
STEPPINGSTONES
SCHOLARSHIP



JOTHAM
2026 RUNNER-UP

The Boston Tea Party is a complex and debated issue. American colonists of 1773 believed that the covert discarding of British tea was a justified action. They were disturbed that the British had put a ban on importing Dutch tea and forced a monopoly with the London-based East India Company. The British government applied a taxation on tea as a way of asserting authority over the colonies. To this, the colonists were incensed at Parliament's taxation lacking representation, but also at the direct infliction of control on colonial merchants. This action imposed what they saw as a looming threat of absolute authority. When the local colonial government commanded for the ships to be unloaded, colonists felt that they had no other option for recourse.

The Bible describes how to rightly act under governmental oppression. In Romans chapter thirteen, Paul visits this debated topic. Verse 1 says, "Let everyone submit to the governing authorities, since there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are instituted by God." This passage plainly tells us that God allowed for the existence of the British Parliament, and that he is the ultimate authority. In the very next verse Paul states, "So then, the one who resists the authority is opposing God's command, and those who oppose it will bring judgment on themselves." This lets us know that there is a consequence from the Lord to those who oppose government. There is allowance for exception, however, when governmental mandate is in contradiction to God's statutes. Romans 13:6-7 says, "And for this reason you pay taxes, since the authorities are God's servants, continually attending to these tasks. Pay your obligations to everyone: taxes to those you owe taxes, tolls to those you owe tolls, respect to those you owe respect, and honor to those you owe honor." This is a direct call to respect and honor those in authority.

In Acts 5:29, Peter says, "We must obey God rather than people." This tells us that in situations where the government and God's laws conflict, we as believers must obey God as our higher authority. In the circumstances surrounding the Boston Tea Party, colonists did not find that governmental authority was putting them in a position of acting contrary to God's Word. Rather, their ideas of fair treatment were being threatened. They may have been encouraged by the writings of John Locke, an influential political theorist of the time, who wrote that if a government protected life, liberty, and property, it was to be respected, but if a government lacked in these areas, it was just cause for revolt. Justice was certainly called for, but according to scripture, colonists acted wrongfully by destroying private property of English merchants.

If I found myself living in a cottage in Boston in 1773, I would take a different approach. I would first and foremost trust God as the divine author of the world and have faith that his plan is best, even if it includes some measure of governmental overreach. I would also be intent on staying tightly within the bounds of scripture. A more blameless approach to addressing the problem could include gathering signatures for petition or peaceful organized resistance by boycotting the purchase of English tea. We see this same issue arise in our day and age. Hostile actions against the government appear in our news feeds daily. Theologian and pastor John Calvin believed that citizens were to obey the government unless it

came into direct contradiction with God's laws, a belief that aligns with scripture and can be a useful guide to us today. Additionally, it is necessary for us to thank the Lord for the leaders he has put in place. Christians need to keep in mind that this world is still under the curse of sin until Jesus Christ returns and that he has a good and perfect plan for every unfolding element in his story. We can use our parallel modern-day disagreements as a way to build a bridge to testify to the divine "government" of the kingdom of God.