

## NEW COVENANT THEOLOGY

by

Gary D. Long\*

**A. NCT Defined.** NCT may be defined broadly as “God’s eternal purpose progressively revealed in the commandments and promises of the biblical covenants of the OT and fulfilled in the New Covenant (NC) of Jesus Christ. Its major themes may be summarily described with reference to: (1) *God’s eternal purpose of redemption*: covenantally revealed and administered through biblical covenants beginning with a pre-Fall covenant of obedience with Adam (Rom. 5:12-19) and a post-Fall covenant of promise (Gen. 3:15); (2) *Hermeneutics*: consistent interpretation of the OT in light of the NT (Luke 24:27, 44; II Cor. 1:20); (3) *The people of God*: all the elect of God throughout time first constituted as the church at Pentecost (Acts 2), but not before (John 7:39; 17:21; Col. 1:26-27; Heb. 11:39-40), as one corporate spiritual body in union with Christ (I Cor. 12:13; Eph. 2:19-21; Col. 1:18, 24); and (4) *The law of God*; the two greatest commandments of God—love of God and neighbor (Matt. 22:36-40)—are innate law known instinctively by man (Rom. 2:14-15) created in God’s image (Gen. 1:27). Upon these two greatest commandments all the Law and the Prophets depend as administered under biblical covenants which culminate in the NC law of Christ (I Cor. 9:20-21; Gal. 6:2; Heb. 8:6, 13; James 2:8; I John 5:3). Innate law is righteous and unchanging; covenantal law is written, righteous and changeable (Heb. 7:12) worked out in history in accordance with God’s eternal purpose (Eph. 1:11; 3:11; II Tim. 1:9).

**B. NCT Described.** NCT is a developing system of theology that strives to provide a more accurate way to interpret the Scriptures by questioning key theological presuppositions which undergird the principles of interpretation (hermeneutics) that exist in both Covenant Theology (CT) and Dispensational Theology (DT). NCT is based upon a redemptive history approach to understanding the fulfillment of God’s eternal purpose on earth. Its *Christotelic Hermeneutic* with Christ as the focus “in all the Scriptures” (Luke 24:27) is based upon a biblical theology that stresses the theology of the Bible itself. NCT challenges explanation of the theological presuppositions of the one *overarching* covenant of grace teaching of CT, including its understanding of the “*moral law*” of God and the nature of the Church. NCT also challenges the two redemptive purposes of DT, one for the Church and one for Israel, and it challenges some of DT’s presuppositions and literal hermeneutic for understanding key elements of Bible prophecy. The driving motive of NCT is “*Back to the Bible.*” NCT emphasizes the inductive study of the Bible. A major objective of NCT is that its hermeneutic will help bring doctrinal unity in this sin-wrecked world by helping to break down the middle walls of doctrinal partition that exist between DT and CT.

**C. NCT Characteristics.** The following lists some of the major NCT characteristics. NCT teaches that:

1. The discernment of the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential for accurately handling the Word of God because *there is no authentic leading of the Holy Spirit that is not contextually wedded to the words of the Bible* (I Cor. 2:13-14; II Tim. 2:15; 3:16). (NCT is *not* affiliated with present-day “*New Calvinism*” and “*Charismatic Calvinism.*”)

2. The most important principle of interpretation is “*contextual biblical exegesis.*” It demands grammatical/historical/theological principles of interpretation.

3. The imputation of Adam's first sin to all mankind (Rom. 5:12d, 18a-19a), the elect's sin to Christ (II Cor. 5:21), and Christ's righteousness to the elect (Rom. 5:18b-19b) are vital for the Christian faith. Without the doctrine of imputation the whole doctrine of the substitutionary atonement and justification by faith alone in Christ alone are undermined (Rom. 5:12-19).

4. The type anti-type teaching of Adam and Christ in Romans 5:12-19 demands that a covenant relationship existed between God and Adam both before and after the Fall.

5. God's plan of salvation is revealed and administered according to His eternal purpose (II Tim. 1:9) through the unfolding of biblical covenants in the flow of redemptive history, but not as explained through the theologically deduced system of CT's Covenant of Works/Covenant of Grace/Covenant of Redemption schema.

6. Christians "are not under law (*hupo nomon*), but under grace (*hupo charin*)" (Rom. 6:14), meaning that the believer in Christ is no longer under the Mosaic law as covenant law but under the grace of the NC—a covenant that not only has the internal leading of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:4, 11), but also external commands to be obeyed (Rom. 12:9-21), summed up in the NC declaration: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14).

7. The law of God is both absolute and covenantal (Matt. 5:17-20). God's "*absolute law*" is innate, written on the heart of man created in the image of God. It is God's unchanging standard of righteousness. God's "*covenantal law*," however, is written and changeable according to the covenant being administered.

