

Notebook

By Every Word

Bible Conference - August 3rd & 4th, 2012



COVENANT REFORMED CHURCH
of Elk Grove

Notebook

By Every Word

God's law or chaos

With Dr. Joe Morecraft III
&
Dr. Derek Carlsen

Hosted by Covenant Reformed Church of Elk Grove
1001 Rohlwing Rd.
Elk Grove Village, IL 60007
847.551.3443
www.CovenantReformed-eg.org

Schedule:

Aug. 3

Registration opens • 6:00 pm

Primer: **Law 101** • 7:00 pm
(Begin at the Beginning)

1. All Laws Are Religious • 8:00 pm
(You Can't Be Neutral)

Aug. 4

2. Three Uses of the Law • 8:00 am
(According to the Reformers)

**3. Law & Grace: Common
Errors Explained** • 9:15 am
(Law Is Not the Bad Guy)

4. Battle of Worldviews • 10:30 am
(Whose Side Are YOU on?)

[lunch: 11:30-1:30]

**5. Understanding the Differences:
Categories of Law** • 1:30 pm
*(Shellfish, Your Neighbor's Ox,
& Stuff Like That)*

6. Law & the Kingdom of God • 2:45 pm
*(Don't Just Stand There;
Do Something!)*

Q&A session • 4:00 pm

(biography)

Dr. Joe Morecraft III

Pastor Morecraft has been Chalcedon's minister since its inception. Pastor Morecraft is a preacher of the gospel and a noted lecturer on contemporary political and historical trends in the United States. Pastor Morecraft has produced the first comprehensive commentary on the Westminster Larger Catechism. This five volume set titled Authentic Christianity dissects and explains the teachings of this oft-neglected encyclopedia of biblical truth for today's readers in language they can understand. His published works also include two books - How God Wants Us to Worship Him: a Defense of the Bible as the Only Standard for Modern Worship, and With Liberty and Justice for All: Christian Politics Made Simple. He has also published hundreds of articles and is currently the Executive Editor of the Counsel of Chalcedon, a reformed magazine. Pastor Morecraft was born in 1944 and is a native of Madison, West Virginia. Pastor Morecraft holds a B.A. in history from King College in Bristol, Tennessee, a M.Div from Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia, and a M.Th. and Th.D. from Whitefield Theological Seminary in Lakeland, Florida.

Ordained by the Presbyterian Church in the United States, Pastor Morecraft has pastored churches in Virginia, Tennessee, and Georgia. He has been the pastor of Chalcedon Presbyterian Church since 1974 and has assisted in the planting of other churches in the Atlanta area. Pastor Morecraft conducts seminars and conferences around the nation. He has also addressed civic, medical, military, political, religious, and educational groups around the world, in such places as Scotland, England, Germany, El Salvador, South Africa, Cypress, Ukraine, Argentina, Paraguay, Chile, and Ecuador. He speaks on a variety of theological, historical, and social issues.

In addition to the two books already listed, Pastor Morecraft has also published a book in South Africa, Liberation Theology: Prelude to Revolution, and has authored numerous articles on national defense, international relations, constitutionalism, and various economic and social issues. He has also contributed a chapter in D. James Kennedy's A Nation in Shame; a chapter in A Comprehensive Faith: An International Festschrift for R.J. Rushdoony, and a chapter in The Theology of Christian Resistance.

Pastor Morecraft has served on the Board of Advisors for the Plymouth Rock Foundation, the North Georgia Reformation Center, the Christian Public Policy Council, and the Larry McDonald Memorial Foundation. He has also served on the Board of Managers of The Lord's Day Alliance of the United States and the Board of Reference of The Christian Film and Television Commission.

Pastor Morecraft and his wife Becky have four children and ten grandchildren.

(biography)
Dr. Derek Carlsen

Derek Carlsen is a native Zimbabwean and was a resident in that country until he was called to be the pastor of the Church of Christian Liberty from April 2003 to September 2005. Following this, he became founding pastor of Covenant Reformed Church of Elk Grove in Elk Grove Village, Illinois. Derek received his theological training through George Whitefield College, Cape Town, South Africa (L.Th. 1992) and Whitefield Theological Seminary, Lakeland, Florida, USA (M.Miss. 1999 and D.Miss. 2001).

