

# **NEW COVENANT THEOLOGY:**

**What It Is and How It Differs from Covenant Theology**

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Extract (including the Dedication page, Preface, Contents, Chapter 1 and Appendix D) of a forthcoming book with the above title by the Faculty President of Providence Theological Seminary in Colorado Springs, CO. [www.ptSCO.org](http://www.ptSCO.org); [info@ptSCO.org](mailto:info@ptSCO.org)

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## **Dedication**

To my mentor, S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., a gracious man and gentleman scholar whose submission to the teaching of the Word of God in doctrine and life lives on

## PREFACE

This book is a condensed one volume documented work purposefully written in a non-technical, palatable style. It is designed to explain what New Covenant Theology is as a developing theological system by showing how it differs from Reformed Theology's system of Covenant Theology. After an opening chapter to state briefly what New Covenant Theology is and how it differs from Covenant Theology, Chapter 2 surveys the historical background to the rise and development of Covenant Theology as a theological system inseparably linked to its practice of *infant baptism*. The follow-on chapters then elaborate upon how New Covenant Theology differs from Covenant Theology (including that Reformed Baptist teaching which also basically holds to it) by focusing upon the theological heart of its system: *its one overarching covenant of grace*, which undergirds its doctrine of the church (*ecclesiology*), and *its understanding of the covenantal administration of the law of God*.

My approach is doctrinal not personal. I owe much to many reformed theologians holding to Covenant Theology, especially in their contribution to the sovereignty of God in creation, providence and redemption. It is my concern that we who have been saved by grace sometimes rely too much upon the writings of gifted but fallible man. Their theological systems and confessions of faith must be continually assessed in the light of the infallible Word of God. I realize that my difference with Covenant Theology must also be assessed. So, as I question the theological system of Covenant Theology, I do so being fully aware that there will be some who will dismiss this book as a futile effort to critique its theological underpinnings as preserved in its famous confessions of faith and writings of godly men of the Reformed faith. However, I am convinced that it is time for a more accurate way to interpret the Bible and I believe that there is a growing number today who also sense this to be true.

I present this work in the spirit of Priscilla and Aquila acknowledging that many of those holding to Covenant Theology—both Paedobaptist and Baptist—have been and are far mightier in the Scriptures than I. But I firmly believe that there has been something missing in their hermeneutical system that affects the theological significance of the newness of the New Covenant in several areas, especially relating to the nature of the church, which is the spiritual body of Christ, and the covenantal administration of the law of God for the believer.

My hope is that this book will help lay a foundation for developing New Covenant Theology as a theological system that explains the way of God more accurately (Acts 18:26) than the theological system of Covenant Theology (as well as that of Dispensational Theology). I have often reflected upon what would happen if the Holy Spirit should be pleased to break down those questionable principles of interpretation that doctrinally divide the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. Would that not be a marvelous blessing in this sin-wrecked world in which we live? Brethren, it is the church which reveals the manifold wisdom of God (Ephesians 3:10). It is my heart's desire for the church to handle God's word more accurately and manifest it corporately and individually in life before mankind that they may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:16). To this end, I submit this work to our great God and Savior for the glory of His everlasting new covenant of love, justice, mercy and grace.

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# CONTENTS

Preface

Chapter 1: New Covenant Theology: What It Is

Chapter 2: How New Covenant Theology Differs from Covenant Theology: A Condensed Historical Background

Chapter 3: How New Covenant Theology Differs from Covenant Theology: The Covenant of Grace Questioned

Chapter 4: How New Covenant Theology Differs from Covenant Theology: The Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Redemption Questioned

Chapter 5: How New Covenant Theology Differs from Covenant Theology: On the Law of God

Chapter 6: How New Covenant Theology Differs from Reformed Baptist Theology: On the Covenant of Grace and the Law of God

Chapter 7: Summary and Conclusion: Time for a More Accurate Way

Appendix A: Explanation of Theological Terms and Systems

Appendix B: Extracts from the Second London Baptist Confession (1689)

