

IX

VOLUME I



A NEW CHRISTIAN AUTHORITARIANISM?

CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM,
THEONOMY, AND MAGISTERIAL
PROTESTANTISM

A Journal
for Pastors

Church Matters

■ A Progressive Covenantal Perspective: Theonomy and Moses's Law

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This article considers theonomy as an alternative proposal to how Moses's law relates to Christians.¹ It first tackles the tripartite division of the law (moral, civil, and ceremonial) and then critiques three vital tenets for theonomy: its understanding of how Christ fulfilled the law, its understanding of the nature of Christ's kingdom, and its understanding of church-state relations.

ASSESSING THE THREEFOLD DIVISION OF THE LAW

Historically, Protestants have often made distinctions between three kinds of laws when considering the contemporary importance of Moses's instruction:²

- *Moral laws* are those fundamental ethical principles that are eternally applicable, regardless of the time or covenant.
- *Civil laws* relate to Israel's political and social structures and supply case-specific applications of the moral law in Israel's context.
- *Ceremonial laws* are those symbolic requirements related to Israel's religious rituals and cult worship that find their typological end in Christ.

Many covenant theologians believe

the "moral laws" alone (most clearly exemplified in the Ten Words) remain legally binding on Christians today, whereas the "civil" and "ceremonial" laws are time-bound and no longer applicable.³ For example, Michael Horton writes,

Civil laws. . . are obviously in force only so long as the theocracy itself exists. Ceremonial laws. . . are similarly "canonical" only as long as the theocracy stands. . . [B]ut the moral law, summarized in the Ten Commandments, is inscribed on our consciences by virtue of our being created in the image of God. . . While the civil and ceremonial laws pertain exclusively to the theocracy and are no longer binding, the moral law is still in force.⁴

In contrast, theonomists assert that because civil laws are situational applications of the moral laws they too carry over through Christ and should guide both the church and the state.⁵ As Rousas Rushdoony asserts: "Every aspect of the Old Testament law still stands, except those aspects of the ceremonial and priestly law specifically fulfilled by the coming of Christ, and those laws specifically re-interpreted in the New Testament."⁶ And again, "It is a serious error to say

that the *civil law* was also abolished, but the *moral law* retained. What is the distinction between them? .

. . . It is clearly *only* the sacrificial and ceremonial law which is ended because it is replaced by Christ and his work.”⁷

Both the covenant theology and theonomy approach to the threefold division of the law celebrate Christ as the antitype, substance, and end of all Old Testament shadows (Col. 2:16–17; Heb. 8:5–7) and that his coming alters some laws more than others. They also recognize that the laws tagged “moral” are those that Christians “keep” (Rom. 2:26) or “fulfill” (13:8, 10; Gal. 5:14; 6:2) in a fashion most similar with their old covenant function.⁸

Nevertheless, neither model satisfies the biblical testimony concerning the nature and lasting significance of Moses’s law. Furthermore, as will be developed below, Scripture treats *all* the law as a single entity, *all* the law to be moral in nature, and *all* the law to have devotional benefit for believers.⁹ After addressing these three issues, we will overview some additional problems with theonomy.

The Bible Treats the Law as a Singular Entity

The Old Testament distinguishes types of laws based on content (i.e., criminal, civil, family, cultic/ceremonial, and compassion laws). In this framework, the call to love was always considered more foundational than ritual (e.g., Deut. 6:5; 10:12; 1 Sam. 15:22–23; Isa. 1:11–17; Hos. 6:6; Amos 5:21–24; Mic. 6:8). At times, people applied the law in new ways (1 Chr. 15:12–15 with Num. 7:9; Deut. 10:8; 2 Chr. 30:2–3 with Num. 9:9–13), adapted it to new contexts (2 Chr. 29:34, 36 with Lev. 1:5–6; 2 Chr. 30:17–20; 35:5–6 with Exod. 12:21), or even developed

it further than was previously observed (2 Chr. 8:12–15; 29:25–30). There are even instances where God did not hold people guilty though they failed to fulfill ceremonial obligations (Lev. 10:16–20) or engaged in ceremonially unlawful activity (1 Sam. 21:3–6; cf. Lev. 22:10; Matt. 12:4).

