

God's Law in Civil Ethics

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“The death penalty is inconsistent with a pro-life worldview,” quote Kristan Hawkins. Kristan Hawkins is a renowned Christian pro-life advocate and public speaker. In her argument against the death penalty, she claims that it is inconsistent to simultaneously advocate against abortion and for the death penalty. Her argument draws from many lines of reasonings, including theological, moral, and pragmatic arguments. However, all of her arguments revolve around this assumed idea concerning the nature of justice. She claims that “Governments must punish evil — but punishment doesn’t have to mean death.” Hawkins asserts that simply since a punishment for murder, such as lifetime imprisonment, is severe, it is therefore sufficiently just. But, another Christian could, with the same authority, claim that lifetime imprisonment does not match the severity of crime, and is therefore unjust. Therefore, it comes down to not question of severity, but to a question of authority. By what standard is the death penalty just or unjust? What should be a Christian’s standard of civil justice? God’s law is that standard.

Under the new covenant, God’s law remains valid as the judicial standard of justice for the nations. This claim is not without grounding however but is a theologically backed claim that will be argued for here. This view is not without historical backing either, and it is the civil application of the construct of Christian ethics known as theonomy. Theonomy, etymologically, simply means God’s (theo-) law (nomia) and advocates that God’s law should be the ultimate standard of ethics in all forms of governance: self, family, church, and state. A large proponent of this idea of ethics, Dr. Greg L. Bahnsen summarizes the core elements of theonomy into the 10 following points:

1. 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; commitment to obedience is but the lifestyle of faith, a token for God's redeeming grace.

2. The word of the Lord is the sole, supreme, and unchallengeable standard for the action and attitudes of all men in all areas of life; this word naturally includes God's moral directives (law).
3. Our obligation to keep the law of God 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.
4. We should presume that Old Testament standing laws continue to be morally binding in the New Testament, unless they are rescinded or modified by further revelation.
5. In regard to the Old Testament law, the New Covenant surpasses the Old Covenant in glory, power, and finality (thus reinforcing former duties). The New Covenant also supersedes the Old Covenant shadows, thereby changing the application of sacrificial, purity, and "separation" principles, redefining the people of God, and altering the significance of the promised land.
6. God's revealed standing laws are a reflection of His immutable moral character and, as such, are absolute in the sense of being non-arbitrary, objective, universal, and established in advance of particular circumstances (thus applicable to general types of moral situations).
7. Christian involvement in politics calls for recognition of God's transcendent, absolute, revealed law as a standard by which to judge all social codes.

8. Civil magistrates in all ages and places are obligated to conduct their offices as ministers of God, avenging divine wrath against criminals and giving an account on the Final Day of their service before the King of kings, their Creator and Judge.
9. The general continuity which we presume with respect to the moral standards of the Old Testament applies just as legitimately to matters of socio-political ethics as it does to personal, family, or ecclesiastical ethics.
10. The civil precepts of the Old Testament (standing “judicial” laws) are a model of perfect social justice for all cultures, even in the punishment of criminals. (Bahnsen Theonomy xxiv-xxvii)

This thesis will only focus on one aspect of theonomy: the continued obligation of the state to uphold God’s civil law. First, this paper will demonstrate the continued validity of the law as a whole. Then, the universality of Old Testament Israel’s civil laws will be specifically shown to apply to all nations, pagan and God-fearing, past and present.