Appendix C: Select Bibliography

Appendix D: A Brief Personal History Leading to New Covenant Theology

# CHAPTER 1

## New Covenant Theology: What It Is

The principles of interpretation (hermeneutics) of New Covenant Theology (NCT) are as old as the New Testament (NT) itself. The way it interprets Scripture is based upon Christ's and the NT writers' understanding of the Old Testament (OT) Scriptures in explaining the outworking of God's will on earth (Matt. 6:10). But as a theological system in America it is a recent development having different explanations, especially due to diverse writings on the Internet. The time has come for those who hold to the need for NCT to unify and explain what it is as a developing theological system. It is in agreement with much that is taught in the theological system of Reformed or Covenant Theology (CT),<sup>1</sup> especially with its teaching on the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible, the doctrine of God and creation, the doctrine of man, and the doctrine of the person and work of Christ.<sup>2</sup> However, there are significant differences with the theological system of Reformed Theology (RT) or Covenant Theology<sup>3</sup> to warrant the development of NCT as a distinct theological system. This introductory chapter provides a definition, description and listing of some of the major characteristics of NCT—some in basic agreement with CT—and closes by summarizing how NCT differs from RT, to be more fully explained historically and theologically in the follow-on chapters.

**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 of Jesus Christ*. Its major themes may be summarily described with reference to:

- *God's eternal purpose of redemption:* covenantally revealed and administered through biblical covenants beginning with a covenant relationship with Adam (Rom. 5:12-19; Eph. 2:12);
- *Hermeneutics:* consistent interpretation of the OT in light of the NT (Luke 24:27; II Cor. 1:20);
- *The people of God:* all the elect of God throughout time first constituted as the church at Pentecost (Acts 1:4-5), and not before (John 7:39; 17:21-22; 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
- *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 of God's covenantally written laws depend as administered under biblical covenants, which culminate in the New Covenant (NC) law of Christ (I Cor. 9:20-21; Heb. 8:6, 13). Innate law is righteous and unchanging. Covenantal law is written, righteous and changeable

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<sup>1</sup>There is a theological explanation of this term and others at Appendix A.

<sup>2</sup>It also agrees with some teachings in the theological system of Dispensational Theology (DT), especially its teaching on the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible, the doctrine of God and creation, the person of Christ, and the understanding of Pentecost as the formation of the Church as the body of Christ.

<sup>3</sup>Generally speaking, the terms *Reformed Theology* and *Covenant Theology* may be used interchangeably (see Appendix A).

(Heb. 7:12) worked out in history in accordance with God's eternal purpose (Eph. 1:11; 3:11; II Tim. 1:9).

**NCT Described.** The historical roots of New Covenant Theology are independent and eclectic. By this is meant that while laboring always to be biblically based, it owes much to the Swiss Brethren of the 16<sup>th</sup> century pertaining to the nature of church, to the English Particular Baptists a century later, especially as expressed in the 1646 edition of the First London Baptist Confession, and to contemporary writings of sovereign grace Baptists in America who are not functionally wedded to the Baptist version of the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1647, the Second London Baptist Confession of 1689. But most of all, today it is a developing theological system which, for the enhancement of the Gospel, strives to provide a more accurate way to interpret the Bible and in so doing also questions and examines key theological presuppositions which undergird the principles of interpretation (hermeneutics) that exist in both Covenant and Dispensational Theology. NCT is based upon a redemptive history approach to understanding the fulfillment of God's eternal kingdom purpose on earth. Its principles of interpretation are based upon a biblical theology that stresses the theology of the Bible itself, especially upon the NT understanding of the OT. NCT questions the basic theological presuppositions of the one Covenant of Grace system of Covenant Theology, including its understanding of the "moral law" of God and the nature of the Church. 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 breaking down the *middle walls of doctrinal partition* that exist within the theological systems of both Covenant and Dispensational Theology.<sup>4</sup>

