# How would Jesus relate to the Civil Government?

INTRODUCTION: What would society be like without laws?

Have you ever imagined what life would be like in NYC if there were no laws?

The existence of law is a clear testimony to one fact: "Man is depraved."

The humanistic teachers of today can call man "good" all they want; however, all the evidence shows just the opposite! (Rom. 3:10, 23).

Law would not be needed if there were no such thing as sin.

If man were flawlessly perfect (as originally created) there would exist no need for law.

However, because man is (due to fallen nature) rebellious, we need laws.

Because man is selfish (often at the expense of others), we need laws.

Because man is greedy, we need laws against stealing.

Because man is perverted, we need laws against rape and incest.

Because man lies, we need laws against fraud.

Because man is vengeful and cruel, we need laws against murder, attempted murder, and physical abuse.

"Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions" (Gal. 3:19)

I Tim. 1:9-10 - "Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be nay other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine."

"For by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20) (in a lawful society, man is made aware of hiss infulness and need for salvation).

"The law entered that the offense might abound"
(Rom. 5:20, cp. 7:7).

**Jesus is the founder of Governmental Authority, therefore He would uphold it**

*Romans 13:1 - 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.*

# 1) Jesus would not offend those in civil positions but would uphold a irreproachable testimony before them (Matthew 17:24-27)

**It was hard to imagine that**
**the LORD would have to <u>pay TAXES</u> --- But He did! (v. 24-27)**
(He paid taxes <u>to not offend others</u>)

**V. 24**

***"Doth not your master pay tribute?"* =** This question seems to be aimed at discrediting Christ. To have something to accuse Him of.

People are always quick to discredit Christ and Christians. We must, therefore, live above reproach.

***"Tribute" =*** *didrachmas*, meaning "double drachma"

Two drachmas were collected each year to support the Temple (This "amounted to about two days' wages for the average worker" (MacArthur p. 86).

To maintain the upkeep, beauty, and practical function of the Tabernacle, then the Temple, a tax was levied.

This tax had its origin in the days of Moses (Exod. 30:13-14) and was carried out throughout the Old Testament (II Ki. 12:4; II Chron. 24:6; Neh. 10:32).

***"Capernaum" -*** This temple tax was to be collected before Passover, so the Jerusalem Temple "IRS" sent tax collectors throughout Palestine to seek the 1/2 shekel tax.

It is interesting that this miracle is only recorded in <u>Matthew's</u> gospel and it is the only miracle involving <u>money</u>.

"Since Matthew had been a tax collector, we would expect him to be interested in this miracle" (Wiersbe, p. 63).

**V. 25**

Peter, quick to defend the Lord he loved, ***"saith, <u>Yes</u>" -*** Peter knew it was right for all citizens to submit to the governing authorities (Rom. 13:1ff).

"***Jesus prevented him" -*** Before Peter could even ask the question, the all-knowing Lord Jesus (knowing what was on Peter's mind) anticipates his perplexion and gives him an answer.

Jesus in effect asks this: Who do the Romans collect tolls (***"custom")*** or taxes (***"tribute"***) from? Do they take these tolls and taxes from their own children (their own offspring) or from strangers (common citizens)?

(ILLUS: How in some states in America, state troopers are more quick to pull over and ticket out-of-state speeders than speeders from their own state)

"It would not make sense for a father to collect money from his sons (*"children")* who were dependent on him. To assess them would be to assess himself. In this context, *"strangers"* is a general term referring to those outside the king's family, specifically his subjects. . . (but) in the human governments of that day, the rulers' families (represented by *"the sons"*) were exempt from taxation" (MacArthur, p. 88).

| Roman tolls and taxes<br>V. 25-26 | Jewish temple tax<br>V. 24, 27 |
|---|---|
| Must be paid by everyone (all *"strangers"*) except | Must be paid by all Jews except members of the royal |
| the king's children | family |

**V. 26**

***"Then are the children free" -*** Children of the kingdom in power would be free from such tolls and taxes. Whereas those outside of the royal family would have to "foot the bill" and shell out to the reigning Empire.

