

**TOTAL TRUTH #17**  
**Recovering A Comprehensive Christianity**

**“By What Standard?”**

**I. Introduction**

My title tonight is a rhetorical question concerning how we measure morality, both in ourselves and in the world. Everyone judges based on some standard. So the question becomes...

**“By What Standard?”**

Here is the general definition of the term:

**“Standard”**

**Something set up and established by authority as a rule for the measure of quantity, weight, extent, value, or quality**

No civilized society can exist without a set of standards that apply to everyone.

America’s founding fathers quickly that their new nation needed standards. A pound and a gallon in Pennsylvania must be the same as in Connecticut.

**George Washington, 1<sup>st</sup> annual address to Congress, January, 1790**

**Uniformity in the currency, weights, and measures of the United States is an object of great importance, and will be duly attended to.**

**President John Quincy Adams, 1821**

**Standardized weights and measures may be ranked among the necessities of life to every individual of human society.**

Today, somewhere in Washington, there is a Bureau of Weights and Measures that contains the official weights and measures to which all must conform. A yardstick must be 36 inches; a gallon of oil the same quantity as a gallon of milk.

Every one accepts and lives by these standards in the *physical* realm.

***The question for Christians is, 'By what standard do we measure morality?'***

### **Theme**

**God has given mankind His immutable moral law as the standard by which all men and nations are to be measured and judged.**

I am taking my text tonight from the Book of Amos, a simple shepherd God called from the fields to prophesy to the nation of Israel at a time much like America today...a nation financially prosperous but spiritually bankrupt.

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**Amos can see that beneath Israel's external prosperity and power, internally the nation is corrupt to the core. The sins for which Amos chastens the people are extensive: neglect of God's Word, idolatry, pagan worship, greed, corrupted leadership, and oppression of the poor.**

In Chapter 7, God gives Amos a vision of swarms of locusts coming upon the land in judgment; Amos intercedes and God agrees to hold it back for a season.

Then Amos sees another vision...

### **Amos 7:7-8 NLT**

**Behold, the Lord stood on a wall made with a plumb line, with a plumb line in His hand. Then he showed me another vision. I saw the Lord standing beside a wall that had been built using a plumb line. He was using a plumb line to see if it was still straight.**

**A plumb line is a string with a non-magnetic weight at one end, used to measure and insure verticality.**

In the next verse, God leaves no doubt that the plumbline is a prophetic picture of how He measures men and nations by the standard of His law.

### **Amos 7:8**

**And the Lord said to me, "Amos, what do you see?" I answered, "A plumb line." And the Lord replied, "I will test my people with this plumb line. I will no longer ignore all their sins."**

Pastor Travis Smith captures this concept perfectly..

**Pastor Travis Smith, Heart of a Shepherd**

**The plumb line is a symbol of God's perfect standard for His people...His law and commandments...*by which the works of men and a nations should be judged.* As a plumbline reveals the imperfections in the blocks of a builder's wall, so the LORD measures His people by His perfect standard.**

God had established Israel upright, as His own elect; He built the wall straight; but in their prosperity, they imagined themselves above the law. So...

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**When God said He was setting a plumb line among His people, He was declaring an end to their attempts to justify their crooked ways. *The Lord was setting the standard.* God does not negotiate His laws. He does not change with the whims of culture.**

God's true believers use the same plumbline God uses; it's how we judge ourselves and the condition of our country.

**Gary DeMar**

**The world is in a moral crisis. But how do we know this? Because the Bible contains numerous fixed moral laws. If God's law is no longer applicable today, then *by what standard* do Christians have to deal with the moral morass?**

I love the term 'moral morass'!

**"Morass"**

**From a French word meaning 'marsh' or 'swamp'. In modern times it has come to signify a predicament as murky, confusing, or difficult to navigate as a literal swamp.**

How else can we say America is in a moral crisis unless we have the plumbline of God's law as a standard of judgment?

**God's moral law is the plumb line against which we determine right and wrong. Just as a carpenter's plumb line is not subject to the opinions or the frustration of the worker, so God's moral standards are not subject to the opinions of man.**

I hope you have realized by now that one of the great burning questions of life is:

## **II. By What Standard?**

### **A. Two Possible Answers: Theonomy or Autonomy?**

1. Some Christians complicate the question of "By What Standard?" of law will we live by. Perhaps it can help us to know that there are really only TWO possible answers.

