

# The Commands of Christ

Part Five

## Why I'm a Theonomist—C

*2 Timothy 3:16, 17*

*With Study Questions*

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*Deuteronomy 4:5-8*

-Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should act according to *them* in the land which you go to possess. <sup>-6-</sup> Therefore be careful to observe *them*; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' <sup>-7-</sup> "For what great nation is *there* that has God so near to it, as the Lord our God is to us, for whatever *reason* we may call upon Him? <sup>-8-</sup> And what great nation is *there* that has *such* statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day (Deuteronomy 4:5-8)?

## Introduction

Dead Man Walking was a movie that came out in 1995 seeking to address the issue of the death penalty. Directed by Tim Robbins, starring Susan Sarandon, Sean Penn (celebrities with openly anti-Christian sentiments) it sought to even-handedly address the positives and negatives of public execution.

Sean Penn played a murderer. They didn't try to downplay his guilt—but rather demonstrate the heinous nature of the brutal crime he had committed. Robbins, no doubt, wanted the audience to, at some level, feel that this man was getting what he deserved.

Sarandon played a nun who opposed to the death penalty. The movie was well-made and clever. But it never addressed the real issue. There is this general disposition that proponents of the death penalty are seeking to cater to the anger of the victim (or the victim's loved-ones); and the most efficient method to assuage that anger and desire for revenge, is to see the perpetrator put to death.

It is this tension which general takes center-stage in the debate—do we opt for the humane and more progressive road of removing the death penalty from the table of political policy or do we take the lower moral ground by furnishing the victims with the gratification of seeing the assailant exterminated?

The movie was clever because it self-consciously avoided any discussion of justice. The means by which it avoids this discussion

descends from clever to cunning by use of the nun—the person who would presumably understand biblical wisdom and justice. Scriptures impotence to sufficiently address the issue is brought to the fore in a scene where the nun, upon entering the prison for a visitation, engages the guards (who are casted as church-going hicks) in a brief dialogue that went so:

“Tell me something, Sister,” a guard asks, “What is a nun doing in a place like this...shouldn’t you be teaching the children? And do you know what this man has done? How he killed them kids?” The nun answers, “What he did was evil. I don’t condone it. What’s the sense in killing to say killing is wrong?” A guard responds by quoting the Scriptures, “You know how the Bible says, ‘an eye for an eye?’” The nun’s responds to the guard’s use of Scripture with, “Know what else it asks for? Death penalty for adultery (seeking perhaps to play on John 8 where a woman is caught in adultery and Jesus asks for the one who hadn’t sinned to cast the first stone), prostitution...homosexuality, trespass upon sacred ground...profaning the Sabbath and contempt of parents.” The guard, no doubt speaking for the entire audience on the utter insignificance of the Bible when it comes to the issue, throws up the white flag, “I ain’t gonna get in no Bible quoting with non nun because I’m gonna lose.”

The nun has accused the simpleton guards of a logical fallacy known as *Argumentum ad Verecundiam* (Appeal to Unqualified Authority). And the unqualified authority, which must be dismissed<sup>1</sup>, is the Bible. Notice she doesn’t make an argument that the Bible does not teach the death penalty—she eliminates the Bible from being relevant to the discussion. Another logical fallacy employed might be the *poisoning the wells*. If the well is poisoned, no water drawn from it can be used—and again, the poisoned well are the Scriptures.

Sadly, this is to be expected from an anti-Christian, humanist driven media. But even more sadly is the church’s inability to answer this fictional nun’s objection. How would you respond to her disqualification of the Bible?

Perhaps you recall my mentioning this subject to a young Christian lawyer I who indicated that if he were to serve in Washington, he would never propose to his fellow legislators that we follow the Old Testament civil codes. He said they would laugh him off the floor. He believed there was some other standard more suited to the functioning of government than the standard given by Moses in the Law. But David proclaimed,

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that the dismissal of the unqualified authority usually has to do with: 1. Lack of expertise. 2. Bias or prejudice. 3. Motive to lie. 4. Lack of ability to perceive or recall. All pretty strong indictments against the sufficiency and trustworthiness of God’s word.

**I will also speak of thy testimonies before kings and not be put to shame (Psalm 119:46).**

To what kings would David speak these testimonies? After all, David is the king in Israel. Could not the answer be, “To any king of any land?”