Nevertheless, the Old Testament never distinguishes moral, civil, and ceremonial laws in the way the threefold division proposes. Leviticus 19, for example, shows little distinction between laws for it mixes calls to love one’s neighbor (vv. 11–12, 17–18) with various commands related to family (vv. 3a, 29), worship (vv. 3b–8, 26–28, 30–31), business practice (vv. 9–10, 13b, 19a, 23–25, 34b–36), care for the needy and disadvantaged (vv. 9–10, 13–14, 33–34), criminal and civil disputes (vv. 15–16, 35a), and ritual matters (v. 19b). Moses made no attempt to elevate certain laws over others.

Following the Old Testament prophets before him (e.g., 1 Sam. 15:22; Hos. 6:6; Mic. 6:6–8), Jesus did distinguish “weightier” and “lighter” matters of the law (Matt. 23:23; cf. 9:13; 12:7). Yet when he confronted hypocrites who were willing to tithe on their spice rack but unwilling to engage in the more difficult tasks of “justice and mercy and faithfulness,” he emphasized, “These you ought to have done, *without neglecting the others*” (23:23).

Furthermore, whether addressing the law’s repudiation, replacement, or reappropriation, the New Testament regularly speaks of the whole law as a unit. Paul says, “The commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,’ and *any other commandment*, are summed up in this word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Rom. 13:9). The call to love neighbor synthesizes not just a group of moral laws but every

commandment, which would include *both* the proposed civil and ceremonial legislation.¹⁰ Jesus also spoke broadly when he asserted, “Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:19). There is no special categorizing of laws here. Paul stressed that the whole “law” brought curse to all (Gal. 3:10), that in Christ we are no longer under the law-covenant as a guardian (3:24–25), and that “every man who accepts circumcision . . . is obligated to keep the whole law” (5:3). James also noted, “Whoever keeps *the whole law* but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it” (Jas. 2:10).

The New Testament repudiates all the Mosaic law-covenant, sees all Moses’s law replaced with Christ’s law, and reappropriates all Moses’s law as revelation of God’s character, as a pointer to Christ, and as a guide for Christian living. Scripture does not teach the threefold division of the law.

All Laws Are “Moral” and Most Are Culturally Bound

Theonomists are correct to note that the so-called “civil” laws illustrate moral principles working their way out in Late Bronze- and Iron-Age culture.¹¹ To this we can add that the so-called “ceremonial” laws demonstrate ethical or moral elements through symbolism. For example, Israel’s sacrificial system testified to Yahweh’s holiness and mankind’s depravity (e.g., Lev 9:1–7). Similarly, when Israel distinguished themselves from their neighbors through dietary restrictions (e.g., 11:44–45; 20:25–26), they pointed to Yahweh’s holiness, which was a loving act to pagan peoples.

Those holding to the threefold division of the law count the Ten Words as the premier example of “moral law,” yet even they contain many culturally bound features:¹²

- The prologue identifies Israel as a people Yahweh redeemed from slavery in Egypt (Deut. 5:6), and this element also grounds the call to rest in the Sabbath command (5:14–15).
- The idolatry command assumes a religious system including carved images (5:8).
- The Sabbath command presumes the context of ancient Near Eastern bond service, geographically limited animals, and cities with gates (5:14); its use of “sojourner” (= Hebrew *gēr*) (5:14) implies the existence of the politically defined nation of Israel.
- The command to honor one’s parents directly points to the existence of the nation of Israel in the land of Canaan (5:16).
- The coveting commands assume a people acquainted with ancient Near Eastern bond service and with animals common in the Mediterranean world (5:21).
- The commands principally address household heads who enjoy wives, children, household servants, and property—all of which point to Israel’s patricentric society.¹³

This list should caution those who want to distinguish “civil” or “ceremonial” laws from “moral” because of their temporal boundedness.

Christians Should Benefit from All Old Testament Laws

Most theologians holding to the threefold division of the law affirm the

lasting value of *all* Scripture. However, the moral, civil, and ceremonial distinction has moved many laypeople to see Exodus's Book of the Covenant (Exod. 21–23) or Leviticus's instructions as having little lasting Christian relevance.