One implied point is this: Jesus is saying, "Do you know why we should pay taxes? Because we are foreigners in this strange land, pilgrims, sojourners, aliens. We are not children of this world (Jn. 15:19; 17:14, 16).

Jesus, being the God of the Temple, actually did not have to pay the tax.

**V. 27**

Jesus, being the Son of God, was not personally obligated to pay for the support of His own temple, yet to avoid offense, He did pay (Ryrie footnote).

***"Offend" -*** anything that is a roadblock or a hindrance to others (coming to Christ).

If Jesus had refused to pay the temple tax, the tax gatherers may have thought He was rebellious or lawless, living in violation of the Law of Moses. Reason: They didn't realize who He was. He was Lord of the Temple.

"Regardless of how unjust a tax is assessed or how blasphemously or irresponsibly it is spend, it is to be paid. If the Son of God claimed no exemption for Himself in paying taxes to the *"den of thieves"* run by the wicked false teachers and leaders of Israel, how much less can His followers claim exemption for themselves" (MacArthur, p. 88).

***"Lest we should offend them" -*** Jesus did not want those temple tax gatherers to have a reason to not listen to and believe in Him, so He did that which He was not obligated to do so as to avoid turning them off.

May we, too, never use our Christian liberty in such a way that it would cause a weaker Christian or a non-believer to stumble. (Jesus is serious, about not offending those who belong to Him - Mt. 18:5-7; cp. Rom. 14:13-16).

***"The sea" -*** the Sea of Galilee

***Cast a hook" -*** the most common form of fishing in Jesus day was to cast a "*net"* Jesus, however, is zeroing in on one particular fish. His omniscient mind and all-seeing eye knows of a fish swimming around with a coin in its mouth.

Jesus, being the Lord of earth, not only exercised dominion over the fish, "but also over the animals (Mt. 21:1-7) and the birds (Mt. 26:34, 74-75). (Wiersbe, p. 63).

"When we consider the complexity of this miracle, it amazes us.

1. First, someone had to lose a coin in the water.
2. Then, a fish had to take that coin in its mouth and retain it.
3. That same fish then had to bite on Peter's hook--with an impediment in its mouth--and be caught" (Wiersbe, p. 63)
4. Then the exact amount needed to pay the tax would be discovered (not a penny less or more)

***"A piece of money" -*** a *stater* (another word for a sheckel). What is amazing is that Jesus and Peter needed a combined total of 4 *drachmas*. The silver coin found in the fish equals exactly 4 drachmas.

I have found a lot of things inside fishes' stomachs, but I have never found something to pay my taxes. What a miracle!

You can't explain away this miracle as an accident, or as a "freak of nature." It was too coincidental to be accidental!

In our lives the Lord Jesus still is able to glorify Himself by coming through (in response to prayer) to give His children exactly what they need, precisely when they need it, in just the right manner!

Trust Him!

***"And thee" -*** This is one of many miracles that Jesus performed for Peter. He healed Peter's mother-in-law (Mk. 1:29-34), helped Peter to catch fish (Lk. 5:1-11), enabled him to walk on water (Mt. 14:22-23), healed Malchus' ear after Peter

chopped it off (Mt. 26:47-56), and delivered Peter from prison (Acts 12:1ff). (Wiersbe, p. 64).

No wonder Peter wrote: *"Casting all your care up on Him, for He cares for you."* (I Pet. 5:7).

This is "the only miracle which does not have the results recorded. We would expect another verse that would read: 'And Peter went to the sea, cast in a hood, and drew up a fish; and when he had opened its mouth, he found there a coin, and used it to pay the temple tax for himself and for Jesus.' But Matthew 17:28 is not there. Then, how do we know that the miracle took place? Because Jesus said it would! *'There hath not one word failed of all His good promise'."* (I Kings 8:56). (Wiersbe, p. 64)

## 2) Jesus would not be enamoured or intimidated by governmental "big shots" (Matthew 22:15-18)

Still smarting from the treatment they received in Christ's series of parables He had aimed at them (Mt. 20-21), the religion leaders now seek to trap Him with a series of "loaded" questions (Wiersbe, p. 79).

