November 15, 2026

Notes:
This Lesson was created using:
- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *Explore the Bible Commentary* (ETBC)
- *New American Commentary: Romans*, Mounce (NAC)
- *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans*, Moo (NICNT)
- *Exalting Jesus in Romans*, Merida (Exalting)
- *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Romans*, Bruce (TNTC)
- *Be Right*, Wiersbe (Be)

REPRESENT: ROMANS 13:1-14

Introductory Activity

Explain: Last week we moved from the pointedly theological section of Romans to the personally theological section. We looked at how the saving work of Christ should shape the way we relate to others in the church. Today, we will examine how it shapes our relationships outside the body of Christ. As we interact with the non-believing world, we do so as representatives of Christ.

Read or have someone read the opening paragraph on page 100 of the Personal Study Guide. (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.)

Discuss: If you were going to create a list of areas in which we should seek to represent Christ as part of a survey to help someone know if they were being good representatives, what areas would you choose? (For example, "On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate your success in representing Christ well in your *finances*? So fill in the blank, On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate your success in representing Christ well in _____. (examples might include business dealings, relations with your extended family, interactions with people at the school.)

Summarize and Transition: There are many areas in which we should guard our actions and interactions. Today, Paul is going to give us a few areas in which we represent Christ and guide us towards a Christ-like way of living in those areas. In each, we will see that honor is essential. At the end of our lesson, we should know that "believers represent Christ well by honoring civil leaders and loving their neighbors." (ETB LG, 119)

1. HONOR AUTHORITIES (ROM. 13:1-7)

Read (or have someone read) Romans 13:1-7.

Explain: When I was growing up, I was told that there are three things you do not talk about in polite company: politics, money, and religion. Well, the Bible does not shy away from money. Moreover, we are instructed to talk about our faith. Here we might say that Paul is diving off into politics, and that might put us on edge a little bit, especially less than two weeks after the midterm elections. However, we should note that Paul is not talking about politics here. Instead, he is speaking about the institutions of government. Nevertheless, we still might not like to hear what Paul has to teach us in this passage. Sometimes we respond negatively or dismissively to God's words given by Paul in this passage for one of two reasons. One, we have an "overrealized eschatology, which says, 'The kingdom is here, so ignore Caesar.'" Two, we have an "underrealized eschatology, which says, 'The kingdom is not here [in its fulness], so pick up your sword against Caesar and let's bring it!' Paul is trying to avoid the 'ignore Caesar' or 'fight Caesar' positions." (Exalting, 212)

Discuss: What comes to mind when you think of Roman officials? "Based on what you know about Roman leaders from that time, do these directions surprise you? Why?" (ETB LG, 123)

When we think of Roman leaders, we conjure a tyrannical image in our minds. We might think of how they are depicted in the movies. We might also consider how the Bible or history depicts them. Despite all of that, Paul

still writes Romans 13. The first thing he says is "**Honor. Period!**" (v. 1a) The words of God, written by Paul, do not offer us a suggestion. Instead, they present a command to submit. In submitting, we honor those in charge. But we do more than that. When we submit to governing authorities, we honor the Lord because "the authorities that exist are instituted by God." (ETB LG, 122) "To 'submit' (or be subject, 'ESV') is broader than 'obey.' It conveys the idea of standing under the government in recognition that this is how God has ordered the world." (Exalting, 213)

Depending on where you stand politically, you might readily or not so readily accept Paul's words. For those who might not approve of those currently serving in the government and therefore bristle when Paul issues this command, we might need to remember the historical context in which Paul writes. "We must remember that Paul was *not* writing in a perfect political climate. Nero was reigning. Nero was somewhat sane early in his career, but he grew progressively more maniacal. Still, Paul wrote Romans 13." (Exalting, 212) In His grand plan, God instituted governments to maintain the social order. All societies develop some form of government. Even the British schoolboys stranded on an island in the Pacific Ocean, as depicted in William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies*, developed a form of government. That makeshift government failed only when some refused to submit, and the island fell into anarchy and chaos. Governments exist for the good of those being governed. Like Nero, those in charge do not always fulfil their role as benevolent leaders. Nevertheless, God says that we are to submit. (For those of you chomping at the bit to discuss civil disobedience, don't worry, we will get there.) Next, Paul is going to go further and explain why we submit to the government. In the first part of verse 1, we saw that we should submit because of God and His sovereign authority to establish earthly authorities.