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

- 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).
- The most important principle of interpretation is *contextual exegesis*. Contextual biblical exegesis demands grammatical/historical/theological principles of interpretation.
- The imputation of Adam's first sin to all mankind (Rom. 5:12d, 18a-19a), the elect's sins 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). The type/antitype teaching of Adam and Christ in *Romans 5:12-19 demands that a covenant relationship (distinguished from that taught by CT) existed between God and Adam both before and after Adam's fall*.
- God's plan of salvation is revealed and administered through the unfolding of biblical covenants in the flow of redemptive history, not as explained through the theologically deduced system of CT's Covenant of Works/Covenant of Grace/Covenant of Redemption schema.
- 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

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<sup>4</sup>I explain how NCT differs from the hermeneutics of Dispensational Theology (DT) in Gary D. Long, *Context! Evangelical Views on the Millennium Examined*, 2d ed. ([www.createspace.com](http://www.createspace.com), 2005), Chap. 3-4; available on Amazon.com. In that book I explain how NCT differs with the two redemptive purposes of DT—one for the Church and one for national Israel—and with DT's literal hermeneutic for understanding key elements of Bible prophecy.

*covenantal law* but under the grace of the NC—a covenant that *not only* has the *internal leading* of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:1-4), *but also external commands* to be obeyed, summed up in the NC declaration: “this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments (I John 5:3).

- 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.
- 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 traditionally taught by CT.
- 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).
- 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.
- The Ten Commandments are not eternal moral law 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 (1647-1649) and the Second London Baptist Confession (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 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 13th century and in the 16th century by Calvin.
- The Decalogue is not “*transcovenantal*” and, therefore, does not function outside the Old Covenant as a unit as much of CT teaches.
- Christ came not to destroy the OT Scriptures but to fulfill them, which includes the Decalogue. The NC law is called the law of Christ which is distinguished from Mosaic law and from the Gentiles who do not have a written revelation of God’s law (I Cor. 9:20-21).
- The law of Christ is not to be equated with the Decalogue. However, 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 NC 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).
- The OC Sabbath commandment is typologically fulfilled by Christ for the people of God who rest in Him by faith (Heb. 4:9-10).
- 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.
- The indwelling Holy Spirit is the norm for Christian living. NCT does not teach that the Ten Commandments are the only objective standard for addressing the Christian life. Rather, NCT emphasizes that it is the Spirit who enables Christians to have a godly walk

(Rom. 8:4; Gal. 5:25) acknowledging that all Scripture is profitable for instruction in righteousness (II Tim. 3:16).

- Christ merited righteousness for the elect only and that it is imputed to them based upon His total obedience to the will of the Father in His life and death (Matt. 3:15; Rom. 5:19).
- The church, which is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18), 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 DT, NCT sees only one redemptive purpose for the people of God, which is the church, the good olive tree (Rom. 11), the body of Christ (Eph. 2:13-22; 3:1-12).
- 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).
- The ordinance of water baptism is the pledge of membership in the NC 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).
- 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 stills awaits the consummation of these blessings at Christ's return. The End has come! The End has not come! The whole theology of the NT is qualified by this tension: between the *already* or *now* and the *not yet* (I John 3:2).
- 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).
- The *blessed hope* will occur when Christ returns (Titus 2:13) to earth bodily and visibly (Acts 1:11) *at the Second Advent* to *abolish death* (I Cor. 15:26) *by swallowing it up in victory* (I Cor. 15:54) and to resurrect, judge and consign the saved to heaven and the lost to a Christless eternity (John 5:28-29; Rev. 20:12-15).

### **New Covenant Theology: How It Differs from Covenant Theology**

This section is a summary of much of the following chapters which provide a fuller explanation of NCT and how it differs from CT. In brief, this section questions the hermeneutical basis of Reformed Theology's system of Covenant Theology and in so doing shows why it is time to *introduce* a more accurate way to interpret the Bible. It is my intent that the substance of the whole book will be clear, palatable and—although purposefully condensed—evidence sound biblical interpretation and documented historical accuracy.

