

New Covenant Theology

An Introduction

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Revision # 25 as of February 14, 2017
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New Covenant Theology Distinctives

An Overview of Core Principles

New Covenant Theology has several core principles that distinguish its understanding of the structure of the Scriptures, the redemptive purposes of God and the relationship between the New and Old Testaments.

Seven NCT Essentials

New Covenant Theology (hereafter NCT) is a biblical-theological system that strives to use biblical language when possible, takes the progressive nature of revelation seriously, and sees the new covenant as the goal and climax of the previous biblical covenants. Here are seven essential points which define New Covenant Theology. The next section expands and explains New Covenant theology, though there may be some disagreement over different aspects and nuances.

There is one plan of God centered in Jesus Christ redeeming and ruling over His chosen people.

The Old Testament should be interpreted in light of the New Testament with special respect being given to the apostles use and interpretation of the Old Testament.

The Old Covenant, that is, the Mosaic Covenant or the Law, was temporary by divine design, promising, portraying and picturing the person and work of the Lord Jesus and the church.

The Mosaic Covenant, the Law, is an indivisible unit made of three distinguishable parts which were given together and came to an end together in the death resurrection and ascension of Christ.

Christians are not under the Law of Moses inclusive of the Ten Commandments but rather are under grace and subject to commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Apostles.

All members of the New Covenant community, the body of Christ, have the Holy Spirit who has given them life, united them to Christ, given them a new heart, indwells in them, enables their obedience and gives them spiritual abilities to serve the Lord and His church.

Both Israel and the church were grafted into Christ who is the true vine, yet Israel stands to the church as promise to fulfillment, type to antitype, shadow to substance, prototype to reality. Thus New Covenant Theology asserts that the church is the eschatological Israel, not by replacing it, superseding it but by reaching the fullness of the people of God.

New Covenant theology rejects the superstructure of Reformed or Covenant theology in its formulation of an overarching covenant of works and covenant of grace; that the covenants in the Scriptures are simply administrations of the Covenant of Grace.

New Covenant Theology rejects the bi-fold redemptive purposes of Dispensationalism in its assertion that there are separate but overlapping purposes for Israel and the church which is derived from a failure to accept that the final word on the meaning of the Old Testament promises is in the New Testament's interpretation of them.

Expanded NCT Distinctives

As with any and all work like this, this is not our own, unique work. The original source is from *Christ My Covenant* by Chad Bresson, which he published which he drafted over time to answer questions put to him about New Covenant Theology. It is not simply a reflection of his thought, but others...especially those in the Earth Stove Society. We are also indebted to Gary Long, who drafted his own set of NCT tenets some time ago. This is an expansion and adaptation of the work done by each of these brothers.

Some of this is repetitive due to being asked questions from many different perspectives and angles.

General

1. New Covenant Theology insists on the priority of Jesus Christ over all things, including history, revelation, and redemption. New Covenant Theology asserts that the understanding and meaning of all reality is centered in Christ.
2. Christ in heaven has not only reached the goal of history and its reality, He Himself is the goal of history and reality, giving meaning to all that has occurred in human history and will occur in human history. Since it is Christ who gives meaning to human history, He is the One who interprets all of the deeds and acts of God in history.
3. Special revelation, comprised of the books that we call the Scriptures, not only informs us about God, but redeems us and makes God present to us, focusing on the person and work of Jesus.
4. New Covenant Theology interprets Scripture in the manner that Christ and the New Testament writers do, particularly in their use and understanding of the Old Testament. Jesus and the inspired New Testament writers, by their use of the Old Testament Scriptures, have left us a pattern by which to interpret not only the Old Testament prophecies, but its history, law and poetry.
5. The way that Jesus, the Apostles, and the prophets used the Old Testament is normative for this age.
6. The entire Old Testament, the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets, point forward to and anticipate the WORD Incarnate, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-2). New Covenant Theology presumes that Jesus Christ, in his person and his saving acts, is the hermeneutic center of the Bible.

7. A careful study of the way Jesus and the New Testament writers understand and write about the Old Testament shows that the Old Testament's anticipated Messiah (and His work) is revealed in the types and shadows of the revelation of the Old Testament, both in God's speech-revelation and God's acts. The Old Testament provides the salvation context for the person and work of Jesus.
8. The Old Testament scriptures are to be interpreted in the light of their new covenant fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Jesus is not only the interpretive key to understanding the Old Testament, the terminology of the Old Testament must be understood through and defined in light of Christ's fulfillment.
9. The two testaments proclaim the same Christocentric message, but from differing standpoints.
10. New Covenant Theology is based upon a redemptive-historical approach to interpreting the Bible, understanding the fulfillment of all of God's promises in Jesus Christ as they are progressively unfolding from Genesis to Revelation.
11. The pinnacle of God's unfolding revelation comes to us in the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ himself, by the New Testament Scriptures.
12. New Covenant Theology presumes that the "already/now - not yet" principle of interpretation is essential to understand the teaching of the New Testament.
13. The organic historical connection, and the Christocentric unity that exists between the Old and New Covenants, guarantees the usefulness of the Old Testament for the church.
14. In the term *New Covenant Theology* we declare that God, for his own delight, has revealed Himself and manifested His glory ultimately in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ and His complete and perfect work on the Cross through which he has established the New Covenant in His blood. (Hebrews 7:22; 8:6; 9:11; 10:14)
15. The New Covenant documents, interpretive of and informed by the Old Covenant documents, are binding for the new people of God until the end of this age.

