

# The Commands of Christ

Part Six

## Why I'm a Theonomist—D

*1Corinthians 15:33; Proverbs 13:20; Ephesians 5:11, 12; Leviticus 20:7, 8*

*With Study Questions*

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**Do not be deceived: “Evil company corrupts good habits” (1Corinthians 15:33).**

**He who walks with wise *men* will be wise, But the companion of fools will be destroyed (Proverbs 13:20).**

**-And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose *them*.<sup>-12-</sup> For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret (Ephesians 5:11, 12).**

**Consecrate yourselfs therefore, and be holy, for I *am* the Lord your God.<sup>-8-</sup> And you shall keep My statutes, and perform them: I am the Lord who sanctifies you (Leviticus 20:7, 8).**

## **Introduction**

In my younger years I was a track and field athlete—a high-jumper to be specific. While participating in my event I found that I had developed a nasty habit. Every time I would feel my body knock the crossbar off of the standards—thus constituting a missed attempt—an expletive would, almost involuntarily, be launched from my lips. This would happen in mid-air. No time to think, no time to plan, no time to form a support group.

This became an issue for me. Articles in the newspaper openly chronicled my Christian faith. Spectators would come to watch the Christian high-jumper only to hear a Richard Prior routine at my every failed effort. I approached a mentor in the faith for counsel. I explained my problem to which he responded, almost immediately, “It’s probably the company you’re keeping.”

There is a general biblical principle, expressed by the above passages, that Christians are to keep themselves “**unstained**” by the world (James 1:27). Some Christian sects (I think mistakenly) take this admonition so seriously that they remove themselves entirely from society and create their own sub-cultures. But it is not the prayer of Jesus that we entirely isolate ourselves from the world by which we are surrounded. Jesus’ prayer is not that the

Father take us out of the world, but that He “**should keep them (us) from the evil one**” (John 17:15).

When we think of the effects of bad company, it might bring our minds to the friends our children might choose or the friends we, as adults, might choose, and their influence upon us; and it certainly includes that (perhaps primarily includes that). But the principle of contamination is not limited to the friends we choose. As our culture becomes increasingly lax in terms of what is acceptable and legal behavior, we are simply foolish to think we, and our children, will be left unscathed.

Back in 1994 I was watching a movie starring our governor, where he was playing a secret agent who was losing control of his teenage daughter. His partner (played by Tom Arnold) offered, what I found to be an accurate analysis, explaining:

Yeah, but you're not her parents, anymore, you and Helen. Her parents are Axl Rose and Madonna. The five minutes you spend a day with her can't compete with that kind of constant bombardment. You're outgunned, amigo.

We are being fed a constant diet of ungodliness. Movies, books, video games, television shows, billboards, bus-stops routinely portray behaviors which the Bible teaches to be capital crimes, as acceptable recreation with no consequences. How many television shows highlight adultery, homosexuality and fornication in such a way that every one is healed by the next program!

How many Christians have been so infected by the world that they engage in pregnancy terminations, divorce, pornography, drug and alcohol abuse, etc., as if these sins, many of which the Bible considers crimes, are standard operating procedure!

Perhaps you recall the strife between Abram and Lot, where Abram offered Lot whatever land he pleased. Lot found the plain of Jordan a pleasing terrain, pitching his tent “**as far as Sodom**”. Moses then records, “**But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord**” (Genesis 13:12, 13). Lots decision effectively destroyed his family—his wife eventually becoming a pillar of salt (Genesis 19:26) and his daughters engaging in unseemly behavior (Genesis 19:30-38).

My point in all of this is to state what should be obvious, that a corrupt environment will be corruptive. This, by the way, in no way alleviates our responsibility to pursue holiness. I think many of us need to re-think what we watch, read, play and allow our children to do along the same lines. We

may find ourselves in an ungodly environment, but that doesn't mean we need to be immersed in it. We may wish to carpet the world, but in the meantime, we should put on a comfortable pair of shoes which insulate us from the current pollutions?

I am not going to make a list of rules (rules will come into play when we specifically look at the Ten Commandments), but I'm here to tell you that we are foolish to think that when we engage in a culture unrestrained by godly statutes, that it will not have negative consequences on us and our children.

How does this relate to Theonomy? The law of God, revealed in the civil codes, primarily in the Old Testament, is God's prescription for the restraining of sins/crimes, which will eventually decimate a culture. I would guess that 70 to 80 percent of people who come to my office seeking to put together their crumbled lives have been, at some level, the victims of a culture that has scoffed at and ignored sins which the Bible would classify as crimes. We will pursue these particular sin/crimes in detail when we start unpacking the Ten Commandments, but for now I am just seeking to lay the groundwork.

If I may parenthetical say, you've been patient students. Though I realize there is a sense in which you just want to know what to do, rather than all the theological nuts and bolts behind it—you just want to know what time it is, not how to build a clock. But it is my conviction that we must be careful of that mentality. The Apostle Paul would generally dedicate the first half (or more) of his efforts in his epistles to enlightening us to the great theological truths of who we are in Christ. Then, after many chapters, he would write "therefore" and tell us what to do or how to behave.