I begin with the heart of CT: its *one overarching covenant of grace*. As a *theological system*, CT evolved historically to explain God's covenants with man under the three theological covenants, first, the "*Covenant of Grace*" followed in order by the covenants of "*Works*" and "*Redemption*." As great and essential as RT's teaching has been for Christianity regarding its teaching of the sovereignty of God in creation, providence and redemption by a host of godly theologians and preachers of the past and present, I am convinced that there is something wrong with the hermeneutical system of CT, especially its explanation on the nature of the church and the covenantal administration of the law of God—the *two carotid arteries* of its theological system.

The points below summarize how NCT differs from CT. The follow-on chapters will address the differences in more detail. The points stem from a fundamental question based upon



the Apostle Paul's explicit teaching that the manifold wisdom of God is made known under the NC through the church according to His eternal purpose (Eph. 3:9-11). Clearly, the fundamental issue with RT pertains to the doctrine of the church (ecclesiology).

- If under the NC the manifold wisdom of God is made known through the cross in reconciling both Jew and Gentile to Him into one body, which is the church, (and the Scripture says it is), is it not highly important to address the nature of the church, the church which “God purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28)? The answer must be unabashedly yes! Anything that distorts or beclouds the true nature of the church—that it is comprised of Jews and Gentiles reconciled to God through the cross—reflects negatively upon the wisdom of God's redemptive purpose, even upon the character of God Himself.
- Reformed Theology explains the nature of the church through the lens of CT and its *one overarching covenant of grace*, which as a *theological system*, traditionally includes three covenants: *Grace, Works and Redemption*, developed historically in that order. But the teaching of this system needs to be examined because it fails to give due consideration to the teaching of the NC Scriptures that the church is a reconciled, spiritual body of believers in which each one of its members knows the Lord (Heb. 8:11). The NT makes it plain that every genuine member of the church is a new creation in Christ having access to the Father in one Spirit. The NT clearly teaches that the gift of salvation is by grace alone and that no one becomes a member of the church without being reconciled to God through faith in Christ (Eph. 2:8-18). Hence, *there are no un-reconciled members in the church, the spiritual body of Christ.*
- *NCT agrees with CT that there was both a pre-fall covenant<sup>5</sup> and post-fall covenant with Adam, but NCT rejects the traditional Covenant of Works explanation of CT as taught by the majority of Reformed theologians, even by many Particular Baptists of the past, including many present-day Reformed Baptists. NCT also rejects the Covenant of Grace explanation of CT held by all Reformed theologians, (see below) which includes with modification by many Reformed Baptists past and present on the nature of the church but retention of the use of the term, the Covenant of Grace.*
- There are several reasons for NCT to hold to a pre-fall covenant relationship between God and Adam. It has also been called a covenant of nature, covenant of life, Adamic (Edenic) covenant, covenant of obedience, and a covenant of creation. I prefer calling it just what it is, a pre-fall covenant, with its explanation understood to be in seed form during the time of the original creation. The most important support for NCT teaching that a covenant arrangement existed with Adam is due to the type/antitype analogy of Romans 5:12-19. On this, NCT agrees with CT; the difference arises over explaining the meaning of that covenantal arrangement starting with the pre-fall Covenant of Creation. The doctrinal truth of the parallel analogy between Adam and Christ in the Romans passage is unique and vital. It is vital because the principle of representative headship is set forth there. As Adam was the sole representative head of fallen humanity, so Christ is the sole representative head of redeemed humanity. Without the representative principle taught in this passage (also see I Cor. 15:22, 45), every human being would have come into the world and would have stood or fallen based on each of his or her own obedience or disobedience to the law of God. There would be no special representation, either by

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<sup>5</sup>Some who genuinely claim to teach NCT do not hold to a pre-fall covenant with Adam because the word for covenant does not occur until Genesis 6:18. But doctrinally, this will, *if consistently carried out*, undermine the whole doctrine of imputation of Adam's original sin and Christ's righteousness, indeed of substitutionary atonement. God forbid! *Without a covenantal relationship existing with the first and last Adam there can be no just imputation of sin or righteousness from another* (see Chapter 4).