Second, he says we **Honor Because of Wrath**. In verse 2, Paul writes, "the one who resists the authority is opposing God's command, and those who oppose it will bring judgment on themselves." Judgment for resisting comes from two sources: God and the institutions of government. Here we see that Scripture commands humans to submit to the authority of governments. To resist the authorities is to break God's command and face His judgment. God's judgment is of course eschatological. It is also present in the here and now. Paul expresses this truth in verses 3-4. If one opposes the governing authorities, he or she will face the judgment of those authorities in the here and now. Do bad, face the consequences. "Do what is good, and you will have" the government's approval. It's that simple. But this does bring us to the point of civil disobedience.

Discuss: At what time or under what circumstances might a disciple of Jesus resist governing authorities?

Explain: I will be honest; this is a tricky question that many have struggled with over the years. I mean, our country *was* founded in a revolt against a government. I can't answer this question for everyone. But let's look at two OT examples in which a follower of God resisted the government. Both come from the book of Daniel, and I encourage you to read the text in detail on your own.

1) In Daniel chapter 3, Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, set up a gold statue and ordered everyone to worship it. The Bible tells us that three faithful Jews living as exiles, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, known to us as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were living in the land. Accusations against them were brought to the king: "They do not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up." (Daniel 3:12) Their response when the king questioned them was, "We will not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you set up." (v. 18) The three men **Refused to *Do Something* that would Break God's Law**.

2) Later in Daniel 6, a different king, whom the Bible calls Darius, governs the region. In this case, the king passed a law that forbade "anyone [petition] any god or man except" him. (6:7) Daniel does not comply with the law. Instead, He went to his upper room where the windows faced Jerusalem "and three times a day he got down on his knees, prayed, and gave thanks to his God, just as he had done before." (v. 10) Here we see that Daniel **Refused to *Not Do Something* that would Break God's Law**.

Explain: These are two examples from the OT in which we see followers of God resist the government. In one case, they were ordered to do something that would break God's law; and in the other, a person was ordered not to do something that would break God's law. What we do not see is godly people resisting the government because they simply don't like those in charge. Nor do we see them breaking the law for their earthly pleasures or because they think they are above the law.

Discuss: What form of "resistance" did Daniel and his friends practice?

They did not raise an army and actively fight to overturn the government. Instead, they simply refused to do something they knew was wrong and refused to stop doing what they knew was right. In both cases, they were held in judgment by the earthly authorities, but here is where we see the limits of earthly authority. F. F. Bruce writes, "The state can rightly command obedience only within the limits of the purposes for which it has been divinely instituted." (TNTC, 224) In both cases, God judged the actions of the authorities to be outside the bounds of their purview, and He rendered the judgment of the kings ineffectual. The three young men were protected in the fire and survived, and Daniel spent a night under God's protection from the lions and survived. God does not always protect the godly on earth in such a way, but here we see that "the state not only may be must be resisted when it demands the allegiance due to God alone." (TNTC, 224)

In summary, we submit to the state because of wrath. God commands that we submit to the laws that do not contradict His higher laws. The state has the authority to punish those who do not submit. However, it is always God's right to override the state since it is delegated as His servant (vv. 4a, 4b, 6).

Paul also tells us in verse 5 that we are to submit to the state **Because of Conscience**. While this applies to all people, it is especially applicable to Christians. In his translation of this text, J. B. Phillips says one should obey "not simply because it is the safest, but because it is the right thing to do." It is simply "right" to obey the laws of the state. Remember the state exists for the good of man and is a bulwark against chaos and anarchy. Wiersbe writes, "A *citizen* can obey the law because of fear of punishment, but a *Christian* ought to obey because of conscience." (Be, 146 emphasis added) Christians should be good citizens simply because "this is one way of serving God" (TNTC, 221) and representing Him in the world. However, there is a flip side to the Christian's conscience. It *can* lead one to civil disobedience as well.

