

AND WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

“Then some soldiers asked him, ‘And what should we do?’ He replied, ‘Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely — be content with your pay’” (Luke 3:14)

For those in the military these words of John the Baptist are encouraging. Even though the emperor was ungodly, John did not tell them to stop being a soldier. He only told them to be godly in the exercise of their duties. Civil government is ordained by God and those in authority are said to be “servants” of God who do not bear the sword for nothing (Rom. 13:1 - 7).

As we said, the emperors of Rome did not have a reputation for godliness. Augustus Caesar died in A.D. 14 and was succeeded by his adopted son Tiberius who was noted for cruelty and injustice. Tiberius was later suffocated on his bed and succeeded by Caligula. Caligula was demented and deranged and ultimately killed by a band of assassins in A.D. 41. Upon the murder of Caligula his uncle Claudius became the emperor, but was poisoned by his second wife. As a point of interest it was Claudius who ordered all Jews to be expelled from Rome (Acts 18:12). Nero was the next emperor. He ordered the murder of his brother, his mother, and his first wife. He also put to death thousands of Christians including Peter and Paul. He died by suicide June 9, A.D. 68.

Yet the soldiers under the command of these emperors were not told to quit being soldiers. They were only told to be honorable. As you can imagine, some of them were not honorable. It was soldiers who mocked and ridiculed Jesus (Lk. 23:11). It was soldiers who twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head (Jn. 19:2). It was soldiers who took a large bribe to lie about the resurrection of Christ (Matt. 28:12 -15). Yes! It is important for soldiers to be honorable!

A centurion is an officer over 100 soldiers. They seem to be a cut above the men in their command. Virtually every reference to centurions in the Bible is positive. There was a centurion in Capernaum who had more faith than any Israelite (Matt. 8:10). He built their synagogue (Lk. 7:5). The centurion at the cross recognized Jesus as supernatural (Matt. 27:54). The first gentile convert was a centurion who was devout, God fearing, and generous (Acts 10:2). A centurion saved Paul from being assassinated (Acts 23:18). A centurion saved Paul from being killed during a ship wreck (Acts 27:43). A centurion like Cornelius could become a Christian and still be a soldier.

The following tribute to soldiers by Charles M Province is especially meaningful to those in free countries: *“It is the soldier, not the minister who has given us freedom of religion. It is the soldier, not the reporter that has given us freedom of the press. It is the soldier, not the poet who has given us freedom of speech. It is the soldier, not the campus organizer who has given us freedom to protest It is the soldier, not the lawyer who has given us the right to a fair trial. It is the soldier, not the politician who has given us the right to vote. It is the soldier who salutes the flag, who serves beneath the flag, and whose coffin is draped by the flag, who allows the protester to burn the flag”.*

Paul told Timothy to “endure hardness with us like a good soldier” (2 Tim. 2:3). There are obviously some comparisons to be made between soldiers and Christians. One obvious similarity involves focus. The soldier does not get involved in civilian life because he is a soldier. When he became a soldier he gave up the right to make decisions on his own and took an other to obey his commanding officer. The same was true of Paul. Whatever he did he did it in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ giving thanks to God and the father through Him (Col. 3:17). That’s why Paul was constantly on the move, enduring hardship like a soldier. He expected Timothy to join with him in the same austere life of commitment.

We are commanded to give honor to whom honor is due (Rom. 13:7). In this regard let us all give honor to the brave men and women in the military who find themselves in harm’s way over there, that we might have peace and safety over here!