

Romans

November 1, 2009

Romans Three

Romans 3:27-31

This is lesson number 13 in our exposition of the Book of Romans.

The Theme of the Letter

Romans 1:16-17

“For I am not ashamed of **the gospel of Christ**, for it is the **power** of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the **righteousness of God** is **revealed** from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’ ”

Romans 1:16-17

Near the end of last lesson I mentioned a recent movement, at least I was first aware of it in 2001, that does away with the Ten Commandments. It is called New Covenant Theology. We ran out of time last week and so I promised that we would take it up today.

This has specifically to do with Romans 3:31

Romans 3:27-31

²⁷ Where *is* boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸ Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. ²⁹ Or *is He* the God of the Jews only? *Is He* not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, ³⁰ since *there is* one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. ³¹ Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.

“NEW COVENANT THEOLOGY”

In order to instruct you on how relevant this notion is of setting aside or making void the law, there is a movement about called “New Covenant Theology.”

In full disclosure, one of our elders and some other brothers that I know subscribe to NCT, and while I disagree with the conclusion of NCT it is not a matter of my support for them or for fellowship. It is to me, however, a serious matter of how we interpret the Scriptures.

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There is in the Bible, a New Covenant, but it is expressed in terms of the blood of Christ and not law. I will not try to go into all the ramifications of NCT, but I will tell you some of what I have come to understand about it.

Summary statements of Covenant Theology and New Covenant Theology would be:

The basic presupposition of Covenant Theology is that everything in the OT is carried over into the New Testament age **unless** the NT specifically abrogates or changes it.

The basic presupposition of New Covenant Theology is that nothing in the OT is carried over into the New Testament age **unless** the N T affirms it.

Neither camp can consistently hold to their presupposition of continuity or discontinuity of the Scriptures.

Beginning about September I have had an extended debate via email with one of the chief advocates of NCT who contacted me. He is a man that I highly respect and intend no personal disparagement, we just do not agree on the original purpose and continued intent of the law, viz. the Ten Commandments.

NCT tightly binds the TC with the Old Covenant, i.e. the Mosaic Covenant and argues that since the TC are the main foundation of the Mosaic Covenant and that since the Mosaic Covenant has been replaced by the New Covenant then the TC must also be abrogated or made void.

A basic tenet, then, of New Covenant Theology is that the Decalogue, or the Ten Commandments have been replaced by a new “law of Christ.”

It is my contention that this is exactly what Paul argues against in Romans 3:31. Paul cannot possibly mean the “law of Christ! It is the “deeds of the law,” law keeping, or the TC that are established by faith

The proponents of NCT base much of their theory on their interpretation of Jeremiah 31:31-34 teaches that the Old Covenant will be abrogated and replaced by the New Covenant. With the New Covenant comes a new law, which is a higher and a more spiritual law than the Law of Moses.

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Jeremiah 31:31-34

³¹ "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah — ³² not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them,* says the LORD. ³³ But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD : I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ³⁴ No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

And Jeremiah is quoted in Hebrews saying that the *first covenant* has been replaced with a *new covenant*!

Hebrews 8:7-13

⁷ For if that first *covenant* had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. ⁸ Because finding fault with them, He says: "*Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah —* ⁹ *not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the LORD.* ¹⁰ *For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.* ¹¹ *None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.* ¹² *For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."*

¹³ In that He says, "*A new covenant*," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

NCT is an argument against Covenant Theology as defined in the Westminster Confession of Faith and the London Baptist Confession of Faith [1689].

These confessions break down the law given to Moses into three categories: the moral law; ceremonial law; and judicial law. The moral law is embodied in the Ten Commandments.

While I am disagreeing with NCT I am not defending Covenant Theology's division of law into three categories. All law was moral to the Jews.

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NCT argues that since the Old Covenant has been replaced by the New Covenant then the Ten Commandments necessarily must also be discarded.

NCT takes exception to the use of the term “moral law” because it is not a biblical term, but ironically they have no problem using the term “Trinity.”

The contact from Mr. X came as a response to my “Critique of New Covenant Theology” in which I used the term “moral law.”

This was his opening statement:

“Brother Gunn: One of our differences centers on the purpose of the Ten Commandments in the history of redemption. Your first statement shows the difference. You said, My understanding of the Ten Commandments is that God gave Moses this “moral law” You have loaded the dice! Everything you say from this point about “moral law” is built on a non-Biblical foundation. The WCF says, “the Ten Commandments, **commonly called** the Moral law . . .” I was surprised that you put “moral law” in quotation marks. Where does Scripture ever call the Ten Commandments the “moral law”? Where does Scripture even ever use the term “moral law?” Neither an OT prophet nor a NT apostle ever refers to the Ten Commandments as “moral law.”

“NCT is not merely concerned with the lack of the term “moral law” ever being found in Scripture. We insist that the *concept itself* is not Biblical. Both the Old and New Testament writers of Scripture view the Law of Moses as unit. They never divide it up into three codes. Obedience to any law of God, regardless of its nature, is a “moral” duty. Circumcision was a ceremonial law but to neglect it meant death. All agree there are individual laws that are ceremonial in character, individual laws that are judicial in character and laws that are moral in character. However, there are not three distinct lists or codes of ceremonial, judicial and moral codes of law. This non-Biblical division is the sole ground upon which men excise the Ten Commandment out of the Old Covenant. They drop two “codes,” the ceremonial and judicial, and keep one “code,” the moral.”

He assumed because I used the term “moral law” that I was rigidly following the WCF.

In my “Critique of New Covenant Theology” I begin by stating that I agree with much of what NCT teaches.

“There is much that NCT argues for that I do wholeheartedly support, viz., the progressive nature of divine revelation until the completion of the NT; the primacy of the NT over the OT; and the preeminence of Jesus Christ over everything. However, these tenets of NCT did not originate with NCT.”

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In other words, to hold to these principles of interpretation does not force you to accept NCT.

We will not take the time to go into all of the pro and con arguments of NCT, however, I will give you two examples, which are enough to make me reject NCT as a novelty that will soon die of its own lack of consistent comparison of Scripture with Scripture. As I said there are tenets expressed in NCT with which I agree but they did not originate with NCT.

The first example:

“The new has come and the old has passed away. Paul looks on the gospel as “promised beforehand through the prophets in the Holy Scriptures” (Rom. 1:2), plainly implying that it had not yet come in OT times. When Paul elsewhere speaks of the gospel being preached to Abraham “beforehand” (Gal. 3:8, NASB), he does not mean that what we now call *the gospel* was announced to Abraham. What Abraham received was *good news* indeed. It was the promise that was fulfilled when the age of the gospel arrived two-thousand years later.”

New Covenant Theology, Tom Well and Fred Zaspel, page 31.

Given that all that is written in the OT regarding Christ was a promise does not mean that Abraham did not believe the essence of the Gospel i.e. Substitution. The Gospel is Christ died for sinners; not every detail about the life of our Lord Jesus Christ as recorded in the NT.

Thus Paul uses Abraham as the paradigm of justification by grace through faith alone in Romans 4:1-4. Abraham did believe a promise but that promise was the Gospel itself; otherwise we have “another gospel.” Or, Abraham was not justified by the gospel! Then you have more than one way to be justified by God!

The second example is that NCT teaches that when Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, says, “You have heard it said by them of old, ‘You shall not murder,’ **But I say unto you ...**” That Jesus is establishing a new law that replaces the law of Moses.

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What is especially disturbing to me is a statement by one of New Covenant Theology's leading proponents: "Christ did say most clearly, that His law is infinitely higher and more spiritual than anything Moses ever wrote. Contrasting the Sermon on the Mount with the Tablets of Stone is like comparing the sun to a candle. Making the Sermon on the Mount to be only the true interpretation of Moses is to effectively deny Christ as a lawgiver and make him to be merely a rubber stamp of Moses."

Note that the writer quotes Jesus as follows: "Christ did say most clearly, that His law is infinitely higher and more spiritual than anything Moses ever wrote." And Jesus never said anything of the sort. Then he attacks me for using the term "moral law" because it is not a Scriptural term?

"Neither an OT prophet nor a NT apostle ever refers to the Ten Commandments as "moral law."

However, the most disturbing statement is : "Making the Sermon on the Mount to be only the true interpretation of Moses is to effectively deny Christ as a lawgiver and make him to be merely a rubber stamp of Moses."

Do they forget that Jesus said, "Moses wrote of Me."

Just as some theologians try to pit Paul against James; here they try to make Jesus oppose Moses. To me that is a wrong view of the inspiration of Scripture.

John 5:41-47

⁴¹"I do not receive honor from men. ⁴²But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you. ⁴³I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive Me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive. ⁴⁴How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that *comes* from the only God? ⁴⁵Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; there is *one* who accuses you – Moses, in whom you trust. ⁴⁶For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. ⁴⁷But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"

Since 2001 I have studied New Covenant Theology and my recent email dialog with one of its leading proponents did not move me from my opposition. And I did not dissuade him either.

The TC are not a code that Moses devised, Moses was the instrument that God used. New Covenant Theology makes Jesus oppose Moses.

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The fallacy of their argument, at least to me, is that the essence of what Jesus says about each of the six illustrations He gave in the Sermon on the Mount {murder, adultery, divorce, the oath, retaliation, love} is found in the O.T.

So, Jesus is not abrogating, making void, amending, or adding to the original commandments of the law. He is, in fact, reminding the scribes and Pharisees of what was the intent of the law from the beginning.

Cf. Romans 3:20

The TC are essentially spiritual and that is what Jesus is reminding them of.

Paul had to learn the difference between the letter of the law and the spirit of the law. Cf. Romans 7:7-13.

My argument is that the TC transcends the Old Covenant both prior to and following. Each of the TC, in essence, are found in Genesis before they were given to Moses as the TC. The essence of the TC is what Romans 2:14-15 states as being a natural law.

E.g. Cain knew murder was sin; Joseph knew adultery was sin, etc.

To be as objective as possible the Sabbath is a problem as to the continuity of the Ten Commandments into the New Testament. If the TC are the essence of the law written on the heart, i.e. a natural law or a Creation ordinance what about the Sabbath? If the Sabbath is a Creation ordinance that raises huge problems that I cannot fully answer.

Fourth Commandment: Sabbath keeping...

8 "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. 11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

Cf. Genesis 2:1-3

2:1 Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. 2 And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. 3 Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

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The best that I have come up with is:

“If I can **break** the commandment on adultery in my spirit is it possible that I can **keep** the Sabbath in the spirit of that commandment by remembering my Creator, resting in Christ, and attending to worship with the church?” My Critique, page 3.

It seemed necessary for me to bring this brief discussion of New Covenant Theology because to me it does “make void the law.” However, NCT argues that there is a new “law of Christ” and therefore they do not “make void the law.” But Romans 3:31 cannot refer to the “law of Christ.”

My position is that the TC are not bound to the Old Covenant, that they transcend Moses and still serve the original purpose of the law; i.e. to give the knowledge of sin [Romans 3:20]. That is all they were ever intended to do and they still do that very well.

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Title: “Imputed Righteousness”

In 2001 I attended the Samford Pastors School at Beeson Divinity School and someone suggested that new believers should first read the Book of Romans and John’s Gospel. I wholeheartedly agree because these two books are, I believe, the most efficient way to understand the Gospel and the person of Jesus Christ. That said, the Holy Spirit must open the Scriptures for them to be spiritually understood. The Gospel is a revealed Gospel; Christ is a revealed Christ. And that revelation of truth is God’s word.

John’s Gospel is about the deity of Christ and Romans is about the righteousness of God in Christ; justification by grace through faith alone.

Not everyone who claims to preach the Gospel is faithful to the Word of God. There are those who preach “another gospel,” which Paul says is not the gospel at all. And you know that Jesus said, “not every one who says, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven.”

There are false prophets who preach a false gospel and preach a false “Christ.”

As a believer in Christ, you are personally responsible to be able to discern the truth. I do not mean to sound as though I am scolding, but I must warn you. If because of sloth, or carelessness, or indifference to the attendance to worship and the hearing of God’s Word , you lack that discernment, that will be yours to give an answer for.

As pastors, we have the responsibility to preach the truth. The Book of Hebrews says, “*Obey those who lead you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.*” {Hebrews 13:17}

So as believers, we all have the responsibility to discern the truth.

In previous lessons from Chapters 1 - 3, we have considered the **wrath of God**. It is not considered prudent nor supportive of “church growth” to even mention the wrath of God. You see, that might offend someone. We must, they say, tell everyone how desperate God is to do something for you. It is the preacher’s job, they say, to make you feel good.

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After all, isn't it enough to indiscriminately tell anyone, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life..." ? Tell them that God is willing to save anyone who will exercise their "free will" and make a "decision" to let God save them. Don't bother with repentance, just invite Jesus to come into your heart. Such deceitful handling of the Word of God has filled our church rolls with lost people.

One of the Puritans, William Perkins, wrote:

"If anyone is to receive this righteousness in Christ for himself he must seek it where it can be found, namely in both the law and the gospel; not in the gospel alone; but first in the law, and then the gospel. We must never try to taste the sweetness of the gospel when we have not first swallowed the bitter pill of the law. If therefore we want to be declared righteous by the gospel, we must be content first to be pronounced miserable by the law. If we want to be declared righteous in Christ, then we must be content first to be pronounced sinful and unrighteous in ourselves." The Art of Prophesying p 106-107

Study Romans: Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, thought it necessary to show that the **wrath of God** is a present reality and that everyone, Gentiles and Jews alike, are condemned because of their ungodliness and unrighteousness {1:18}.

Those who do not have the law as given through Moses are condemned by the law that they do have, the law of conscience {2:15}.

The Jews, with few exceptions, believed that because God had entrusted them with the law and with circumcision, they were exempt from the judgement and condemnation of God. But the Book of Romans says they are condemned because of their unbelief {2:25ff}.

And we examined that clearest of all statements of the Gospel in 3:21-26!

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