Romans 13:1–14 Study Guide

Romans 13 continues the practical turn that began in Romans 12. After explaining salvation by grace through faith in Romans 1–11, Paul now shows what transformed faith looks like in everyday life. Romans 12 addressed humility, service, love, generosity, and hospitality. Romans 13 extends that transformed life into our relationship with governing authority, our obligations to others, and the urgency of living visibly as people who belong to Christ.

Paul's teaching assumes that government has legitimate authority under God, but not unlimited authority. Christians are called to honor governing institutions without confusing government with God. Our highest allegiance always belongs to the Lord.

1. Why does Paul tell believers to submit to governing authorities? (Romans 13:1–2)

Paul says "every soul" should be subject to governing authorities because legitimate authority ultimately exists under God's sovereignty (Romans 13:1). Submission does not mean every ruler is righteous or every decision is good. It means Christians recognize the importance of ordered authority in human society.

Peter similarly tells believers to submit to governing institutions "for the Lord's sake" and later says, "Honor the king" (1 Peter 2:13–17).

This helps distinguish the **person** from the **position**. Personal trust and admiration may be earned by character, but appropriate honor is due to the office and authority entrusted to it. Paul himself criticized the high priest's unjust behavior but then acknowledged the biblical obligation not to revile a ruler (Acts 23:1–5; Exodus 22:28).

Everyday Application: We can disagree strongly with a leader without becoming contemptuous. Christians should be able to challenge conduct while still showing appropriate respect for legitimate authority.

2. Does submission to government mean Christians must obey every command? (Romans 13:1–5)

No. Government has real authority, but it is authority **under God**, not above Him. When rulers command what God forbids or forbid what God commands, Scripture shows believers choosing obedience to God.

The apostles said, "We ought to obey God rather than men" when ordered to stop preaching Christ (Acts 5:29). Daniel continued praying when prayer was prohibited (Daniel 6:7–10), and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar's image (Daniel 3:16–18).

Romans 12 also provides an important boundary. Immediately before Paul says government "bears the sword" (Romans 13:4), he tells individual believers, "Do not avenge yourselves" (Romans 12:19). Resistance to wrongful authority is therefore not permission for personal vengeance or lawlessness.

Everyday Application: Christians should normally submit to governing authority, but our highest allegiance belongs to God. When the two genuinely conflict, we obey God while still seeking to act with courage, restraint, and integrity.

3. What purpose does God intend governing authority to serve? (Romans 13:3–5)

Paul describes governing authority as "God's minister to you for good" and as an agent that restrains and punishes wrongdoing (Romans 13:3–4). Government therefore has a legitimate role in preserving order and administering justice.

Paul also says Christians submit "not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake" (Romans 13:5). Our motivation should be deeper than merely avoiding punishment.

Everyday Application: Obedience based only on fear asks, "Will I get caught?" Christian conscience asks, **"What is the right thing to do before God?"**

4. What does Paul mean by "render therefore to all their due"? (Romans 13:6–7)

Paul becomes very practical: pay taxes and customs that are owed, and give appropriate respect and honor to those in authority (Romans 13:6–7).

Jesus taught the same principle when He said, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mark 12:17). That statement recognizes legitimate governmental claims while keeping God above Caesar.

Everyday Application: Christian witness includes ordinary civic integrity—paying what we owe, obeying legitimate laws, and giving proper honor even when we disagree with those holding office.

5. How does Paul show that our individual choices affect the wider community? (Romans 13:7–10)

Paul moves from individual responsibilities toward governing authorities—taxes, customs, respect, and honor—to the continuing responsibility to love one another (Romans 13:7–8).

This reflects the larger pattern of Romans 12–13. Believers are "members of one another" (Romans 12:5), are called to live peaceably with others (Romans 12:18), and are to act in ways that do no harm to a neighbor (Romans 13:10).

Paul is showing that Christian conduct is never isolated. The way one person behaves can either strengthen or weaken trust, peace, order, and care within the larger community.

