



Relentless Grace: How the Gospel Changes Everything

Paul's Letter to the Romans

Session 15 – Citizens with Godly Influence | Romans Chapter 13

Nothing proves our Christian witness like the wear and tear of daily life. In chapter 12, Paul taught how we should treat one another in light of God's mercy to us. Love is the motive, and the specific instructions Paul gives encourage us to examine how we come across as individuals. Do we respond in ways that reveal the transforming power of God's love in our life?

In chapter 13, Paul continues to think about the implications of the gospel for daily life. We live in a time when people are losing faith and don't know where to find it. So let the church be known as respectful, law-abiding people who exert a godly influence on society. Above all, let Christians be known by their love.

Icebreaker

A recent poll asked Americans what they think is **very important** in order to be a good citizen. What do you think the top three answers were? See the answers by percentage below.*

- Vote Respect opinions of those who disagree Pay your taxes Display the flag
 Stay up with events in government/politics Always obey the law Volunteer

Goals for this Session:

- Discover what citizenship has to do with your Christian witness.
- Consider how the power of love motivates and enables us to fulfill the law.
- Pray for grace to be a godly influence wherever you are.

* **Vote:** 74% **Pay taxes:** 71% **Obey the law:** 69% **Respect opinions:** 61% **Volunteer:** 52% **Stay up with current events:** 49% **Display flag:** 36%
Pew Research Center: The Responsibilities of Citizenship, April 2018

Good to know . . .

Submit to governing authorities and practice love toward your fellow man. This wasn't an easy thing for Christians in Rome and Paul knew it. Their world was unfriendly—in fact, the political and social atmosphere in Rome was rapidly deteriorating. Every citizen was affected, and within a few years after Paul's writing, the emperor Nero began targeting Christians in particular. Here is a glimpse of what the church in Rome was confronted with.

- **Indifference.** In general, Romans were not religious. They borrowed religion and philosophy from the Greeks and shaped it to fit Roman interests. Romans valued the practice of worship mainly for what it contributed to community life; feeding the soul was secondary.
- **Suspicion.** In the public's perception, Christians were a fringe-group with dubious motives. Meeting in private homes was frowned upon, as it might foster rebellion. There were rumors of cannibalism (exaggerations about their observance of the Lord's Supper). Loyalty was an issue, since Christians avoided participation in community rituals and offerings to gods.
- **Political unrest.** Jewish zealots were stepping up their religious rhetoric and calling for the overthrow of Rome. Any act of civil disobedience (as defined by government) was taken seriously and harshly dealt with. Resistance to paying taxes was gaining momentum and by AD 58 (a year or two after Paul's letter) Rome had a full-blown tax revolt on its hands.

Model Citizens

Romans 13:1–7

Paul turns his attention to how believers must live and conduct themselves in society.

1. Governing authorities (verses 1–2). What command does Paul give in these verses?
 - a. Paul emphasizes why being a law-abiding citizen is essential. What is our first, and most important, motive for respecting authority?

Explain how resisting this command adversely affects our relationship with God.

- b. In verses 3–7, what follow-up reasons does Paul give in support of this command?
 - c. Consider how verses 3–5 can also be an instructive model for those in authority to follow. How should they lead? According to the Bible, what is the purpose of civil government?
2. Paul was not advocating blind obedience to governing authorities. We are responsible to live with our spiritual eyes open. What do examples from the Bible show us about the limits of our Christian duty to obey? Note how they responded in these situations.

Daniel 3:12, 16–18

Daniel 6:5, 10–13

Acts 4:18–20, 29–31

Acts 5:27–29

#wordstoknow

Greek words/terms at a glance.

submit (hypotasso) Willing cooperation; in this context, to government authority.

put on (endúo) To be clothed in Christ; what we “put on” reminds us of who we are, which allows us to behave accordingly.

no provision (pronoia) In context, to make no plan or leave open the option to sin.

3. What does citizenship have to do with your Christian witness? Think of the various ways you have potential and the responsibility to be a godly influence.

