
STEPPINGSTONES
SCHOLARSHIP



JOSEPH
2026 RUNNER-UP

Faith and Civil Disobedience

Throughout history, there have been many examples of people rebelling against their governments. Some of these people were Christians. The Bible says in Romans 13:1, “Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.” According to this verse, God establishes all authority, and people are normally expected to obey. However, history also shows that Christian societies have sometimes chosen to resist their government. Because of this, it is important to understand when obedience to God should come before obedience to government authority.

The Boston Tea Party is an example of a group rebelling against their government. Some members of this group were Christian. This event was organized by the Sons of Liberty and took place on the night of December 16, 1773. A group of about 30 to 130 men dressed as Mohawk Indians marched to the harbor and boarded 3 ships: the Dartmore, Eleanor, and the Beaver, dumping 342 chests (92,000 lbs) of tea into the harbor. This protest was against the Tea Act of 1773, which granted the British East India Company control over the tea trade. The colonists saw this as a trick move to force them to accept unfair taxes. The Boston Tea Party led to the Intolerable Acts and was a key event leading to the American Revolution.

This response by the colonist raises a question. If the Bible says Christians should obey authority, why would Christian men take part in something like the Boston Tea Party? The Bible provides additional context in Acts 4:18-20. In this passage, Peter and John were told by authorities to stop speaking about Jesus. They responded with a question: “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him?” These verses show that when government authority goes against God’s commands, obedience to God comes first.

The men involved in the Boston Tea Party were not commanded by God to throw tea off British ships into the harbor. However, they were allowed to judge if the government’s actions were right or wrong. The British government continued to heavily tax the colonies even after the colonists made it clear they believed the taxation was unfair. Over time, the freedoms that the colonists lived with were being taken away. Taxes became a symbol of government overreach and a breaking point. The Bible gives several examples of people standing up against authority when it conflicted with God’s law, such as when Israelite midwives refused to murder all males born when Pharaoh demanded it. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to worship an idol, Daniel continued to pray to God, and Peter and John continued to preach even when told to stop. Their reply to authorities was “We must obey God rather than men,” Acts 5:29.

From both Scripture and history, it is clear that Christians are called to respect authority, and there are times when standing against injustice is allowed. There may not always be a direct command to act, but there is freedom to choose how to respond against tyranny.

If I had been alive during the time of the Boston Tea Party, I believe I would have joined the protest. The colonies were founded in search of freedom, especially freedom of religion, and the British government was threatening that freedom. I believe the colonists faced the question of how much freedom they were willing to lose before nothing was left. Scripture supports respecting authority, but it also supports standing up for what is right. While resistance should be done with respect, like Moses approaching Pharaoh calmly, there are times when saying “no” to authority is the right choice. As Christians, we are guided by the Holy Spirit who will “lead us in all truth” John 16:13, and we are responsible for being obedient to God above all else.