Our country provides a great example of a people who have, during the past 150 years, maintained the outward veneer of Christian morals and convictions while de-emphasizing the theological substance of those convictions. Churches have, therefore, descended to relief stations or counseling centers while the secular universities inherited mantle of truth and wisdom. All this to say that it is not enough to just know what to do, we need to know why we are to do it and be firmly convinced of these convictions—parenthesis over.

Friends, not all sins are crimes. But God, in His word, tells us which ones are. And I believe it is our responsibility, as Christians—as those who have been saved not by the works of the law but by faith alone—to seek to cultivate an environment that looks as little like Sodom and Gomorrah as possible.

This all may seem obvious. I have found that basic laymen who read their Bibles are in general agreement with Theonomy. In this respect, for the most of you, I may be preaching to the choir. But I guarantee if you, as the choir, start singing theonomic hymns, there are plenty in the world and within the church who will seek to quell your song and you'll then want to refer back to these notes.

This morning I'll ask and seek to answer just one question. Is the New Testament silent on the issue of Theonomy.

## 1. Is the New Testament Silent on Theonomy?

When I was being examined at Presbytery to be admitted as a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, there was, apparently, common knowledge that I held this theonomic perspective. Many questions I received were, therefore, thus directed. I appreciated that members of the presbytery weren't mean about it and I found a number of advocates and "amens" along the way.

### Arresting the Brethren?

But it was those who lovingly sought to correct me that further confirmed by commitment—largely due to the flawed logic (at least in my opinion) of their objections. Much of this was based upon the New Testament's supposed silence on the issue. One pastor quoted Galatians 6:1, **"Brethren if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness."** He then asked, "If you're a theonomist, it would seem that, instead of restoring, you would arrest him."

But the answer to that objection is simple. Galatians was written, not to the civil magistrates in Galatia but to the **"churches of Galatia"** (Galatians 1:2). It is not my job as an officer in the church to arrest anyone. But if the particular trespass is a crime, then I would recommend that offender turn himself in to the civil magistrate who should arrest him.

People who object to theonomy, based upon the New Testament, tend to ignore the primary purpose of the New Testament (which was to reveal that Christ, the Messiah had come) and the historical/political context of the New Testament church—it was a monarchy and no one was asking Christians to run for the senate or what they thought the law ought to be—unlike the republic and democracies which would follow and now exist.

Do we, for a minute, think that if first century Rome had a representative form of government in which Christians could run for and be

elected as lawmakers, that they would not seize that opportunity for good as they watched their brothers and sisters in the faith being eaten by animals and burned to light gardens?

## A Lawful Use of the Law

That being said, I would argue that the New Testament is not silent on Theonomy. Here are but a few examples:

Paul indicates that it is a lawful use of the law to restrain evil.

**-But we know that the law is \_\_good if one uses it lawfully, <sup>-9-</sup> knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for *the* lawless and insubordinate, for *the* ungodly and for sinners, for *the* unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, <sup>-10-</sup> for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is \_\_contrary to sound doctrine, <sup>-11-</sup> according to the glorious gospel of the \_blessed God which was \_committed to my trust (1 Timothy 1:8-11).**

John Calvin comments on this that “the law of God was given in order to restrain the licentiousness of wicked men; because they who are good of their own accord do not need the authoritative injunction of the law.”

Someone might assume that we all fall into the category of “lawless and insubordinate”. After all, who is actually righteous? But here I would again agree with Calvin who explains that the righteous person Paul writes of here is not “absolutely perfect” but one who desires to “aim at what is good”.<sup>1</sup>

## God’s Ministers of Wrath

I also heard, as an objection to theonomy, an appeal to Romans 12 and 13 where God has “**appointed**” all governing authorities. The general objection here is that that’s God’s business and we shouldn’t worry ourselves about it. We, of course, recognize that God makes and deposes kings. But that is a begging question objection. The question is, if these appointed authorities are, as the text indicates “**God’s ministers**” who are to “**execute wrath on him who practices evil**” (Romans 13:4), what is their standard? Has God left His ministers with no standard?

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<sup>1</sup>Calvin, J. (1998). *Calvin’s Commentaries: 1 Timothy* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; Calvin’s Commentaries (1 Ti 1:9). Albany, OR: Ages Software.

It would be particularly cruel of God to establish civil ministers then leave them to their best guesses regarding that which is just—especially in light of the great judgment that falls upon those who lead in an ungodly manner. It was in a very political context that God said, **“Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees” (Isaiah 10:1)**. It is in the New Testament that we are told that God’s minister bears **“the sword”** (Romans 13:4); the sword being an instrument of civil punishment.