Yet Jesus and Paul reaffirmed the prohibitions against reviling parents (Matt. 15:4; cf. Exod. 21:17) and leaders (Acts 23:5; cf. Exod. 22:28), Paul drew pastoral insight from the instructions on temple service (1 Cor. 9:13–14; cf. Lev. 6:16, 26; 7:6), and Peter called believers to holiness *because* God called for it in Leviticus (1 Pet. 1:15–17; cf. Lev. 19:2). “All Scripture. . . is profitable” for Christians (2 Tim. 3:16), and we align most closely with the Bible's testimony when we emphasize how loving our neighbor fulfills *every* commandment of the law and how all the law still matters for Christians, though not all in the same way.

The old covenant law is not the Christian's legal code, but it was still written *for* us by portraying God's character and values, by directing our eyes to Jesus, and by clarifying how deeply and widely love for God and neighbor should consume our lives. Every commandment counts.

ADDITIONAL PROBLEMS WITH THEONOMY

The term *theonomy* (“God's law”) commonly refers to one of two overlapping systems of thought related to the lasting value of Moses's law: Christian reconstructionist theonomy and general equity theonomy. The difference between the two systems is one of degree, for both stress that God defines justice most clearly through Moses's law and that these principles of justice should guide both the church and society today. Those adopting the title of reconstruction usually focus more on the society over the church,

whereas those employing the title of general equity commonly stress that the church must first be reconstructed according to God's law and then through that influence government.¹⁴ Nevertheless, both approaches believe that the church and state are to be part of Christ's kingdom on earth.¹⁵

Associated with names like Rousas Rushdoony, Greg Bahnsen, and Gary North in the 1980s and 1990s, Christian reconstructionist theonomy confronts the world's increasing secularization by seeking to fulfill the “cultural mandate” of filling and subduing the earth and taking dominion (Gen. 1:28). It emphasizes that right order in this world will only be realized when all levels of society and government—including nation-states—surrender to Christ's authority by being governed by biblical law. In the words of Gary North and Gary DeMar, “The continuing validity and applicability of the whole law of God, including, but not limited to, the Mosaic case laws is the standard by which individuals, families, churches, and civil governments should conduct their affairs.”¹⁶ Christian reconstructionist theonomy seeks “to integrate every aspect of American life into a consistent world view based upon the abiding validity of the Old Testament law in exhaustive detail.”¹⁷

The Christian church has strongly critiqued this movement,¹⁸ yet it is on the rise again under the title of general equity theonomy through teachers like Doug Wilson and Jeff Durbin.¹⁹ Both attempt to diminish the extreme nature of their claims by saying that *all* Christians are “theonomists” of some sort because all Christians believe God's definition of justice informs all spheres of life.²⁰ Nevertheless, like the reconstructionists before them, they seek to awaken a religio-political movement that unhelpfully employs the tripartite view of the Mosaic law, stresses too much continuity between

the old and new covenants, and fails to distinguish just laws that Christ would approve (which would be appropriate for all nation-states) from a body politic wholly under Christ's leadership (which will only be realized in the church).

Theonomy teaches that God has only one standard for all governments: the Mosaic Law. Specifically, Moses's moral and civil laws remain directly binding for the church *and* the world's societies, though with some necessary redemptive-historical or contextual progressions. Because Greg Bahnsen sets forth the most scholarly arguments for the theonomic approach, my critiques will confront his claims most directly.²¹ However, my criticisms still apply more broadly to all theonomists.

Christ Fulfills All Moses's Law, not Just the Ceremonial Parts

First, Bahnsen says of Moses's ceremonial laws:

“The ceremonial observations were stop-gap and anticipatory; Christ and the New Covenant are the *fulfilled reality*. Therefore, all Christians have had the ceremonial laws observed for them finally and completely *in Christ*.”²² Elsewhere he adds:

[The] moral laws of the Old Testament, such as those that forbid adultery or oppressing the poor . . . do not foreshadow the redemptive work of Christ,

show us justification by faith, or symbolically set apart the Jews from Gentiles. That the laws pertaining to the priesthood, temple, and sacrificial system do accomplish those ends, however, and are to be considered “put out of gear” by the coming of Christ as demonstrated by the author of Hebrews (esp. chaps. 7–10).²³

These claims assume that the only discontinuities created in the coming of Christ relate to shadows and substance. Yet Christ does more than serve as the antitypical substitute sacrifice on behalf of a sinful world (Heb. 9:13–14, 23–28). He is able to “make many to be accounted righteous” and to “bear their iniquities” because he was the “righteous one” (Isa. 53:11; cf. 1 John 1:9–2:2) who perfectly obeyed his Father's will, even unto death (John 5:30; 6:38; 14:30–31; Phil. 2:8; Heb. 5:8). This obedience

included his fulfilling Moses's broad teaching and not just his ceremonial instruction (Matt. 5:17; 23:2–3; Luke 24:44; John 8:46).