#### **Dr. Cornelius Van Til, Christian Theistic Ethics**

**"There is no alternative but that of theonomy and autonomy"**

a. The 'nomos' means 'law'; 'Theos' means 'God'; 'autos' means 'self'; so Theonomy means God's law and Autonomy means 'man's law'.

2. The question is ethical; by what standard will we measure what is right and what is wrong? What is good and what is evil? There are only 2 choices.

#### **Greg Bahnsen, "By What Standard?"**

**Every ethical decision assumes some final authority or standard, and that will either be self-law ("autonomy") or God's law ("theonomy").**

a. Can you see that this issue is as old as the Garden of Eden?

b. There were only 2 trees; 2 choices; man could accept God's law to set the standard on good and evil or he could seek to know good and evil for himself,

3. The same choice stands before us today: Theonomy or autonomy?

a. Autonomy is the position men (or governments) take in replacing God's standard of good and evil and replacing it with their own standards. On the other hand,,,

**Greg Bahnsen**

**Theonomy is the position that holds the word of the Lord as the sole, supreme, and unchallengeable standard for the actions and attitudes of all men in all areas of life.**

**Greg Bahnsen**

**While unbelievers consider themselves the ultimate authority in determining moral right or wrong, believers acknowledge that God alone has that position and prerogative.**

4. Or do they? Does the average American Christian today truly look to the law of God as the standard of right and wrong?

a. We have millions of professing Christians who limit the law of God to the so-called 'spiritual' life with no application to society or politics. German theologian Gustav Oehler spoke to this problem in 1874...

**Gustav Friedrich Oehler, "Theology of the Old Testament"**

**In the law, the total life of man is ordered; there is no distinction between the inner and the outer life; the holy calling of the people must be realized in both.**

b. In more modern times, Anglican clergyman Christopher Wright says the same thing...

**Christopher Wright**

**Biblical law can function sharply as a standard or model for our personal and social ethics in all kinds of areas: economic, familial, political, judicial, sexual, and so on. We are not "keeping it" in a literalist way like a list of rules.**

c. God's commandments are not a list of rules; they are the standard by which He judges men and nations.

5. The moral morass in America is upon us because millions of professing Christians have never been taught that God's standards apply politically as well as personally.

### **R.J. Rushdoony, The Institutes of Biblical Law**

**Civil law cannot be separated from biblical law because the biblical doctrine of law includes *all law*; civil, ecclesiastical, societal, familial, and all other forms of law. The social order that despises God's law places itself on Death Row: It is marked for judgment.**

- a. Most Christians do not know that God's law speaks to every area of life!
- Civil law; how we are to treat each other; the standards of punishment
  - Ecclesiastical; how the church is to function and be governed
  - Societal: the definition of marriage; the role of men and women
  - God's law has something to say about every issue facing us today: borders, taxes, courts and juries, the right to a fair trial; the responsibilities of the magistrates to prosecute and punish evildoers

6. When men set aside God's law (theonomy), we are left with man's law (autonomy); and since all civil laws set standards, and define good and evil, right and wrong, we can see...

### **B. All Law is Religious in Nature**

1. Laws do not just appear; they are written by men; the men who right the laws make them up according to their own moral standards; or we might say, according to their own *religion*.

### **R.J. Rushdoony, The Institutes of Biblical Law**

**Law in every culture is religious in origin because law governs man and society and establishes and declares the meaning of justice and righteousness. So, law is inescapably religious.**

2. Consider the laws in the various nations of the world; the body of law in Communist/Socialist countries are fundamentally different from the body of law in the United States!

a. Communist countries practice the religion of atheism and write their laws accordingly; America was founded as a Christian nation and the founding documents reflected the principles of biblical law.

3. In any case, Rushdoony is right; 'law in every culture is religious in nature because it sets the standards of good and evil right and wrong; but there's more...

**R.J. Rushdoony, The Institutes of Biblical Law**

**In any culture, the source of law is the god of that society. Modern humanism, the religion of the state, locates law in the state, and thus makes the state the god of the system.**

a. 'The source of law is the god of that society': Why? Because the law sets the standards of right and wrong; of good and evil; the source of law in a society is the 'god' of that society because it commands the people what to do and what not to do.

**Review**

**Law in any culture is religious in origin  
The source of law in any society is the god of that society  
(But there's more...)**

**R.J. Rushdoony, The Institutes of Biblical Law**

**In any society, any change of law is an explicit or implicit change of religion.  
Nothing more clearly reveals a religious change in a society than a legal revolution.**

4. Repeat: "A change of law is an indication of a change of religion"; nothing more clearly reveals a religious change in a society than a major change in the law.

