God's command**. God's plan for the culture is tied to His plan to spread the gospel, either through good means or by overcoming evil. This entailed a basic level of respect that avoided chaos and disorder in society. Rebellion against God always leads to **judgment**, whether in this life or the next.

**(v. 3)** Paul noted that citizens who focus on **good conduct** have no reason to fear **rulers**. Sometimes, leaders overstep their authority. In those situations, Christians may need to practice civil disobedience. The Romans had seen that already and would face it again under various emperors. But, in general, **terror** of the law was reserved for those who did **bad** things.

**(vv. 4-5)** Ultimately, civil authority operates as **God's servant**, which was for everyone's benefit. Even under wicked rulers, Paul acknowledged the blessings of the Roman Empire. God had ordained those blessings as a means for sharing the gospel. The **sword** was a symbol of the government's power to punish **wrong**. Paul highlighted the government's role as an **avenger**, so private citizens would not take the law into their own hands.

Christians have two reasons for submitting. First, they avoid the **wrath** Paul mentioned. But they also protect their **conscience**. This related to one's moral responsibility toward God and others. Since God ordained the government, our conscience confirms our need to submit to it.

**(vv. 6-7)** One area of submission involves paying **taxes**, which Jesus already had encouraged (Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:25). Government leaders are responsible for **attending** to the good of the people, and Christians needed to respect that authority. While emperors did use tax money to build temples and to secure their own luxury at the expense of their subjects, Paul was willing to let God be the judge. Believers are told to **respect** and **honor** authority and trust God to hold them accountable for their actions.

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### 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.)

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**APPLICATION POINT:** Believers should honor civil authorities.

**BACKGROUND:** Encourage adults to share what comes to their minds when they think of Roman emperors. Share that Christians in the first century dealt with some wicked emperors who consistently persecuted the church, including Caligula (AD 37–41), Claudius (AD 41–54), and Nero (AD 54–68).

**READ:**

**Invite a volunteer to read Romans 13:1-7** as the group notes how believers are called to relate to governing authorities.

**ASK:**

**Based on what you know about Roman leaders from that time, do these directions surprise you? Why?**

**HIGHLIGHT:**

Emphasize what Paul shared about a believer's responsibility toward government leaders:

*Our Christian faith does not give us the freedom to flaunt the legal system. Of course, 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 of our choices. Paul and the Romans certainly understood this truth, having suffered for faith on numerous occasions. . . . Because the Lord established human government, discerning believers recognized their responsibility to submit to civil authorities. (PSG, pp. 102-103)*

**DISCUSS:**

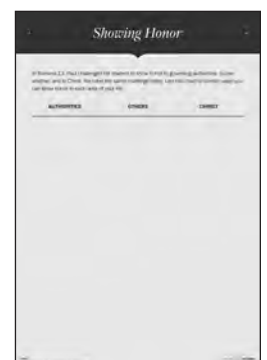
Direct the group to turn to a neighbor and discuss how these verses relate to the words “honor” and “respect.”

**APPLY:**

Direct attention on **Pack Item 7** (Poster: *Showing Honor*). Allow adults to identify specific actions believers can take to honor human authorities. Record responses on the pack item.

**ASK:**

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



### Group Activity Option

#### Object Lesson: Coin

Display a coin. Note the words on each side of the coin. 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.

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

**8** Do not owe anyone anything, except to love one another, 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. **10** Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Love, therefore, is the fulfillment of the law.

**(v. 8)** Earlier, Paul had reminded believers that they owed respect and taxes to the government. Here, he spoke of another kind of debt—the debt of love. He said, **do not owe anyone anything**. The Bible does warn against the dangers of financial debt (Prov. 22:7) and encourages wise stewardship. But this verse emphasizes an obligation for believers to **love one another**. From God’s perspective, the debt of love has no limits and is never completely satisfied.

Interestingly, the Greek language here suggests that God’s people should love those who are the same (other believers) and those who are different (unbelievers). So, love is not restricted to Christian friends and family, just as respect for civil authority is not limited to Christian leaders. Those who embrace this broad understanding and practice of love have **fulfilled the law**.

**(v. 9)** To illustrate what love looks like, Paul listed several commandments from Exodus 20:13-17. The prohibition against **adultery** revealed honor and respect for marriage, as spouses remain faithful to one another. Those who do not **murder** affirm the sanctity of all human life. They honor life as a gift from their Creator.

Those who do not **steal** demonstrate their love for others by respecting property and labor. Those who do not **covet** love others by celebrating God’s blessings with them rather than envying those blessings. These examples are not exhaustive, but they—and **any other commandment**—do represent God’s longstanding expectation for love and honor among people.