Speaking of Moses's “moral law,” Bahnsen recognizes that “Christ came. . . to atone for our transgressions against those moral requirements (Rom. 4:25; 5:8–9; 8:1–3).”²⁴ Yet he then attempts to limit Paul's comments about the law's temporary imprisoning power and guardianship (Gal. 3:23–25) to the ceremonial legislation.²⁵ This

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will not do, however, for “the law that came 430 years” after “the promises were made to Abraham and his offspring” (3:16–17) and “the law. . . [that] was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come,” was the whole Mosaic administration, not just its ceremonial aspects. “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Rom. 10:4). A proper Christian approach to Moses’s law requires that we see Christ fulfilling all the law and not just the ceremonial portions (Matt. 5:17–18).

Christ’s Kingdom Is Not of This World

Second, Wilson longs to see America abandon secularism and reconstruct into an ideal “new covenant republic.”²⁶ Similarly, Bahnsen points to Isaiah’s promise that the nations would gather to hear Yahweh’s law in Zion (Isa. 2:2–3) in support of his claim that “the Gentiles were obligated to the same moral requirements as the Jews.”²⁷ But that’s not what Isaiah is envisioning. Instead, his vision predicts and anticipates the ingathering of God’s multi-ethnic, transformed peoples (i.e., the church of Jesus Christ), who would heed Yahweh’s word through his messianic Servant (Isa. 42:4; 50:4, 10; 51:4; 54:13; 55:3; cf. Matt. 12:18–20; 17:5; John 6:44–46). Theonomists fail to appreciate that *the church* and not any modern state stands as the mixed, multi-ethnic “nation” that the Old Testament prophets anticipate God’s kingdom people would become (e.g., Jer. 31:36; Mic. 4:7; Ezek. 37:22). This explains why Peter can declare the Christian community to be “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a *holy nation*, a people for [God’s] own possession” (1 Pet. 2:9).

Jesus himself seems to stand against any form of political Christian reconstructionism. Consider what he says on the night of his crucifixion to Pilate: “My kingdom is *not* of this world” (John 18:36). Jesus further notes that his followers are to disciple “nations” not as political entities but as individuals whom they can baptize and teach (Matt. 28:19–20; see also the “from” in Rev. 5:9).²⁸

Similarly, Paul emphasizes that believers’ “citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20) and that God has transferred Christians and not governments from “the domain of darkness. . . to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Col. 1:13). Our allegiance, therefore, is to Christ’s kingdom (Col. 3:1–4). We are resident aliens on earth (1 Pet. 2:11), *freely* subject to human systems even as we recognize our service is to God (2:16).²⁹

God created humans in his image, which necessarily calls for love and justice to be part of every human society, government included. Furthermore, the principles of love and justice within Moses’s law inform such activities in other salvation-historical periods. But God’s new covenant community is international and not associated with any geo-political power or province. Indeed, it is made up of some “from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9). Christ’s kingdom is not yet of this world, but one day it will be when the present order is replaced at the final judgment (Matt. 6:10; Rom. 8:18–25; 2 Cor. 4:17–18; Rev. 5:10). Then and only then will voices from heaven ring forth, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever” (Rev. 11:15).

Through Christ, Moses's Law Applies to the Church, Not the State

Third, Bahnsen stresses that, according to Matthew 5:17–20, Jesus came “to confirm and restore the full measure, intent, and purpose of the Old Testament law.”³⁰ Yet the theologians’ affirmation that Moses’s law still bears lasting value fails to appreciate that when Jesus fulfills the Old Testament he not only maintains (e.g., never murder, muzzling an ox) and annuls (e.g., sin offering) various old covenant laws but also transforms others (e.g., Sabbath, capital punishment) *for the church*.