Adam or Christ—the principle is the same: no imputation of the guilt and penalty of Adam’s first sin to all mankind; no imputation of the guilt and penalty of the believer’s sin to Christ; no imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the believer. *Therefore, there could be no vicarious atonement for sin, no substitutionary Savior, indeed no salvation!*

- Aside from the traditional arguments for a pre-fall covenant with Adam associated with Adam being created in the image of God and understanding that Hosea 6:7 teaches a covenantal relationship with Adam—which I agree is exegetically preferred—I will here only mention a couple of other reasons to support a pre-fall covenantal arrangement, a creation covenant, with Adam. *First*, the several facets of the original creation are redemptively reenacted in the new creation. For example: (1) the parallel between Genesis 1 and John 1; (2) the creation rest of the original creation in Genesis 2 culminating in the redemptive rest in Christ of the new creation in Hebrews 4; and (3) the Spirit’s presence in: (a) hovering over the surface of the waters in Genesis 1 regarding a *creation covenant*; (b) passing between the divided sacrifice in Genesis 15 regarding the Abrahamic covenant; (c) engulfing Mount Sinai in smoke and fire in Exodus 19 regarding the Mosaic covenant; and (d) the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost in Acts 2 regarding the NC fulfillment of OT prophecy (Ezek. 36:26-27; Joel 2:28-32). *Second*, I do not find in Scripture where God ever *communes* with man outside of a covenantal arrangement; so it was with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and so it is with Christ under the New Covenant.
- The above reasons for a pre-fall covenant are contested by many holding to NCT. They rightly object to RT’s pre-fall *Covenant of Works*. But I do not find their arguments convincing in denying a covenant relationship itself with Adam before the fall, especially in light of Romans 5:12-19. I hope that an elaboration upon this issue in the following chapters will help break down the doctrinal wall of partition that exists between Paedobaptist Covenant Theology and Baptist Theology, including those among the latter who deny any divine covenant with Adam before the Fall. Was there a divine covenant with Adam before the Fall? Yes, there was. Is it to be explained as traditional CT has done? No, it is not. Is it to be explained as contemporary covenant theologians explain it? No, it is not; they too differ over how to explain the *Covenant of Works*. Then, how can a covenantal arrangement be biblically established without taking upon it all the encumbrances of CT including its stress on the organic nature of biblical revelation?<sup>6</sup> I believe that it can be if it be rooted in a biblical theology of God’s eternal kingdom purpose coming to pass on earth. (This is what I and the resident faculty of Providence Theological Seminary are working to accomplish for the sake of doctrinal unity in proclaiming of the gospel of Christ. May it come to pass.)
- New Covenant Theology so understood, therefore, has a theology of the covenants because *covenants are biblical* and because God’s covenants with man reveal how He governs creation and man in history. NCT holds that God’s will, “will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10) and that His eternal kingdom purpose is the central theme of the Bible as He administers His will covenantally in time. However, *New Covenant Theology dissents with Reformed Theology’s one Covenant of Grace theological system to explain redemptive history*. Indeed, it disagrees with all three covenantal teachings of CT, believing that they are based upon *theological deductions* with little biblical warrant. NCT, therefore, holds that there is: (1) *no one Covenant of Grace* that overarches both

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<sup>6</sup>The progressive unfolding of biblical revelation is what Reformed theologians call the *organic nature* of revelation. Indeed, the organic nature of biblical revelation is true, *if it is not overworked*. However, CT has *overworked* the organic nature of Scripture by reading the OT as though it were the NT, especially with regard to the nature of the church being generically one in both Old and New Covenant dispensations. CT does this based upon its one Covenant of Grace teaching.