Paul also quoted Leviticus 19:18, **Love your neighbor as yourself**. Jesus had said that people fulfilled the entire law by loving God and loving people (Matt. 22:37-40). He also had emphasized that a **neighbor** goes beyond those who are like us (Luke 10:25-37). So, the command to love others well is not bound by ethnicity, religious affiliation, or other divisions the world creates to classify or separate people. The debt of love is owed to all.

**(v. 10)** **Love** always chooses right over **wrong** toward others. It always pursues the best interests of a **neighbor**. Love also fulfills the moral standards of the law. For that reason, love is the ultimate **fulfillment of the law**. The word *fulfillment* refers to that moment in time when something that was not full becomes full. It was used to describe the leftover baskets that were filled with bread and fish after Jesus fed the multitudes (Mark 6:43).

Of course, the law was not an end unto itself. Those who avoid adultery still may show disrespect toward their spouses. Those who refuse to murder another may still withhold love from a neighbor. But love is what completes the law and gives it meaning.

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### Praying Scripture

#### Romans 13:8

Spend time praying Scripture using Romans 13:8. Read the verse, then respond to these questions:

- How does God reveal Himself in this verse?
- How should I respond to what He reveals?

*Example:* Ask God to show you ways you can pay your “love debt” to those around you. Thank Him for the love He showed by freeing you from sin.

During the session, invite adults to pray this Scripture as well. You and the adults in your group can also take advantage of the Explore the Bible Prayer Guide. This QR code also appears on page 63 of the *Personal Study Guide*.



### Prayer Guide

Scan here for a weekly prayer guide based on this quarter’s Bible passages.

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**APPLICATION POINT:** Believers are to love our neighbors.

**READ:** Invite a volunteer to read **Romans 13:8-10** as the group highlights key words or phrases. Invite volunteers to share what they noticed in the verses.

**DISCUSS:**

Encourage the group to list common kinds of debt in our society. List their responses on the board or on a large sheet of paper. Lead a brief discussion on some dangers associated with being in debt.

**SHARE:**

Highlight Paul's reference to our obligation to love others. Talk about how this debt is different from others listed:

*Beyond taxes owed to government, Paul pointed to a larger debt believers owe—to love one another. Unlike financial debts, the debt of love will never be paid in full. We are always under an obligation to love others. . . . Love for others is a recurring theme throughout the New Testament. In John's Gospel, Jesus taught that His followers would be identified by their love for one another (John 13:34-35). The early church embodied this principle through practical expressions of care (Acts 4:32-35). Later, Paul reminded the Corinthians that genuine love consistently seeks the good of others (1 Cor. 13:4-7). Likewise, both John (1 John 3:18) and Peter (1 Pet. 4:8) urged believers to demonstrate sincere and steadfast love. In the same way, we must learn to love others well. (PSG, pp. 104-105)*

**SAY:**

*Paul never distinguished between loving saved people and loving lost people. He emphasized that Christ followers are called to love all people. We are called to love others because that love reflects the character and compassion of God, who loves everyone.*

**ASK:**

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

**APPLY:**

Record responses on **Pack Item 7** (Poster: Showing Honor). Remind adults that love requires action and challenge them to identify one idea they will put into practice this week.

**PRAY:**

Distribute copies of **Pack Item 9** (Handout: Praying Scripture in Romans). Give adults a few minutes to pray Romans 13:8 back to God as noted on page 124 of the Leader Guide. Suggest they continue using this for a prayer prompt as they start each day this week.



## Honor Christ (Rom. 13:11-14)

**11** 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. **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, and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires.

(v. 11) Paul appealed to the Romans' knowledge of the **time** in which they were living. This word suggests an opportune time rather than chronological time. Even though they lived in a dark and difficult era, he reminded his readers that the present evil age would not last forever. Since the **hour** was approaching, they needed to **wake up** and get ready for action.

Paul encouraged his readers to prepare themselves because their **salvation** was **nearer than when we first believed**. This usage of *salvation* carries a future expression. Though people were saved (justified) in the past and are being saved (sanctified) now, the fullness of salvation awaits a future date. Every day brings the believer closer to this fullest expression of salvation, so we should spend our time on earth preparing for the day we will see Christ.

(v. 12) Paul often used darkness and light as metaphors of sin and righteousness (2 Cor. 6:14; Eph. 5:8; Col. 1:12-13; 1 Thess. 5:4-5). Some people sleep during the **night**, while others commit the **deeds of darkness**. Because the **night** is passing and the **day is near**, he encouraged believers to **discard** such evil practices. This Greek language indicates the removal of dirt (1 Pet. 3:21) or the removal of life from the body at death (2 Pet. 1:14). Like those who needed a good bath or needed release from the sin that binds them, believers should remove the *deeds of darkness* (see also Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:8-10; Jas. 1:21; 1 Pet. 2:1).