Before addressing the continuance of the civil laws specifically, what does Scripture say about the continuance of God’s law in its entirety, starting with Matthew 5:17-19? These verses expound upon our understanding of the law extensively. In this passage, we see Jesus clarifying exactly how we should view the condition of the law, how it pertains to himself, and how it relates to us (Bahnsen Theonomy 41). The question to ask here is: Does the Scripture truly advocate for the continued validity of God’s law or has it served its purpose? Christ says the following:

**“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 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.”**

Upon first observation, the endorsement of the law as a whole seems self-evident. Christ’s direct statement that He came *not* to abolish the law initially seems to support the idea that the law does have some use in the New Covenant. Furthermore, this interpretation is not without historical backing. It is this stance that has been generally accepted as the historical Reformed interpretation of these particular verses. In this view, the “unity of the Divine covenant with man is presupposed” and Jesus is seen confirming the eternal constancy of the “Divine moral requirement” (Bahnsen Theonomy 42). This interpretation sees Jesus upholding the eternal truth that God’s standard of righteousness that he utilizes in His dealings with man has and will always remain the same and that that standard is His law. Nevertheless, these verses do leave much to unpack, specifically words like “fulfill” and phrases such as “until all is accomplished,” which do produce some interpretive ambiguity.

Diving into the original language, koine Greek, significantly aids in understanding the meaning behind this passage. First, one of the most critical words in this passage is the Greek word *καταλύω* (or *katalyō*), translated in the ESV as “abolish.” Throughout the New Testament, it is used in reference to destroying or pulling down something established, usually a physical

building such as the temple (Bahnsen Theonomy 49). However, in other old historical Greek texts, like 2 Maccabees 2:22, the figurative, metaphorical use of the word is on display: “And restored the laws that were about to be *abolished*.” Similar to Matthew 5:17-19, καταλύω (abolish) when used in this metaphorical sense, takes on a more clear meaning “to invalidate” or “to abrogate.” Clearly, the metaphorical use of the word καταλύω (abolish) cannot mean simply to disobey or transgress the law as some assert (John Murray Principle 149). Understanding the figurative use of the word καταλύω (abolish) as “abrogate” is evident enough within the context of Matthew 5, and hence the historical Reformed interpretation of this word to mean “abrogate” is confirmed. (Bahnsen Theonomy 50).

The next word, and possibly the most critical word for our understanding of the passage, is πληρόω (plēroō), translated here as “to fulfill” (Bahnsen Theonomy 54). The historical Reformed interpretation of the word is “to confirm.” In order to fully grasp the meaning of this particular word, two separate techniques offer assistance. First, an overall analysis of the meaning of the word. When doing so, one will immediately recognize that there are many times throughout the New Testament, 2 Maccabees, and the Septuagint that we see πληρόω (fulfill) being used to mean “confirm.” For instance, in 1 Kings 1:14: “Then while you are still speaking with the king, I also will come in after you and *confirm* your words,” (ESV) Nathan *confirms* Bathsheba’s word. Similarly, Jesus *confirms* God’s Word (God’s ethical will) found in the Old Testament (Bahnsen Theonomy 70). Consequently, translating πληρόω (fulfill) to fundamentally mean “confirm” is already a viable and precedented option, and one that is well supported in the context of the passage.

Second, the contrast of καταλύω (abolish) with πληρόω (fulfill) only further strengthens our interpretation of the word as “confirm” (Bahnsen Theonomy 67). Above, the meaning of καταλύω (abolish) was best interpreted as “abrogate.” With this in mind, understanding πληρόω (fulfill) as the direct contrast between the two Greek words would be lost if πληρόω (“fulfill”) meant simply to “obey” or “enforce” as some would postulate. As B.B. Warfield states, “The exact opposite of καταλύσαι [abolish] is to ‘establish,’ to ‘ratify.’” As such, based upon both historical precedence and the logical use of antonyms, our English understanding of the word πληρόω (fulfill) as to “confirm” is only further demonstrated. Therefore, following a cross-textual analysis of these Greek words, the historical Reformed interpretation of the passage is thus far established. Dr. Bahnsen summarizes verse 17 as “Do not (begin to) think that I came in order to abrogate the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abrogate but to confirm.”