Let's look at two quick examples from the NT. Both come from the book of Acts.

1) In Acts chapter 3, Peter and John were preaching about Jesus in the temple. This annoyed the Jewish religious and civic officials (4:2). They arrested Peter and John and held them overnight (v.3). The next morning the governing officials "ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus." (v. 18) In response, "Peter and John answered them, 'Whether it's right in the sight of God for us to listen to you rather than to God, you decide; for we are unable to stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.'" (vv. 19-20) After threatening the disciples more, the officials released them. The two then reported the events to other believers. All then prayed and asked for more boldness to keep speaking the name of Jesus (v. 29). God answered their prayer, and they "began to speak the word of God boldly." (v. 31)

2) Another incident in chapter 5 occurred after the religious and civic authorities became jealous of the Apostles' teaching and healing ministry. Verse 18 states that the apostles were arrested. We don't know the scene of their arrests, but it appears they were rounded up and thrown into a "public jail." (v.18) During the night, they were miraculously delivered from the prison and given orders from the Lord's messenger angel to "Go and stand in the temple, and tell the people all about this life." (v. 20) They obeyed God's directive and were subsequently rearrested and brought before the court, where they were once again ordered to keep quiet about Jesus. The apostles refused to comply with the order and said, "We must obey God rather than people." (v. 29)

Represent: Romans 13:1-14

Explain: What we see in both of these incidents, in relation to Paul's teaching, is that the Christian conscience guides the believer to submit to the *correct* authority. On the face of it, a Christian does not submit to the governing authorities because of the negative consequences that result from not submitting; instead, they submit because it is the right thing to do. However, the Apostles' actions show that there is a higher authority and a higher good. Remember, the purpose of government is the protection of its citizens from evil and to prevent anarchy. However, a higher good exists beyond the earthly well-being of mankind. That higher good is mankind's salvation. The message of the gospel is the means by which mankind will discover that salvation. Therefore, any government that prevents the spread of the gospel message must be resisted. Again, this resistance does not involve taking up arms or participating in a violent uprising. As we see with the Apostles, it involves preaching the Word, facing the legal consequences, and then preaching the Word further. As we know from the following chapters of Acts, this will eventually lead to the death of Stephen and then James, but it never leads to the silence of the apostles.

Summarize Transition: Paul sums up this section on the relationship between the government and the believer with the three practical ways that answer the question, "**Honor How?** He instructs the believers in Rome to pay your taxes and tolls even when you don't like it or deem them unfair. It's the law, so do it. Lastly, he tells them to pay respect or honor to those you might not like or agree with. You will notice throughout this passage Paul makes no distinction between believing government officials and nonbelievers in government. They are the governing authorities regardless of their relationship to the Lord, so show honor to the position they hold. In summation, "Believers should honor civil authorities." (ETB LG, 123) In the next passage, Paul is going to move on and tell the believers how they should interact with those around them regardless of their belief or unbelief in the gospel.

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

Read (or have someone read) Romans 13:8-10

Explain: According to the Treasury Department, the debt held by the United States government on October 29, 2026, was $40,593,637,262,883.48.[1] Let's call that $40.5 trillion. That seems unimaginable and insurmountable. However, assuming that the longest term for any US Treasury bond is 30 years, if the government stopped issuing bonds today, the debt could be erased in 30 years. The debt seems insurmountable, but with wise fiscal policy it can be conquered. In verse 8, Paul reveals a debt that can *never* be completely paid. It truly is an insurmountable debt. That is **The Debt of Love**. This love debt is not owed to believers alone. It is due to all of our "fellowmen," even when we view that man as "the other," the one not like me (cf. TNTC, 226) "As God's love extended to all, so must our concern reach out to believer and nonbeliever alike." (NAC, 246)

Just as we live under the laws of the state, we also live under **The Law of Love**. Paul, like Jesus (Matt 22:39, Mk 12:31, Lk 10:27) and Moses writing for God (Lev. 19:18), sums up the law with the command to love your neighbor as yourself. As examples of the love expressed in the law, Paul cites 4 commands from the second table of the Decalogue. This portion of the Ten Commandments lists the horizontal commands—the commands that relate to our relationships. Each forbids unloving actions directed toward others.