Covenants

1. God's redemption of His people is revealed and administered through the unfolding of biblical covenants in the flow of redemptive history.
2. God's promise of the New Covenant was that the Messiah would be Himself the embodiment of an everlasting covenant with His people. This promise, typified in the covenants, is fulfilled in Christ. (Isaiah 42:6-9; 45:21-25; 46:9-13).
3. The Old and New Covenants are two different covenants in terms of both form and function. The one is an administration of death, and the other is an administration of life (2 Corinthians 3:6-8).
4. The New Covenant is distinct from previous covenants in the Old Testament. The New Covenant is a new covenant in its own right. It is new in time and it is new in quality. The New Covenant is not the Abrahamic Covenant nor is it a recapitulation of the Abrahamic Covenant.

5. The New Covenant is not a new administration, a new expression, a new version of the Mosaic Covenant. The Mosaic Covenant had types and foreshadows in it of Christ, His person, priesthood, mediation and sacrifice.
6. Christ has fulfilled the Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants in his life, death, resurrection, and exaltation. While He has completely fulfilled them, they yet will be consummated in Him and thus in the church in the New Heavens and New Earth.
7. The New Covenant is not like the covenant made with the people through Moses. Embodied and personified in Christ, the New Covenant brought into existence through the life and cross work of Christ is made with His redeemed people through grace. God's people do not enter the New Covenant by works, but by grace through faith; it is radically internal, not external; everlasting, not temporary.
8. The tearing in two of the veil in the temple was a decisive, supernatural act that visibly demonstrated the end of the Old Covenant, that is, the Mosaic Covenant and the establishment of the New. This end of the Old Covenant was consummated in the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple.
9. As the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises of a New Covenant, Jesus Christ personifies, embodies, and incarnates the New Covenant. Thus, the New Covenant is in His Blood, that is, in His person and work. (Isaiah 42:6, 49:8, Luke 22:20).
10. All of Scripture is to be read, understood, and interpreted in light of the New Covenant, established in Jesus Christ (Matthew 5:17; Luke 10:23-24; 24:27, 44; John 5:46; 8:56; Hebrews 10:7). The New Covenant has become the interpretive paradigm for understanding the church's existence in temporal and redemptive history.
11. A biblical theology of the New Covenant recognizes that God's purpose was being unfolded and wove its way from Genesis to Revelation on the timeline of redemptive history, culminating in Jesus Christ.
12. Christ's inauguration of the New Covenant brings in things that are both qualitatively and historically "newer," expressed in developing the theological significance of such basic concepts as new wineskins, new teaching, new commandment, new creation, new man, new name, new song, new Jerusalem and all things new (Revelation 21:5).

The Law

1. The Law of Moses as a unit and in its totality was connected to a particular covenant people. It was codified after a specific act of national redemption, the Exodus.
2. In the ultimate purpose of God, this Mosaic economy was *temporary*, destined to exist "until the time of reformation" (Hebrews 9:10) when God would speak in a final way in His Son in the last days (Hebrews 1:1-2).
3. The history, covenants and the Law was of a *typical* nature, and was fulfilled in the person and work of Christ (Hebrews 3:5; 8:5; 9:8-9) who is the New Israel of God (Matthew 2:15).

