

# Law-abiding Citizens

Historically, Jews were known for not being good subjects during the Roman empire. Governors were sent to keep peace in a land where political tensions ran high. In the midst of that environment, Jesus Christ was questioned by Jews whether or not paying taxes to Caesar was lawful. Jesus knew their real motive. His wisdom and authority is clearly seen in the profound answer He gave. “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” (Matthew 22:21). Christ was not a rival to Caesar, nor was His teachings antagonistic to the role of government.

Societies need governments to keep law and order. All governments are not good, nor are all bad. Without some kind of governing authority in place, peace and prosperity are unattainable because law is beneficial. [That does not mean that every specific law men make is good, but law in general is advantageous to the well-being of societies.] The holy Scriptures teach us that the role of government is God-ordained. “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.” (Romans 13:1). God knows that chaos and disorderliness are the result when men are no longer accountable to law.

Throughout history governments have become corrupted; man-made laws have been established which were destructive. Greedy, selfish men often fill positions of power. Yet, God’s greater purpose can still be achieved and fulfilled during such dark moments in human affairs. For example, a corrupt Jewish leadership, a cowardly governor and cruel soldiers failed to comprehend the hand of God at work in the path His Son Jesus chose to walk. As Pilate was feeling the pressure from the Jews, he questioned Jesus, “Do you not know that I have power to crucify you, and power to release you?” (John 18:10). The Lord then told Pilate, “You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above.” (18:11). Authorities exist because God rules over the nations.

Therefore, God instructs men to be law-abiding citizens. “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities” (Romans 13:1). “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake” (1 Peter 2:13). To subject means to place yourself willingly under another. This subjection when applied properly includes rendering taxes, customs, fear and honor to whom due (cf. Romans 13:7). Peter states further, “For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men” (1 Peter 2:15). *Doing good* is in the context of obeying rulers. God-fearers are law-abiding citizens because governments are “God’s ministers” for good (cf. Romans 13:4). “Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. . . . Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake.” (13:2, 5).