

Session 13: Put On the Lord Jesus Christ

Romans 13 · Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers how the living sacrifice behaves in public: subject to legitimate authority as God's servant for the common good, yet answerable first to God; owing everyone one permanent debt, love, which fulfills the whole law; and awake to the hour, casting off works of darkness and putting on the armor of light, until the chapter ends in the very sentence that converted St. Augustine, which this study met on its first night: "put on the Lord Jesus Christ."

Catholic Touchstone. The Church reads 13:1-7 with both hands: authority comes from God and deserves genuine obedience in its sphere (CCC 1899-1900), and that same origin sets its limits, for "the citizen is obliged in conscience not to follow the directives of civil authorities when they are contrary to the demands of the moral order" (CCC 2242, citing Acts 5:29). And the love command is not a lower bar than the law but its fullness: at the evening of life, we will be judged on love (CCC 1022).

What You Need to Know

Handle 13:1-7 with precision, because history has handled it badly. Paul's claims: "there is no authority except from God" (13:1); the ruler "is God's servant for your good" (13:4); therefore be subject, pay taxes, give respect and honor where due (13:5-7). Three facts frame the passage. First, Paul wrote it under Nero, to Christians in the capital, a few years before, as ancient tradition holds, that same state killed him: this is not naivety about government. Second, the passage grounds authority theologically, and a grounding is also a leash: an authority that exists from God is answerable to God, holds office as servant (13:4, twice), and is ordered to your good; the office's legitimacy is tied to its purpose. Third, Scripture itself models the limit: the apostles who taught submission also stood in courtrooms saying "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29), and the Church canonized the martyrs who refused the pinch of incense. The Catholic synthesis (CCC 1899-1903, 2242): real, conscientious civic duty, and a conscience that answers to God first when the two collide. Tonight's Wisdom discovery gives your group the frame Scripture itself puts around kings. Keep the discussion at the level of principle; the moment it becomes a referendum on current politics, name the move and return to the text: Paul gave Rome principles, not a party.

Then the debt that cannot be retired (13:8-10): "Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law." The commandments are "summed up" in loving neighbor as self (13:9, quoting a verse the group will be surprised to locate), and "love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (13:10). Be careful with the logic: love is not a vaguer substitute for the commandments; it is their engine and their measure. The commandments describe what love never does (murder, adultery, theft, coveting), so appeals to "love" against the commandments have misread both. This lands the law-thread's last piece: the law upheld (3:31), fulfilled in us by the Spirit (8:4), is fulfilled as love (13:10).

Finally the wake-up call (13:11-14): "salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand" (13:11-12). The imagery is a soldier's reveille: cast off the works of darkness, "put on the armor of light" (13:12), conduct becoming daytime (13:13), and then the sentence: "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires" (13:14). Your group has met this verse before: it is the sentence St. Augustine's eyes fell on in the Milan garden, the one after which, as he tells it, he needed to read no further (Session 1). Tonight the study arrives, in course, at the very words. Let the group

discover the recognition themselves if they can; it is a rehearsal for how Session 15 will feel. One more echo worth an aside: "armor" here (13:12) and "instruments" of righteousness in 6:13 render the same Greek word, *hopla*, weapons: what you yielded to God in chapter 6, you wear in chapter 13.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Wisdom 6:1-3. Scripture's own frame for rulers, from a deuterocanonical book again: "Listen therefore, O kings... your dominion was given you from the Lord, and your sovereignty from the Most High, who will search out your works and inquire into your plans." Given from the Lord: Paul's 13:1. Who will search out your works: the leash. Authority from God was never authority without audit. A discovery passage; keep it back.