Hence, Jesus notes that he, the “lord of the Sabbath,” only gives rest to those who come to him (Matt. 11:28–30; 12:8); in other words, his rest is for the new covenant community and not the world in general. Similarly, Paul applies Moses’s criminal legislation regarding the death penalty (Deut. 22:22)

to the church’s excommunication of professing members who refuse to repent of their sin (1 Cor. 5:13); he does not use it to ground the state’s responsibility to bear the sword (Rom. 13:4).³¹

In the Old Testament, through the prophet Amos, Yahweh declared punishments on Israel’s neighbors based on their oppression of others (Amos 1:2–2:3), whereas he condemns Judah for rejecting “the law of the LORD” (2:3) and Israel for profaning his name (2:7) and maligning his house (2:8). The “laws.

... statutes. . . [and] everlasting covenant” that all the earth’s inhabitants have violated, resulting in curse (Isa. 24:4–6), relate *not* to the Mosaic law but to principles of nature (i.e., image-bearing and community justice) associated with the Adamic-Noahic covenant (cf. Gen. 6:11–12; Lev. 18:26; Zech. 11:10; Rom. 5:12–14). Hence, Paul speaks of the world’s unrighteous people suppressing God’s “truth” (Rom. 1:18), acting contrary to “nature” (1:26), and engaging in all forms of wickedness despite their knowing “God’s decree that those who practice such things deserve to die” (1:32). Each of these standards points not to Moses’s law but to every human’s more fundamental awareness of right and wrong, apart from any special revelation.³²

Later on in Romans, Paul distinguishes God’s special revelation to Israel from his general revelation to mankind (9:4–5). Or, as he writes in Romans 2: “All who have sinned without the law [i.e., the

Gentiles] will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law [i.e., the Jews] will be judged by the law” (2:12). Yet because Israel was Yahweh’s special covenant people, their failure to keep the revealed law proved that all without such a gift would also be under God’s condemnation (3:19). Thus, Israel’s relationship to the law served as a paradigm for the world, but not in the way theologians argue. The “law of Christ” and not the “law of Moses” stands as the direct authority over Christians today, and neither of these

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laws binds secular governments.³³ Secular government should enact laws that Jesus would approve, for the ruler of every nation-state is “God’s servant for your good. . . an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer” (13:4). Nevertheless, such figures are not extending Christ’s kingdom on earth. The church alone performs this role, as it serves God in complete freedom from every world power (1 Pet. 2:11–16).

CONCLUSION

Recognizing our world order’s increasing brokenness, theonomy rightly seeks God’s justice on a global scale and at all levels of the church and state. However, it improperly holds to a threefold division of Moses’s law and fails to appreciate the significance of Christ fulfilling all Moses’s law and not just the

ceremonial parts. It also misses that the church and not any modern state is the locus of Christ’s kingdom, which is not presently of this world, and it fails to recognize that the New Testament applies Moses’s law through Christ only to the church and never to the state. All those made in God’s image bear innate value that clarifies types of morality and justice, a picture of which both Moses’s law and Christ’s law supply. However, Christ’s law binds the church alone, and Moses’s law relates to Christians only through Christ. Today the church is God’s “nation,” and only Christ’s return will reconstitute right order on a global scale. This—and no earthly state of the present age—is the church’s hope.

¹ This article abridges and adapts material taken from chapter 11 of *Delighting in the Old Testament: Through Christ and for Christ* by Jason S. DeRouchie © 2023. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023). Used with permission.

² For an affirmation of the threefold division of Moses’s law, see the Westminster Confession of Faith 19:3–5. These are theological categories, in contrast to the content distinctions of criminal, civil, family, cultic/ceremonial, and compassion laws that I address elsewhere. Most scholars point to Thomas Aquinas as the first to utilize the threefold division as the basis for discerning continuity and discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments; Aquinas stressed the lasting validity of the “moral” law but viewed both the “civil” and “ceremonial” legislation terminated in Christ.