## Review

By quick review, we are seeking to obey Jesus’ command in the Great Commission to obey all that He has commanded—the commands of God being His prescription for true love (Matthew 22:37-40). We have and will continue to address the danger of using God’s law in an unlawful manner—as a means by which we seek to approve ourselves before God—i.e. we’re not saved by our ability to keep God’s law. One of the beauties of God’s law is how it teaches just the opposite.

Paul wrote that he **“through the law died to the law that he (I) might live unto God” (Galatians 2:19)**. Should we not follow Paul’s example and keep the law ever before us (continually delighting in it—Psalm 1; Romans 7:22), that it might ever remind us of the one who delivers us **“from this body of death...Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 7:24, 25)!** But the question before us is ‘what is the standard by which we, who are saved by grace, live?’ And more specifically (here in our sub-series on Theonomy), is there a compartment of men’s affairs to which the law of God, recorded in Scripture, is not given access—specifically government? Is the nun correct?

We discussed the means by which the New Testament interacts with the Old Testament. How the New Testament writers continually appeal to the Old Testament regarding instruction on both Law and Gospel. We also discussed the issue of continuity versus discontinuity—that is, unless God repeals or modifies His law in the New Testament, we should view the law to continue as binding on human conscience. We discussed that God did not nullify or modify laws for no reason.

The nullified or modified laws were due to: 1. Their purpose, which was **“a shadow of the good things to come” (Hebrews 10:1)**. Because the good things came in Christ—I no longer need a map telling where to drive once I’ve arrived. 2. The separation laws which were used to distinguish Israel from other nations (also the particular tribal/land laws) are nullified since the New Covenant is an international kingdom.

The civil codes of Moses were not a shadow of the good things to come. That kidnappers should be prosecuted by the civil magistrate tells me nothing about the atoning work of Christ on the cross. There may be some very indirect ways in which we may see this but they are so indirect that to employ the methodology would functionally remove all the commands in Scripture.

## **Future Questions**

Some questions we will not ask this morning but will get to in the weeks to come are: Why is the New Testament silent on civil issues/is it? Is this understanding of civil law harsh or compassionate? What do the secondary standards of our church have to say about this issue? In a society which would view many of God's laws as extreme and ridiculous, how are we to reasonably apply this theonomic concept?

This morning we ask: 1. To what extent the Christian is to promote justice? 2. What is the standard for that justice? 3. Should understand the civil laws of God, given through Moses, to be unique to Israel, or should we view them (as with the moral law) as transcendent (above everyone) and universally (applying to everyone) binding on all humanity?

### **1. Promoting Justice**

First, let's recognize a general call the Christian has to promote justice. The following are just two, of many, passages which tell the Christian, not only to walk justly, but to promote justice.

**He has \_shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you But \_to do justly, To love \_mercy, And to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8)?**

**Wash \_yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. \_Cease to do evil,  
<sup>17</sup> Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke \_\_the oppressor;  
\_Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow (Isaiah 1:16, 17).**

The Hebrew word for 'justly' or 'justice' (*mishpat*) it is worth pointing out, carries a very civil connotation. It means "decision by arbitration, (a)

legal decision, (a) legal case...what is in conformity to a case.”<sup>2</sup> It means to make a “judgment, i.e., the act. of deciding a legal dispute or case.”<sup>3</sup>

## Eye for Eye?

People often take the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount in such a way as to eradicate any sense of justice of ever being employed.

**You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’<sup>-39-</sup> \_\_ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. \_\_ But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also (Matthew 5:38, 39).**

This is often read as if Jesus is speaking contrary to the Moses (Exodus 21:24). But is this addressed to the civil magistrate? Is Jesus telling the civil magistrate not to resist “an evil person”? If that is the case, the critics of the Bible have found a clear contradiction since Paul writes that civil rulers are appointed by God to be “a terror” to evil doers (Romans 13:3).

No, Jesus is speaking of personal vindictiveness, not civil justice. I am not to take vengeance into my own hands. It is worth noting the reasoning Paul gives regarding the same sentiment when he admonishes Christians to “**Bless those who persecute**” them, and not to “**Repay...evil for evil**” (Romans 12:14, 17). The basis Paul gives for Christians to cease from avenging themselves is that God has ordained the “governing authorities” as His “**minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil**” (Romans 13:1-4).