dispensations of the OT and NT (see Chap. 3 below); (2) *no Covenant of Works* with a *temporal* probationary period which, if kept by Adam, would have resulted in earning eternal heavenly life for Adam and all mankind (see Chap. 4 below); and, (3) *no* pre-temporal intra-Trinitarian *Covenant of Redemption* because God's covenants are all made and occur in history according to and in execution of His eternal *purpose* (see Chap. 4 below). These three theological covenants have helped to shape Reformed Theology's hermeneutic for interpreting the entire Bible. But they distort the very nature of the church which God purchased with His own blood. They ought to be examined biblically and historically. *Indeed, there is a more accurate way to understand and explain the covenantal nature of the Bible. And this is what NCT is working to accomplish* while holding, without reservation, to Reformed Theology's biblical teaching on the sovereignty of God in creation, providence and redemption.

- One of the major reasons why RT was first formed during the early years of the Reformation was due to the need to answer the Swiss Brethren's (Anabaptists') stance that the NT church was a believer's church consisting of confessing members only, which necessarily ruled out a state-church (*Corpus Christianum*—see chap. 2) and the long held practice of infant baptism. So, to defend the sacrament of infant baptism, the early Reformers developed a *covenantal mold* based upon the OT covenant of circumcision in an attempt to provide an *evangelical* basis for practicing it (paedobaptism) under the NC without teaching that it was necessary for salvation. Huldreich (Ulrich) Zwingli (1484-1531), the Swiss Reformer, taught that just as covenant children were circumcised under the OC prior to faith so now under the NC baptism of covenant children should take place. Zwingli feared that if baptism of infants of adult believers were rejected the Reformation in Switzerland would be stopped. The people in the canton of Zurich just would not accept this doctrinal reformation step. It was too much and too fast as Reformation truth was causing them to reject so many other unbiblical practices of Roman Catholicism.
- The *theology* of the covenant birthed by Zwingli subsequently developed systematically into what is called RT; also called CT. It teaches that there is one overarching *Covenant of Grace*,<sup>7</sup> which was instituted by God after the Fall of Adam. This means that all the biblical covenants from Noah to the New Covenant are administrative outworkings of that *theologically deduced*, one overarching Covenant of Grace, rather than a covenantal outworking of the eternal purpose of God (II Tim. 1:9). Hence the *covenant of grace* and God's *eternal purpose* are terms frequently understood to be interchangeable by CT.
- The covenant of grace teaching of RT results in the church beginning in Genesis 3:15. Thus, the church began its existence in the OT and continues generically as one body under both the Old and New Covenant administrations of the covenant of grace. With rare exception, RT, however, does not accurately address how the body of Christ was formed and in existence before Christ—"the head" and "the first-born" of "the body, the church"—was raised from the dead (Col. 1:18). Many fail to mention the historical significance of the gift of the Holy Spirit poured out at Pentecost in first forming the church in redemptive history: *otherwise a headless church existing in the OT? That makes no biblical sense!* To say the least then, RT's understanding of its one covenant of grace system needs *recasting*. Further—
- This overarching covenant of grace teaching carries the OC law over into the NC. Yet, RT recognized that not all of the OC law could apply to the NC. Hence, the Reformers Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575), Zwingli's successor, and John Calvin (1509-1564)

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<sup>7</sup>The *covenant of grace* is italicized here because it is a term that never occurs in the Bible. It is a theologically deduced term by covenant theologians resulting from their system of interpretation. The question is whether it has biblical warrant. Its occurrence hereafter will not necessarily be capitalized, or italicized.

followed Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225-1274), the systematizer of ancient and medieval Roman Catholic dogma, in the threefold division of the law of God into moral, ceremonial and judicial. This was interpreted to mean that the ceremonial and judicial aspects of the OC law were fulfilled and done away under the NC administration of the Covenant of Grace, but the *moral law* continued.