³ Classic covenant theology is a theological system that sees one people of God in both Testaments and views all the historical covenants as progressive expressions of a single covenant of grace. For a brief synthesis of the view, see Benjamin L. Merkle, *Discontinuity to Continuity: A Survey of Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020), 139–69 and Michael S. Horton, “Covenant Theology” and “A Covenant Theology Response,” in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture*, Brent E. Parker and Richard J. Lucas (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022), 35–73, 183–200. Some in the classic reformed tradition do not follow the threefold division. For example, Vern Poythress, professor at Westminster Theological Seminary, notes, “No simple and easy separation between types of law will do justice to the richness of Mosaic revelation. . . . The entirety of this Mosaic revelation simultaneously articulates general moral principles and symbolic particulars: it points forward to Christ as the final and permanent expression of righteousness and penal substitution (with moral overtones) but is itself, in that very respect, a shadow (with ceremonial overtones).” Vern S. Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1991), 283. Similarly, Jerram Barrs, professor at Covenant Theological Seminary, writes, “These divisions are not hard and fast. For example, many ceremonial laws include moral and civil aspects. Many civil laws include moral aspects. A problematic consequence in this view, if it is held with systematic rigor, is that the beauties of the ceremonial and civil aspects of the law become lost to us during this present age.” Jerram Barrs, *Delighting in the Law of the Lord: God’s Alternative to Legalism and Moralism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 314.

⁴ Michael Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 177–78, 180; cf. John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 203–36; Philip S Ross, *From the Finger of God: The Biblical and Theological Basis for the Threefold Division of the Law* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2010).

⁵ Christian reconstructionism is a type of Reformed, postmillennial theology that teaches the law as Scripture reveals it (especially Moses’s old covenant law) should be used to reconstruct not only the church but all societies in every time. For a brief synthesis of the view, see Merkle, *Discontinuity to Continuity*, 170–200.

⁶ Rousas John Rushdoony, *The Roots of Reconstruction* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House, 1991), 553.

⁷ Rousas John Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law, 3 vols.* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1973), 1:10.

⁸ Even Christian reconstructionist Greg Bahnsen, who affirms the lasting validity of the old covenant's "civil" legislation, recognizes redemptive-historical and cultural discontinuities between the old and new covenant eras. Greg L. Bahnsen, "The Theonomic Reformed Approach to Law and Gospel," in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, ed. Wayne G. Strickland, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 100–108.

⁹ For further reflections on why dividing the law into these categories is not preferable, see David A. Dorsey, "The Law of Moses and the Christian: A Compromise" *JETS* 34 (1991) 329–31; D. A. Carson, "The Tripartite Division of the Law: A Review of Philip Ross, *The Finger of God*," in *From Creation to New Creation: Essays on Biblical Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Daniel M. Gurtner and Benjamin L. Gladd (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 223–36; William W. Combs, "Paul, the Law, and Dispensationalism," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 18 (2013): 26–28; Brian S. Rosner, *Paul and the Law: Keeping the Commandments of God*, NSBT 31 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 36–37; Jason C. Meyer, "The Mosaic Law, Theological Systems, and the Glory of Christ," in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies*, ed. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2016), 87–89; Stephen J. Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism and the Doing of Ethics," in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies*, ed. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2016), 218–21. For helpful critiques of the Christian reconstructionist approach to the law (also known as theonomy), see William S. Barker and W. Robert Godfrey, eds., *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991); Douglas J. Moo, "Response to Greg L. Bahnsen," in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, ed. Wayne G. Strickland, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 165–73; Thomas R. Schreiner, *40 Questions about Christians and Biblical Law, 40 Questions* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 223–26.

¹⁰ Cf. Douglas Moo, *Epistle to the Romans, NICOT, 2nd ed* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 832; contra Colin G. Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans, PNTC* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), s.v. Rom. 13:9.

¹¹ See, e.g., the section titled "The Direction of the Law" in volume 1's introductory chapter of Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*.

¹² The initial five of these come from Dorsey, "The Law of Moses and the Christian," 330; the last is noted in Daniel I. Block, "'You Shall Not Covet Your Neighbor's Wife': A Study in Deuteronomic Domestic Ideology," *JETS* 53.3 (2010): 457–58.

¹³ On the biblical vision of Israel's society being centered on the father as servant leader (i.e., patricentric) as opposed to dominated by a father as self-exalting dictator (i.e., patriarchal), see Daniel I. Block, "Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel," in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, ed. Ken M. Campbell (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 33–102.

¹⁴ For this distinction, see timestamp 7:39–9:38 in Doug Wilson, "Are You a Theonomist?": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBgUnih2Bs0>. The phrase "general equity" derives from the wording of The Westminster Confession of Faith §19.4. Speaking of old covenant Israel, it reads: "To them also, as a body politic, He gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people, not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require." Advocates of "general equity theonomy" believe they are simply carrying out the original expressed meaning of the WCF, but many others who affirm the WCF strongly disagree with this application.