In verses 15-40, Matthew purposely and systematically cites Christ's rejection by the Jewish religious leaders of His day.

Their rejection of Christ is seen in three attempts to interrogate Him and to trip Him up or entangle Him in His words.

They like a prosecuting attorney in a courtroom scene fire questions at Jesus seeking to find some contradiction, some inconsistency, any inaccuracy, a slight blunder, error, mistake, any doctrinal heresy, any disloyalty to God or government (any politically incorrect statement).

What is thrilling is how Christ:

--immediately answers their questions (with no time for thought as to what to say or the articulate way of saying it);

--concisely answers their questions (with no "fat" that could be maligned and used to discredit the pillars of His arguments);

--profoundly answers their questions with answers that leave the inquirers baffled, dumb-founded, and amazed

(Note: V. 22 *"they marvelled";* v. 33 *"they were astonished";* SEE v. 46)

Christ's response to their questions, and the question He Himself asks shows that He was Who they thought He wasn't -- the Messiah! The King of Israel! God Almighty!

**Jesus answers. . .**

**A POLITICAL QUESTION ABOUT TAXES** (v. 15-22)

**V. 15**

***"The Pharisees" -*** Self-righteous religious "extremists" Everything about them looked and smelled "religious," but they stunk with hypocrisy (Mt. 23).

***"Entangle" -*** They planned and plotted a way of ensnaring or trapping Jesus in His words. They wanted to say, "I caught you!" when they would find some inconsistency or contradiction in His teaching.

**V. 16**

In order to ***"trap Him"*** the Pharisees send to Him people with two totally different views of taxation. So if Jesus would swing either way in His answer, they could trap Him and accuse Him of an injustice.

They interrogate Jesus with ***"their disciples"*** and with the Herodians.

1) Their "disciples" - Jews who were made *"two-fold more the child of hell"* than their teachers (23:15), who supported Judaism (they believed in giving to God not government; they believed the land was God's not Caesars)

2) The "Herodians" - Jews who supported the Herodian dynasty (peace at any price) - they supported Rome and Caesar.

It's amazing how when it comes to opposing Christ, heathen of differing views, religions, philosophies (who can never get together on anything) can suddenly find common ground and unite in a common task to fight against Christ and Christianity.

***"Neither carest thou for any man"*** - You don't "take sides," you are not swayed by men.

***"Regardest not the person of men" -*** You don't show preferential, impartial or prejudiced treatment to people or parties.

**V. 17**

***"Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar" -*** Is it in accordance with the Law (Torah) to pay taxes to government.

**V. 18**

The omniscient Lord Jesus saw right through their masks and ***"perceived their wickedness".*** He saw their well-covered trap!

If He said, "Yes, you should pay tribute to Caesar" - the Pharisees' disciples could accuse Him of being disloyal to Judaism (and send the religious inquisitive after Him and hang Him as a heretic).

If he answered, "No, you should not pay taxes to Caesar," the Herodians could accuse Him of being disloyal to Caesar (and send the "IRS" after Him and hang Him as a tax evader).

**V. 19**

***"Shew me the tribute money" -*** Jesus knew what it looked like, but wanted the coin as a convicting object lesson.

***"A penny" -*** a denarius

**V. 20**

***"Whose portrait*** (picture) ***and whose name is stamped on the coin?"*** Jesus asks.

**V. 21**

Jesus in His answer wisely and appropriately does not swing one way or the other, but teaches that we should give to government what is due them and should give to god what is due Him!