Discuss: How can we see the positive command to love expressed in the negative commands cited by Paul? (How does not committing adultery express love? How does not murdering express love? How does not stealing express love? How does not coveting express love?)

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[1] https://fiscaldata.treasury.gov/datasets/debt-to-the-penny/debt-to-the-penny

Represent: Romans 13:1-14

Explain: Clearly each of these negative commands are commands against being unloving. Do not cheat on your spouse; instead, love him or her. Do not murder people (or hate them, to use Jesus' interpretation in Matthew 5); instead, love them sacrificially as Christ loved you (His former enemy). Do not steal or covet; instead, express love by practicing "sympathetic joy," or joy over the success of others. To love like this, as the law commands, is to love like Jesus. "Love and law are *not* enemies; they are 'in-laws,' united by their relationship to Jesus...Without Christ the law is powerless without the law love is directionless." (Exalting, 218)

Expressing love through not doing something, as Paul expresses here, is entirely legitimate. However, he tells us further to love them as we love ourselves. Since we love ourselves, we often do things for ourselves, including the good things that lead to longer lives and happier lives. We have here not just the law of love but **The Working of Love**. In the working out of love, we not only avoid unloving actions, but we cultivate loving actions into our lives.

Discuss: How can we cultivate love for others and the other (those outside of our social sphere) into our lives?

Explain: One way to cultivate love of the other is to **know others**. Sometimes we limit our social sphere to a small number of people who usually look and think like us. Even if we interact with people at work who are different from us, we might not let them into our sphere of friendship and love. If we open our lives up to others, we will learn to love those who are different from us. This can be a difficult practice, but it can be helpful in our walk toward Christlikeness. Let's be honest, the easiest way to go through life is to huddle up with those we are kin to us or those we already know through our social circles. If we want to live like Christ, we should **expand our social circles** to include people who are not kin to us or like us. Not only should we know others, but we should also **acknowledge the needs of others**. When we consider the needs of others, we often think about the needy or those in economic distress. While we should care for others in this way, we should consider other needs like the need for friendship or empathy or wise counsel or a listening ear. Let's be honest again. The easiest way to go through life is to distance ourselves from the physical, emotional, and mental needs of others. "I have enough problems. I don't need theirs too," we say. If we want to live like Christ, we should **expand our sphere of care** to include others. Thank God Christ decided to care for us in that way.

Summarize and Transition: We have an insurmountable debt of love. That love is a fulfillment of the law because the law is a law of love. In obeying that law and fulfilling our debt obligations, we do the work of love. "God's intent for His people was never that they merely abide by a list of rules, but more basically that their behavior honor and reflect His character." (ETBC, 117) In the next passage, Paul is going to help us learn to honor Christ with our lives.

3. HONOR CHRIST (ROM. 13:11-14)

Read (or have someone read) Romans 13:11-14

Explain: We might break this passage into three actions: **Wake up!; Clean up!; and Grow up!** (Be 148)

Wake Up!: By beginning this passage with the word "besides," Paul links it to the previous discussion on honoring others through love. What follows is another reason we live like Christ and an admonition to do what is necessary to do so. Paul begins by pointing to the present hour. It is the time just before Christ's return. Clearly, this was written about 2000 years ago, and Christ has not yet returned. "Paul's words were intended to encourage hope and provide a sense of urgency, not provide a time frame for the Lord's return." (ETBC, 118) Every day we live is a day closer to Christ's return or our going to be with Him. Since that is true, we need to wake up. Actually, Paul says, "Since you know the time, it is already the hour for you to wake up from sleep." When I was a kid, my parents always reminded me that you cannot leave home at the same time you are supposed to arrive somewhere. This also means you cannot wake up at the same time you are supposed