Verse 18 only strengthens this thought, with Jesus asserting that “until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.” Here we see two conditionals being utilized to demonstrate the eternity and extent of the law’s validity. “Until heaven and earth pass away” was a phrase commonly used in the Old Testament when stressing something’s eternity. However, it is with the ambiguous “all” in the second conditional that has misled many into believing that he’s still referring to the law. With this reasoning presupposed, they then assert that “accomplished” must refer to Jesus’ work on the cross when He says “It is finished” (John 19:30), and conclude the law, though applicable to Jesus’ audience, does not apply to us now after Jesus’ death and resurrection.

First of all, the first conditional does not corroborate with this faulty interpretation. Heaven and earth's passing cannot and never does refer to Christ's salvific work on the cross. Furthermore, this interpretation widely misunderstands the albeit ambiguous term "all." Here we must recognize that the "all" is of the neuter gender whereas the "Law" earlier in verse 18 is in the masculine and thus, they cannot refer to the same thing. Therefore, "all" cannot be taken to mean the "Law" but rather as George Campbell observes, the sentence ought to be understood more as "til everything comes to pass" (88). Hence verse 18 only strengthens the broad and adamant blanket endorsement of the law advocated for here in Jesus' sermon, as He upholds even the smallest particulars of the law, even until "heaven and earth pass away" and "all is accomplished."

Lastly, in verse 19, Jesus further emphasizes his endorsement of the Law by applying both it and its teaching to his disciples and the kingdom of heaven. He states that obedience, even to the smallest particulars of the law, characterizes that type of righteousness that exceeds the even the seeming externally-thorough righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees, and is that which acts as the criterion of personal standing within the kingdom of heaven (Bahnsen Theonomy 87). Thus, in conclusion, this passage, Matthew 5:17-19, demonstrates a total blanket endorsement of the law by Christ.

However, the historical Reformed view of this passage isn't simply an interpretation of the Greek that best suits any presupposed theological construct regarding the law, but rather, as shown, the direct result of a detailed and thorough analysis of each and every word. As such, this interpretation is one that is backed extensively by theologians throughout history. As Charles

Spurgeon states, “The law of God, he established and confirmed . . . Our king has not come to abrogate the law, but to confirm and reassert it.” Thus our prima facie answer to our question of the law’s current validity is as B.B. Warfield summarizes: “It is asserted with an emphasis which could not be made stronger, that the law in its smallest details remains in undiminished authority so long as the world lasts.”

Since God’s law remains valid in the New Testament, both the moral and civil laws therein must be addressed. Throughout the Mosaic law, civil commandments and precepts for the civil magistrate are given to follow, including punishments assigned as direct recompense concerning different crimes. But do these fade along with Old Covenant Israel? First, by default, the prima facie answer to that question: no.

Jesus’ affirmation of the law as a whole “until heaven and earth pass away” assumes the civil law’s validity until scripturally shown otherwise. With that presupposition, the burden of proof should rest on anyone who asserts that the civil magistrate ought not to carry out God’s civil laws. They must prove that, in the Scriptures, God distinctly meant for the civil laws to only apply to Old Covenant Israel (Bahnsen Theonomy 312). Thus, they would either have to demonstrate a discontinuity in the standard of justice between pagan nations and the Old Testament nation of Israel, or a discontinuity between the nations of the Old Testament and the nations of the New (Bahnsen Theonomy 313). However, there is no such evidence. Civil laws given to Israel by God still apply in the New Covenant as God’s judicial standard of justice for all the nations today.

God's law most definitely applied to national Israel as the standard by which its kings and rulers were to administer justice. This is widely understood. But did God's civil law apply to the other civil magistrates of the nations surrounding Israel? First, we should approach this question with a predisposition to affirmative rather than that of the negative, and for good reasons. We are all God's creatures and created by Him. As such, we are all, believer and non-believer, morally accountable to God for the decisions we make, regardless of our historical circumstance or social standing. Like Paul relates in Romans, all have the law of God written on their hearts, to where we are without excuse. Furthermore, he goes on to assert that "even the Gentiles know God's judicial ordinance that certain crimes are worthy of death" (Bahnsen Theonomy 332). "Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them" (Romans 1:32). Although the Old Testament Gentile did not have the written revelation of God as did the Jews, this does not excuse them from the eternal consequences of their actions. In other words, the law as a whole condemns both the Jew and Gentile equally, regardless of their knowledge of it.