Leviticus 19:18. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (13:9) is not a New Testament invention; Paul and Jesus both quote Moses: "you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord" (Lev 19:18), from the heart of the holiness code. Most people are astonished to find it there; let them be. A discovery passage; guard it.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. JUSTIN MARTYR

Writing to the emperor himself around AD 155, St. Justin Martyr explained the Christian position in almost exactly Paul's terms: everywhere, he says, we more readily than all men endeavor to pay the taxes to those you appoint, as Jesus taught; we render worship to God alone, but in all other things we gladly serve you, praying that in you the royal power may be found joined with sound judgment (First Apology 17). Taxes gladly, worship never: the both/and of Romans 13, written openly to the emperor by a man Rome would behead. One of the Church's earliest surviving public accounts of Christian civic duty was written by a martyr who had read this chapter carefully.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. THOMAS MORE

On the scaffold in 1535, St. Thomas More, Chancellor of England, condemned after refusing to swear what conscience forbade, declared, as the earliest contemporary report (the Paris Newsletter of 1535) records it, that he died "the King's good servant, and God's first." The sentence is Romans 13 compressed to seven words: good servant, truly, taxes and honor and years of loyal office; and God's first, because the authority that gave the king his crown also set its limit. More did not rebel; he declined, paid the price, and blessed the king from the block. Where obedience to God and Caesar part, the Catholic does not seize power or surrender conscience; he suffers, and the suffering is the testimony.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

"At the evening of life, we shall be judged on our love" (St. John of the Cross, quoted at CCC 1022). Tonight's chapter says why the examination has one subject: love is the fulfilling of the law (13:10), so the final audit of a life and the law's whole demand turn out to be the same question. St. John's sentence also guards the standard from going soft: he was a reformer, a prisoner, and a mystic of the purgative way; the love he means is not a mood but the fire that has burned selfishness out. To be judged on love is not the easy exam; it is the total one.

Catechism Connection

CCC 1899-1900. Authority, required by the moral order, comes from God: the duty of obedience and honor to legitimate authority is genuine, and the Catechism cites this chapter for it. Catholics are not anarchists on principle; the state is not a necessary evil but a servant with a mandate.

CCC 2242. The limit, in the Church's own words: "The citizen is obliged in conscience not to follow the directives of civil authorities when they are contrary to the demands of the moral order," grounded in "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Both paragraphs are the Church reading Romans 13 whole.

CCC 1022. The particular judgment, carrying St. John of the Cross's sentence: judged on our love. Set beside 13:8-10, it means the permanent debt is also the final exam.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

St. Augustine's verse: PAYS OFF tonight. 13:13-14 is the Session 1 Voice arriving in course. If someone recognizes it, hand them the moment; if no one does, ask "where has this study heard this verse before?" and wait. Then note what the study has done: the group has now read, in context, the sentence that converted the Church's greatest teacher of grace.

Hopla echo. "Instruments" of righteousness (6:13) and "armor" of light (13:12) translate the same Greek word. One aside, no lecture: yielded weapons become worn armor.

Law thread: final piece. 3:31 upheld, 8:4 fulfilled in us, 13:10 fulfilled as love. Name the three-step arc once; it completes the law thread for the study.

Overcome evil with good: carried. 12:21 governs 13:1-7 more than is obvious: subjection, taxes, and honor are that maxim applied to public life. One sentence connects them.

Session Goals

1. The group can state the Catholic both/and on authority (genuine duty, conscience's limit) with texts for each half (13:1-7; Acts 5:29; Wis 6:1-3).
2. The group discovers Wisdom 6:1-3 and Leviticus 19:18 and can explain love as the law's fulfillment, not its replacement.
3. The group recognizes 13:13-14 as St. Augustine's conversion text and can say what "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" asks of them.
4. The group keeps the entire discussion at the level of principle, and the leader can name and redirect partisan drift.

Timed Plan (75-90 minutes)

- Opening prayer and Win questions: 12 min
- Build questions 1-2 with the Wisdom discovery and the steelman: 32 min
- Build question 3 with the Leviticus discovery: 18 min
- Build question 4 (the hour; St. Augustine's verse): 13 min
- Send questions, Live It This Week, memory verse, closing prayer: 15 min

If time runs short, pre-chosen cuts: drop the Dig Deeper box, and compress 13:6-7 (taxes, revenue, respect, honor) into one sentence. Never cut the discoveries, the steelman answer, or the St. Augustine recognition.

Session 13: Put On the Lord Jesus Christ

Romans 13 · Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Father, all authority is yours, lent to servants and audited by you. Make us good citizens and better saints: subject where we owe subjection, unbending where we owe you first, and debtors to everyone in love alone. The night is far gone; wake us, arm us with light, and clothe us in your Son. Amen.

