

The theonomic and pro-nomian approach is conveniently summarized in the following ten theses:

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 of gratitude for God's redeeming grace.
2. 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; this word naturally includes God's moral directives (law)
3. Our obligation to keep the law of God cannot be judged by any extra-scriptural 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should presume that Old Testament standing laws¹ continue to be morally binding in the New Testament, unless they are rescinded or modified by further revelation.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.

These propositions highlight the essential points and distinctive features of the theonomic position. The precious truth of salvation by grace alone (#1) is the context within which every other thesis is developed and understood. "Theonomic" ethics is committed to developing an overall Christian world-and-life-view (#2) according to the regulating principle of *sola Scriptura* (#3) and the hermeneutic of covenant theology (#4).² The new and better covenant established by Christ does offer Biblical warrant for recognizing changes in covenantal administration (#5), but not changes in moral standards, lest the divinely revealed ethic be reduced to situationism or relativism—just one tribal perspective

¹ "Standing law" is used here for *policy* directives applicable over time to classes of individuals (e.g., do not kill; children, obey your parents; merchants, have equal measures; magistrates, execute rapists), in contrast to particular directions for an individual (e.g., the order for Samuel to anoint David at a particular time and place) or positive commands for distinct incidents (e.g., God's order for Israel to exterminate certain Ca-naanite tribes at a certain point in history).

² By contrast, dispensational theology holds that Old Testament commandments should be deemed abrogated unless repeated in the New Testament. See Charles Ryrie, "The End of the Law," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 124 (1967), 239-242.

among many in the evolutionary history of ethics (#6). Righteousness and justice, according to Biblical teaching, have a universal character, precluding any double-standard of morality.

“Theonomic” ethics likewise rejects legal positivism and maintains that there is a “law above the (civil) law” to which appeal can be made against the tyranny of rulers and the anarchy of overzealous reformers alike (#7). Since Jesus Christ is Lord over all (cf. #2), civil magistrates are His servants and owe obedience to His revealed standards for them (#8). There is no Biblically based justification (cf. #4) for exempting civil authorities from responsibility to the universal standards of justice (cf. #6) found in God’s Old Testament revelation (3). *Therefore*, in the absence of Biblically grounded argumentation which releases the civil magistrate from Old Testament social norms (cf. #4, #5), it follows from our previous premises that in the exercise of their offices rulers are morally responsible to obey the revealed standards of social justice in the Old Testament law (#10).

In light of the theses leading up to it, the above conclusion does not seem so controversial after all. It makes perfectly good, ethical sense for a Christian. Besides, that conclusion has a great deal of practical value in our day. It is not accidental that the glaring socio-political and criminal problems of the late twentieth century concern matters where our society has turned against the specific directives of God’s law. Humanism has been taught in our schools and media; it has been practiced in economics, medicine, politics, and our courts. And the results have been a social disaster. Human life is treated as cheap. Sexual purity is an outdated concept. Truth and honesty have little place in the “real world” of business or politics. Repeat offenders and crimes which go completely unpunished belittle the criminal justice system. Prison reform is desperately needed. In short, humanism has proven its ineffectiveness in case after case. Where can we turn for socio-political wisdom which can effectively counter the degeneration and disintegration of our culture? The only acceptable answer will be to turn to God’s directives for social justice, and those are (for the most part) found in the Old Testament commandments to Israel as a nation, a nation facing the same moral problems about life, sex, property, and truth which all nations must face, including our own.