

THEONOMY

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Theonomy? you ask. That's all right; this page will help you. The following excerpt is by Dr. Robert P. Lightner, from his fine article, "Theonomy and Dispensationalism" (Bibliotheca Sacra - January-March 1986)

Theonomy means Law of God. It is not a system of theology. It is rather a contemporary emphasis on the relationship of the Law to the present age, stemming from Covenant Theology and associated with the current expression of Postmillennialism.

Postmillennial Theonomy is championed in the "Journal of Reconstruction," the Chalcedon Ministries, Christianity and Civilization, Christian Liberty Academy, and the Geneva Divinity School Press of Tyler, Texas. Some of the contributors to the movement are Greg L. Bahnsen, Paul Lindstrom, James B. Jordan, Gary North, Rousas John Rushdoony, and Norman Shepherd.

Actually, Theonomy is Calvinist-Covenant theology gone to seed, and poison seed at that. It is an extreme example of what can happen in law-orientation outside the realm of dispensational truth. The following are five points from Lightner's article.

1. Theonomy is founded on Covenant Theology. But Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology represent different systems of theology.
2. Theonomy insists that no distinction exists between God's program with Israel and His program for the Church. But this distinction is the *sine qua non* of Dispensationalism.
3. Theonomy believes that the Old Testament Law of God--in brief, the entire Mosaic economy--is still in force today. But Dispensationalism believes that the Law of Moses as a rule of life [for the Jew] was terminated for this age at Calvary. [Besides, the believer is dead to the Law].
4. Theonomy believes it is the duty of the Church to bring civil powers into subjection to God's Law, both its precepts and its penalties. But Dispensationalism does not believe this for a moment.
5. Theonomy does not believe in a future for Israel as a nation. But Dispensationalism most assuredly does!

THE ENFORCERS

The current textbook for the theonomist movement is the late Greg L. Bahnsen's *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co.). A few thoughts from this book will provide a chilling picture of the anti-dispensational theonomic thrust.

Although we must insist upon a proper separation of Church and State, we must insist that both be subject to God's holy and authoritative Law; both Church and State, as well as the home, should be under the sovereign dominion of God. Civil government must enforce God's Law, the whole Law, and rest its authority thereupon. Christ said that every stroke of the Older (sic) Testament Law remains in force for the New Testament era; that includes the stipulations having social and penal relevance.

The civil ruler who does his proper duty must have authoritative direction from God in order that he deter those activities which are actually unrighteous and promote those which are truly godly. That direction is found in God's revealed Law. Therefore, the biblical Christian must hold to the theonomic responsibility of the civil magistrate! (p. 472)

Governments are good or bad according as they approximate or diverge from the pattern shown on the Mount. Whether one looks to Mount Sinai or to the Sermon on the Mount, the criterion of good government is the same: obedience to, and enforcement of, the Law of God. But what is this Law of which "political authority" is a part and which it is called upon to enforce? It is the Law which the Jews received in the Ten Commandments and which God has written in the hearts of all men. (p. 472)

All men are held responsible by God to obey all of His Law in every area of their lives. The magistrate's duty as uniformly taught in both Testaments is to enact and enforce the Law of God as it pertains to social affairs; his duty also extends to God's penal demands, even that of capital punishment. All rulers of the earth are subject to the Law of God, for Christ is the King over kings. Scripture indicates that rulers will be liable to God's sure judgment if they do not justly rule according to the perfect Law of God. (p. 493)

The attitude of the Puritans in founding this new land was governed by the model set by Calvin in Geneva. They were convinced of the dire need for godly politics and determined to let God's infallible word guide their endeavors. The renewed emphasis we see in this day (Theonomy) on the application of Christianity to every area of life and human activity is the heritage of Reformed Theology; much can be learned from the New England Puritans in this regard.

Their goal was to see the Kingdom of Jesus Christ come to expression in society as well as the private, inner heart of man. Due to their zeal for a righteous political structure they "preferred a wilderness government by Puritans to a civilized land governed by Charles I." The New England Puritans agreed on a great deal. They wanted a government that would take seriously its obligation to enforce God's Commandments upon all.