## 3) Jesus would render unto Caesar the things which are Caesars. (Matthew 22:19-21)

***"Render to Caesar" -*** Pay your taxes

(Rom. 13:7 - *"Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour."*

Don't practice tax evasion, hire workers "under the table," cheat on your income tax returns, or slug the toll booths or ignore your parking tickets.

***"Render to God" -*** Give your tithes and offerings

***"the things that are God's"*** - Certain things that we have already belong to God. These words show an obligatory responsibility that we have toward God. What is owed God when it comes to money?

--God commanded Israel to "pay" a tithe (10% to Him) (SEE: Mal. 3:8-12; cp. Lev. 27:30; Prov. 3:9-10, 11:24-26).

--The practice of the New Testament believer was to give to God through the local church when they gathered on Sunday (I Cor. 16:1-2; cp. II Cor. 9:6-12).

## 4) Jesus would believe in the separation of Church and State (Matthew 22:21)

By showing a distinction between God and government, Christ's answer shows how He favored a separation between church and state (i.e. the state [Caesar] is distinct from the Church, and the state is not to control the church, nor is the church to be a state church like the R.C.C. of the Dark Ages).

**Romans 13:1-7**

v.1 - "Every soul" = every living being. The obligation to obey government applies to all people. No one excluded. [unless you are dead; hense, the word "soul" refers to living.]

"Be subject" = to place yourself under; to take your place in rank; to submit to the authority over you.

"Higher powers" = governing authorities.

After commanding all men to submit to the law, God gives four reason why we should [NOTE: The word "for" (meaning "because") - v. 1, 3, 5, 6]

Each of the four reasons simply can be stated in one word: We ought to submit to the law because of:

1)"God" (v. 1-2)
2)"Wrath" (v. 3-4)
3)"Conscience" (v. 5)
and4)"Dues" (debt or obligation - v. 6-7)

***You must submit to the law! (v. 1a)**

Four Reasons why you should obey governmental authority:

**I. Reason # 1 - We should submit to the law: TO HONOR GOD (v. 1-2)**

**V. 1**

"For there is no power but of God" - The word "for" gives us a very good reason to obey the "higher powers" (governing authorities).

The reason is, God is the originator or establisher of all true, bonified authorities. EX:

1)The home - the husband (I Cor. 11:3)
2)The church - the pawtor (Heb. 13:7, 17)
3)The society - government officials

"The powers that be" = the authorities that presently exist.

"Are ordained of God" = lit. have been placed by God (perfect tense)

It is God who established the principle of government ("authority") in the past.

Contrary to the humanists of today, our law system did not originate over a "millions of years" evolutionary process. But God established law.

A detailed system of law existed even before the Mosaic Law, as evidenced by the archaeological finding of "hammurabi's Code of Laws." Hammurabi, who reigned from 1728 - 1686 B.C. (at least 3 centuries [300 years] before the Law was given to Moses) wrote down many laws strikingly similar to the Law of Moses.

It is important to note that:

1)God ordained (appointed) the fact of government, not necessarily the forms of government that exist today.

EX: of inferior forms of government:

--Communism - A forced redistribution of wealth (taking it from those who earned it and giving it to those who did not). No one owns private property.

--Totalitarianism - Dictatorship (EX: Hitler); the state has total control over everything in a society.

2)God instituted the principle of law and justice, not necessarily the specific laws that a given government might legislate.

EX: of inferior laws:

--Legalized abortion (freedom to murder)

--No Bible reading in public schools (viewed as unconstitutional)

--Murderers gaining freedom (EX: Charles Manson getting weekend passes)

--Compulsory education (the education of children is the responsibility of the parents, not the state)

--Social Security (government becoming a provider of goods and services [seeds of Socialism])

--Certain "Anti-discrimination" laws - forcing an employer to hire homosexuals, etc.

Despite the growing inadequacies in our crumbling government, praise God some element of justice remains.

Bad government is better than no government.

If there were no government authority, there would be anarchy and lawless, wild, uncontrollable, barbaric behavior.

Society would be like a roller coaster off its tracks, like a river over its banks, or like nuclear waste outside of its container.