1 Timothy 2:1–4

Titus 3:1–2

1 Peter 2:12–19

1 Peter 4:12–16

- a. Have you ever been required to comply with a specific command that goes directly against God’s Word? How did you respond? If you had it to do over, would you do anything differently? Why, or why not?
- b. In your observation, what attitudes or behaviors among believers tend to give the church a bad name and diminish the effective sharing of the gospel?

What attitudes or behaviors give us a solid witness and increase our influence in sharing the gospel in our communities? Share one or two specific examples you can think of.

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, let it sink in and make it part of your prayers. Ask the Holy Spirit to examine your heart and increase your understanding.

“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.”
Romans 13:14 NKJV

Think About It . . .

Which part of this verse resonates most with you today? How and in what way?

Love's Duty

Romans 13:8–14

Since we are free from the law, why obey? Paul talks about fulfilling the law through love.

1. Love in action. If you could sum up our Christian responsibility from these verses, what would it be?

a. From verses 8–10, how does love sum up the entire law? Put another way, how is being obedient to God's commands always the loving thing to do? Please explain.

b. From verses 11–14, can you hear the urgency in Paul's words? In your own words, explain what it means to:

→ Wake up (verse 11).

→ Put on the armor of light (verse 12).

Use the following verses to add to your answer.

Ephesians 5:6–17

1 Peter 4:7–8

1 Peter 5:8–9

2. *How the gospel changes everything.* Never underestimate the impact of a loving and godly witness. Jesus said, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35 esv). When we consider the effects of loving others, the power of the gospel is good news all over again.

a. **The gospel is incentive to love your neighbor.** The Jews thought of a neighbor as anyone who was Jewish, but Paul had the Lord’s definition in mind. According to Jesus, who is our neighbor and what is our responsibility toward them? Read Luke 10:25–37 for help with your answer.

“There is one debt which will always remain outstanding... And that is our duty to love. We can never stop loving others and say, *I have loved enough.*”

John R.W. Stott

Who do you “owe” love to today? Identify someone who is your neighbor (who knows, they may actually live right next door). List some practical ways that you can show love and take the opportunity to share the gospel with them.

b. **The gospel is incentive to be properly dressed.** When Paul said, “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ,” he wasn’t making a fashion statement—or was he? There’s an old saying that “*clothes make the man*” which sounds like a slick ad pitch from the fifties, but the phrase traces back to ancient Greece, long before Paul’s day. The idea being that the way we dress influences the way others perceive us, and even how we see ourselves. Think about that in terms of our life and witness.

From Colossians 3:8–9, what items need to be thrown out of our spiritual wardrobe?

From Colossians 3:12–14 what items should our spiritual wardrobe be bulging with?



Gospel at a Glance: Put on the Lord Jesus Christ | “To *put on the Lord Jesus Christ* conveys the idea of making Jesus a part of everything you say and do. Like a comfortable piece of clothing that you wear all day, Jesus wants to join your decision-making process. He wants to be Lord over your singleness or your marriage, over your career and free time, over what you hear and watch. By the way you live, you reveal that either He is Lord *of* all, or He is not Lord *at* all. This is especially true when it comes to the lust of the flesh. Some of us play around a little here; we set up our schedules or create certain routes that we *know* will take us past something we have a hard time resisting. And when we fall, we say, ‘I couldn’t help it.’ Yes, you could. Make no provision for the flesh! That’s part of *putting on Jesus*.” – Greg Laurie¹

Adoration **C**onfession **T**hankfulness **S**upplication

“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.” Ephesians 6:18 NIV

In each session, we will pray—for ourselves, for others, for our church, and for our nation. As a focus for prayer, use the memory verse, another scripture, or what the Lord has impressed on you from the chapter. No need to be profound or elaborate, just authentic.

Write a simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

T _____

S _____

¹ Greg Laurie, *Start! The Bible for New Believers*, (©2010, Holy Bible NKJV ©1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.) p. 197