Claims of ignorance cannot be arguments against the universal and current civil applicability of God's laws. "One law and one rule shall be for you and for the stranger who sojourns with you" (Numbers 15:16). This universality of moral responsibility applies not only in terms of eternal judgement, but also within the civil magistrate of Israel itself, with God demanding that both the native Jew and Gentile alien be held under the same standard of His holy law. As the NASB puts it: "The conclusion, when everything has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Hence, universal moral responsibility shared between redeemed Jew and unregenerate Gentile even in

Israel's legal system should lead us to a predisposition of continuity between the ethical standards in Israel and those used by God to judge the nations (Bahnsen Theonomy 333).

Second, the written law of God, itself, is scripturally taught to be universal. The law of God, rather than conforming to the general ideals of laws of nations surrounding Israel, was given by God, with a secondary purpose to set Israel apart. However, that doesn't mean that God invented a higher standard of justice for the Israelites. God's standard of justice and righteousness stems directly out of his character of justice and righteousness. As the psalmist proclaims, "Righteous are you, O Lord, and right are your rules. You have appointed your testimonies in righteousness and in all faithfulness" (Psalm 119:137-138). As such, He cannot tailor justice to a time or nation anymore than He can tailor His character. God is unchangeable and holy and thus so is His standard of justice as found in His law. Furthermore, God is not a god of double-standards as we see throughout Deuteronomy and Leviticus. (Deut. 25:13-16; Lev. 19:35-37) What is sinful or criminal in Israel cannot be condonable outside of Israel, and this is due to the universality of justice, and as such, the universality of His law. The revelation of the law to solely the Jews does not imply the existence of a double standard but rather the law was given to Israel in order that it might be a light to the surrounding pagan nations. "Give attention to me, my people, and give ear to me, my nation; for a law will go out from me, and I will set my justice for a light to the peoples" (Isaiah 51:4). His Law is thus a light of justice to all "the peoples" in order that His name might be glorified.

Moreover, God's law is universally wise. Often, and rightly so, we view wisdom literature in the Bible as holding universal application for believer and unbeliever. Regarding this, we must consider the significance of verses such as Deuteronomy 4:6-8 which state:

“Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?”

The universality of moral responsibility between redeemed Jew and unregenerate Gentile has been substantiated, claims of ignorance of God's civil laws as the basis for not currently applying has been dispelled, and the singularity of God's justice, righteousness, and wisdom has been shown. The revelation of the singular standard of justice and wisdom is vastly present in God's law, which is why it is so often compared to the unjust civil laws and practices of the surrounding pagan nations and why God describes his law as a light of justice to the Gentile nations. Hence, significant evidence reveals God's civil law was universal to all nations in the Old Covenant.

Notwithstanding this, one might maintain that the law's universality died with the dissolution of Old Covenant Israel. In other words, does a covenant change warrant a change in justice or the role of the magistrates to administer it? In response, it will become soon evident that the role of the government has not changed in the New Testament. Authorities are still

morally obligated to exact God's civil law upon their citizens as ministers of His justice. In support, Romans 13:1-5 relates the following:

“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.”

It's here in Romans that we see the stressed continuance of the Old Testament system where the civil magistrates are to be the ministers of justice, avenging that evil-doer who incur God's wrath in the interest of that which is good. These morally-charged words of “good” and “evil” show the direct correlation of magistrates' role as ministers of justice and God's law.