There must be law and order, restraints, enforced boundaries.

**V. 2**

"Resisteth" = to place oneself against; to oppose; or rebel.

"The ordinance of God" - the <u>institution</u> of God.

Certain forms of civil disobedience--taking the law into one's own hands, or refusal to obey the law of the land--is sin against God!

Why? Because God established government.

"Damnation" = judgment

The judgment in view is no doubt temporal (in this life, by rulers - v. 3); but also it will be answered for at the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev. 20:1-15).

You will not get away with breaking the law! "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Ga. 6:7). "Be sure your sin will find you out."

There are times when it is <u>right</u> to break the law.

When is it okay?

*When man's law conflicts with God's law. [when government imposes a law that will violate a Biblical conviction]

Three Biblical examples of when Christians <u>can</u> disobey government:

1.When it interferes with your prayer life (Dan. 6)

2.When it interferes with your worship (Dan. 3)

3.When it interferes with your witnessing (Acts 4:19-20)

"We ought to obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29)

Examples of situations when it is right to disobey the law:

When the law forbids evangelism
church attendance
Bible reading and prayer
Child discipline

The reason for separation of church and state is:

1.To keep the church from becoming political, and the state (government) from becoming a religion (EX: the corruption of a "state-church")

2.To safeguard the state from telling the church who or how to worship. The state is never to impose (force) a belief or practice on the church.

## II. Reason # 2 - We should submit to the law: TO AVOID PUNISHMENT (v. 3-4)

**V. 3**

A law-abiding citizen will not be afraid of the law-enforcing authorities.

Someone who lives a life of good works (or good behavior) will not feel guilty whenever he sees a policeman nor will he hide what he is doing when a "blue car" passes by. Someone who obeys the traffic laws (EX speed limit) will not be looking in his rear view mirror constantly. Someone who is honest and respectful of others and their property will not live in constant fear of "getting caught!"

"Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power?" - Do you want to not live in terror of the law? Do you wish to be free from fear?

Wouldn't it be great to not wake up every morning with paranoia?

The secret to living a life free from "law-enforcement paranoia" is to simply practice what is good. Not only will you be free from having "the shakes" but you might eveng et recognition from the authorities for honoring the law (v. 3b).

**V. 4**

"He (government) is the minister of God to the for good"

"Minister" = servant. The same word as translated "deacon" (diakonos).

"to thee" = government to be a servant to the people (not a dictator)

"For good" = government is to help make this world a better place to live; it is for our benefit, that we might have freedom and peace. God not only teaches us to obey government leaders but to pray for them - so that we might enjoy such peace (I Tim. 2:1-4).

"He beareth (carries) not the sword in vain" -

"Sword" - the symbol of law enforcement

"In vain" - for nothing; for no purpose; a police officer does not carry a gun for nothing. It is not a decorative piece of metal, designed to make his hip attractive!

He carries it to use it, when the need arises.

Government has the authority (under God) to practice corporal punishment upon criminals.

Capitol punishment is Biblical. It is not murder because murder is an indivdual taking the life of an innocent person. Capitol punishment is the law taking the life of a guilty criminal.

Gen. 9:6 - "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man."

Num. 35:33 - "So ye shall not pollute the land wherein ye are: for blood it defileth the land: and the land cannot be cleansed by the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it."

Acts 25:11 - "For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar."

"A revenger" - Someone who carries out justice by executing God's wrath upon the one who practices evil.

[NOTE: previous context - Individuals are not to avenge themselves (12:19); but are to leave the "getting even" up to God. Government, however, is God's only legitimate means to do His work of vengeance by human beings.]

A just government's best friend is a law-abiding citizen (of all people, Christians should be the most law-abiding citizens).

What a shame it is for a Christian to go to jail for evil doing (I Pet. 4:15 - "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other matters.")

III. Reason # 3 - We should submit to the law:
TO KEEP A CLEAN CONSCIENCE (v. 5)

An observation: Lawbreakers with any conscience at all will generally be nervous people, jumpy, shaky. Why? Because they have a guilty conscience.

