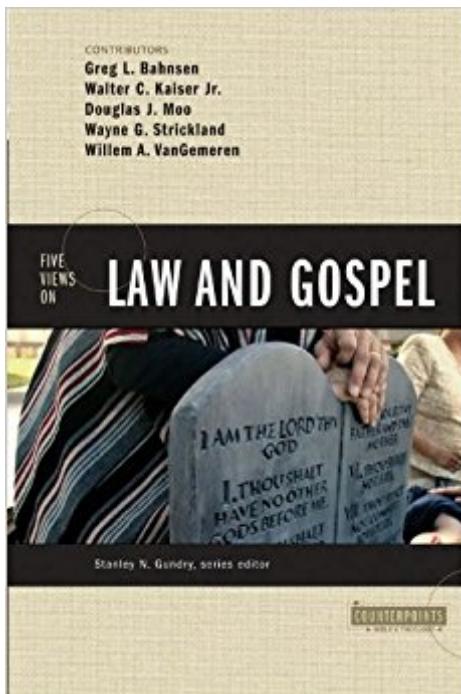


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# Five Views On Law And Gospel (Counterpoints: Bible And Theology)



## **Synopsis**

Do the Law and the Gospel belong to two separate dispensations? Has the Gospel replaced the Law? What is the relevance of the Old Testament Law to our lives as Christians? Is there continuity between it and what Christ expects of us in the Gospel? It is no secret that Christians have differed widely on these questions. This book explores five major approaches to this important biblical topic that have developed in Protestant circles. Each of the five authors presents his particular perspective on the issue and responds to the other four. The Counterpoints series provides a forum for comparison and critique of different views on issues important to Christians. Counterpoints books address two categories: Church Life and Bible and Theology. Complete your library with other books in the Counterpoints series.

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## **Customer Reviews**

Anyone interested in the various views on the Law and Gospel should definitely consult this book.

Ever since the groundbreaking book by E. P. Sanders in the late 1970s the issue of the Law's role in the Christian life has exploded in biblical-theological circles. This book will give you five predominant evangelical views on the Law and Gospel. This review will give a concise evaluation of the five views. The first essay is by William VanGemeren and he expounds the standard Reformed perspective. His approach is very similar to Vos' redemptive-historical approach, and thus, many traditional Reformed people (especially those who are steeped in the WCF) will find some points of disagreement. However, in essential agreement with standard Reformed theology, VanGemeren argues that no person can be justified by the Law and that the Law (the moral aspect) is a rule for the regenerate. This essay was the weakest by far, since VanGemeren argued mostly using logic than exegesis. The second essay by Greg Bahnsen argues for the Reformed theonomic approach. I found Bahnsen using logic and "God's nature" a lot rather than exegesis to argue for his position. It is no surprise then that most Christians reject this view because it fails to take into account the redemptive-historical shift after the Cross. Also, those who do accept this position do so because of social-cultural-political distaste of our secular world than biblical exegesis. The third essay is by Walter Kaiser. Though his essay is the shortest of all (only 22 pp.) he argues most effectively for the continuous position than VanGemeren and Bahnsen. Kaiser argues that the moral aspect of the Law continues to have relevance for the new covenant Christian for sanctification.

While this collaborative counterpoint effort has a number of negative aspects to it, I still found this book to be very helpful in assessing the relationship between the OT Mosaic law and the NT Gospel message. First, the positives. Five contributors are asked to provide their views on this question. Of the 5, I found Kaiser to be the most persuasive, followed by Bahnsen and then Moo. All of the contributors do a good job of sufficiently nuancing the issue to reveal the many points upon which scholars depart from each other. I felt that each scholar made a solid attempt to deal with the whole counsel of Scripture as it relates to this question, which is a definite plus since this is not a given. Given this, the reader might well conclude that each view presented has strengths and weaknesses in light of Scripture. I felt that Kaiser's main essay was the most persuasive, as well as his rebuttals to the other essays. I thought that Bahnsen, while regrettably employing a rather harsh tone here that pervades many of his writings, was nonetheless accurate in many of his critiques of the other views. I also felt that Bahnsen did a very good job of arguing for a theonomic position that is widely rejected because of the discomfort such a position tends to create on our modern sensitivities. But in many ways, Bahnsen made a good case for this view. Both Kaiser and Bahnsen argued in favor of continuity between law and gospel and applicability of portions of the law on the believer today,

although they disagreed with each other mainly over how much of the law is applicable today. Moo offered the antithetical approach, and while I don't agree with him, I thought his essay was well done, although not without its problems.

This book strikes at the heart of the continuity/discontinuity debate that still surges throughout evangelicalism today, because ones' decision on this issue is the key to the entire issue in the mind of this reviewer. Overall, I found the book a much needed book as non-evangelical positions in regard to the Law and Gospel are being formed and propounded heavily now. The occasion seems proper now for an understanding of the evangelical positions on the issue. In the book, five overarching views are presented and then debated. The five positions are: a Non-Theonomic Reformed View (VanGemeren), a Theonomic Reformed View (Bahnsen), Kaiser's View (which is, in essence, a repackaging of VanGemeren's view), a Dispensational View (Strickland), and a Modified Lutheran View (Moo). In this first point in regard to the work seems to be the greatest weakness of the book. Although 5 views are presented, really only two major viewpoints are being espoused (viz., continuity in VanGemeren, Bahnsen, and Kaiser, and discontinuity in Strickland and Moo). This is not a substantial problem, but it seems that within the two categories, only slight variations exist. For example, within the continuity side of the spectrum, Bahnsen adds application of the Civil Law and Kaiser subtracts the Covenant of Works. No real earth-shattering differences seem to this reviewer to exist between the three views besides these points. On the discontinuity side of the spectrum, the differences seem less clear. On some levels, Moo seems to attempt to differentiate himself from Strickland, but on the whole seems to promote a theology that identifies with the dispensational model (with only nuanced differences).

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