4. The Ten Commandments are **not** an eternal moral law first written in the heart of man at creation and forever binding upon all mankind.
5. The Ten Commandments are not "transcovenantal"; that is, they do not exist as the common thread, the common moral basis, across all the covenants.
6. The church no longer has to do with the law in any other way than in Christ. The Old Covenant law, including the Decalogue, has been completely fulfilled in Jesus Christ which it typified (foreshadowed) in shadow and stone.
7. New Covenant believers are under grace through their union with Christ, and in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit; they are not under the Old Covenant Law of Moses.
8. Because the Old Covenant law, including the Decalogue, has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ, New Covenant Theology denies that the Old Covenant Law, including the Decalogue, is binding on New Covenant believers as a rule of life. Yet, as the special revelation of God as fulfilled in Christ, the Old Covenant Law, including the Decalogue, primarily functions as wisdom in the New Covenant.
9. All behavioral norms, including those detailed in the Decalogue, are ultimately defined by and expressed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. God's Old Covenant Law is fulfilled in Christ Himself
10. Just as the law cannot justify, the law cannot sanctify. Just as it is impossible to be justified by the law, one cannot be sanctified by the law. The background problem being addressed by Paul in different churches in 2 Corinthians 3, Galatians 3-5, and Romans 7 was the attempt to be sanctified by the law.
11. NCT does not teach that the Ten Commandments are the objective standard for evaluating the Christian life. Christ is now the objective standard by which all holiness in the Christian life is measured.
12. Regeneration does not change the inability of the law to transform. "Walking" in or by the law is the antithesis of "walking" in or by the Spirit (Galatians 5).
13. The New Covenant commandments of Christ and the Apostles, which may be referred to by the phrase "the law of Christ", are distinguished -- both in substance and in form -- from the Mosaic law.
14. New Covenant Theology insists that reference to the law of Christ is not a reference to the Decalogue, nor, is the law of Christ to be equated with that work of the law which was on the heart of Adam and all natural men.
15. The Old Covenant Sabbath commandment is typologically fulfilled by Christ for the people of God who rest in Him by faith (Romans 14:5; Colossians 2:16,17; Hebrews 4:9-10). New Covenant Theology denies that Sunday is a Christian Sabbath after the manner of the Old Covenant.
16. Christ has incarnated the new standard of holiness defining what from the Old Testament, including the Mosaic Covenant has abiding validity without placing the New Covenant people of God under the Mosaic Law (Colossians 2:17). The Holy Spirit is the

indwelling holiness and representative of Christ, causing New Covenant members to obey Christ in conformity to His image.

17. God also promised that each New Covenant member would have His law written on their hearts. This promise is fulfilled by the Holy Spirit who dwells in believers to guide their steps and conform them to Christ.
18. Just as the Old Covenant community was structured by written revelation which centered in Moses, so the New Covenant community is ordered by the written revelation as personified and incarnated in the person of Jesus Christ, applied by the Holy Spirit, and given in the writing of the Apostles and prophets (Ephesians 2:20).
19. New Covenant Theology emphasizes that the indwelling Holy Spirit, the law written on the heart, is the norm for Christian living. The Holy Spirit both causes (Ezekiel 36:27) and enables the Christian to be conformed to and transformed into Christ's image, Who is the Imago Dei, the perfect image of God.
20. For the New Covenant believer, the law of God is no longer an external standard that demands compliance with the will of God. The indwelling Spirit is now an internal person who causes and inclines us to obey God's commandments from the heart.
21. The progression of history to a final New Covenant guarantees that the "law of Christ" in the commandments of Christ and His Apostles are sufficient for the church.

The Church

1. The dominion of Christ over His Kingdom (the church, Matthew 16:19, 18:17,18), typified and foreshadowed in Israel's Old Testament theocracy, has been inaugurated in the New Covenant, is expressed in the New Testament, and is effectively carried out in the life of the local assembly, the visible New Covenant church.
2. The visible and local New Covenant church is the primary means by which the invisible church is expressed and manifested in the New Covenant.
3. The church on earth is located in the local church. New Covenant Theology recognizes that Christ exercises his Lordship in and through the local church.
4. The New Covenant church is a local, visible colony of the universal gathering in heaven. The universal gathering of God's redeemed people has begun on earth in the form and expression of the local church. Thus by intent and design, the local church as a gathering of New Covenant people who participate in faith, mirrors the universal gathering of the redeemed.
5. It is through the New Covenant church that God's wisdom for the ages and his purposes throughout revelation and history -- having been fulfilled in Jesus -- are most visibly expressed.
6. New Covenant Theology asserts that the Church, which is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18), first came into visible existence in history when the Spirit descended and was poured out at Pentecost, not in past history under the Old Covenant. There is only one redemptive purpose for the people of God, which is the church,

grafted into the true olive tree, Christ (Romans 11), who is the body of Christ (Ephesians 2:13-22; 3:1-12), the visible expression of which is the local church.

Israel

1. The New Covenant is now in force and finds its fulfillment in Jesus, who is the antitype or fulfillment of Israel.
2. New Covenant Theology sees, in the church, the consummation of promises that, in their Old Testament context, seem to be addressed to Israel as a nation.
3. New Covenant Theology denies that there is a one to one correlation between Israel and the New Covenant church. Israel was not the church in the Old Covenant. The nation of Israel was made up of a mix of those who had faith and those who did not.
4. Under the Old Covenant, Israel was the people of God. Under the New Covenant, the church is the people of God.
5. In the Old Covenant, Israel was a type of Jesus. Israel typified the New Israel and His redeemed new covenant people of God. That which was true of Israel, in type, is now true of Jesus as the Federal Head of his people and God's new covenant people in fulfillment. Thus, the supreme covenantal formula promised to Israel is now true of the church: Yahweh is our God, and we are His people.

Thinking it Through...

What are your challenges in your thinking?

How will you try to grow in your understanding of NCT?

What practical changes does this make in your use of God's Word?

