

Bigger Government, Yet Bigger Crime

By Dr. Greg Bahnsen

Theonomic ethics maintains that the law of God is the objective standard of justice by which all human societies should be governed. Many people meet that idea -- on first hearing anyway -- with alarm or antagonism. But we should ask: what is the plight of those who refuse to take the law of God as their standard for socio-political morality?

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. What we are reaping is criminal anarchy on the one hand, and (ironically) an ever-increasing scope of state authority on the other. The state is doing more and more (and spending irresponsibly), but doing less and less of what God has ordained it to do for our good.

Civil justice -- respect for every person's rights, freedom and protection -- has fallen in the streets. Have the critics of theonomic ethics not noticed this? Do they have any other standard to propose than God's law? What exactly is the alternative they have for theonomic ethics?

We have inherited the worst of both worlds when it comes to political theory: a social order which is simultaneously authoritarian (big government) and disrespectful of law (big crime). The state interferes with everything from milk prices to private Christian schools, promoting discriminatory results by unjustly restricting the market and our freedoms.

Yet the criminal justice system is as ineffective and unfair as we have ever seen: first degree murder receiving a lighter sentence than armed robbery in some cases, teenage hoodlums being arrested up to seventeen times (including felonies) before spending any time in jail, molestation, rape and destruction of property rising sharply in incidence and severity, unborn children slaughtered for convenience, assault and gang violence becoming a way of life (death), sexual infidelity as well as perversion promoted everywhere from the media to the schools (with no right to discriminate against it), prisons inhumanely warehousing offenders who will return repeatedly, plea-bargaining and early parole making a mockery out of already light sentences, etc....

At the same time, the opponents of theonomic ethics have unwittingly turned us over to the worst kind of tyranny imaginable -- political power which is not restrained by any objective, publicly accessible, written standard of transcendent justice by which the state's actions and prerogatives may be judged. Having no inscripturated morality from God as our socio-political standard (or nothing specific enough to be helpful), the critics of theonomy have no principled basis or guidance by which to protect us from those who defy God (criminals) or those who wish to play God (the state).

The most persuasive refutation -- and biggest indictment -- of those who have criticized theonomic ethics is ... that they have no other standard to offer which can deal with the problems theonomy simultaneously addresses.

This is a short excerpt from Dr. Bahnsen's new book, *No Other Standard*, which is due to appear this month. The book answers the critics of theonomic ethics.