

## Biblical Submission: Rulers and Authorities (Titus 3:1)

Paul transitions from second person singular “you” (as he addresses Titus) in 2:15, to third person plural “them” in 3:1.

### 1. Scripture’s Theme of Submission

Submission is a theme of God’s economy:

We are to submit to Christ (Ephesians 5:24), we are to submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21), children are to obey their parents (Ephesians 6:1), slaves are to obey their masters (Ephesians 6:5; Titus 2:9), the congregation is to submit to their leaders (Hebrews 13:17), wives are to submit to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22; Titus 2:5), and we are to submit to the rulers and authorities (Romans 13:1; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13).

The “submission” towards rulers and authorities is the same Greek word that acknowledges the equal dignity, value and worth of both parties, while recognizing different functions.

The Greek word refers to someone offering themselves willingly, accepting the place God has assigned. It means to keep one’s rank in society. This Greek word is used in Ephesians 5:21, 5:24; Titus 2:5, 2:9 and 3:1).

### 2. Not Every Ruler and Authority will Obey God’s Moral Law

Rulers: in the Greek it means “beginning, origin and domain.” It refers to “what comes first” or “what is chief/first ranking in priority or pre-eminent.” These would be those who are ruling in the affairs of the nation.

Authorities: the delegation of power from the rulers. It refers to those who have the lawful and legal right to carry out a function. It means in the Greek “a license to act.”

It is important to note that Paul does not condemn or promote any specific system of human government or authority. Paul is primarily concerned with Cretans who were constantly involved in insurrections, murders and wars. Paul already hinted at the Cretan insubordinate spirit (Titus 1:10, 16). Cretans were known in the Roman world as being insurrectionists.

Paul acknowledges that every human institution is appointed by God (Romans 13:1-7). How do we reconcile that every institution is “supposed” to be a power that promotes good and punishes evil, yet does not always do it? Regarding Romans 13:1:

- Caesar, as well as other Roman magistrates are going to be reading this letter (Romans) and need to know that Christians are not anarchists.
- Caesar is reminded that he is not God and not in control.
- Civil authorities must submit to the moral law of God which objectively determines and describes what is right and wrong.

Submission to anyone or anything alone does not determine what is right. God’s moral law must determine who and what we are to submit to. The state does not determine what is right and wrong, but instead should reward good and punish evil.

### 3. Being Ready for Every Good Work (Disobedience Commanded)

- God’s people must be ready for “every good work” in cooperation with the rulers and authorities providing that they are rewarding good and punishing evil. The Greek word for “good” refers to something that is praiseworthy or inherently good.
- Christians have dual citizenship (heaven and country) but can serve only one master (Matthew 6:24). We are Christians first, citizens of a country second.

The Bible is full of examples of civil disobedience:

- Peter and John before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:13-22).
- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refusing to bow down (Daniel 3:6, 16-18).
- Saul’s soldiers refusing to kill Jonathan (1 Samuel 14:24-27, 43-46).
- Hebrew midwives refusing to obey Pharaoh’s edict to kill Hebrew male infants (Exodus 1).
- Rahab’s deceit with hiding the two spies, despite the king’s order (Joshua 2).
- Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah were all men who rebelled against the establishment and were honored for it (Hebrews 11).

### 4. Choices for the Christian Regarding Abusive Rulers and Authorities

- Use current laws in place to petition rights that are being violated.
- Remain willing to have property seized, be imprisoned, or face martyrdom.
- Flee area and hide (either “underground” or in another country).
- Stay and fight (use violence) to overthrow the “illegitimate” establishment.

All Christians agree that when the rulers and authorities commands us do evil rather than good, our obedience to God takes precedence. The difference between Christians is the outlet, degree, and “vehicle” for that disobedience.

#### Points of Application:

- Civil disobedience is commanded when the rulers and authorities pass laws or mandate Christians to act in a way that is in direct violation of God’s laws and precepts.
- If a Christian disobeys the authority, he/she must be willing to accept the consequences of that disobedience (popularity, job, finances, comfort, prison, death).
- Christians are to pray for those in high positions because God’s desire is for them to be saved (1 Timothy 2:1-2).