¹⁵ Rushdoony asserted, "Not only is every church a religious institution, but every state or societal order is a religious establishment. Every state is a law order, and every law order represents an enacted morality, with procedures for the enforcement of that morality. Every morality represents a form of theological order, i.e., is an aspect and expression of religion. The church thus is not the only religious institution; the state also is a religious institution. More often than the church, the state has been the central religious institution of most civilizations throughout the centuries." Rousas John Rushdoony, *Christianity and the State* (Vallecito, CA: Rose House, 1986), 7. For a similar view, see timestamp 14:15–18:33 in Jeff Durbin, "Theonomy, Biblical Justice, and Church and State": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCpkIsLMuVo&t=6s>.

¹⁶ Gary North and Gary DeMar, *Christian Reconstruction: What It Is, What It Isn't* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1991), 81.

¹⁷ Michael D. Gabbert, "An Historical Overview of Christian Reconstructionism," *CTR* 6.2 (1993): 281.

¹⁸ See, e.g., Barker and Godfrey, *Theonomy*; Gabbert, "An Historical Overview of Christian Reconstructionism," 281–301; T. David Gordon, "Critique of Theonomy: A Taxonomy," *WTJ* 56 (1994): 23–43; Moo, "Response to Greg L. Bahnsen," 165–73; Schreiner, *40 Questions about Christians and Biblical Law*, 223–26.

¹⁹ See, for example, from Doug Wilson, "General Equity Theonomy (Reformed Basics #13):" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_4KGGzjxLY; "Are You a Theonomist?": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBgUnih2Bs0&t=340s>; from Jeff Durbin: "Theonomy, Biblical Justice, and Church and State": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCpkIsLMuVo>.

²⁰ See timestamp 00:20–00:50 in Doug Wilson, "Am I a Theonomist?": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBgUnih2Bs0>; and timestamp 3:45–4:45 in Jeff Durbin: "Theonomy, Biblical Justice, and Church and State": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCpkIsLMuVo>.

²¹ See especially Bahnsen, "The Theonomic Reformed Approach to Law and Gospel," 93–143; Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics, 3rd ed.* (Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media, 2013).

²² Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 205.

²³ Bahnsen, "The Theonomic Reformed Approach to Law and Gospel," 104.

²⁴ Bahnsen, "The Theonomic Reformed Approach to Law and Gospel," 112–13.

²⁵ Bahnsen, "The Theonomic Reformed Approach to Law and Gospel," 99.

²⁶ See timestamp 4:15–20 and then 5:50–6:45 in "Are You a Theonomist?": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBgUnih2Bs0>.

²⁷ Bahnsen, "The Theonomic Reformed Approach to Law and Gospel," III.

²⁸ Jesus highlights this fact by unpacking his call to make disciples of neuter plural "nations" by calling for the church to baptize and teach masculine plural peoples (= "them") (Matt.28:19–20). Jesus never called his church to

make nation-states into disciples.

²⁹ On all these texts, see John Piper, “Politics, Patriotism, and the Pulpit,” *Desiring God: Ask Pastor John*, July 4, 2022: <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/politics-patriotism-and-the-pulpit>.

³⁰ Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 67; cf. 84.

³¹ Paul notes that God granted governments the responsibility to execute judgment, even unto death (Rom. 13:4). This fact is built into the fabric of being made in the image of God (Gen. 9:6) and clarifies why the old covenant called for Israel’s government to ensure that the punishment fit the crime (e.g., Exod. 21:23–25; Lev. 24:19–20; Deut. 19:21). Nevertheless, that the government executes criminals today in no way derives from the lasting validity of the Mosaic law.

³² Frank Thielman, *Paul and the Law: A Contextual Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 169; Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 131–32; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT, 2nd ed (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 108.

³³ Carson proposes that the category of “moral law” is still helpful if we define it not as that a priori (“before the fact”), unchanging standard of God’s love and justice that stands across all times and cultures and governs our understanding of continuity and discontinuity between the Testaments but as an a posteriori (“after the fact”) reality that the Testaments themselves disclose in relation to “those instructions and laws that change the least across time.” D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *Matthew–Mark*, EBC 9, 2nd ed (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 177.



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