In addition, Bahnsen points out that “since magistrates are sent and ordained by God, represent the rule of God, are ministers of God, execute the vengeance of God, and show the wrath of God, it is not the case that “good” in Romans 13 is whatever the rulers recognize or take to be good. “Evil” and “good” must be understood as presented in Scripture” (Theonomy 375). The term “good” throughout the Bible, is that which conforms to the directive will of God as found in His law. This is a biblical truth that even Paul claims earlier in his epistle, where he

explicitly sets forth that which we should consider as “good.” “So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good” (Romans 7:12). Therefore, it can be justly inferred that God’s civil law still applies to all countries in the New Covenant and that the law’s universality did not die with the dissolution of Old Covenant Israel. Since God’s law defines that which is civilly good, and good is universally valid even in the New Covenant, therefore, God’s law is universally valid, even in the New Covenant.

The last reason God’s civil law has continued validity in the New Covenant is the need for a final standard. As proven, God’s law applies as the standard of justice to the pagan nations as well as Israel. The singularity of God’s justice has been sufficiently shown. As such, it is also rational to presume that, on final Judgement day, all nations (secular, pagan, and Christian) will be *judged* by the same standard. Furthermore, we have established the continuity between Old and New Covenant nations as pertaining to the unity of justice. Thus, it is also rational to presume that, on final Judgement day, all nations, those of the Old and New Covenant eras, will be *judged* by the same standard. Time is of no separating factor when it comes to the final standard by which He will judge the nations. Thus, when we consider that standard by which “He will execute judgment among the nations” (Psalm 110:6a), what exactly is the *nature* of that standard?

The *nature* of the standard by which He will judge all the nations, past and present, is revealed through a critical process of elimination. Natural revelation does not suffice because either this is simply just a sin-obscured version of God’s law at best, or else it requires one to pit natural revelation against special revelation, which is altogether unbiblical (Bahnsen 387). It

cannot be common law or natural law, seeing how it is essentially autonomous in nature; this is once more simply a man-made convention invented arbitrarily out of the sin-obscured natural revelation. Any similarities it has with God's civil law or biblical metrics of justice is simply a confirmation of the unity of special and natural revelation, not a proof for the latter's superiority. Natural law or common law can only point us to God's true law at best, and at worst can distract from the whole and perfect reflection of God's justness found in his civil law. Man's involvement in the creation of this standard of common law rules it out as God's standard of final judgement. God's final standard of judgement cannot be that of the people or the politician either, for if that were the case, abortion, racism, slavery, or any other number of vices could be voted into God's metric of justice. Finally, our understanding of God's final standard of judgment of the nations cannot further be formed or defined by any ongoing special revelation or special revelation of the Holy Spirit because this would negate the closed nature of the Canon. Whereas the Holy Spirit might guide a godly civil magistrate and help them discern between just and unjust, it cannot in and of itself define that which is perfectly just and that which is not. The role of the Holy Spirit works to point to the truth already sufficiently contained in the Holy Scriptures. Thus any guidance of the Holy Spirit would have to lead us straight back to God's perfect law. And even in the impossible hypothetical of a continuing special revelation as the basis for God's final judgement of civil magistrates, Deuteronomy 13:1-4 commands that one such magistrate would first have to, once again, test his supposed revelation by previous revelation as found in God's law and this would thus be his standard. And thus, he would've come full circle and so have we. Therefore, after an examination of all other possible options for the standard by which God will

judge the nations, only His civil law remains as the only infallible, perfect, holy law that does not lend its invention to sin-depraved man (Bahnsen Theonomy 388).

Therefore, if God's civil law is the standard by which all magistrates are to administer justice and the metric by which God does and will judge all the nations, then, as His children, we also ought to hold all civil governments against that same standard, as that which they ought to be enacting and exacting upon their citizens. In the words of Martin Luther: "Human law, when it does not agree with the divine, is unjust." Justice is defined by God's law because it is the true reflection of God's holiness, righteousness, and goodness as Paul so puts it in Romans 7:12. Therefore that which disagrees with it has to be by nature of inference, unjust. As Calvin puts it: "Accordingly, nothing truer could be said that the law is a silent magistrate; the magistrate, a living law." (Calvin Institutes 1502) In conclusion, based on the validity of God's law as a whole, the continuance of justice between the pagan nations and Israel, the continuance of justice between the New and Old Covenant, and the singular, exclusive, and necessarily, perfectly holy nature of God's final standard of justice, God's law remains valid as the judicial standard of justice for the nations, even under the New Covenant.

