

Evaluation and Comparison

By Dr. Greg Bahnsen

Such then is the graveyard of autonomous ethics; each gravestone reads the Satanic temptation, "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." When man turns away from covenantal theonomy to autonomy, when he despises God's law in favor of humanistic self-law, the inevitable result is spiritual death for man and the loss of any hope for ethics. The autonomous philosophies of man have failed to answer the crucial questions of both normative ethics and metaethics; they have thus failed because each has assumed a nonbiblical anthropology wherein man is not the creature of an authoritative and sovereign Lord-Creator who has placed His indelible image in man and has perspicuously revealed Himself to each man in every facet of man's environment. Rather man is taken to be, as Sartre unpretentiously puts it in *Being and Nothingness*, "the being who tries to become God." Rather than submitting himself to God and God's self-attesting word, man has attempted to deify himself; the consequence of this in the area of ethics is that God's law is rejected or ignored in favor of a moral law which man himself will devise or validate. Man is *culpable* for trying to develop his own ethic, for God's image and revelation are inescapable; man *knows* himself to be a creature accountable to God and responsible to God's demands. Theonomy condemns autonomy. The very fact that *God* has uttered the law makes man obligated to it since he is the creature of God. God's law is ethically self-attesting; as such it cannot be questioned, appealed, ignored, or replaced....

Theonomy is pitted against autonomy; no man can take a stand in between, for no man can serve two masters (Matt. 6:24). The authority and righteousness of God must be asserted against any and all serpents who question His goodness and veracity. Even if God should ask that we sacrifice the only son of promise, we must never demur or question; His revealed will alone defines the righteousness which is becoming of the believer (cf. Gen. 22; Heb. 11:17-19). We do not attempt to be as God, determining good and evil; rather, we gladly take our place beneath the sovereign Lordship of the Triune God. His word, not our autonomous reasoning, is our law. Theonomy is the *exclusive* normative principle, the only standard, of Christian ethics. It is all or nothing, ethic or nonethic, obedience or sin.

From: *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., Phillipsburg, NJ: 1977 [1984 second edition], pp. 301, 306.