Derek has served as a pastor in Zimbabwe for 10 years and was also involved in pioneering a Christian school in that country together with his wife Elise. He also started Reason of Hope Ministries, a mission based in Zimbabwe that has its focus upon printing and distributing Christian literature in southern Africa. Derek is the author of three commentaries: Faith and Courage: A Commentary on Acts; That You May Believe: A Commentary on John's Gospel; and Grace and Law: A Commentary on Galatians.

Derek and Elise have been blessed with three children.

Primer: Law 101

(Begin at the Beginning)

with Bill LaPrise

Notes:

All Laws Are Religious

(You Can't Be Neutral)

with Dr. Joe Morecraft III

Notes:

Three Uses of the Law

(According to the Reformers)

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Notes:

Law & Grace: Common Errors Explained

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Battle of Worldviews

(Whose Side Are YOU on?)

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Understanding the Differences: Categories of Law

(Shellfish, Your Neighbor's Ox & Stuff Like That)

with Dr. Derek Carlsen

Notes:

Law & the Kingdom of God

(Don't Just Stand There; Do Something!)

with Dr. Derek Carlsen

Notes:

Q&A Session

with Dr. Derek Carlsen & Bill LaPrise

Notes:

Jesus Christ: “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” [Matthew 5:17-19]

John Calvin: “With respect to doctrine, we must not imagine that the coming of Christ has freed us from the authority of the law: for it is the eternal rule of a devout and holy life, and must, therefore, be as unchangeable, as the justice of God, which it embraced, is constant and uniform. With respect to ceremonies, there is some appearance of a change having taken place; but it was only the use of them that was abolished, for their meaning was more fully confirmed. The coming of Christ has taken nothing away even from ceremonies, but, on the contrary, confirms them by exhibiting the truth of shadows: for, when we see their full effect, we acknowledge that they are not vain or useless. Let us therefore learn to maintain inviolable this sacred tie between the law and the Gospel, which many improperly attempt to break. For it contributes not a little to confirm the authority of the Gospel, when we learn, that it is nothing else than a *fulfillment of the law*; so that both, with one consent, declare God to be their Author.” [Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark and Luke, pg.277]

John Murray: We are bound to love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and strength and mind, and such love is the fulfilling of the law. Herein appears the perverseness of the idea that the moral law may be abrogated and is superseded by love. Law for us is the correlate of the nature of God, in us and to us the correlate of the divine perfection. Love is the fulfilling of the law. But love is not an autonomous, self-instructing and self-directing principle. Love does not excogitate the norms by which it is regulated. Love fulfils the law but love itself is not the law. Sin is therefore the violation of the law which love fulfils. Abrogate law and we abrogate sin, and we make love an emotion abstracted from all activity and meaning...The law of God extends to all relations of life. This is so because we are never removed from obligation to love and serve God. We are never amoral. We owe devotion to God in every phase and department of life. It is this principle of all-inclusive obligation to God, and of all-pervasive relevance of the law of God, that gives sanctity to all of our obligations and relations. [*Collected Writings* vol.2, pgs.77-78]

A.A. Hodge: While the law in its relation of a covenant of works has been fulfilled by our Surety, so that they who are under grace are no more under the law in that capacity (Rom. vi. 14), nevertheless the law as a rule of action and standard of character is immutable, unrelaxable, and inalienable, in its personal relations. Christ fulfilled the law for us vicariously as the condition of salvation, and on that basis we are justified. But no one can be vicariously conformed to the law for us as a rule of conduct or of moral character. Therefore, while Christ fulfilled the law *for* us, the Holy Spirit fulfils the law *in* us, by sanctifying us into complete conformity to it. And in obedience to this law the believer brings forth those good works which are the fruits, though not the ground, of our salvation. [*The Confession of Faith* pg.251.]

