



By This Standard: The Authority of God's Law Today

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God's Law is Christianity's tool of dominion. This is where any discussion of God's law ultimately arrives: the issue of dominion. Ask yourself: Who is to rule on earth, Christ or Satan? Whose followers have the ethically acceptable tool of dominion, Christ's or Satan's? What is this tool of dominion, the Biblically revealed law of God, or the law of self-proclaimed autonomous man? Whose word is sovereign, God's or man's?

Millions of Christians, sadly, have not recognized the continuing authority of God's law or its many applications to modern society. They have thereby reaped the whirlwind of cultural and intellectual impotence. They implicitly denied the power of the death and resurrection of Christ. They have served as footstools for the enemies of God. But humanism's free ride is coming to an end. This book serves as an introduction to this woefully neglected topic.

By This Standard: The Authority of God's Law Today Details

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Adam Calvert says

A terrific condensed book from his much larger work *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*. (If you're comparing page numbers it might be hard to see that since it goes from TiCE 476 pages to BTS 350 pages. But TiCE has 476 - 6"x9" pages - while BTS has 350 - 4"x6.75" pages. This makes a huge difference.)

By This Standard is in many ways better than *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* in that it doesn't read like a master's thesis, is more digestible in its chapter lengths, is aimed at a broader audience and so is more accessible for the layman, and has a great succinct section at the end refuting criticisms of his previous work.

The *main point* of this book though is still the same: by what standard shall nations decide what is just in socio-political laws? By the standard God has revealed in Scripture.

For a review of that main point, see my review of *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*.

As for this book, Bahnsen applies the same principles of argumentation and clear exegesis but presents it in an easier tone. Of course this means his argument is not as exhaustive in this book; but it still carries the same weight. Chapter by chapter he uses Scripture over and over again to present the case. And just as before, while it is hard psychologically and emotionally sometimes to reach the conclusions he does. There doesn't seem to be any Biblical or logical reason not to come to the same conclusion.

I hope every Christian interested in the Christian life, the Christian's role in social responsibility, or the nature of law, justice, and/or crime and punishment will read this book - if nothing else to at least see a view presented from Scripture that is not advocated that much today but is very hard to combat (Acts. 26:14).

Heather Denigan says

If you want to watch logic in action on a grand scale, Bahnsen's the man. By This Standard continually reminded me of the best and worst aspects of systematic anything. At its best, it arrays all the promises of God before you, letting them shine together as if all the vaults at Tiffany's had been opened for your benefit. At worst, it's like reading a spreadsheet of the jewels in Tiffany's vault, with so many grams and carats and still more obscure measurements for color and clarity--all while you are being made to stand on a chair in windowless room.

Having grown up around die-hard lovers of systematic theologies of everything, I was a little wary of this book -- and still remain so after the fact although I greatly profited from this reading. (Helpful hint: read Hebrews, 1 & 2 Peter, and 1st John in as few sittings as possible before opening Bahnsen. I did, quite by Providence, and it proved perfect preparation.) I loved the quotes from John Newton and Samuel Bolton that Bahnsen used.

This is a good book, a necessary book, an encouraging book. Just be careful if you tend toward pedantry, legalism and "study too hard for words of four syllables."

Patrick McWilliams says

This book is somewhat repetitive. It almost seems as if it was designed to allow one to take each section within each chapter as a unit, without having to have context to understand the point. However, it really allows Bahnsen to drive home his point again and again. I agree with most of the book, with some notable exceptions such as his view of covenant theology and his interpretation of James 2. Otherwise, Bahnsen makes a great case for using Scripture as THE ethical standard in all areas of life. *Sola Scriptura!*

Brandon Wilkins says

In this book Greg Bahnsen offers a defense of theonomy. This is the view that the OT civil laws are still binding on Christians, and also binding on non-Christians, and all societies. I personally found this book's argument to be quite wanting.

FWIW, I owe an eternal debt of gratitude to Greg Bahnsen because his debate with Gordon Stein was essential to my continued faith in God. Were it not for his brilliant presuppositionalist argument for God's existence, I am certain I would have walked away from the Christian Faith in college. So I have a high regard for Greg Bahnsen.

...But this book was just simply not good. I appreciated some points, like his more general case for the validity of the concept of God's law in the NT era. I appreciated that he sought to make a detailed case for theonomy and respond to its many, many detractors. However, the argument he makes is problematic on several points--too many to get into in a review--but let me name just two, that I perceive to be major problems for the book:

1) Throughout this 300+ page book, Bahnsen does not once interact with WCF 19.4 and its statement that the civil laws have "expired together with the State of [OT Israel]; not obliging any other now." That statement is a pretty big problem for any who would argue that theonomy is a confessionally Reformed view of ethics and the state. But Bahnsen, quite literally, skips over this phrase to go to the final part of 19.4 which speaks of the general equity of those laws still obliging obedience (and he never explains what the concept of general equity even means).

Naturally, this would not prove his argument wrong, but it does throw into question his claim that he is advancing a Reformed view of the Law--which should matter to those who identify as Reformed Christians.

2) While Bahnsen is right that the NT quotes civil law passages, he never actually studies or interacts with how those passages are used in the NT. This too is a problem for theonomy because they are wielded by the apostles in a very different way than how they were used in the OT. In the NT, OT passages about stoning people for false prophecy are reworked to be about excommunication from the church in hopes of restoration. So here is one example in which OT penalties are explicitly not carried over into the NT era. More could be said on this, but Bahnsen seems just to proof text the fact that OT civil laws are quoted at various places in the NT without interacting much with how they are quoted and whether they are being used in the same way as before. That interaction is vital to proving his case, and he doesn't do it.

It is tempting to go chapter by chapter through the book, pointing out places where I disagree (there are MANY), but that's too much to do in a goodreads review. I may do this on my blog at some point.