Chilton states that:

Matthew 5:13–16 is nothing less than a mandate for the complete social transformation of the entire world. The center of Christian Reconstruction is the Church. The River of Life does not flow from the doors of the chambers of Congresses and Parliaments. It flows from the restored Temple of the Holy Spirit, the Church of Jesus Christ.

Our goal is world dominion under Christ's Lordship, a 'world takeover' if you will; but our strategy begins with reformation, reconstruction of the Church. From that will flow social and political reconstruction, indeed a flowering of Christian civilization.

This is the theory of Postmillennialism. The Kingdom must be established all through the world, and the time is now. The thing that distinguishes the biblical postmillennialist from amillennialism and premillennialism is his belief that Scripture teaches the success of the Great Commission in this age of the Church. The postmillennial theologians have an optimistic confidence that the nations of the world will become disciples of Christ, and that the Church will grow to fill the earth, and that Christianity will become the dominant principle. The Gospel shall convert the vast majority of the world to Christ and bring widespread obedience to His Kingdom rule. (p. 29)

Note the attitude of the theologian in his erroneous intention of enforcing the Law upon all in order to "rule the world":

If the Christian does not urge the full keeping of God's commandments he becomes a consentor to the crimes of others. The believer must have hot indignation and loathing for those who break God's Law (Ps. 119:53); the unjust man must be abominable in the sight of the righteous (Prov. 29:27). Psalm 139:21 gives us the example of David's proper attitude of hating those wicked men who hate his Lord and God; Psalm 97:10 commands those who love the Lord to hate evil. Then they will not be ashamed, as the Psalmist was not, to promote God's Law publicly (Ps. 119:13). (p. 477)

A theologian leader, Dr. Paul Lindstrom, is head of the Christian Liberty Academy in Arlington Heights, Illinois. Lindstrom's church and school have an extensive satellite school system for home education with an enrollment of over 22,000 children. The strong support of Bill Gothard has generated many of the participants in this Academy school program.

PAUL OR PAUCITY

J.B. Stoney saw this theologianistic cataclysm coming one hundred years ago.

The failure of the Church was giving up Paul. "All ... in Asia" did not give up evangelical truth but they gave up Paul; anything popular you may have, but not Paul. Why? Because Paul is heavenly.

William Kelly wrote at about the same time,

The Law, even if kept, could never make a man what a Christian is expected to be [let alone the unsaved!]. Can we wonder then that those who look no higher than the Law, regarding it as the proper rule of life for the believer, walk on low ground? Need we be surprised that such are involved with the world, to the harm of their souls and the loss of their Christian testimony? (Bible Treasury, Vol. N-1, p. 331)

As Dr. Francis L. Patton put it long ago,

The only hope of Christianity is the rehabilitating of the Pauline theology.”

May I add unto you a gentle reminder? Pauline theology is the personal ministry of the glorified Lord Jesus Christ which He shares exclusively with the members of His Body, which far supersedes His earthly ministry that was primarily to Israel during the time of His humiliation here.... “But I make known to you, brethren, that the Gospel which was preached by me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal. 1:12).

Finally, once and for all, the Theonomist Movement cannot possibly be of the Holy Spirit, simply because Paul wrote, “If ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law” (Gal. 5:18).

Nothing can be more sure than the steps of one guided by the Spirit of God and the Word of God, and yet nothing more difficult than to have to walk in separation from all that exists around. It is indeed difficult to have to wind one’s way through things so perplexing as the religious systems of our own day.

We have to avoid on the one hand systems formed in imitation of things past [Israel], and on the other systems more characterized by anticipation of things future [Kingdom]. We have to allow that such things were once given by God, and that they will yet again be introduced by Him, while invariably contending that they are positively opposed to. His present working by the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven. --J.L. Harris (Bible Treasury, Vol. X VII, p. 61).

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