Though the evidence for the continuant validity of God's civil laws is overwhelming, that does not mean it is without objection. The first claim is that the civil magistrate cannot be ethically bound to God's law as this would deconstruct the distinction between church and state. The separation between church and state does not entail a separation between God and state. When advocating for the responsibility of the civil magistrate to uphold the civil sections of God's law, this is an argument for the recognition of God's authority over the state, not the

dissolution of church and state as separate government entities. The state as an entity ought not to be civilly administering church discipline or preaching the word anymore than the church ought not to be punishing criminals. Just because the church and state have different functions does not negate the fact that the authority of both come from God directly and thus they must answer directly to God for how well they carry out their jobs and functions as deemed by God.

Upholding the state to a biblical standard of civil justice is not a merger of church and state but a recognition of what the state ought to be already doing. God is god over the state and church. In concept, to dethrone Him as god over the state, in practice, invites other gods to fill that role.

Regardless whether that false god is Allah, secularism, or pragmatism, the main center of authority necessarily becomes man and the state. When there is no God over the state, the state becomes god and the religion they adopt becomes law. Our laws can either be Muslim, secular, pragmatic or any host of things, but unless God is recognized as the true center of authority those are necessarily by inference unjust. Similarly, when God is recognized as the god over the state, as he most truly is, it is his word that becomes law. In other words, God's world, so God's rules.

“And all the trees of the field shall know that I am the Lord; I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it.” (Ezekiel 17:24) God in his sovereign power, is King of all kings and appoints and deposes all forms of government and civil magistrate and as such as Christians we need to be advocating that this authority be recognized and God's civil laws applied. The nations ought to “serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled.” (Psalm 2:11-12)

Moral responsibility does not just exclusively apply to Christ's bride but is universal to all forms of government: family, church, and state. To recognize this authority is not to merge them all but actually provides the necessary groundwork to biblically define and separate their respective functions. Without recognizing God as god above all, we are only left to arbitrary autonomy to define exactly what state, church, and family look like and to what extent they are allowed to interact before their functions destroy their distinctiveness. Thus, to advocate for the ethical binding of the civil magistrate to God's law most definitely does not deconstruct the distinction between church and state, but is rather a recognition of God over the state as further defined and explored earlier in regards to the civil magistrate and civil justice.

The second argument asserts that in Old Testament Israel there was a union of church and state that does not exist in the current civil magistrate and, therefore, God's law does not apply. While Israel was a holy nation with a special form of typological and covenantal significance in the Bible, this does not entail by inference that the "church" or priesthood of Israel was thereby merged with the "state" of Israel. Rather, the opposite is evident throughout the Old Testament Scriptures. This distinction is made time and time again: between Moses and Aaron, between Nehemiah and Ezra, and between Uzziah and Azariah. "Then bring near to you Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the people of Israel, to serve me as priests—Aaron and Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar (Exodus 28:1) "The next day Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood around Moses from morning till evening" (Exodus 18:13) Here, side-by-side, we can immediately see the first obvious example of separation of church and state even in the roles of Moses and Aaron. It would've been just as unfit for Moses to offer the sacrifice of atonement as for Aaron to neglect his priestly duties and act as judge and

