

Under authority for the sake of the Gospel

- Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17
- Cindy and I were blessed to be able to go to The Cove and hear Al Mohler present a pastor's seminar this week, and at the beginning of the third and final session he took questions from the audience. Before he started with our questions, he said his favorite question of all time was one he got from a 14-year-old boy. The teenager asked, "How do I know my parents are really my parents? I am becoming increasingly doubtful." We laughed and Mohler said he told the young man, "They're your parents. Deal with it. And if you think you're dealing with two strange human in your parents, believe they have some of the same thoughts about you, too. Probably every morning at breakfast."
- One of the questions that was asked on Tuesday that relates to our text this morning. It was, "How should we be training the next generation for civil disobedience?" I think Paul would have approved of Al Mohler's response. He said, "The best way to get into trouble is to preach in season and out of season." In other words, the day may come sooner than we think in our culture that our greatest single act of civil disobedience may simply be to preach the Word without apology. That will have more effect than any sit-in or political rally ever could.
- It was almost like he knew I would be preaching from Titus 3:1 this week, because Dr. Mohler also told a story about Martin Luther, the great German reformer who took on the Roman Catholic church armed with just the Word of God, and won. There were countless Germans who converted to faith in Jesus Christ and left the Catholic Church during Martin Luther's ministry, but old habits died hard. Some of them, knowing that they couldn't go to mass or confession any more were having an altar built in their homes. Then they would ask a priest to come to their home and offer a private mass. Luther was horrified by this and preached against it. But some of his most loyal students took it a step further. They broke into the peoples' houses who were doing this and tore down their altars. Luther was even more horrified by this. He said to his students, No! Your job is to preach the Word. God will do the rest. Jesus said it like this in Mark 4:26-27, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how."
- All of that ties into our text for today. We will start chapter three with verse one, and that's all I plan to cover. Paul spent all of chapter 2 teaching the church how they are to live in community with one another. Older men and older women, and younger men and younger women, and bondservants. But in each case of how the people in the church were to relate to one another, there was another reason why this was important. Remember? In chapter two verse 5, younger women are called to live in submission to their husbands that the Word of God may not be reviled. Chapter two verse 8, pastors are called to show integrity, dignity and sound speech in their preaching so that an opponent may be put to shame. And chapter two verse 10, bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything "so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior." What is at stake if we do not live as people of the Word with one another in the church? The Gospel. It is so important that later in chapter three Paul says that if anyone in the church is stirring up division, he is to be warned two times, and then the church is to "have nothing more to do with him." Why? Because what is at stake is the Gospel.
- Now in chapter three, Paul is going to teach the church how they are to live in society. And the question is the same: what is at stake if we do not live as people of the Word with those in our culture who reject the Word? The Gospel. Paul reminds us that we, like those in the culture who do not know Christ, "were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another!" That is where we were. But it should not at all reflect where we are! Because the goodness and loving kindness of God appeared and He saved us. We need to preach the Gospel to ourselves every day, because it is the Gospel that is at stake in how we relate to the culture around us.