Martin Luther: “When one does not preach faith... all the world relies on its good works. On the other hand, when one teaches only faith, people become false Christians, who, to be sure, highly commend faith, are baptized and number with the Christians, and yet show neither fruit nor spiritual power... “

“Although, not only the inexperienced common folk, but also those who consider themselves very wise, reason like this: If the Law does not justify, it is worthless – this notion is false. For just as the conclusion is not valid: money does not justify, therefore it is worthless; the eyes do not justify, therefore they must be torn out; the hands do not justify, therefore they must be cut off, so this conclusion also is not valid: The Law does not justify, therefore it is worthless.”

“The Law indicates what is wrong with a man. Then, when Christ comes, He says: Now we want to establish the Law. For He comes who helps to fulfill, as He says: I did not come to destroy the Law, so that there should be no Law, but in order to fulfill it Myself and to bring help and strength and the Holy Spirit, through whom you, too, may fulfill it. I do not want idle Christians.”

“First our failure to keep the Law is remitted through Christ, and sin is entirely and completely forgiven. But not in such a way or to the end that henceforth we need not keep the Law and may go on sinning, or that one may teach thus: If you have faith, you need no longer love God and your neighbor. On the contrary, sin is forgiven so that a man may now begin to keep the Law. This is the eternal, unalterable, and immutable will of God: therefore it is necessary to preach of grace, that a man may be advised and helped to attain this keeping of the Law.”

“[Christ] did not destroy and abrogate the Law; but He so changed our heart, which formerly was under the Law against its will, and He showered so many good things upon it and made the Law so lovely to it, that the heart now delights and rejoices in nothing more than in the Law. It would not willingly see one tittle of it fall away.”

“The Commandments must be kept; otherwise there is no life but only death. For even faith is nothing where love, that is, the fulfilling of the command, does not follow (1 Cor. 13:2). For Christ Jesus, God’s Son, did not come into the world or die that we might live in unfettered disobedience to the Commandments but that we might fulfill the Commandments with His help and cooperation. Therefore, just as it is true that works without faith are nothing, so it is also true that faith without fruits is nothing; for works without faith are idolatry; faith without works is lying and no faith at all.”

“Pernicious teachers those are who nowadays contend – I do not know what has induced them to do so – that the Law is not to be preached in the church. So you would not teach the Law just where people are to be found who truly need the Law, namely, avaricious, proud, adulterous, usurious, and idolatrous people... Nowadays you may find many who are offended by the indispensable preaching of the Law and avoid hearing it, for they say that their consciences are burdened when they listen to such sermons... They do not stop sinning... But when they hear these sins reprov'd, they are offended and do not want their consciences burdened. Shall we, then, let everybody do what he pleases and pronounce him blessed to boot? Never! For here you are told that the burning of Sodom should be proclaimed to every succeeding generation and even to the church of God itself, that men may learn to fear God.”

[What Luther Says: A Practical In-Home Anthology for the Active Christian, pgs. 741,757,763-6,771]

King David: Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord!

Blessed are those who keep His testimonies, who seek Him with the whole heart!

You have commanded us to keep Your precepts diligently.

I will praise You with uprightness of heart, when I learn Your righteous judgments.

How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. With my whole heart I have sought You; oh, let me not wander from Your commandments!

Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.

Blessed are You, O Lord! Teach me Your statutes.

You rebuke the proud - the cursed, who stray from Your commandments.

But Your servant meditates on Your statutes.

Your testimonies also are my delight and my counselors.

Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me in Your way.

So shall I keep Your law continually, forever and ever.

And I will walk at liberty, for I seek Your precepts.

Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe Your commandments.

Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word.

You are good, and do good; teach me Your statutes.

I will never forget Your precepts, for by them You have given me life.

I am Yours, save me; for I have sought Your precepts.

I have not departed from Your judgments, for You Yourself have taught me.

How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

Your testimonies I have taken as a heritage forever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart.

I have inclined my heart to perform Your statutes forever, to the very end.

Direct my steps by Your word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me.

Redeem me from the oppression of man, that I may keep Your precepts.

Great are Your tender mercies, O Lord; revive me according to Your judgments.

I see the treacherous, and am disgusted, because they do not keep Your word.

The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever.