leader of the people. Hence, in God's wisdom he set Aaron over the priestly duties and Moses over leading the people and administering the law. Similarly, during the returning of the Jews from exile, Nehemiah was explicitly described as being the civil appointed governor of Israel, "Nehemiah, who was the governor" (Nehemiah 8:9) and "appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah" (Nehemiah 5:14). On the other hand, Ezra was also sent to help rebuild Israel but for a different function. Ezra was clearly sent to be "the priest and scribe"(Nehemiah 8:9). The book of Ezra also confirms his role as "the priest, the scribe, a man learned in matters of the commandments of the Lord and his statutes for Israel" (Ezra 7:11) and also goes so far as to establish his ancestral authority to function as a priest over the people, identifying him as a "son of Aaron the chief priest." (Ezra 7:5) Hence we once again see a distinction between the roles of state and "church" (or priesthood). Lastly, we see an example where the separation between church and state and their distinct functions was ignored by King Uzziah and the deserved consequences which resulted. In this narrative, King Uzziah, went into the temple to perform the duties of the priests. However, Uzziah had no right to be burning incense to the Lord on the altar of incense and rather than heeding the counsel in priest Azariah's confrontation, with prideful wrath he brought leprosy upon his own head and his role of civil governance was immediately passed on to his son.

In conclusion, we see that in Old Testament Israel there was actually a prevalent observance of the separation of church and state. Therefore, we cannot use Old Testament Israel as an argument against the application of God's law today. Rather, just as separation of church and state apply both then and now, so also does God's Law.

The prevalent idea of the “Spirit of the Law” is actually more Biblically valid within the scope of this thesis than most initially think. However, it must be conditionalized and termed differently. First, only God can rescind or remove any requirement or revelation of which He has previously required of His people or revealed in His Law and Word. “You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you” (Deuteronomy 4:2) This is a generally accepted rule when considering Biblical revelation from God, and also when considering the unity and consistency of God’s definition of truth, justice, and righteousness throughout the two Testaments. Man has no authority to rescind that which comes directly from God unless specially inferred as so from Scripture. Applications of this truth regarding the law are further argued for in the first section’s demonstration of the continued validity of the Law. Secondly, what is about to follow does not contradict the fact that it is the obligation of the believer to follow the entirety (every jot and tittle) of God’s law out of gratitude, in the pursuit of obedience and holiness, acknowledging it as the normative standard for sanctification. The same applies for the extensive and complete obligation of the state to God’s law as the judicial standard of justice for the nations. This is only a Biblically accurate principle as all particulars of the law, no matter how small, have equal importance in terms of the obligations of holiness. As Jesus states in Matthew 5:19: “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.” Therefore, the biblical application of this much-discussed idea of the moral intent or general equity of God’s law is not a matter of the law’s extent or its validity as a whole but rather a matter of its exact application across all cultures.

This idea of general equity answers the reasonable question of how certain laws would be applied in modern culture. For instance, Deuteronomy 19:4-6:

“This is the provision for the manslayer, who by fleeing there may save his life. If anyone kills his neighbor unintentionally without having hated him in the past— as when someone goes into the forest with his neighbor to cut wood, and his hand swings the axe to cut down a tree, and the head slips from the handle and strikes his neighbor so that he dies—he may flee to one of these cities and live, lest the avenger of blood in hot anger pursue the manslayer and overtake him, because the way is long, and strike him fatally, though the man did not deserve to die, since he had not hated his neighbor in the past.”

One might say, “How is the civil magistrate obligated to keep this rule before God? Cases of flying axeheads killing people are insignificant in 21st century America?” However, to apply the passage in this way is to miss the point of the Mosaic statute altogether. Rather, this passage has everything to do with the safeguards protecting those who commit unintentional manslaughter and it demonstrates the wisdom and foresight of God in such civil situations, providing us with a base metric for such cases. From this example with the axehead we can infer the general equity, moral intent, and what one might call (though linguistically inaccurately) “the spirit of the law” and apply it to today, using it as the standard against which to judge all other modern civil laws and judicial rulings regarding unintentional manslaughter. According to the sections prior, does this verse still apply and remain valid today? Yes, yet we must still utilize spiritual discernment and rigorous hermeneutics to infer exactly how or in what way a certain civil principle or penalty is still to be upheld. The thesis of theonomy does not solve all civil problems in such a way as to allow for lazy lawmakers who simply lay back and implement Deuteronomy and Leviticus

verbatim, but rather, such biblical application of God's law would require careful and accurate assessment and debate over the interpretation and application of each principle found in each and every one of God's laws and what each civil principle looks like in the 21st century. The changing of culture does not in and of itself negate the universality, extent, or validity of God's law as we have seen. It is up to committed theologians and lawmakers to remove the cultural trappings to decipher the principle behind each law just as we do with New Testament commands and exhortations.