## **Jesus’ Use of the Civil Law**

It is in the New Testament that Jesus appeals to the one of the most commonly ridiculed civil laws of Moses (from Exodus 21:17) in expressing the due condemnation of the Pharisees. Jesus rebukes the Pharisees, saying,

**Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? <sup>-4-</sup> For God commanded, saying, \_\_‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, \_\_‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ <sup>-5-</sup> But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, \_\_“Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God” — <sup>-6-</sup> then he need not honor his father \_or mother.’ Thus you have made the \_commandment of God of no effect by your tradition (Matthew 15:3-6).**

We haven’t time to get into the particular infraction by the Pharisees; the point is Jesus’ use of the civil code of Moses without a hint of lessening its continuing authority. There is nothing in that text, or any New Testament text, which abrogates or alleviates God’s civil law given through Moses.

And when people appeal to tradition, as the basis of their legal standards (as is often the case today with popular conservative radio personalities—people holding to the traditions that made this country great—traditions that, for the most part are good), those traditions—if not grounded in the Scriptures, by the very nature of the case, make the commands of God of no effect.

## **Other Examples**

Other examples of the civil law of God, at least surfacing in the New Testament would be the efforts of Jason and the brethren in Acts 17 who were **“turning the world upside down...acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar,**

saying there is another king—Jesus” (Acts 17:6, 7). The accusation here had political overtones to it.

When the Jews wanted to convince Pilate that they were not followers of Jesus, their chant was one which unveiled their political convictions—“**We have no king but Caesar**” (John 19:15). It is a fairly common held position that the phrase “Jesus is Lord” was a response to the required phrase in the Roman Empire acknowledging that “Caesar is Lord” (*kyrios Kaisar*).

When Pilate expressed his own political power over Jesus, Jesus made it clear that Pilate’s power was given to him from above. In all the talk of worldly kingdoms versus the heavenly kingdom, Jesus made one thing clear—if Pilate would be savvy enough to understand—it is not that there is no relationship between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of men—but the kingdom of which Jesus is King is the one which appoints all kings.

It is in the New Testament that we see John the Baptist beheaded for openly criticizing the ungodly marriage of a political figure (Matthew 14:3-5). It is in the New Testament that we are introduced to that which is anti-christ and Him who is anti-Christ. Instead of the law of God written on our hands and foreheads (Deuteronomy 6:8—signifying how we are to think and act) it is the name of this beast of a political figure who can likely be identified as the “**man of Lawlessness**” (2 Thessalonians 2:9) who demands our thoughts and deeds. Friends, we will either have God for a ruler or end up with a beast for a ruler.

Is Theonomy taught in the New Testament? It doesn’t have to be, since as Christians, we believe in the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments. And when we read of all the promises associated with the coming of the Messiah recorded in the Old Testament, it speaks of one who will rule over (Psalm 22:28) and bring justice to the nations (Isaiah 42:1). That is the expectation of the Messiah. And we should think no less of it. Nonetheless, the answer to the question is yes.

## **One Last Point**

In all this talk of law and cultural transformation, I need to make one last point—especially as we proceed to the Lord’s Table. None of this should be thought of as man-made triumphalism or carnal culture wars or a moral majority pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps and creating a utopia on earth through human innovation; it is in fact, just the opposite.

It is by a God-given recognition of our own sin, folly, weakness and need for Christ that any good thing will happen in this world. The redemption of the world does not come through law-making or law-keeping

or transformed cultures but through the blood of Christ redeeming souls one at a time through word and sacrament.

If we do not have humility before God, continually confessing our utterly incapacitated state and need for forgiveness—if we do not, day by day seek to drink from the cup of Christ's tender mercies, praising God alone for our salvation—all this talk of law means nothing and will amount to nothing. May that subdue our hearts, as we come to eat, drink and remember the broken body and shed blood of our righteous Savior.

### Questions for Study and Meditation

1. What is the general principle expressed in the opening passages of this message? What are some ways people have attempted to obey God's counsel regarding this principle (pages 2, 3)?
2. Does the general principle apply only to friends or can it also apply to cultures (pages 3, 4)?
3. Why is it important for Christians to understand why we believe certain principles in Scripture (pages 4, 5)?
4. If Theonomy is true, shouldn't the church be arresting sinners instead of restoring them (pages 5, 6)?
5. Why is it important to understand the historical/political climate of the first century when discussing Theonomy in relationship to the New Testament church (pages 5, 6)?
6. Is the restraining of evil a lawful use of the law according to the New Testament (pages 6, 7)?
7. How does Romans 12, 13 speak to the issue of Theonomy? Should we

simply view those in authority as God's business and not concern ourselves at all? What standard should these authorities use (page 7)?

8. Did Jesus ever use the civil code of Moses to make a point? Explain (pages 7, 8).
9. Can you give some other examples of Theonomy in the New Testament (pages 8, 9)?
10. Should Theonomy be thought of as man's attempt to make the world a better place? What must come before all talk of transforming cultures (page 9)?