Everyday Application: Our choices belong to us, but their effects rarely stop with us. A useful question is, **"What kind of community am I helping create by the way I live?"**

6. What does Paul mean when he says it is time to "awake out of sleep"? (Romans 13:11–12)

Paul introduces urgency: "Now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed" (Romans 13:11). Each passing day brings believers closer to Christ's return and the completion of the salvation He has already begun in us (Philippians 1:6; 3:20–21).

Therefore, spiritual sleepiness is inappropriate. “The night is far spent, the day is at hand” (Romans 13:12). Jesus similarly warned His followers to remain watchful because they do not know the hour of His return (Matthew 24:42–44).

Everyday Application: Christianity should not become spiritual autopilot. The limited nature of our time should make us more intentional about obedience, relationships, service, and the things God has called us to do.

7. Why does Paul place strife and envy alongside sins we more readily recognize as “works of darkness”? (Romans 13:12–13)

Paul tells believers to “cast off the works of darkness” and then names drunkenness, sexual immorality, strife, and envy (Romans 13:12–13). We may immediately recognize the first sins as serious while treating hostility, rivalry, and divisiveness as somehow less spiritually significant.

But the placement matters. Paul has just spent much of the chapter discussing authority, civic responsibility, love of neighbor, and how our individual conduct affects the wider community (Romans 13:1–10). A person can therefore be morally disciplined in some areas while allowing anger, contempt, factionalism, or political rivalry to dominate another part of life.

Scripture does not forbid respectfully challenging rulers or opposing wrongdoing (Acts 5:29; Acts 22:25). But our political loyalties can become spiritually disordered if they begin to determine our identity, shape whom we love or despise, or command an allegiance that belongs to God alone. Paul reminds believers that our ultimate citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20), and Jesus warns that no one can serve two masters (Matthew 6:24).

So political conviction itself is not the problem. **The danger comes when political allegiance becomes a substitute for spiritual identity, or when political engagement produces the very strife, contempt, and division Paul tells Christians to cast off.**

Everyday Application: We readily examine ourselves for obvious moral sins, but we should apply the same seriousness to anger, contempt, rivalry, and political tribalism. A helpful question is, **“Does the way I engage public issues show that Christ is my highest allegiance—or has another identity begun to shape how I see and treat people?”**

8. What does it mean to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” and make no provision for the flesh? (Romans 13:14)

Paul ends with a positive command and a negative one: **put on Christ**, and **make no provision for the flesh** (Romans 13:14).

This connects directly to Romans 12:2: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” The Christian life involves refusing to let the values, desires, and identities of the surrounding world determine who we become. Instead, we increasingly allow the character, teaching, and lordship of Christ to shape how we think and live (Romans 12:2; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 3:10–14).

That connection is especially important after Romans 13:12–13. Paul has warned against drunkenness, sexual immorality, strife, envy, and other patterns of darkness. The answer is not merely to remove bad behavior, but to **put on Christ**. We replace conformity to the world with transformation into a life that reflects Him.

At the same time, Paul recognizes what Romans 6–7 has already taught: sinful desires remain a real threat. James says temptation gains power through our own desires (James 1:14–15). Therefore, "make no provision for the flesh" means we should not deliberately create circumstances that feed desires we know can draw us away from Christ.

Everyday Application: We are always being shaped by something. The question is not only, **"What sin am I avoiding?"** but also, **"Am I becoming more like Christ, or am I allowing the world around me to determine how I think, desire, speak, and live?"** Following Christ means refusing to feed the old life while intentionally allowing Him to reshape the new one.

Closing Thought

Romans 13 shows that Christian transformation reaches beyond private belief into the way we participate in the world around us.

- **We honor legitimate authority.**
- **We recognize that God remains above every human authority.**
- **We fulfill our obligations with integrity.**
- **We recognize that our individual choices influence the wider community.**
- **We love our neighbors.**
- **We refuse to allow politics, rivalry, or any other identity to replace our identity in Christ.**
- **We resist conformity to the world and put on Christ.**
- **We refuse to make provision for the old life.**

Paul's message is not that the individual disappears into the collective. It is that **the way each believer lives matters beyond himself**. Our conduct can strengthen or weaken peace, trust, justice, and care within the communities we inhabit.

God remains above Caesar, and our responsibility is to represent Christ faithfully within the society in which He has placed us.