This should not be thought of as an excuse for vindictiveness or taking the law into our own hands, but when the civil law does not exercise justice, it tempts its citizens to do just that. Eye for eye is viewed as harsh in a culture where people get away with theft and murder on a regular basis. But in lands where hands are chopped off for stealing a piece of fruit, eye for eye is preferred. Eye for eye is neither harsh nor lenient—it is simple justice.

## 2. The Standard for True Justice

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<sup>2</sup>Holladay, W. L., Koehler, L., & Koehler, L. (1971). *A concise Hebrew and Aramaic lexicon of the Old Testament*. (221). Leiden: Brill.  
act. active voice

<sup>3</sup>Swanson, J. (1997). *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)* (electronic ed.) (DBLH 5477, #1). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

Where does one find the standard for true justice? As Christians, we of all people, ought to recognize the provision of God's word as a sufficient source of wisdom to thoroughly equip.

***All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16, 17).***

**"Thoroughly equipped for every good work"** means God, through His word, has revealed everything we need to know either directly or by implication. For example, Scripture may not give civil courts specific rules on how long of a chain to put on your dog, but they do inform them of their responsibility to create a safe environment when it comes to things that might be dangerous or a public nuisance (Exodus 21:28-32—a goring bull).

It is in the context the law that God warns us not to **"add to...nor take from"** from His word (Deuteronomy 4:2). Paul also warns us **"not to think beyond what is written, that none of us (you) may be puffed up..." (1 Corinthians 4:6)**. So the short answer to question two is the Word of God. Of course this does entirely address this morning's issue—Is God's civil law to be considered universal or unique to Israel. If it is unique to Israel, we in the New Covenant, would either be excluded from boundaries of that law, or, as the Israel of God, should understand it as binding on us but not on the world by which we are surrounded.

### **3. God's Laws—Unique to Israel or Universally Binding?**

Finally we ask if God's standards given in Scripture should be viewed as authoritative over all the earth, or are these laws restricted to Israel? It could be asked this way: When it comes to law, is Jehovah a tribal deity or God over all the earth?

In a few short minutes I will seek to make an argument that, I think, should be obvious. I am not questioning the motives of those theologians and sincere Christians who disagree. I must say, nonetheless, that the theological efforts made to restrict God's commands to Israel are either way over my head or creative beyond my level of comfort.

### **Right is Right—Mitigating Circumstances**

The short and the long of it amount to this—Right and wrong are not geographically defined. What’s right is right and what’s wrong is wrong. I don’t want to over-simplify this. We understand mitigating circumstances. But mitigating circumstances (circumstances which lessen the severity of the crime and its punishment) are found within the boundaries of the Old Testament itself.

***People do not despise a thief If he steals to satisfy himself when he is starving (Proverbs 6:30).***

The idea of a sweeping abrogation or mitigation of Old Testament civil law based upon date or geography is simply over the top. Having already spoken of how the New Testament writers comfortably use the Old Testament in all areas--thus addressing the date issue—we now discuss the boundary issue—our final point this morning. Our final point is the universally binding nature of God’s law. Crossing county lines (or country lines) does not make right wrong or wrong right.

This should hardly need proving, if we recognize the character and nature of God as the standard for all law. Nonetheless, the Bible is not silent on the issue. Moses’ laws were not simply for Israel. God was not a tribal deity (we do not acquiesce to political polytheism). God is God over all the earth. His law was for all men.

## **How Israel was Viewed**

Prior to Israel entering into the Promised Land, God informs them of how they will be viewed by the non-Israeli inhabitants.<sup>4</sup>

**Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. <sup>-6-</sup> Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is \_\_your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ <sup>-7-</sup> “For \_\_what great nation is there that has \_\_God \_\_so near to it, as the Lord our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? <sup>-8-</sup> And what**

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<sup>4</sup> Certainly not all of them, but some—Rahab for example.

**great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day (Deuteronomy 4:5-8)?**

Those outside of God's covenant will view the laws of God observed by God's people and say **"Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people."** And the reasoning is explained by the rhetorical question, **"What great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law."** Note **"all this law,"** not *some* of this law. People are happy to assign this typologically to the church, and in some respects that may be accurate. But given the civil nature of Israel, as a nation with just civil codes, why in the world would be eliminate that from the equation? Couldn't these wonderful words be said of any nation governing in a wisely and godly manner?