My tongue shall speak of Your word, for all Your commandments are righteousness.

[Psalm 119:1,2,4,7,9,10,21,23b,24,44,45,66,67,68,156,93,94,102,103,111,112,133,134,158,160]

The Westminster Confession:

God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which He bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience, promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it, and endued him with power and ability to keep it.

This law, after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness; and, as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments, and written in two tables: the first four commandments containing our duty towards God; and the other six, our duty to man.

Besides this law, commonly called moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel, as a church under age, ceremonial laws, containing several typical ordinances, partly of worship, prefiguring Christ, His graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits; and partly, holding forth diverse instructions of moral duties. All which ceremonial laws are now abrogated, under the New Testament.

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.

The moral law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof; and that, not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it. Neither doth Christ, in the gospel, any way dissolve, but much strengthens this obligation.

Although true believers be not under the law, as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified, or condemned; yet it is of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a rule of life informing them of the will of God, and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly... The promises of it, in like manner, show them God's approbation of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof: although not as due to them by the law as a covenant of works. So as, a man's doing good, and refraining from evil, because the law encourageth to the one, and deterreth from the other, is not evidence of his being under the law, and not of grace.

Neither are the formentioned uses of the law contrary to the grace of the gospel, but do sweetly comply with it; the Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do that freely, and cheerfully, which the will of God, revealed in the law, requireth to be done.

[WCF Chapter 19]

B.B. Warfield: “In a word, we do not understand the nature of the mission which Jesus here ascribes to Himself until we clearly see that it finds its end in the perfecting of men. His purpose in coming is not accomplished in merely completing the law: it finds its fulfillment in bringing men completely to keep the completed law... The law is His, and He uses it as an instrument in the accomplishment of His great end, the making of men righteous... He came to make this law, thus nobly expounded, the actual law of human lives. Abrogate it? Nothing could be further from His purpose. He came rather to fulfill it, to work it out into its most wide reaching applications, and to work it, thus worked-out, into men’s lives... [So] His disciples shall be truly the salt of the earth which has not lost its savor, the light of the world which cannot be hid.” [*Biblical Doctrines*, pg.296-299]

Samuel Bolton, speaking about antinomians (those who oppose the law of God): “They tell us that we make a false mixture together of Christ and Moses, and that we mingle law and Gospel together. How unjustly they lay this charge against us, let men of understanding judge. We cry down the law in respect of justification, but we set it up as a rule of sanctification. The law sends us to the Gospel that we may be justified; and the Gospel sends us to the law again to inquire what is our duty as those who are justified. Whatever they say of the law, though they cast contempt and disgrace upon it, and upon those who preach it, yet we know that, for the substance of it, it is the image of God, a beam of His holiness. The things therein commanded and forbidden are things morally, and therefore eternally, good and evil; nothing can alter the nature of them... The law is subservient to the Gospel. Its purpose is to convince and humble us, and the Gospel is to enable us to fulfill the obedience of the law. The law sends us to the Gospel for our justification; the Gospel sends us to the law to frame our way of life. Our obedience to the law is nothing else but the expression of our thankfulness to God who has freely justified us, that ‘being redeemed, we might serve Him without fear’ (Luke 1:74). [*The True Bounds of Christian Freedom*, pgs.71-72]

MOSES: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

“For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.

“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess. I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days;”

[Deuteronomy 6:4-6, 30:11-20a]

R.J. Rushdoony: “It is a modern heresy that holds that the law of God has no meaning nor any binding force for man today. It is an aspect of the influence of humanistic and evolutionary thought on the church, and it posits an evolving, developing god. This “dispensational” god expressed himself in law in an earlier age, then later expressed himself by grace alone, and is now perhaps to express himself in still another way. But this is not the God of Scripture, whose grace and law remain the same in every age, because He, as the sovereign and absolute Lord, changes not, nor does He need to change. The strength of man is the absoluteness of his God.”

