

Responding to New Covenant Theology

1. What is new covenant theology?
 - a. An alternate system for understanding the unfolding plan of God in history. It is not widely known but has made a big impact among Baptists in the Reformed tradition.
 - b. Sees itself as a middle ground between covenant theology and dispensationalism
 - c. Appeals to Baptists in the Reformed tradition who have traditionally called themselves “Sovereign Grace Baptists”
 - d. A reaction to the perception that covenant theology leads to infant baptism
2. What does NCT teach?
 - a. The church is the fulfillment and continuation of Israel
 - b. One way of salvation in both Old and New Testament, flowing from the new covenant
 - c. Agrees with Baptist CT in rejecting one covenant of grace with two or more administrations
 - d. All OT law abolished unless re-established by Christ in the New Testament. “Law of Christ” applies in the NT.
 - i. Based on passages such as Mt 5:17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”
 - ii. In practice, this involves a denial of the Christian Sabbath
 - iii. Often leads to a denial that the Lord’s Day is a special day for Christians
 - iv. Potentially takes away many helpful OT instructions because they aren’t repeated in the NT
3. Baptist covenant theology sheds light on the permanence of the law.
 - a. The old covenant put special laws in place for special, temporary purposes as well as permanent purposes.
 - b. The old covenant made a sharp distinction between the foundational law—the 10 Commandments—and the temporary, additional law.
 - c. The temporary aspects of the law were fulfilled and expired once the offspring came.
 - d. The new covenant does not abolish this fundamental law but inclines our hearts to it. Heb. 8:10
4. Baptist covenant theology sheds light on biblical principles of interpretation.
 - a. The proper method of interpretation is taught by divine revelation just as other doctrines are. The NT’s interpretation of the OT is authoritative, and the *method* the NT uses in interpreting the OT is authoritative. We can learn from many examples in the NT concerning how to understand the OT.
 - b. Eph. 6:1-3
 - c. Paul teaches us to affirm the authority of *all* the Ten Commandments in the new covenant. That is, we are to use the OT the way Paul used it.

5. Baptist covenant theology sheds light on the role of the law in convicting both Jews and Gentiles of sin.
 - a. Rom. 2:12-23

Conclusion is that Jews and Gentiles have substantially the same law. The additional laws of the Jews are in a sense “window dressing” on the fundamental bedrock law of the 10 Commandments.

- b. Jesus must have lived under substantially the same law as both old and new covenant believers so that he could obey on our behalf, overcome temptation for the same sins that we fall to, and suffer for the sins we’ve committed.
 - c. For both Jew and Gentile, the law cannot save but can only condemn. Its only role in salvation is to bar the door to everything but salvation in Christ. However, it continues to have a role of showing us what is pleasing to God.
6. NCT and Baptist Confessions: A Cautionary Tale
 - a. NCT churches often use the First London Baptist Confession (1644/1646)
 - i. The earlier confession is much shorter and does not have an explicit statement concerning the law.
 - ii. However, there is no contradiction between the two confessions.
 - iii. Many of the same individuals and churches were involved in producing both confessions.
 - b. NCT claims that the 1689 Confession was compromised—followed the Presbyterian Westminster Confession too closely out of fear of persecution.
 - i. The authors state clearly their reasons for a new confession based on the Westminster:
 - (1) The first confession wasn’t readily available.
 - (2) Many more had embraced the same truth as was taught in the first confession.
 - (3) “In those things wherein we differ from others we have expressed ourselves with all candor and plainness.”
 - (4) “We have no itch to clog religion with new words but...acquiesce in the form of sound words...used by others.”
 - ii. The confession was published and adopted both in and out of persecution within a 12-year period.
 - iii. Major and minor changes were made compared to the Westminster that reflect great courage as well as theological discernment. Anyone willing to publicly proclaim Baptist principles in that would not have avoided persecution because of similar wording in other areas.
 - c. A lack of confessional discipline has opened up NCT to a number of errors in their movement.
 - d. Confessional Baptist covenant theology might have diminished the unwarranted fear of leading to infant baptism. Sadly, Baptist covenant theology was somewhat obscured during the early years of Baptists rediscovering the doctrines of the Reformation (1960-present) and has only recently begun to be rediscovered and taught through publications like *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, Pascal Denault and *Covenant Theology: From Adam to Christ*, Nehemiah Coxe & John Owen.