

# Willful defiance

**“ONE WHO BREAKS AN UNJUST LAW  
MUST DO SO OPENLY, LOVINGLY, AND  
WITH A WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT THE  
PENALTY.”**

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There are many reasons why we find it easy to break certain laws (especially when we think we won't get caught).

- We don't understand the purpose behind the law
- We understand the purpose but still think it is dumb
- We understand the purpose and agree it's sensible, but we don't want to pay the price of complying

And then, of course, there are the laws that we disobey because we believe them to be unjust. Sometimes a willful defiance of the law is morally justified as a means of protesting unjust laws.

From Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr's Letter from a Birmingham Jail, 1963:

“One who breaks an unjust law must do so openly, lovingly, and with a willingness to accept the penalty. I submit that an individual who breaks a law that his conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is really expressing the highest respect for the

law.”