### **This is Your Wisdom**

Those Christians who reject Theonomy will often answer that they, given the opportunity to rule, would seek to rule with wisdom. But God says we ought to **"be careful to observe them (his laws); for this is your wisdom"**. I hesitate to go over-patriotic on you, recognize the vicissitudes of human government, but wasn't there a time when the blatant Christian convictions of American government made this country a marvel to the world?

We see that the godly statutes of Israel were to be a light and a blessing, as it were, to those nations outside of Israel. But does that mean those nations were not obligated to God's law prior to this? Absolutely not!

### **Vomited From the Land**

Again, observe the instructions of God regarding entering Canaan. Having given detailed commands, God then issues the warning:

**-Do not defile yourselves with any of these things; \_\_for by all these the nations are defiled, which I am casting out before you. <sup>-25-</sup> For \_\_the land is defiled; therefore I \_\_visit \_\_the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land**

**\_\_ vomits out its inhabitants. <sup>-26-</sup> \_\_ You shall therefore \_keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit *any* of these abominations, *either* any of your own nation or any stranger who dwells among you <sup>-27-</sup> (for all these abominations the men of the land have done, who *were* before you, and thus the land is defiled), <sup>-28-</sup> lest \_the land vomit you out also when you defile it, as it vomited out the nations that *were* before you (Leviticus 18:24-28).**

The neighboring nations (non-Israeli) were vomited out of the land because they defiled themselves. How did they defile themselves? By either doing or not doing those things which God had just commanded—**“for all these abominations (these referring back to the commands just given to Israel) the men of the land have done, who were before you.”** The idea of being vomited out meant God’s judgment. Those outside the borders of Israel were judged because they broke God’s law.

We haven’t time to fully address it here (some might ask how they can be accountable for a law they never knew) but either by oral transmission (for we’re all descendants of Noah) or by general revelation (Romans 1:18-23) or our being made in the image of God, (knowing good and evil—Genesis 3:22), or other theories...men know certain behaviors are worthy of death, yet practice them nonetheless and **“also approve of those who practice them” (Romans 1:32).**

Friends, Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed way before Moses because of their sexual perversion (a gentile peoples without a written revelation—destroyed them for breaking God’s law. Ninevah was going to be destroyed if it wouldn’t repent. The Scriptures teach the God will judge the nations (Psalm 9:19; 110:6; Isaiah 2:4). We read in Isaiah,

**\_The earth is also defiled under its inhabitants, Because they have \_\_transgressed the laws, Changed the ordinance, Broken the \_\_everlasting covenant (Isaiah 24:5).**

The gentiles were under the laws of Moses just as much as the Jews. Is it genuine love and forbearance to approach our neighbor, culture or nation with anything less than a statute which God says will be viewed as “wise and understanding”? Should we hesitate because of the mockers and scoffers? Or should we, like David, speak the testimonies of God **“before kings and not be put to shame” (Psalm 119:46).**

## What Next?

In the weeks to come we will seek to answer other questions, such as: Why is the New Testament silent on civil issues/is it? Is this understanding of civil law harsh or compassionate? What do the secondary standards of our church have to say about this issue? In a society which would view many of God's laws as extreme and ridiculous, how are we to reasonably apply this theonomic concept?

## Questions for Study and Meditation

1. Discuss the logical fallacies employed in the movie, *Dead Man Walking* (pages 2, 3)?
2. Review what has been discussed so far regarding the commands of Christ (pages 4, 5)?
3. Should Christians promote justice? What does it mean to promote justice (pages 5, 6)?
4. Does Jesus' admonition to turn the other cheek contradict Moses' admonition of "eye for eye"? Explain (pages 6, 7).
5. Where do we find our standard for true justice (pages 7, 8)?
6. What is a mitigating circumstance? Should we view all of the laws in the Old Testament as mitigated or abrogated (pages 8, 9)?
7. How was Israel to be viewed by the neighboring nations (pages 9, 10)?
8. Is the law of God binding only on Israel or on all? Explain your answer from Scripture (pages 10, 11).