“The purpose of Christ’s atoning work was to restore man to a position of covenant-keeping instead of covenant-breaking, to enable man to keep the law by freeing man ‘from the law of sin and death’, ‘that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us’. (Rom. 8:2,4) Man is resorted to a position of law-keeping. The law thus has a position of centrality in man’s indictment (as a sentence of death against man the sinner), in man’s redemption (in that Christ died, Who although the perfect law-keeper as the new Adam, died as man’s substitute), and in man’s sanctification (in that man grows in grace as he grows in law-keeping, for the law is the way of sanctification).”

“Lawless Christianity is a contradiction in terms: it is anti-Christian. The purpose of grace is not to set aside the law to but fulfill the law and to enable man to keep the law. If the law was so serious in the sight of God that it would require the death of Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, to make atonement for man’s sin, it seems strange for God then to proceed to abandon the law! The goal of the law is not lawlessness, nor the purpose of grace a lawless contempt of the Giver of grace.”

“But the Old Testament also presents life under grace, and both Old and New Testaments present life under grace as life under the law, *never* as lawlessness. *The alternative to law is not grace; it is lawlessness.*”

[*Institutes of Biblical Law*, vol. 1, pgs. 2-4, 20]

What is "Theonomy"?

By Dr. Greg Bahnsen

Dr. Van Til taught us that "There is no alternative but that of theonomy and autonomy" (*Christian-Theistic Ethics*, p. 134). Every ethical decision assumes some final authority or standard, and that will either be self-law ("autonomy") or God's law ("theonomy"). While unbelievers consider themselves the ultimate authority in determining moral right or wrong, believers acknowledge that God alone has that position and prerogative.

The position which has come to be labeled "theonomy" today thus holds that the word of the Lord is the sole, supreme, and unchallengeable standard for the actions and attitudes of all men in all areas of life. Our obligation to keep God's commands cannot be judged by any extrascriptural standard, such as whether its specific requirements (when properly interpreted) are congenial to past traditions or modern feelings and practices.

Jesus My Savior

When any of us come to Christ for salvation, it is with a sense of our sin and misery before God. Our very need of the Savior arises from a conviction of sin, brought home to our hearts by the Holy Spirit showing our guilt for violating God's commandments. As Paul wrote, "I had not known sin except through the law" (Rom. 7:7). The law defines what sin is (1 John 3:4). As such the law cannot be our personal vehicle for gaining favor with God. It rather aims at Christ as our only righteousness, tutoring us that justification must be by faith in Him (Rom. 10:4; Gal. 3:24).

So theonomy teaches that since the fall it has always been unlawful to use the law of God in hopes of establishing one's own personal merit and justification, in contrast or complement to salvation by way of promise and faith. As Paul said, it was "through the law" that he learned to "die to the law" as a way of self-salvation (Gal. 2:9). Commitment to obedience is but the lifestyle of faith, a token of gratitude for God's redeeming grace. "By grace you have been saved through faith... not of works.... We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God previously prepared that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:8-10).

In *What is Faith?* J. Gresham Machen urged that "a new and more powerful proclamation of that law is perhaps the most pressing need of the hour.... A low view of laws always brings legalism in religion; a high view of law makes a man a seeker after grace. Pray God that the high view may again prevail" (pp. 141-142).

Jesus My Lord

After coming to Christ in faith and repentance we all naturally ask how a Christian should live. A. A. Hodge answers: "While Christ fulfilled the law *for* us, the Holy Spirit fulfils the law *in* us, by sanctifying us into complete conformity to it" (*The Confession of Faith*, p. 251). Paul wrote in Romans 8:4-9 that unregenerate men are enemies of God who cannot submit to His law, but those who walk by the Holy Spirit subject themselves to that law. Paul himself endorses that we should "delight in the law after the inward man" (Rom. 7:22).

The Christian confesses that Jesus is the Lord, thus looking to the directives of Jesus to guide his life. Jesus said "if you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Moreover, we will strive to teach others to observe whatever He has commanded us (Matt. 28:18-20). Such healthy and necessary moral standards are surely not burdensome to the believer who bows to Christ as the Lord (1 John 5:3).