"Ye must needs" = It is a binding obligation or an absolute necessity that you place yoruself under the law.

If the fear of punishment is not a good enough reason for you to obey the law, obey the law for your own conscience's sake.

Your "conscience" is "that internal voice" put into you by God (Rom. 2:15) that tells you either something is right or something is wrong. "I can do this; I can't do that."

The Bible says that even unsaved "Gentiles" have: "The work of the law written in their hearts" (Rom. 2:15).

Even unsaved people who don't know the Bible have an intuitive sense of right and wrong.

The Christian, however, has a heightened sense of right and wrong. He who knows God's Word has a greater sensitivity to morals

Don't violate your conscience: if you do, it will become calloused (I Tim. 4:2).

We as believers must keep a clean conscience.

Paul could say: "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day" (Acts 23:1).

(To disobey government is to be guilty before God)

Acts 24:16 - ""And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men."

At salvation we have had "our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience" (Heb. 10:22).

Don't defile it! Keep it clean and you will keep it tender and sensitive.

--We are commanded to have a "good" conscience (I Tim. 1:5, 19)

--The servant of God is to have a "pure" conscience

(I Tim. 3:9)

The Bible says: "The spirit of a man is the lamp of the LORD, searching all the inner depths of his heart (Prov. 20:27 - NKJV).

Don't dim your lamp by dulling your conscience!

## LAWS THAT ARE OFTEN VIOLATED, EVEN BY CHRISTIANS:

- **Immigration**
- **Marriage Laws**
- **Traffic Laws (Speeding/stop signs/red lights/no seat belts)**
- **Not paying Fines**
- **Tax evasion**
- **Cheating on income tax**
- **Arms (illegal possession of guns)**
- **Drugs**
- **Alcohol sales to minors**
- **Draft dodging**
- **Renting out illegal apartments**
  - **Welfare Laws abused**
  - **Ecological abuse (littering; graffiti defacing public property)**
- **Vehicle Laws (No Registration; inspection; insurance etc.)**
- **Copyright infringement**

***Christians should never have to lie, cheat, or steal.***
***Have a clean conscience toward God & men***

IV. Reason # 4 - We should submit to the law:
TO FULFILL AN OBLIGATION (v. 6-7)

**V. 6**

"Pay ye tribute" - the phrase could be translated as present tense, indicative or imperative.

In context, it seems best to understand it as an imperative. You must pay tribute (taxes).

"Ministers" - a different word than in verse 4 (Greek "leitourgoi" - Eng. "loiter" - someone who constantly remains in a certain location.)

This word "minister" refers to a "devoted and dependent servant" (a "hired servant"). Someone who, because of their devotion to a certain task must be renumerated financially for their service so that they can make a living (EX: the O.T. priests and Levites and N.T. pastor offer such full-time, dependent service - Luke 10:7; I Cor. 9:14; I Tim. 5:18 - "a laborer is worthy of his hire").

"Attending continually (working full-time) upon this very thing (namely, law enforcement).

**V. 7**

"Render (pay back) therefore to all their dues (that which is owed).

"Tribute" = tax (EX: IRS, state and federal taxes)

"Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's . . ." (Mt. 22:21; Lk. 20:22-25)

"Custom" = toll (EX: NYC bridges)

"Fear" = reference (a healthy fear of the law is good)

"My son, fear thou the LORD and the king" (Prov. 24:21)

"Honor" = respect (to treat with value)

Don't ever call police "pigs"

Don't ever belittle your mayor, governor or president (if you don't respect htem for their character, at least respect their position).

CONCLUSION: The only time a Christian is justified to disobey the law is when the law violates a Biblical command of God. Otherwise we must obey!

"They that forsake the law praise the wicked: but such as keep the law contend with them" (Prov. 28:4)

The best way to fight crime and criminals is to be a law-abiding citizen.