
STEPPINGSTONES
SCHOLARSHIP



MERIAN
2026 RUNNER-UP

The Boston Tea party is practically the stuff of American legend. And yet, some Christians struggle with the fact that many of the men who dumped the tea were faithful, professing Christians. Does not the Apostle Paul write in Romans 13, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment” (English Standard Version, Rom. 13:1-2)? Is civil disobedience ever justifiable for Christians? The answer is a resounding yes; civil disobedience is justified for Christians if the laws they are disobeying go against the Word of God, or the laws are unlawful as they go against the highest law in the given land.

The Boston tea party was a wakeup call for King George. The leaders of the colonies had repeatedly sent winsome and urgent envoys to their lawful King to tell him of the oppression of Parliament, but each time the king turned a blind eye to their pleas. The colonies had been practicing long-suffering and patience with the British crown, but when it was clear that this was no longer effective, many leaders decided that something bolder must be done. Often the Boston Tea party is represented as a brash, reckless, and incendiary act. But that is untrue. Instead of immediately starting a war because they didn’t like their taxes, the colonies went to the highest authority within the British government. When that highest authority would not protect them from the injustice of Parliament (to whom they owed no allegiance), they realized this situation was unsustainable and declared independence.

The Boston Tea Party gives American Christians an example to follow today. The very highest authority in all Christians’ lives, no matter where you live, is the Bible. If the law goes directly against God’s commands to His people as shown in His Word, so that if you obeyed the law it would be sin, then Christians must disobey this earthly law, regardless of the consequences. As seen in Acts, when the chief priests threaten the apostles and command them to stop preaching the Gospel, Peter and the apostles reply, “We must obey God rather than men” (ESV , Acts 5:29). In terms of next-tier civil disobedience, for America as a country, the highest authority is the Constitution. As American Christians, if a law goes against the Constitution, we do not have to obey it because we ultimately obey the Constitution. For example, if Washington state tried to ban civilians from having any private firearms in their possession in direct opposition to the Second Amendment of the Constitution, Christians would be completely justified to protest and rebel against this law.

But biblical civil disobedience is a narrow path. Many Republican Americans seem to think that if they don’t like a law then they do not have to obey it. For example, in the Gospel of Matthew, the Pharisees attempt to trap Jesus in his words saying, “Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” Jesus knows their motives and says, “Whose likeness and inscription is this?” They said, “Caesar’s.” Then he said to them, “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (ESV , Matt. 22:17, 21). Jesus knew that the tax money was certainly not always used for righteous pursuits, and yet he told them to pay anyway - to show honor and obedience to their governing authority.

So what does biblical civil disobedience look like? As it says in 1 Peter 2:17, “Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.” That means respecting all people as Imago Dei, especially those in power, by praying for their salvation and wisdom in their decisions. Love the Church, by seeking to build up the body in how you obey or disobey the law. Above all, fear God and pray for His wisdom and grace.