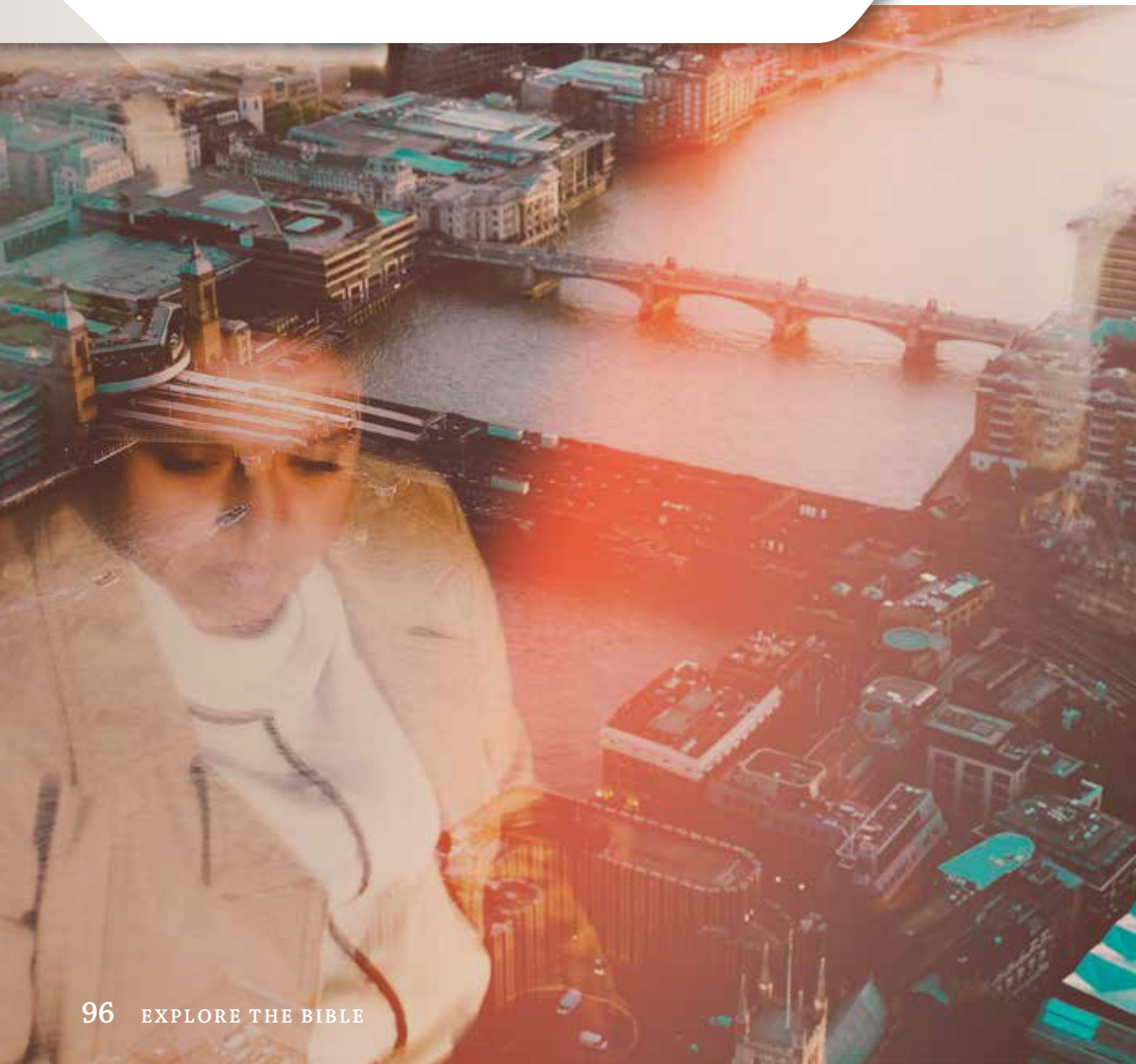


Session 12

# Citizens

*Believers should seek to represent Christ well in their communities and world.*

Romans 13:1-14



## **How would you describe your relationship with local government?**

### **What do you value the most in your local government?**

Our view of the government often depends on our current circumstances. At tax season, some may feel the government is too intrusive. When a police officer stops someone for speeding, the complaint may be, "Don't they have anything better to do?" In Romans 13, Paul dealt with the believer's relationship to governing authorities. He called for submission to authority, balancing government's God-given right to rule with our submission to God, who alone holds absolute authority.

