

Romans 13:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

Analysis

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers—The command πᾶσα ψυχὴ ἔξουσίας ὑπερεχούσαις ὑποτασσέσθω (pasa psychē exousiais hyperechousais hypotassesthō) uses psychē (soul/person) to emphasize universal scope—every individual without exception. Hypotassō (be subject) is a military term meaning to arrange under authority, not mere external compliance but heartfelt submission. Exousiais hyperechousais (higher authorities) refers to governing powers placed over society.

For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God—
Οὐ γαρ ἐστὶν ἔξουσία εἰ μὲν ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ (οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν ἔξουσία εἰ μὴ ὑπὸ Θεοῦ, 'for there is no authority except from God'). The emphatic negative structure demolishes anarchism—all legitimate authority derives from God's sovereignty. Ήαί οὖσαι ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ τεταγμέναι εἰσὶν (αἱ οὖσαι ὑπὸ Θεοῦ τεταγμέναι εἰσὶν, 'those existing have been ordained by God'). The perfect participle tetagmenai (ordained/appointed) indicates God's past action with continuing effect—governments exist by divine appointment, whether rulers acknowledge God or not.

Historical Context

Paul wrote this during Nero's reign (AD 54-68), before intense persecution began (AD 64). The early church faced accusations of sedition for worshiping Christ as Lord, not Caesar. Paul establishes that Christian faith doesn't promote political rebellion. This teaching was revolutionary: Roman rule was often brutal, Jewish

zealots advocated violent resistance, yet Paul commands submission. Later church fathers (Tertullian, Augustine) developed 'two kingdoms' theology—Christians honor earthly rulers while maintaining ultimate loyalty to God.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How do you reconcile submission to governing authorities (exousiai
hypotassesthō) with civil disobedience when government commands contradict God's law (Acts 5:29)?
2. What does it mean practically that all authority is 'ordained by God' (hypo theou tetagmenai), including corrupt or unjust governments?
3. How should Christians engage politically—as passive subjects, active citizens, or prophetic witnesses challenging injustice?

Interlinear Text

Πᾶσα ψυχὴ ἔξουσίαι ὑπερεχούσαις ὑποτασσέσθω οὐ

Let every soul power unto the higher be subject no
G3956 G5590 G1849 G5242 G5293 G3756

γάρ ἔστιν ἔξουσίαι εἰ μὴ ἀπὸ θεοῦ αἱ δὲ οὖσαι

For there is power of God G3588 G1161 that be
G1063 G2076 G1849 G575 G2316 G5607

ἔξουσίαι ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ τεταγμέναι εἰσίν·

power of God ordained are
G1849 G5259 G2316 G5021 G1526

Additional Cross-References

Titus 3:1 (Parallel theme): Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work,

Daniel 2:21 (Parallel theme): And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding:

John 19:11 (Parallel theme): Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.

Jude 1:8 (Parallel theme): Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities.

Psalms 62:11 (References God): God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God.

Ephesians 5:21 (References God): Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

1 Samuel 2:8 (Parallel theme): He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD'S, and he hath set the world upon them.

Revelation 19:16 (Parallel theme): And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

Revelation 1:5 (Parallel theme): And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,

Daniel 4:32 (Parallel theme): And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.