As our Lord, moreover, Jesus teaches us that man is to live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4). We have no right to edit God's commandments for ourselves, deciding to follow those which agree with our preconceived ideas and rejecting the others. James teaches that we are not to become "judges of the law," but rather doers of that law (4:11-12); to break even one point of it is to be guilty of breaking it all (2:10). The whole law is our duty, except where the Lawgiver and Lord reveals otherwise. God forbids us to diminish His commands on our own authority (Deut. 4:2). "Every scripture" (even the Old Testament) is profitable, said Paul, for "instruction in righteousness" so that we would be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Accordingly theonomy views God's laws directing moral behavior to be a reflection of His unchanging character; such laws are not arbitrary, but objectively, universally, and absolutely binding. It is God's law that "you are to be holy because I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16, citing Leviticus). The law may not be criticized or challenged by us. It is "holy, righteous and good" (Rom. 7:12). This moral law was revealed to Israel in oracles and ordinances, but even the Gentiles show the work of the law upon their hearts and know its ordinances from the natural order and inward conscience (Rom. 1:32; 2:14-15). Who, then, is under the authority of God's law? Paul answers "all the world" (Rom. 3:19).

Covenant Theology

The law revealed by Moses and subsequent Old Testament authors was given within a covenantal administration of God's grace which included not only moral instruction, but gloriously and mercifully "promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come" (Westminster Confession of Faith VII.5). God's revelation itself teaches us that New Covenant believers, who have the law powerfully written on their hearts (Jer. 31:31ff.; Heb. 8:8-12), no longer follow the foreshadows and administrative details of the old covenant. They are obsolete (Heb. 8:13), having been imposed only until the time when the Messiah would come (Heb. 9:10; Col. 2:17). Thus, for example, on the basis of God's own instruction, we no longer resort to animal sacrifices at the temple and a Levitical priest (Heb. 7-10); the cultic dietary laws have been set aside, for God has cleansed the unclean meats (representing the Gentiles) from which Israel was to be separate or holy (Acts 10).

Theonomy teaches, then, that in regard to the Old Testament law, the New Covenant surpasses the Old Covenant in glory, power, and finality. The New Covenant also supersedes the Old Covenant shadows, thereby changing the application of sacrificial, purity, and "separation" principles, redefining the people of God (e.g., Matt. 21:43), and also altering the significance of the promised land (e.g., Rom. 4:13; 1 Peter 1:4).

What is crucial to notice here is that theonomic ethics comes to these conclusions on the basis of Biblical instruction. Men have no right to alter or spurn Old Testament laws on their own say-so, social traditions, or preconceived ideas about what is morally appropriate or inappropriate in the Mosaic law. They have no right to include more in the discontinuity between old and new covenants than can be warranted from divine revelation.

Theonomy thus teaches that we should presume that Old Testament laws continue to be morally binding in the New Testament unless they are rescinded or modified by further revelation. Theonomy's methodology stands squarely against that of dispensational theology which maintains that all of the Old Testament commandments should be deemed -- in advance of exegesis -- to be abrogated, unless they are repeated in the New Testament.

On this issue the words of our Lord are definitive and clear in Matthew 5:17-19. Jesus declared that he did not come to abrogate the Old Testament Law and Prophets, but to give them their full measure. John Murray wrote that Jesus' "fulfillment" of the law "refers to the function of validating and confirming the law and the prophets" (*Principles of Conduct*, p. 150). With respect to the Old

Testament's moral standards, Jesus went on to insist that until the end of the physical cosmos, not the slightest stroke of the law will pass away. "Therefore whoever shall break one of these least commandments and teach men so shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven." Jesus confirmed the validity of the law, *even down to its least commandment*, and censures anyone who dares to teach otherwise (without authorization from the Lawgiver Himself). New Testament Christians must operate on the presumption of continuity with the Old Testament moral code.