## **UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT**

After highlighting behavior within the church in chapter 12, Paul turned his attention to how believers should interact with those outside the church. While we are citizens of heaven, we also live as citizens of earth (Rom. 13:1-14). As such, we have a responsibility to respect our leaders and to make our community a better place. If we abdicate our duty to be a light to the world, the darkness will dominate with no one to blame but ourselves.

This challenge to live as upright citizens on earth is rooted in the truth that Christ will return. We do not know the day, so we live each day as if that is the day He is coming back. Such an attitude will protect us from straying too far from His commands, in addition to showing the world what it means to truly live for Him. As Paul noted, we should live as children of the day, not as agents of darkness (13:11-14).

# ROMANS 13:1-14

**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** **A**. **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 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** **B** but also because of your **conscience** **C**. **6** And for this reason you pay taxes, since the authorities are God's servants, continually attending to these tasks. **7 Pay your obligations** **D** 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, 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. **11** Besides this, since you know the time, it is already **the hour** **E** 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** **F**. **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 don't make plans to gratify the desires of the flesh.

## Passage Outline

Submit (Rom. 13:1-7)

Love (Rom. 13:8-10)

Anticipate (Rom. 13:11-14)

## Keywords

- A. God is the source of all authority and those in earthly authority have been "established by God" (NIV).
- B. "God's anger" (CEV) deters wrongdoing because it appeals to our fear of punishment.
- C. A positive reinforcement to avoid doing wrong is "to have a clear conscience" (Acts 24:16).
- D. We must fulfill our responsibilities to everyone because we're accountable for our actions.
- E. Now is the time to be alert to the Lord's return and be faithful in doing His will (Matt. 24:42-44).
- F. Paul wants us to join the battle against the darkness of evil deeds and put on our spiritual armor (2 Cor. 6:7; 10:4; Eph. 6:11-17).

# EXPLORE THE TEXT

Paul addressed Christian citizenship with a command and a rationale. First, he said to *submit to the governing authorities*. As Paul would explain later, obeying authorities is tied to obeying God. The rationale for submission to governing authorities is God’s sovereignty over human affairs. Whether leaders acknowledged it or not, none of them hold their position *except from God*. Likewise, all of their authority has been *instituted by God*.

## **How might a believer show respect to government leaders even when they disagree with government leaders?**

The best way to avoid the consequences of breaking the law is to avoid breaking the law. It seems simple, but that is the gist of Paul’s message. Christians also need to consider their conscience. Disobedience creates guilt, and believers are called to walk in freedom from guilt.

**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 (1 Pet. 3:11-17).

Beyond taxes owed to government, Paul pointed to a larger debt believers owe—to *love one another*. Unlike financial debts, the debt of love never expires. We are always under an obligation to others. Like honoring the authorities, loving others nurtures a spirit of peace and protects the church’s larger mission.

## **How does keeping the commandments listed by Paul demonstrate love for others?**

Paul didn’t know when Jesus would return, but he was confident that the time was coming. Because Jesus is coming back, the Roman believers needed to wake up and act like it.

## **How does thinking about Jesus’ return serve as motivation for believers to make a difference today?**

In the midst of darkness, Paul challenged the Romans to serve as lights to their community.

## **How can a believer shed light in a dark world and do so with love? Are there inappropriate ways of being light in a dark world? Explain.**

**BIBLE SKILL: Use multiple Scripture passages to understand a major doctrine.** – Paul used the phrase “put on” to describe the activity of Christians (Rom. 13:12,14). Read the following passages to gain deeper insight into what Paul was telling Christians to do: Ephesians 6:11-18; 1 Thessalonians 5:8; Galatians 3:27; Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10. How do these passages help us understand Paul’s commands in Romans 13? Read 1 Corinthians 15:53-54. How does it differ from the other passages listed?

# APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers should honor their government and its leaders by being model citizens.
- Believers should demonstrate Christlike love to all people, especially other Christians.
- Believers should live holy lives in anticipation of the return of Christ.

**What are some things you and the members of your Bible study group do to make your community a better place? How can you be a light by ministering to your leaders?**

**Who are some people you struggle to love? How can you learn to love them better? What are some practical ways you can show God's love this week to the people you listed?**

**Identify some dark places around you that need Christ's light. How can you represent Christ in those areas? What holds you back? How can you overcome those barriers?**

## Prayer Requests

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# DAILY EXPLORATION

## Day 1: Submit to authority.

**Read Romans 13:1-2, understanding the actions believers are called to.**

Since God places individuals in authority, rejecting their authority amounts to opposing God's command. While many leaders don't claim allegiance to God, the majority of society's laws still serve the greater good. We may not agree with every decision, but we are still called to live in a way that honors God.