"Furthermore, it should be perfectly plain to any student of Scripture, theonomic or not, that God requires obedience to the underlying principles illustrated by Scripture's cultural expressions.

*Theonomy* plainly observes: "the case law illustrates the application or qualification of the principle laid down in the general commandment," and it is "the underlying principle (of which case law was a particular illustration)" which "has abiding ethical validity." (Bahnsen *Theonomy* xxiv)

We are not bound to the cultural details of flying axeheads and rooftop railings, but to the principles about unpremeditated manslaughter and safety precautions, etc. Those who have ridiculed the theonomic position for requiring observation of ancient cultural details should give responsible reflection to their ill-conceived criticism. Such disdain would equally ridicule New Testament ethical directives with their cultural trappings as though "Go and do likewise" at the end of the story of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:37) literally obligates us to pour oil and wine on the wounds of half-dead victims of robbery on the Jericho road today, setting them on donkeys (not in cars) and paying for their stay at roadside inns with (literal) denarii. Critical ridicule

which is blind to this feature of Biblical interpretation in general is too superficial and inconsistent to warrant serious attention.” (Bahnsen Theonomy xxiv-xxv)

Ultimately, identifying the general equity, moral intent, or the “spirit of the law” does not affect the validity or extent of God’s law. Proper interpretation, removing the cultural trappings attached to the Mosaic moral and civil laws, reveals the heart of each law, which is necessary to correctly apply each just precept rightly and identify exactly the individual and civil magistrate’s obligation.

In conclusion, under the new covenant, God’s law remains valid as the judicial standard of justice for the nations. First, in Matthew 5:17-19, Jesus confirms the continued validity of God’s law as a whole. Consequently, it is the moral obligation of all nations to observe and uphold God’s civil laws, due to the continuity in the universal standard of justice between the pagan nations and Israel, between the Old and New Covenants, and finally the need of a perfect, holy standard of judgement that is only reflected in God’s law. The position was further clarified as to how the separation between church and state is upheld, and how removing the cultural trappings to find the general equity of each law would be a theologically accurate system whereby the thesis would be applied in our current era.

Hence, the question of “what is our civil standard of justice?” has been answered, but in its wake Christians are left with another question: “why should we care?” Christians should care because laws are formulated from a standard of values. Laws found in secular nations will reflect a standard of justice based upon secular values. Thus abortion, pornography, and homosexuality will run rampant due to ordinance of the state. Laws found in Islamic countries will reflect a

standard of justice sourced from Muslim values. Thus polygamy, unequal divorce rights, and severe corporal punishments like amputations for theft will stand — sanctioned practices enforced by the state. But what do laws reflecting Christian values look like? And it is here that one of the Church's biggest compromises is revealed. Ask any everyday Christian what laws based on Christian values look like and most cannot confidently tell you. The church has developed an environment where justice is replaced with general empathy in the name of loving your neighbor and law-making is left to a secular state. God is god over the state and yet so many refuse to see him as so. That is why a theonomic worldview is so necessary. It is God's world and so, as Christians, it should be His rules that the Church should be advocating for. Loving your neighbor looks like supporting true justice in the political realm, because just policies propagate societies where God's just nature is glorified and people's true well-being is protected. In compromising with unjust policies, the Church has allowed for secular values to distort national justice. Thus it is only by turning to God's word that Christians will ever find answers for the truth of what true justice looks like.

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