8. The love of God and the love of neighbor are the two greatest commandments (Matt. 22:36-40) upon which the whole Law and the Prophets hang. This means that the Ten Commandments, the Decalogue, hang upon these two greatest commandments, not the reverse as CT teaches.

9. The Ten Commandments are a covenantal outworking of the two greatest commandments in redemptive history, not the reverse. They were given through the hand of Moses to the nation of Israel first at Mount Sinai (Exod. 20).

10. The Fourth Commandment, the Sabbath Commandment, being the sign of the Mosaic Covenant (Exod. 31:15-17), is not a creation ordinance as taught by CT.

11. The Ten Commandments are not moral law "*forever*," first written in the heart of man at creation and forever binding upon all mankind as CT teaches in its confessions of faith; e.g., the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647-49) and the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1677/1689). In fact the term "*moral law*" does not occur in the original languages of the Bible. Although under any given covenantal administration, man is morally obligated to obey all of God's commandments, yet the Bible does not separate God's law into three parts: moral, ceremonial and civil. Historically, this threefold separation was not substantially taught until the time of Thomas Aquinas in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by Calvin.

12. The Decalogue is not "*transcovenantal*" and, therefore, does not function outside the Old Covenant as a unit as much of CT teaches.

13. Christ came not to destroy the OT Scriptures but to fulfill them, which includes the Decalogue (Matt. 5:17-18). The New Covenant law of Christ is distinguished from the Mosaic law (Luke 9:35) and from the Gentiles who do not have a written revelation of God's law (I Cor. 9:20-21).

14. The law of Christ is not to be equated with the Decalogue. Although the law of Christ, the law of the NC people of God, is related to the Decalogue in that it incorporates nine of the Ten Commandments. The law of Christ is a better law than the law of Moses (Matt. 5:21-48; Heb. 7:19) in the sense that (1) it is a higher revelation of the righteousness of God (Matt. 5:20);

(2) it is based upon a higher standard of love (Matt. 5:44); and (3) Christ's inauguration of the New Covenant brings in things that are qualitatively "*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 (Rev. 21:5).

**15.** The OC Sabbath commandment is typologically fulfilled by Christ for the people of God who rest in Him by faith (Heb. 4:9-10; Col. 2:16-17).

**16.** New Covenant believers are in-lawed to Christ; they are not under the OC law of Moses but under the grace of the NC (Rom. 6:14). NCT does not equate the law of Christ with the Decalogue as do many holding to CT.

**17.** The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is the norm for Christian living. NCT does not teach that the Ten Commandments are the only objective standard for evaluating the Christian life. Rather, NCT emphasizes that it is the Spirit who through Scripture enables the Christian to have a godly walk (Rom. 8:4) acknowledging that all Scripture is profitable for instruction in righteousness (II Tim. 3:16).

**18.** Christ merited righteousness for the elect only and imputed it to them based upon His total obedience to the will of the Father in His life and death (Matt. 3:15; Rom. 5:19).

**19.** The Church, which is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18; see Eph. 2:13 to 3:12), was first formed in history when the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost not in past history under the OC. Most holding to CT see the Church existing in the OT before Pentecost; NCT does not. Contrary to Classical DT but in agreement with CT, NCT sees only one redemptive purpose for the one people of God, the good olive tree (Rom. 11).

**20.** Christ gave both *permanent* spiritual gifts to the church for exercise throughout the entire age of the NC—from Pentecost to the Second Advent—and *temporary* gifts (largely sign or miraculous gifts, including that of apostleship and prophecy) exercised during its foundation (Eph. 2:20; 3:5).

**21.** The ordinance of water baptism is the pledge of membership in the New Covenant for believers alone and the sign of the NC is not baptism, rather the sign is the cup, which memorializes the NC in Christ's blood (Luke 22:20; I Cor. 11:25).

**22.** The "*now-not yet*" principle of interpretation is essential to understand the teaching of the NT. The Christian experiences the commencement of "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3); yet he still awaits the consummation of these blessing at Christ's return. The whole theology of the NT is qualified by this tension: between the "*already*" or "*now*" and the "*not yet*" (I John 3:2).

**23.** The "*recapitulation*" principle is essential to understand the NT prophetic Scriptures (Matt. 24:4-14 and 24:15-31; Rev. 11:15-19 and 12:1-6).

**24.** The "*blessed hope*" will occur when Christ returns (Titus 2:13) to earth bodily and visibly (Acts 1:11) at the Second Advent to resurrect, judge and consign the saved to heaven and the lost to a Christless eternity (John 5:28-29).

\*Gary D. Long, Th.D., is the Faculty President of Providence Theological Seminary located in Colorado Springs, CO. [www.ptsco.org](http://www.ptsco.org); [info@ptsco.org](mailto:info@ptsco.org)

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