



The Book of
ROMANS

Small Group Study 4: Romans 12–16

Week Two: Romans 13:1–14

Key Verse

- “Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Love, therefore, is the fulfillment of the law.” - Romans 13:10 (CSB)

Key Principles

- Christians obey earthly authorities because we know that God establishes all authority, and earthly authorities are mediators of God’s rule.
- Love is the fulfillment of the law.
- We should live with a sense of urgency in our obedience because the day of Christ’s return is almost here.

Read

When we hope in a merciful God who is forever faithful to all his promises, our whole life changes. In Romans 12, Paul began to describe the specific ways we are transformed as we dedicate all of our life to God. Romans 13 continues to describe this transformed life, and we find three points of emphasis in this chapter. First, Paul teaches us to submit to God through our submission to governing authorities (13:1–7). Next, Paul shows how love is the fulfillment of the law (13:8–10). Paul concludes by pointing us to the future, which serves as a motivation for present obedience (13:11–14).

Throughout Romans, Paul reminds us that God is ultimately in control of what happens on earth. God’s sovereign rule extends over our individual lives as well as what happens in human systems of government. Since we, as Christians, know and serve God as the ultimate Authority, it might be tempting for us to disregard earthly rule. As Paul explains, Christians are to submit to all governing authorities because “there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are instituted by God” (13:1). This means that rebellion against God-ordained authorities constitutes rebellion against God, which will bring judgment (13:2–3). Such verses should produce in us a healthy respect for earthly authority and fear of retribution if we break the laws of our government.

To approach the same idea from a different angle, all authorities—whether they know it or not— are ultimately God’s servants. **Christians obey earthly authorities because we know that God establishes all authority, and earthly authorities are mediators of God’s rule.** In other words,

our respect for earthly authorities brings honor to God. Thus, Christians are to give people what is due to them whether it be taxes, tolls, respect, or honor (13:7).

Paul's teaching about authority does not fit naturally with the spirit of our times, as our society tends to celebrate individual freedoms and rebel against governing authorities. Some people even equate authority with corruption, oppression, and abuse of power. We might be eager to spend the majority of our time discussing situations where Paul's teaching does not apply. However, we should acknowledge the general principles that are clear in this passage. All authorities (whether good or bad) are only in place by God's sovereign will. Additionally, no one exercises authority perfectly except God. God has called us to obedience to him through our submission to the governing authorities. This means if an authority requires us to sin against God or go against God's Word, it is always right to obey God first. If obeying God rather than human authority brings us negative consequences, we should be willing to trust God as we endure unjust suffering. At the same time, Paul's general point remains: God calls for our obedience to the authorities he has placed over us.

Paul transitions to the subject of love in 13:8, which he already emphasized in chapter 12. Paul explains that **love is the fulfillment of the law**. Paul's teaching here reminds us of Jesus' teaching on the "greatest and most important command" (Matthew 22:37–40). All of the Law and the Prophets, Jesus teaches, hang on the commands to love God and love one's neighbor. If we genuinely love other people, we will not commit adultery, murder, steal, or covet—thus fulfilling the demands of the law (Romans 13:9–10).

In the final verses of Romans 13, Paul orients our obedience on earth to our future salvation in Christ. Paul's list of commands from Romans 12 extends into Romans 13:1–10. As Paul concludes chapter 13, he references Christ's return in 13:11. This is Paul's way of explaining to the church, "Obey all of 12:1–13:10 because the end is coming soon." Indeed, **we should live with a sense of urgency in our obedience because the day of Christ's return is almost here (13:12)**. The image of putting off and discarding communicates a turning away from sinful patterns of behavior. On the contrary, we are to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (13:14). Paul warns us to make no provisions for our sinful desires. Furthermore, Paul's emphasis on turning from sinful behaviors to godliness corresponds to the theme from the beginning of Romans 12–13: not being conformed to the world but being transformed in Christlikeness (12:1–2).

Romans 12–13 provide a guide for how we should think about transformation. What part does submission to authorities play in our vision for personal change (13:1–7)? How important is loving others in how we desire to be transformed (13:8–10)? And how can what God has promised us in the future give us a sense of urgency in our lives now (13:11–14)? Our striving to obey these commands is a sign that the Spirit is transforming us. We are not passive in the work of transformation, but the power to change comes ultimately from God.

Study Guide

The following study questions are meant to help us wrestle with the text of Romans and see how the gospel displays God’s righteousness. Set aside some time this week to meet with God and answer these questions for yourself. Complete each question before your weekly small group meeting. Then, when you gather with your small group, be prepared to discuss your answers together.



Read Romans 1:16–17 to remain focused on Paul’s major points. Then, read Romans 13:1–14 in preparation for this week’s study.

Highlight

Read chapter 12 and 13 together. Make a list of words or concepts that are the same in both chapters.

Circle all the times Paul mentions God in 13:1–6. What verbs are assigned to God?

Highlight any Old Testament quotations in Romans 13. Where are they from? Go back and read those verses in their Old Testament context.

Make a list of the different types of images Paul uses in 13:11–14.

Explain

How would you explain the connection between Romans 12 and 13 in your own words?

What is the relationship between God and governing authorities?

How does the command to love fulfill the requirements of the law?

Summarize Romans 13:11–14 in one sentence.

Apply

Make a list of the many authorities God has placed over you. According to the truths of Romans 13, what might obedience to each of these authorities look like in both your actions and your heart?

Imagine a close friend says to you, “Christianity is not about obeying rules but about love.” How would you respond to that statement in light of Romans 13?

Earlier in Romans, Paul pointed to God’s past work in Christ to propel us to obedience (Romans 6). But in Romans 13:11–14, Paul points us to future realities as a reason to obey. In what areas of your life might you walk in greater obedience to God’s commands because “you know the time” (13:11)?

What are some ways you are tempted to “make plans to gratify the desires of the flesh” (Romans 13:14)? What next step could you take to ask your Christian community to help you fight against these desires?

Respond in Prayer

Each week of this study guide will include a recommended Scripture passage that helps us focus on the faithfulness of our great God. Set aside some time this week to read through the selected passage and use the prayer prompts below as your guide. We recommend praying through this passage on your own at home and together with your small group.

This Week's Prayer Passage: Romans 13:1–14

Read Romans 13:1–14.

Pray through the following prompts, according to the A.C.T.S. method.

- **Adoration:** Praise God for being the highest and best Authority. Praise him that there is “no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are instituted by God” (13:1). Revel in the absolute authority of God over all things.
- **Confession:** Acknowledge to God how we have rebelled against his authority, particularly in rebelling against earthly authorities (13:2). Confess instances of failure in loving our neighbors as ourselves (13:9). Take time to ask for forgiveness for any participation in the “deeds of darkness,” whether it be drunkenness, sexual impurity, promiscuity, quarreling, or jealousy (13:12–13).
- **Thanksgiving:** Thank God for appointing authorities over us so we can know his will for us (13:1–2). Thank him for transforming us from darkness to light, clothing us in Christ, and changing our walk (13:11–13).
- **Supplication:** Ask God to grant us the Holy Spirit so that we trust his authority in all of life (13:1–6). Ask him to incline our hearts to a genuine love for others (13:7–10). Pray that God would grant us hope in the second coming of Jesus that gives us an urgency to kill the desires of the flesh and walk in obedience (13:11–14).