Win

1. What is a rule or authority you obey gladly because you can see the good it serves, and one you obey grudgingly? What makes the difference?
2. Finish honestly: I put off spiritually urgent things because I assume I have ____.

Build

Read Romans 13:1-7 aloud.

1. Before anything else: who was emperor when Paul wrote this, and what does that fact do to lazy readings in both directions? Then find the job description hidden in verse 4: what is the ruler called, and for what?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Nero. Paul commands subjection, taxes, and honor under a regime that would later execute him, which forbids two lazy readings at once: this is not a passage that only applies under good governments (Paul had no such luxury), and it is not naivety about power (Paul knew Roman power from custody and courtrooms). The job description: the ruler "is God's servant for your good" (13:4), servant twice in one verse, and minister again in 13:6. Authority in this passage is never autonomous: it is derived ("from God," 13:1), diaconal (servant), and directed ("for your good"). Every word that grounds the duty of obedience also builds the platform for the question the steelman will ask: what about when the servant turns on the good?

Discovery moment. Say: "Paul's claim that authority is 'from God' has an Old Testament address, in a book addressed directly to kings, and the same passage that grants their authority adds something rulers prefer to forget. Find the opening of Wisdom 6."

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Wisdom 6:1-3: "Listen therefore, O kings... your dominion was given you from the Lord, and your sovereignty from the Most High, who will search out your works and inquire into your plans." Given from the Lord: there is Paul's 13:1. Who will search out your works: there is the audit no earthly office escapes. Scripture never taught the divine right of kings to do as they please; it taught the divine mandate of kings to serve, with an inspection coming. (And note, again, which shelf this frame sits on: a deuterocanonical book, load-bearing under Romans for the second time in this study.) Authority from God is authority under God, which is exactly where the next question presses.

Steelman: Does Romans 13 Command Unconditional Obedience?

Build it at full strength. Say to the group: "Here is the reading at its full strength, and history has taken it seriously, sometimes to its shame. The text has no exception clause. 'Let every person be subject' (13:1); 'he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment' (13:2). Paul does not add 'unless the ruler is wicked': he wrote under Nero and still said it. On this reading, the Christian's duty is submission, full stop, and every appeal to conscience against the state is just rebellion wearing a pious mask. Rulers have quoted it that way for centuries. If the plain text is unconditional, who are we to add conditions?" Let it stand. Then press, with a discovery.

Discovery moment (inside the steelman). Say: "Before we answer from Romans, watch the apostles themselves handle the collision. Find Acts 5:27-29: Peter and the apostles, before the council, ordered to stop preaching. Read their answer aloud."

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Acts 5:29: "We must obey God rather than men." The same apostolic church that taught submission drew the line in a courtroom and took the flogging that followed (Acts 5:40-41). Now assemble the whole answer from tonight's texts. The grounding is the limit: authority "from God" (13:1) is authority under God, audited (Wis 6:3), defined as servant "for your good" (13:4); a command to do evil is the office abandoning its own charter, and obeying God first is not resisting the authority but honoring its source. The Church states it plainly: obedience to legitimate authority is a real duty (CCC 1899-1900), and "the citizen is obliged in conscience not to follow the directives of civil authorities when they are contrary to the demands of the moral order" (CCC 2242, citing Acts 5:29). And mark the manner, because it separates conscience from mere rebellion: the apostles, the martyrs, and St. Thomas More did not riot or seize power; they declined the evil command specifically, kept every other duty, and accepted the cost. Their path of refusal-with-suffering is the Church's constant pattern, though not her only permitted remedy: lawful challenge and appeal remain open, and the Catechism sets out strict conditions under which resistance to oppression can be legitimate (CCC 2243). Keep this at principle level in the room: the moment it becomes about a current party or politician, name the drift and return to the text; Paul equipped consciences, not campaigns.

Read Romans 13:8-10 aloud.

Discovery moment. Say: "'You shall love your neighbor as yourself' (13:9): most people assume Jesus coined it. He was quoting, and so is Paul. Find the original command, buried in the middle of the Old Testament's holiness laws, in Leviticus 19."