- a. Consider: The removal of prayer from the public schools
- b. The pro-abortion decision in Roe v. Wade
- c. More recently, the government shutdowns during the COVID crisis
- d. The law that allows sexual reorientation courses for children (without parental consent!)

5. All these changes in the *law* in America indicate a change in the *religion* of America; the religion of Christianity has been supplanted by the religion of humanism, which wears many masks, but is a religion just the same.

- a. And yet, stupid Christians still sit on the sidelines seduced by the idea that politics and lawmaking are off limits to believers.
- b. Too many have never been taught that...

**R.J. Rushdoony, The Institutes of Biblical Law**

**No disestablishment of religion is possible in any society; only one religion supplanted by another; the change is simply to another religion. Since the foundations of law are inescapably religious, no society exists without a religious foundation or without a law system that codifies the morality of its religion.**

6. Here are 3 things that make up America's new religion:

- a. There is a perversion of justice; the biblical standards of 'innocent until proven guilty' and a fair trial has been replaced by the religion of Communism, where the justice systems are weaponized and political enemies imprisoned or killed. (Like Beria of Russia, who murdered 100's of 1000's of his fellow countrymen)

**Lavrentiy Beria**

**Show me the man and I'll show you the crime.**

- b. In the new religion the biblical standards of family have been supplanted by the religion of socialism. The law of God says children are God's gift to their parents; in the new religion of socialism, your children belong to the state.

**Adolf Hitler**

**He who owns the children controls the future.**

**Joseph Goebbels**

**The youth belong to us. We will yield them to no one.**

Sounds like...

**Joe Biden**

**There is no such thing as someone else's child—they are all our children.**

And these quotes from those who lead America's teacher associations...



**John Goodlad**

**Parents do not own their children. They have no 'natural right' to fully control their education.**

**John J. Dunphy**

**I am convinced that the battle for humankind's future must be waged and won in the public-school classroom by teachers who correctly perceive their role as the proselytizers of a new faith: a religion of humanity...**

c. In the new religion, the biblical standards of fair taxation have been supplanted by the socialist/communist legislators who view your money as theirs.

- There was no federal income tax until 1913 (125 years in)
- A billion dollars in student loan forgiveness
- Billions in aide to Ukraine with no idea of where the money is going

**Margaret Thatcher, May 4, 1979**

**Let us never forget this fundamental truth. The state has no source of money other than the money people earn themselves. If the state wishes to spend more, it can do so only by borrowing your savings or by taxing you more.**

**Margaret Thatcher**

**It is no good thinking 'someone else will pay'. That someone else is you. There is no such thing as public money. There is only taxpayer's money.**

d. Now they want to hire 80,000 new IRS workers to make sure you are paying 'your fair share'. The great Thomas Sowell asks the right question...

**Thomas Sowell**

**What exactly is your 'fair share' of what someone else has worked for?**

e. God's standard tax rate is 10%; man's standards run much higher!

### **III. Close**

**A. The Question is: "By What Standard?"**

**Amos 7:8**

**And the Lord said to me, "Amos, what do you see?" I answered, "A plumb line."  
And the Lord replied, "I will test my people with this plumb line. I will no longer  
ignore all their sins."**

We see God saying the same thing in Isaiah...

**Isaiah 28:17 NLT**

**I will test you with the measuring line of justice and the plumb line of  
righteousness.**

**Pastor Travis Smith, Heart of a Shepherd**

**The plumb line is a symbol of God's perfect standard for His people...His law and  
commandments...*by which the works of men and a nations should be judged.***

**By What Standard?**

There are only 2 alternatives: Theonomy or Autonomy  
God's law or self-law; God's standard or man's standard

**Since law defines good and evil, the source of all law is religious**

**The source of law in a nation is the god of that nation**

**Changes in the moral law of nation signify a change in the religion of that nation**

Our nation needs to return to the biblical standards established in God's word.

This is a chore for God's church. We must wake up and get to work.

**Dutch Sheets**

**The body of Christ is supposed to disciple people when we gather, teaching  
them the full counsel of God, including His standards for all of life and morality  
found in the Bible.**

**Dutch Sheets**

**Our church services should be more than worship and fellowship; they are  
supposed to be where truth is taught.**

## Closing Prayer

**Title**