Those who disobey human law will face the consequences—probably at the hands of the authorities they have snubbed. Paul said that such individuals *will bring judgment on themselves*. Our faith as believers does not give us the freedom to flaunt the legal system.

Of course, at some point, we may be forced to choose between the rules of society 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.

**How have you rejected authority in your life?**

## Day 2: Do what is good.

**Read Romans 13:3-4, noticing the instruction to do what is good.**

Our first loyalty should be to God, and our primary aim should be to please Him. In most cases, that does not keep us from doing what's right according to earthly laws. So Paul instructed his readers to *do what is good*.

God has established leaders for the *good* of those who do what is right—including believers. In His grand scheme, they are God's servants to dispense justice in the world.

The *sword* was a symbol of power and judgment. Under God's authority, governments carry a sword to punish those who create chaos—when appropriate force is necessary. Where injustice exists, God expects the governing authority to be an avenger that defends the weak and moves quickly to make things right. Christians support such efforts. Of course, this does not work perfectly in every setting. History reveals some leaders who were more of a problem than a solution. But ideally, good government protects the innocent and punishes the guilty.

**How can you show respect to government leaders even when you disagree with them?**



### Day 3: Love your neighbor as yourself.

**Read Romans 13:8-10, considering the connection to the Ten Commandments.**

Paul used the Ten Commandments to illustrate the relationship between love and the law. Sins like adultery, murder, theft, and coveting are caused by selfishness, which is the opposite of sacrificial love. What God expects can be summed up in a single principle: *Love your neighbor as yourself*. (See also Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:34-40; Gal. 5:13-15; and Jas. 2:8.) Those who practice love well place their own desires on hold for the benefit of others. Our natural tendency is to advance our own agendas, even if it hurts others in the process. Paul emphasized that love *does no wrong* to others. By doing no wrong, we put others first. This represents the ultimate fulfillment of the law.

Loving others is a common theme in the New Testament. In John's Gospel, Jesus said His followers would be known by their love (John 13:34-35), and the early church members worked to live that out in practical ways (Acts 4:32-35). Later, Paul told the Corinthians that love treats others well (1 Cor. 13:4-7). Likewise, John (1 John 3:18) and Peter (1 Pet. 4:8) each encouraged genuine love among early Christians. We must learn to love others well.

**How does keeping the commandments listed by Paul demonstrate love for others?**

### Day 4: Wake up.

**Read Romans 13:11, identifying the command to wake up.**

Paul often filtered his teaching through the second coming of Christ. He did the same when it came to citizenship. How we act as citizens of earth should be determined by our citizenship in heaven.

Paul didn't know when Jesus would return, but he was confident that the time was coming. Because Jesus is coming back, the Romans needed to wake up and act like it. Biblical reminders of Christ's return typically include accompanying challenges for moral purity and spiritual awareness.

While two thousand years have passed, each day moves us closer to His return. As Paul wrote, the completion of our salvation is *nearer than when we first believed*. We are on the clock, and we will give an account for our time.

**How does thinking about Jesus' return serve as motivation for you to make a difference today?**

## Day 5: Put on the armor of light.

**Read Romans 13:12-14, noting the difference in light and dark.**

Paul used *night* and *day* to contrast the darkness of the world and the *light* of faith. (See also 1 Thess. 5:4-11; Eph. 5:1-20.) In the midst of darkness, Paul challenged the Romans to serve as lights to their community. The first step in this process was to *discard the deeds of darkness*. Christ had already redeemed them from that lifestyle; they didn't need to go back to it. The alternative was to *put on the armor of light*. Armor equips warriors for battle, and God's armor of light equips believers to illuminate darkness while we wait for Jesus' return.

As believers put on God's armor, they are empowered to live in purity and beyond reproach. Paul compared the way we live to a *walk*. It's an appropriate comparison, since life really is a journey that moves each of us closer to eternity. We must walk *with decency*. This means our lives can stand up to the most intense scrutiny of those around us. We may stumble, but our hearts should also be set on what is good (Phil. 4:8).

**How can you shed light in a dark world and do so with love?**

## TALK IT OUT

**Reflect on the truths found in Romans 13, sharing with other members of your Bible study group.**

How do we honor the government even if some government officials are ungodly?

In practical ways, what does it look like for believers to demonstrate Christlike love to all people, especially other believers?

If we are to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ," then what are we to take off?



For additional context, read "The Rise of the Roman Empire" in the Spring 2020 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at [LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator](http://LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator).