

History of the Reformation

New Covenant Theology

- Theological Systems
 - Question – How much continuity from the Old Testament to the New Testament, how much discontinuity?
 - Why do we need theological systems?
 - It's a way to integrate the whole of the Bible, many individual human authors, many subjects, events, etc.
 - Helps us to answer the Continuity/Discontinuity question of historical theology and thereby answer perplexing questions raised in individual texts
 - Three primary systems
 - Dispensationalism
 - Classic
 - Revised
 - Progressive
 - Covenant Theology
 - Westminster (Presbyterian)
 - Reformed Baptist
 - 1689 Federalism
 - New Covenant Theology
 - Distinctives of Dispensationalism (DT)
 - Redemptive History divided up into time dispensations where the revelation changed and the administration changed
 - Literal (historical, grammatical) hermeneutic when interpreting OT prophesies. OT must be interpreted independent from the later revelation in the NT
 - Two peoples of God (Israel and the Church)
 - Emphasis on Israel's role in the Millennium; the Church having been raptured
 - Distinctives of Covenant Theology (CT)
 - Redemptive History divided down based on the theological Covenant concept
 - Covenant of Grace, Covenant of Works, Covenant of Creation
 - All biblical covenants are "administrations of the Covenant of Grace"
 - The only discontinuity is that which is specifically abrogated (sacrifices, Aaronic priesthood, etc)
 - Some modifications are made, but the rule remains the same (Sabbath changed from Saturday to Sunday, circumcision changed to infant baptism)
 - Mosaic law is divided into three parts (moral, civil, ceremonial)
 - Civil and ceremonial are done away, moral remains in effect
 - The Ten Commandments ARE the Moral Law of God
- New Covenant Theology
 - Relatively recent development
 - 1970's – Many men were seeing the truth of God's Sovereignty
 - Causing them to go to the Scriptures, questioning previous teachings (free will, altar call, pre-trib rapture, Carnal Christian theory, etc.)
 - With more biblical study, God's different plans (one for Israel and one for the Church) didn't seem to be taught in the New Testament

- In fact, the NT teaches that the “barrier wall was broken down” and “the two became one”
 - Many left DT and embraced Covenant Theology
 - Yet the logic of the CT system drove them to infant baptism, which was also not in the NT
 - 1973 – David Kingdon – Children of Abraham – showing you could adopt Covenant Theology and still be a Baptist
 - Late 1970’s, conclusions of CT needed to be questioned
 - The logical outcome of CT was Theonomy, where the entire Mosaic Code was to be used for believers
 - Baptists realized that the problem was the system itself
 - 1977 – *Is There A Covenant of Grace*, John Zens, Baptist Reformation Review
 - By 1980, two Baptist camps began emerging
 - Reformed Baptists (Al Martin, Walt Chantry, Ernie Reisinger, et al)
 - Sovereign Grace Baptists (John Reisinger, Ron McKinney, Gary Long, Tom Wells, et al)
 - A movement eventually gained the name New Covenant Theology
 - Fulfillment Theology
 - Sovereign Grace Baptist Theology
 - Back and forth publications pro and con (mostly within the two Baptist camps)
 - Pro
 - Reisinger – Tablets of Stone, Abraham’s Four Seeds, Wells and Zaspel – New Covenant Theology
 - Con
 - Chantry, God’s Righteous Kingdom, Barcellos – In Defense of the Decalogue, Getting the Garden Right
 - Trinity Ministerial Academy, Founder’s Ministries, ARBCA
- Reasons for Development of NCT
 - Dispensationalism emphasizes discontinuity at the expense of continuity
 - Why the hard distinction between Israel and the Church when the NT teaches that they are all one in Christ?
 - The entire NT teaches that Jesus will judge the disobedient when He returns. Why do you make 6 verses at the very end of an apocalyptic book to be the “central turning point” of all of eschatology?
 - Covenant Theology emphasizes continuity at the expense of discontinuity
 - Justification of giving the sign of repentance and faith to infants when that is never mentioned in the entire NT
 - The NT clearly teaches that believers are not “under law”, yet being bound to the law is the central teaching point of CT
 - CT teaches that the church is to be a mixed population of believers and unbelievers, just like Israel when the New Covenant indicates that “they shall all know me”
 - Both rely on a one-to-one Old Testament physical relationship in their system
 - DT – physical Israel can only inherit a physical land, physical throne in physical Jerusalem
 - CT – Abraham’s physical children were in the covenant, so physical children must be in the New Covenant
 - And so, gradually, on many fronts, New Covenant Theology began developing
 - There is no definitive work such as the Westminster Confession for CT

- Many writers added many nuances, but the central core has remained the same
- The 1st London Baptist Confession (1644/1646) with its clarifying appendix by Benjamin Cox seemed to be saying exactly what was being felt by NTC
 - The 2nd London Baptist Confession (1677/1689) is substantially (most often word for word) the Westminster/Savoy Confessions with Baptist modifications
- New Covenant Theology
 - NCT is still a developing system
 - Much exegetical and historical work still need to be done
 - It has only been “named” for about 20 years
 - Fulfillment Theology
 - while fulfillment is one aspect, it is not the whole
 - Sovereign Grace Theology
 - New Covenant Theology
 - Progressive Covenantalism (Wellum and Gentry, Kingdom through Covenant, 2012)
 - The need for NCT is the accurate proclamation of the Gospel.
 - We must interpret the Bible as Christ did to His disciples on the road to Emmaus
 - “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27)
- What is New Covenant Theology?
 - Dr. Gary D. Long – “What is NCT and what are some of its major characteristics?”
 - NCT is a way to understand God’s eternal purpose in Christ
 - Progressively revealed in the promises and commandments of the Old Testament
 - And fulfilled in the New Covenant of Jesus Christ
- New Covenant Hermeneutics
 - Develop a system which starts from strong biblical exegesis
 - Look for the biblical terminology and sub-categories before you invent theological ones
 - Covenants rather than Dispensations
 - Biblical Covenants rather than theologically derived covenants
 - Recognize that literary forms often determine meanings
 - Understand that Jesus and the Apostles give insight into the fulfillment of prophetic texts
 - “Out of Egypt I have called my Son”
 - Clearly meaning Israel in the OT, yet NT says that it applies to Jesus
 - Believers are the children of Abraham (even though not the physical seed)
 - The Abrahamic covenant was made with Abraham and his seed (which is the Christ)
 - Have at the center of your interpretation that “It’s all about Jesus”
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- Major Themes
 - God’s eternal purpose –
 - Covenantally revealed and administered through historical covenants (Eph 2:12)
 - Beginning with a pre-fall covenant of obedience with Adam (Rom 5:12-19) and a post-fall covenant of promise (Gen 3:15)
 - Hermeneutics –
 - Consistent interpretation of the OT in the light of the NT (Luke 24:27; 2 Cor 1:20)
 - All Scripture is Christocentric/Christotelic (*telos* – goal/purpose)
 - The people of God –
 - All the elect of God throughout all time

- Identified in shadow (type) as the nation of Israel
 - First constituted as the church at Pentecost (not before)
 - One corporate spiritual body in union with Christ (I Cor 12:13)
 - The Law of God –
 - Innate (Absolute) law – the two greatest commandments (Mt 22:36-40)
 - Known instinctively by all men (Ro 2:14-15)
 - A part of being created in God’s Image (Gen 1:27)
 - Covenantal law – written, righteous, yet changeable (Heb 7:12)
 - Worked out in history in accordance with God’s eternal purpose (Eph 1:11, 3:11; 2 Tim 1:9)
- Essential Points (from A. Blake White)
 1. One Plan of God Centered in Jesus Christ
 - in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (Eph 1:9-10)
 2. The Old Testament should be interpreted in the light of the New Testament Revelation
 - Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. (Heb 1:1-2)
 3. The Old Covenant was temporary by Divine Design
 - In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away. (Heb 8:13)
 4. The Law is a Unit
 - For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. (Heb 7:11-12)
 5. Christians are not under the Law of Moses,, but the ‘Law’ of Christ
 - Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ (Gal 6:2)
 6. All Members of the New Covenant Community have the Holy Spirit and are motivated by Him toward righteousness
 - For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. (Gal 6: 15)
 7. The Church is the Eschatological Israel
 - And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, even upon the Israel of God. (Gal 6:16)
- Summary
 - NCT is a developing system of theology
 - Its principles of interpretation are based on biblical theology
 - The biblical covenants form the “narrative plot line” which forms the whole plan of God
 - Understanding their progressive interrelationship forms the key to understanding the details of the Scripture
 - Stressing the NT as the way to understand the OT
 - It seeks to provide a more biblical way to interpret the Whole Counsel of God (the Scriptures)
 - Questioning both Covenant and Dispensational Theologies
 - Based on a redemptive history approach to understanding God’s glorifying Christ through His eternal kingdom purpose on earth.
 - NCT challenges the theological presuppositions of Covenant Theology

- One “overarching” Covenant of Grace
- The “Moral Law” = the Ten Commandments
- The nature of the Church
- NCT challenges the theological presuppositions of Dispensational Theology
 - Two redemptive purposes for two distinct peoples of God
 - The literal hermeneutic for understanding key elements of Bible prophecy
 - The OT must be interpreted as if Jesus Christ has not yet come