- Notice the first word in verse 1 is “Remind.” Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities. Why does Paul start this verse with that word? Two words. NOTHING NEW. What he is going to tell them, just like what I am going to tell you today and every week, is nothing new. I like what John Stott said about this: “So all conscientious Christian teachers, once they have been delivered from the unhealthy lust for originality, take pains to make old truths new and stale truths fresh.” I trust I can do that with this text this morning, but there is nothing new in this principle, that as followers of God, we are to submit to rulers and authorities. I saw a friend of mine this week that I haven’t seen in a while and he said to me that his son-in-law is like Joseph of old. What do you mean, I asked. He said, you know, everything Joseph put his hand to prospered. And it’s true, but it made me think, why? We know that it was because the Lord was with him and that’s the main thing. But what did Joseph do, even as a slave, that gave him favor in the eyes of Potiphar, to the point that Potiphar would put him in charge of everything in his household? Even so much that, as Joseph said, “Behold, because of me my master has no concern about anything in his house, and he has put everything that he has in my charge.” Potiphar could trust Joseph because Joseph was submitted to him. He was a man under authority. Same with Daniel. And David, even when Saul was trying to kill him. These men were submitted to the civil authorities, even when those civil authorities were pagan. These men lived as people who are FREE!
- **Submit to civil authority.** Paul starts with a reminder: “be submissive to rulers and authorities.” How are we to live in society as followers of Jesus Christ? We are to submit to civil authority. The word for submission here is the same one used in chapter two and so let me remind you that it means to be under another, or, “arranging one’s gifts under the purposes of those with proper authority.” As I said, this is not something new; submission to civil government has been a requirement for followers of God as long as there has been civil government. But Paul may be bringing it up to the Cretans because of the history of insurrection and political upheaval on the island. Stott tells us that Crete had been subjugated by Rome in 67BC, but since then had been resistant to the Roman yoke. Paul mentioned the spirit of insubordination that was there, even in the churches, in chapter 1.
- It is our Christian responsibility to submit to the state. But often the first question Christians ask when we are told we need to obey civil authorities is what...? Right, what about civil disobedience? And though it is true that we can never give civil authority our unconditional allegiance, so that we would disobey the laws of God in order to obey the laws of man...that is the exception rather than the rule. Jesus did not resist the civil authority of Rome. He paid the temple tax, even though He was the One who created the heavens and the earth. When asked by the Pharisees in Matthew 22 if it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, what did Jesus do? He asked for a coin, asked whose inscription was on it, and then said...”Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s.” Jesus did not say the tax was just or fair or would be used for good things or for evil. He knew that Caesar claimed to be a god. But He said unequivocally that the tax should be paid.
- Paul explores this idea more fully in **Romans 13:1-7**. Notice the reasons why we are called as believers to submit to civil authority. First, all authority is ordained and exists by God’s authority. Second, when we resist authority, we resist those whom God has appointed. Third, when we resist authority, we will receive judgment. Fourth, God ordains authority to restrain evil and therefore we who do what is good will receive approval. Fifth, God’s civil servants exist for our good. Sixth, God’s civil servants also exist to punish evil (he does not bear the sword in vain). Seventh, we obey those in authority not just to avoid punishment but because we want to keep a clear conscience!
- **Be obedient, ready for every good work.** We are not just to be submissive to rulers and authorities. Think of this on a lower level, just working at your job. What do you think of that employee who does just enough to get by, who keeps the rules and does what he is supposed to do, but it is passive subservience, not active obedience? If you are an employer, you are trying to

figure out a way to get rid of him. If you are a fellow employee, you are trying to figure out a way to help the boss get rid of him! I wrote a column 9 years ago about this and I remembered it this week as I thought about this passage. It refers back to my college days when I worked at RJ Reynolds during the summer. Here's an excerpt from the column: There was another college boy working at the factory one of those summers. I heard the guys talking about him in the break room one day. "I tell you what, that is about the height of laziness," one of the older men said, between swigs of a Pepsi. "Did you see 'college boy' out there on the floor?" They were talking about the other college kid. He had been given the job of painting the guardrails in the factory that separated the floor area from the walkway around the perimeter. He was observed that day lying on his side on the floor, slowly moving his paintbrush to cover the guard rails with a neon yellow spread. It took him until lunchtime to paint ten feet of rail. At times it was hard to tell he was alive, his movements were so slow. "I tell you what, if my boy was that sorry," the man continued, his eyes flashing, "I wouldn't let him out in public. That college boy is pathetic." The older man continued to complain and was joined by others in the room, who shook their heads in disgust. It made me think of that verse in the book of Proverbs: "As vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, so is the lazy man to those who send him." Laziness may not be a deadly communicable disease, but it sure does irritate everyone who is exposed to it!