to be at work. You must wake up beforehand so you can get ready. Paul encourages believers not to dilly-dally; don't twiddle your thumbs waiting for Christ's return. Wake up beforehand. Why, though? Why do believers need to wake up and get ready for Christ's return? J. B. Phillips translates this verse as "wake up to reality." **The reality is threefold: We should be found righteous, working, and accompanied when Christ returns**. In the prelude to His Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24-25), Jesus speaks of the troubling time prior to His return. Jesus challenges His disciples to endure to the end (Matt 24:13). In reality, we are His, and we should be found righteous at His return. In the parable of the faithful servant (vv. 45-51), Jesus warns His disciples to be about the work assigned to them and be found busy working at His return. The reality is we have been given instructions, and we should be found working. In Christ's explanation of the coming judgment, He separates the sheep (the saved) from the goats (the unsaved). There will be a judgment and true separation of the unbeliever from the eternal presence of God. This reality should challenge us to share the good news of the gospel so that we are found accompanied by many sheep at His return. But it is not just enough to wake up and know preparation is required. We must Clean Up!

Clean Up!: Paul tells us to discard the "deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light." The idea here is to take off the filthy, grimy clothes of unrighteousness and put on not just the clean clothes of righteousness but the armor of righteousness. In Ephesians 6:10-18, Paul explains what he calls, there, the Armor of God. We are to arm ourselves with weapons of righteousness (2 Cor 6:7) and spiritual weapons of warfare (10:4) *so that* we can "walk with decency." (Rom 13:12) The only way we can be found righteous, working, and accompanied at Christ's return is to clothe ourselves in the armor of light. When we do that, we will Grow Up!

Grow up!: Paul goes further and tells the believers in Rome and believers today to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ." What does that mean?! F.F. Bruce explains that in his *Roman Antiquities* (11.5) Dionysius of Halicarnassus uses the phrase "put on." There, the phrase is to "put on Tarquin" and means to play the part of Tarquin. (cf. TNTC, 229) To put on Christ is to play the part of Christ. In other words, act as Jesus acted. In order to play the part of Jesus in this world, we must be in close relationship with Him. (cf. ETBC, 119; Exalting, 220) If we determine to look like Jesus and stay in close fellowship with Jesus, we will "make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires." To make provision "indicates something that requires thoughtful planning in advance. This is not a spur-of-the-moment choice, but a carefully orchestrated strategy." (ETB LG, 126) Believers have the power to say no to sin. But to do that, we should heed Merida's advice: "Do not plan to sin. Do not daydream about sin. Do not seek comfort in sin. Do not flirt with sin." (Exalting, 220)

Summarize and Transition: Wake up, clean up, and grow up. Our faith is an active faith as we wait for the return of Christ. It is active in loving relationship with other believers and unbelievers alike. Paul's words here challenge us to avoid spiritual lethargy.

Discuss: "What steps can we take to prevent spiritual lethargy?" (ETB PSG, 107)

We can prayerfully put on the armor of God each morning. We can practice the spiritual disciplines like prayer, study, solitude, giving, etc. More essentially, we can remember that everything we do—going to work, raising children, running errands, or hunting deer—is to be a means of expanding and broadcasting God's kingdom on earth. Far too often we live as if we do not know the time (v. 11) or that the day is not near (v. 12). Paul writes with urgency to encourage us to actively live as Christ in this world. When we do so, we show Him the honor He deserves.

CONCLUDE

Let's draw all of this together. The passages might not seem to go together, but Paul is trying to help us represent Christ well in this world, and in doing so we will honor Him.

Represent: Romans 13:1-14

1) First, we are to be good citizens. “Believers should honor civil authorities.” (ETB PSG, 108) Challenge: Pick one government official (local, state, or national) to pray for this week. If you want to truly challenge yourself, pick one that you might not agree with.
2) Second, we are to be good neighbors. “Believers are to love our neighbors.” (ETB PSG, 108) Challenge: Find one way to love someone in a practical way this week. If you want to truly challenge yourself, pick someone who is not a believer.
3) Third, we are to be good Christians. “Believers are to display Christlikeness so that their lives reflect Jesus.” (ETB PSG, 108)—Challenge: Choose one new activity to practice this week that will prompt you in any areas of the Christian life where you might be a little lethargic. This does not have to be a lifelong commitment, just something to help you wake up to the realities of this world and your place in it this week.