King of Kings

That general continuity which we presume with respect to the moral standards of the Old Testament applies to political ethics. John Murray called it a fatal error "if it is thought that the Christian revelation, the Bible, does not come to the civil authority with a demand for obedience to its direction and precept as stringent and inescapable as it does to the individual, to the family, and to the church"

In addition to being the Head of the church, Christ has been made King over all other earthly kings (1 Tim. 6:15), the "ruler of the kings of the earth" (Rev. 1:5); to Him by right they owe allegiance and obedience. He has been invested with all authority in heaven as well as on earth (Matt. 28:18), and it is to be our prayer that God's will be done on earth just as perfectly as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:10). Jehovah has established His Son as King upon His holy hill, and thus the kings and judges of the earth are now required to submit reverently to Him and serve the Lord (Ps. 2:6-12).

So theonomy teaches that civil rulers are morally obligated to enforce those laws of Christ, found throughout the Scriptures, which are addressed to magistrates (as well as to *refrain* from coercion in areas where God has not prescribed their intervention). As Paul wrote in Romans 13:1-10, magistrates -- even the secular rulers of Rome -- are obligated to conduct their offices as "ministers of God," avenging *God's wrath* (compare 13:4 with 12:19) against criminal evil-doers. They will give an account on the Final Day of their service before the King of kings, their Creator and Judge. Christian involvement in politics calls for recognition of God's transcendent, absolute, revealed law as a standard by which to judge all social codes and political policies. The Scottish theologian, William Symington, well said: "It is the duty of nations, as subjects of Christ, to take his law as their rule. They are apt to think enough that they take, as their standard of legislation and administration, human reason, natural conscience, public opinion or political expediency. None of these, however, nor

indeed all of them together, can supply a sufficient guide in affairs of state" (*Messiah the Prince*, p. 234).

The Apostle Paul affirmed that one of the uses of the Old Testament law which we know to be good is the restraint of criminal behavior (1 Tim. 1:8-10). Jesus endorsed the penal sanctions of the Old Testament law, condemning those who would make them void by their own human traditions (Matt. 15:3-4). Paul likewise upheld the penal standards of the Mosaic judicial law (Acts 25:11). The author of Hebrews leaves us no doubt about the inspired New Testament perspective on the Mosaic penalties, saying "every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward" (2:2). God requires that judges not punish too harshly or too leniently, but assign a penalty proportionate to the crime (cf. "an eye for an eye..."). To uphold genuine justice in their punishments, magistrates need the direction of God's law. In observing the law which God revealed to Israel, all nations should respond "what great nation is there that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law?" (Deut. 4:8).

Although Israel as a political body has expired -- and along with it its judicial law as a constitution -- the *general equity* of those judicial laws is *still required* (Westminster Confession XIX.4). Similarly, when a public library goes out of business (and your library card thus expires), the truth of what was written in its books is not abolished or changed. Political codes today ought to incorporate the moral requirements which were culturally illustrated in the God-given, judicial laws of Old Testament Israel. George Gillespie, widely regarded as the most authoritative theologian at the Westminster Assembly, wrote: "the will of God concerning civil justice and punishments is no where so fully and clearly revealed as in the judicial law of Moses.... He who was punishable by death under the judicial law is punishable by death still" ("Wholesome Severity Reconciled...", 1645).

Those who do not favor taking God's law as the ultimate standard for civil morality and public justice will be forced to substitute some other criterion. The civil magistrate cannot function without some standard of good and evil. If that standard is not the revealed law of God, then in some form or expression it will have to be a law of men -- the standard of self-law or autonomy. Men must choose in their civil affairs to be governed by God's law (theonomy), to be ruled by tyrants, or acquiesce to increasing social degeneracy.

Notes:

For Further Reading:

Institutes of Biblical Law - R.J. Rushdoony

Theonomy in Christian Ethics - Greg Bahnsen

By This Standard - Greg Bahnsen

No Other Standard - Greg Bahnsen

Covenantal Theonomy - Kenneth Gentry

God and Government - Gary DeMar

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.


[2 Timothy 3:16-17]

I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father. And now I plead with you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment to you, but that which we have had from the beginning: that we love one another. This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.

[2 John 1:4-6]

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

[Matthew 28:18-20]



But He answered and said,
"It is written,
'Man shall not live
by bread alone, but
by every word
that proceeds from
the mouth of God.'"

Matthew 4:4



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1001 Rohlwing Road • Elk Grove Village, IL • 60007