Also, the prologue by Gary North really should be omitted from all future publications of this book. It contributes nothing except an unhelpful tone of hubris, and setting a context in which readers that are on the fence might be swayed to root for this book to be bad.

Josiah Richardson says

I can't fault this book for what I thought it was going to be, but ended up not being; but I can for what it actually was.

I thought this book was about Theonomy, and my interest in this topic sparked the read; but this actually turned out to be a giant critique of Antinomianism. Yes, Bahnsen did lay out some principles for the general validity of the law, but failed to discuss the implementation of them in today's culture, other than to say how it shouldn't be done. the writing was well done and gave me new appreciation for the Law of God, but didn't make me a theonomist.

A good majority of his arguments were presuppositional, which just was Scripture bombing his arguments, which at face value is great, but actually really isn't, because, just citing 20 scriptures per assertion and bouncing away isn't good way to back up your argument.

Other than those things, I really enjoyed finally reading some banhsen. He is definitely intelligent, but has trouble backing up his claims.

Tim McClain says

Is the Christian to be guided by God's law—as found in Scripture—as the rule for life? Moreover, should God's law be the standard by which all societies should be run? Bahnsen answers in the affirmative to both questions, giving a strong and clear case as to why. This book serves as a great primer for anyone wanting to learn about theonomy, clearing up most questions people might have on the subject. Bahnsen was always one of the best and most lucid communicators on any subject about which he wrote, such as presuppositional apologetics and Postmillennial eschatology. For a more thorough treatment on the issue of theonomy, Bahnsen's larger work, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, cannot be beat.

Ryan Watkins says

This book is very helpful on understanding the reconstructionists view of civil ethics. Bahnsen writes in a clear and straight forward manner. Out of the various reconstructionists I've read Bahnsen seems to be the best. It is also very helpful in understanding the differences between Bahnsen and Kline when it comes to their views on Christianity and culture. It ultimately comes down to covenant theology and more specificity

how the mosaic and noahic covenants are viewed. Worth being familiar with for those interested in the relationship between Christianity and culture.

Douglas Wilson says

Great.

John says

This is an outstanding book arguing for the validity of Old Testament law today. Bahnsen argues that the civil law ordained by God for Israel was and remains God's standard. It was a gracious gift to Israel that it be given to them; and God judged both Israel and Gentile nations according to it. God does not change, hence his law remains unchanged today. His standards for right living remain.

Today, many dismiss the validity of OT law using many gimmicks, but Bahnsen argues that none of the dismissive arguments can stand. Christ did not come to abolish the law--Scripture is clear on this point. Attempts to do so are antinomian and ultimately fail exegetically.

If not God's law--then what law? How can man judge according to any law but God's? Are we to do what is right in our own eyes? Bahnsen's argument is persuasive--for if we abandon God's law we are left with chaos or autonomy. Both fail the demands of Scripture. Let us therefore embrace the law of God--not for righteousness, but to be obedient to God's Word.

Hallie says

Awesome book. Well thought out, very concise, and every point is well backed by Scripture. Recommended reading for everyone.

Ross Leavitt says

I give it five stars because it convinced me of the authority of God's law today. I had previously held a vague, negative view of the law, but by the time I read this book I had heard some statements from men I admired that challenged that attitude. Until this point I had heard statements but not arguments, and I hoped that Bahnsen's book would show whether it was possible to methodically answer all the objections to God's law that I had heard. He did, and when I was finished, I had no objections left. In this book he is thorough and convincing, and that is exactly what is needed in a topic as foundational as this.

Scott Cox says

"Over against the autonomous ethical philosophies of men, where good and evil are defined by sinful speculation, the Christian ethic gains its character and direction from the revealed word of God." Thus begins this challenging work by the late Dr. Greg Bahnsen. I take a historic redemptive approach to the law, rather than a theonomic approach. However much of what Dr. Bahnsen taught has Biblical application with either approach, and can be agreed upon by the majority of those within Reformed branches of Christianity. This is most evident in the chapter entitled "Discontinuity Between the Covenants on the Law" which begins with the following quote, "The New Covenant surpasses the Old in glory, power, realization, and finality."

Ryan says

Fantastic read.

Daniel Anderson says

EXCELLENT!

I read this the first time in the mid 90's and it made a significant impact. It is even better second time around. There is much to be gleaned from this work, which is a basic introduction to Bahnsen's seminal work Theonomy In Christian Ethics. You will find much of Bahnsen's thesis presented in this book almost 30 years ago has become quite common in modern Christian scholarship.

Matthew says

First the housekeeping complaints: this is one of the most poorly edited books I've read. I'm fairly sure it was self-published or just not read by the editor. I would recommend reading this book but not this version, or just be prepared for random periods and hyphens to break up the flow of your reading.

Now, am I converted to Theonomy? No. I am more aware of the difficulties associated with both sides of the argument. Most of the book is leveled at those who outright reject the Law which I think is an unfair characterization of "non-theonomic" reformed folk. The Holy Spirit teaches us to love the law and it guides us in obedience and righteousness. The rub comes with the application of the political use of the law and its penal sanctions. To make a compelling argument for Theonomy one needs to define the applicable laws (moral vs. religious vs. ceremonial) without grey zones. Is blasphemy a moral offense? Yes a thousand times! Do we put to death blasphemers as was prescribed in the OT? No, nor should we. Do we put to death adulterers? No, and if adultery is lust in the heart then we would all be guilty. It turns a bit Pharisaical because it deals with the letter of the law (some laws) and neglects the bigger purpose of the law (to drive us to Christ).

I see the problem that civil laws then become arbitrarily legislated. I do believe that civil law is founded only on the immutable Word of God. How I can reconcile all this I haven't quite worked out.

