

What is the Responsibility of Government toward the Church?

Acts 23:23-35

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Then he called two of the centurions and said, "Get ready two hundred soldiers, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go as far as Caesarea at the third hour of the night. Also provide mounts for Paul to ride and bring him safely to Felix the governor." - Acts 23:23-24, ESV

All governments have the responsibility to protect innocent people, especially their own citizens. Paul lays out the responsibilities of government in Romans 13:1-7, and we will look at that passage in greater detail when we get to it in our journey through Acts and Romans. For today, we will consider what responsibility the government has toward the church. In today's passage, we see the Roman tribune acting in an exemplary manner toward Paul in a time of great need.

We can answer the question of what special consideration the government should extend to the church in a single word: none. Christians should be treated just like other citizens by the government, and churches should be granted the same status as other non-profit religious organizations. The state should not grant special privileges to the church, but neither should it penalize, punish or restrict the church.

The tribune is acting in an exemplary manner both for what he does and for what he does not do. The Roman government does not try to govern the church. The tribune does not try to settle any theological disputes, nor does he try to grant special advantages to one group over another. What he does is provide robust protection for Paul from a violent conspiracy. This is the same protection that should be given to anyone in a similar situation.

Notice also that when the tribune sees the need to act, he acts decisively and effectively. He will leave no opportunity for the conspirators to attack Paul. Knowing Paul is threatened by 40 determined conspirators, he sends Paul with 470 soldiers and puts him on horseback. He also sends a letter to Felix the governor, explaining to him the situation so that justice can be administered fairly, and the proper protections and protocols implemented.

Government has a vital role in God's providential care for all people. Its role is not a theological one but a judicial and administrative one, to protect the rights and safety of all citizens. May we support government in its role and not ask it to do what God has not called it to do.

Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of good government. We pray that You would give our government leaders wisdom and discernment, that they may protect and serve the rights and freedoms of all citizens. In Jesus' name, Amen.