However, removing darkness is not enough. We also need to **put on the armor of light**. The word *armor* suggests the weapons of military warfare. Paul referred to such weapons throughout his writings (2 Cor. 6:7; 10:4; Eph. 6:13-17; 1 Thess. 5:8). Just removing sin is not adequate preparation for the coming day. Along with taking off the grime, they also needed to put on the spiritual weapons of God to battle sin and darkness.

(v. 13) The goal of practical Christian living is to **walk with decency**, rather than giving in to sin. The Greek word involved that which was proper or in order (1 Cor. 14:40). For the Christian, deeds of darkness have no place in daily life.

Using a series of couplets, Paul offered examples of the aforementioned deeds of darkness. The first couplet identified **carousing and drunkenness**. This was a lifestyle of partying and abusing alcohol. Many Romans would have been caught up in this lifestyle before coming to Christ.

The second couplet involved **sexual impurity and promiscuity**. Sexual sin was also common in many Roman circles. But Paul's readers needed to reject such sins.

The final couplet deals with **quarreling and jealousy**. These sins might seem minor compared to the others in the list, but they are still deeds of darkness and were not acceptable lifestyles for Christ followers.

(v. 14) Along with discarding the deeds of darkness, God's people are called to **put on the Lord Jesus Christ**. In Galatians 3:27, Paul described this as something that happens at conversion. However, this passage serves as a reminder that God's presence and power should be appropriated daily. Like taking off old, grimy clothes and replacing them with new, clean garments. Submitting to Jesus's lordship must become a habit.

To follow Jesus as Lord requires believers to avoid any temptation to **make . . . provision for the flesh**. The wording indicates something that requires thoughtful planning in advance. This is not a spur of the moment choice, but a carefully orchestrated strategy. Believers who have been freed from sin (Rom. 6:18) possess the power to say "no" as the battle against darkness starts to take shape in the mind.

## EXPLORE Romans 13:11-14



**APPLICATION POINT:** Believers are to display Christlikeness so that their lives reflect Jesus.

**READ:**

**Read aloud Romans 13:11-14** as the group listens for how believers should respond to the urgency of Christ's return.

**ASK:**

**How do you wake up in the morning?**

**GUIDE:**

Note that some folks set an alarm, while others wake up on their own. Affirm that many like to hit the “snooze” button. Share that Paul urged his readers to wake up to a spiritual reality: the return of Jesus and the fulfillment of our salvation.

*Although Paul did not know when Jesus would come again, he understood that the appointed time was coming. Because of this, he urged the Roman believers to wake up spiritually and conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the nearness of that day. Though two thousand years have passed, each day brings us closer to His return. As Paul reminded his readers, the fulfillment of our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. (PSG, p. 106)*

**ASK:**

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

**HIGHLIGHT:**

Briefly discuss the list of sins believers are called to avoid in verse 13, along with the challenge to put on Christ in verse 14. Use the commentary for verses 13-14 on page 126 of the Leader Guide to supplement the discussion.

**DISCUSS:**

**What steps can we take to prevent spiritual lethargy?**  
(PSG, p. 107)

**APPLY:**

Lead the group to identify specific ways believers can honor Christ and record the information in the third column of **Pack Item 7** (Poster: Showing Honor).



### Group Activity Option

#### Bible Skill

Compare Romans 13:11-14 to 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?*

## CHALLENGE

### SUMMARIZE:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 108 of the *Personal Study Guide*.

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

### REFLECT:

Direct attention back to **Pack item 7** (*Poster: Showing Honor*). Encourage adults to consider how the three application points relate to the activities listed on the poster. Challenge adults to put their faith into action by selecting at least one idea from each column to implement this week.

### DISCUSS:

Direct adults to read and consider the first set of questions on page 108 of the PSG. Lead a brief discussion on what it means to honor civil authorities as a believer today. Remind adults that they don't have to agree with every policy or position, but they do need to show respect for the individual that God has placed in authority.

### PRAY:

Remind adults about **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Praying Scripture in Romans*) and encourage them to use it as a prayer prompt during the week. Close in prayer, asking God to help each adult represent Christ by honoring leaders, other people, and Jesus.

### AFTER THE SESSION

Reinforce the session, sending a text or email to the group. Encourage them to memorize Romans 13:14 and to read and reflect on the second set of questions on page 108 of the PSG. Urge them to consider ways they can show honor to someone else this week and to find someone who will hold them accountable for this kind of activity on a regular basis.

### ADULT COMMENTARY



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insights related to the key passages.  
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