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Leviticus 19:18: "you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord," sitting in the Torah between commands about wages, justice, and grudges. Jesus' second great commandment is already in Moses, which matters for how your group reads 13:8-10: "love is the fulfilling of the law" (13:10) does not mean love replaces the commandments with a warm feeling; it means the commandments are love's job description: "love does no wrong to a neighbor" (13:10), and murder, adultery, theft, and coveting are the wrongs love never does (13:9). So the two counterfeit readings die together: legalism (commandments without love: Saul's livestock, last week) and sentimentalism ("love" invoked against the commandments: a love that wrongs the neighbor while feeling warmly toward them). And the study's law-thread completes: the law upheld by faith (3:31), fulfilled in us by the Spirit (8:4), turns out to be fulfilled as love

(13:10). One permanent debt remains on every account: "Owe no one anything, except to love one another" (13:8), the debt that is never paid off and never in default while it is being paid.

2. Read 13:11-14 aloud. What time is it, according to Paul, and what are the wardrobe instructions? Then look hard at verse 14. Where has this study heard that sentence before?

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The hour: late. "Salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand" (13:11-12): every day of the Christian life is closer to the dawn than the last, so live as daylight people now: "cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light" (13:12), and note the armor: the same Greek word (hopla) as the "instruments" of righteousness you yielded in 6:13; what was surrendered is now worn. Then the sentence: "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires" (13:14). Let the room find it: this is the verse from our first night, the one St. Augustine's eyes fell on in the Milan garden, after which he needed to read no further (Confessions VIII.12). Your group has now traveled the whole road to the sentence that ended his war, and they arrive knowing what he knew when the light flooded in: behind "put on Christ" stand thirteen chapters of mercy, and a font where the putting-on began (6:3; Gal 3:27). "Make no provision for the flesh" is the practical edge: do not pre-stock the fall; the soldier of light does not keep the old uniform in the closet.

DIG DEEPER

Nearer now than when we first believed (13:11). Paul's eschatology is a posture, not a datebook. He does not say when the day comes; he says which direction time runs: toward it. Two errors doze through the sentence: the panic that sets dates, and the drowse that assumes the alarm is broken because it has rung so long. The Church's liturgy keeps Paul's posture on an annual clock: every Advent she prays this very passage, waking as if the year were the age. The practical form of watchfulness is not calculation but readiness: live tonight so that the day's arrival would be a joy interrupted, not a scramble.

Send

1. Where in your public life, work, citizenship, online, does honoring authority need work, and where might conscience be asking you to politely, costly decline something? (Principles, not parties.)
2. What "provision for the flesh" are you still keeping in the closet, the pre-stocked occasion of the fall, and what would it mean to clear it out this week?

Live It This Week

- Pay one debt of honor deliberately this week: genuine respect to someone in rightful authority over you (boss, pastor, parent, official), in word or writing (13:7 names civil authority; the wider circle is its natural analogy).
- Identify one "provision for the flesh" and remove it: the app, the stash, the bookmark, the route past the occasion. Do not negotiate with it; clear it (13:14).

- Each night this week, pray one sentence before sleep: Lord, the night is far gone; clothe me in Christ for the day at hand.

Memory Verse

"But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires."

Romans 13:14 (RSV2CE)

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, our armor and our garment, the sentence that ended St. Augustine's night has reached us in ours. We cast off what belongs to darkness; we owe every neighbor love; we serve every rightful authority, and you first. Clothe us, and let the day find us dressed. Amen.

Session 13: Put On the Lord Jesus Christ

Leader Reference Card · Every Passage, In Order

- Romans 13:1-7 (read aloud: authority from God; God's servant for your good; taxes, respect, honor)
- Wisdom 6:1-3 (discovery passage: dominion given from the Lord, who will search out your works; do not reveal in advance)
- Acts 5:27-29 (steelman discovery: we must obey God rather than men; do not reveal in advance; cf. Acts 5:40-41)
- Romans 13:8-10 (read aloud: owe no one anything except love; love fulfills the law)
- Leviticus 19:18 (discovery passage: love your neighbor as yourself; do not reveal in advance)
- Romans 13:11-14 (read aloud: the hour; armor of light; put on the Lord Jesus Christ; cf. Rom 6:13 hopla, Gal 3:27, Confessions VIII.12)
- CCC 1899-1900, 2242, 1022 (Catechism Connection)
- Memory verse: Romans 13:14