

VIII. THE CHURCH AND THE STATE

1. We believe that not only the church but also the state, that is, all governmental authority, has been instituted by God. "The authorities that exist have been established by God" (Romans 13:1). Christians will, therefore, for conscience' sake obey the government that rules over them (Romans 13:5) unless that government commands them to disobey God (Acts 5:29).
2. We believe that God has given the church and the state their own distinct responsibilities. To the church the Lord has assigned the responsibility of calling sinners to repentance, of proclaiming forgiveness through the cross of Christ, and of encouraging believers in their Christian living. The purpose is to lead the elect of God to eternal salvation through faith in Christ. To the state the Lord has assigned the duty of keeping good order and peace, of punishing the wrongdoer, and of arranging all civil matters in society (Romans 13:3,4). The purpose is "that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness" (1 Timothy 2:2).
3. We believe that the only means God has given to the church to carry out its assigned purpose are the Word and sacraments (Matthew 28:19,20). People are converted by the Holy Spirit only through the message of law and gospel, sin and grace, the wrath of God against sin and the mercy of God in Christ. We believe that the means given to the state to fulfill its assignment is civil law with its punishments and rewards, set up and used according to the light of reason (Romans 13:4). The light of reason includes the natural knowledge of God, the natural knowledge of the law, and conscience.
4. We believe the proper relation is preserved between the church and the state only when each remains within its divinely assigned sphere and uses its divinely entrusted means. The church should not exercise civil authority nor interfere with the state as the state carries out its responsibilities. The state should not become a messenger of the gospel nor interfere with the church in its preaching mission. The church should not attempt to use the civil law and force to lead people to Christ. The state should not seek to govern by means of the gospel. On the other hand, the church and the state may cooperate in an endeavor as long as each remains within its assigned place and uses its entrusted means.
5. We believe that Christians are citizens of both realms and serve God by faithfully fulfilling their duties in both (Romans 13:6,7).
6. We reject any attempt by the state to restrict the free exercise of religion.
7. We reject any views that look to the church to guide and influence the state directly in the conduct of its affairs.
8. We reject any attempt on the part of the church to seek the financial assistance of the state in carrying out its saving purpose.
9. We reject any views that hold that citizens are free to disobey such laws of the state with which they disagree on the basis of personal judgment.

This is what Scripture teaches about church and state. This we believe, teach, and confess.