- In essence, then, what remained of the OC law were the Ten Commandments which are said to transcend all of God's covenants and thus they continue as eternal moral law even under the NC in which all people are obligated to obey.
- Admittedly, the keeping of the moral law, specifically the Ten Commandments, could not save, since salvation is by grace through faith alone. So, although obeying the Ten Commandments can never save a person, they are to be obeyed as a rule of life for the believer's sanctification.
- However, difficulties arose over RT's understanding of the law of God relating to both the Sabbath commandment—the fourth commandment—and how the Ten Commandments as a unit could continue covenantally under the NC, since the NC fulfilled the OC, making it and its “tablets of stone” covenantally obsolete (Heb. 8:6-13; II Cor. 3).
- To show that the Ten Commandments continue under the NC, they are said to be eternal (unchanging) *moral law*. But this presents a problem, especially with the Sabbath commandment. So, RT teaches that the seventh day Sabbath was changed to the first day Sabbath, the Christian Sabbath, following the NT apostolic practice of the Christian church meeting on the first day of the week, the day that Christ rose from the dead. However, this does not answer the question: “If the Ten Commandments are eternal *moral law* how could the day change?” Several explanations have been given for keeping the Christian Sabbath, but without unanimity over how to observe it, especially as practiced by 17<sup>th</sup> century Puritanism in England and New England and by some Reformed churches (both Presbyterian and Baptist) today.
- *The bottom line: The one overarching covenant of grace teaching of CT has created serious difficulties in understanding the biblical nature of the church and the covenantal administration of the law of God under the NC.* It has also created difficulties among Credo-Baptists or Reformed Baptists, many of whom have accepted the one Covenant of Grace teaching of CT while attempting to modify it regarding Baptist church doctrine.
- *In sum*, the Bible clearly teaches that God administers His will on earth covenantally; yet, it is not accurately explained by CT (see the following chapters). Any method of interpretation, therefore, that distorts the nature of the church which God purchased with His own blood or confuses the covenantal administration of God's holy and just law must be corrected. The main purpose of this book, therefore, is to examine RT and introduce a more accurate way to understand the Bible than adhering to the traditional one Covenant of Grace—different administrations system of CT, whether held by Presbyterians or Baptists.

It has been over 480 years since the *theology* of the Covenant of Grace was birthed by Huldreich (Ulrich) Zwingli in Switzerland in the 1520s and over 360 years since its confessional formulation of the Westminster Confession of Faith in 1647. The scriptural basis for CT on its teaching regarding the doctrine of the church has been questioned since the early Swiss Brethren in the 1520s and 1530s and the early English Particular Baptists in the 1640s and 1650s. As a result, those holding to a confessing church of believers only have long held that the Reformation was never doctrinally completed. Complicating the development of a better hermeneutic is the fact that many Credo- or Reformed Baptists have accepted Covenant Theology's one covenant of grace theological system (see Chap. 6), except for its teaching on the nature of the church and the

ordinance of baptism for believers only—not to mention CT’s teachings on a Covenant of Works and Covenant of Redemption. But the retention of the system of CT, although modified by the Credo-Baptists, has failed to resolve the hermeneutical barrier that can only remain between Presbyterians and Baptists. It is time for a more accurate way to interpret the Bible that will help break down this doctrinal barrier. I am convinced that there is a more accurate way that must be pursued for the cause of Christ and the unity of the body of Christ. That way is called New Covenant Theology. It understands the covenantal administration of God’s eternal purpose with man in history more accurately than that taught in the system of Covenant Theology, whether held by Presbyterians or Baptists.

I readily acknowledge that this book questions long standing tradition held to be biblical by men mighty in the faith and that it will be strongly assailed by many, even by some as doctrinal heresy. Be that as it may be; here I stand. I remind the reader again that my disagreement with covenant theologians and their system of CT is doctrinal not personal. John Murray, one of CT’s greatest exegetical paedobaptist theologians, has acknowledged that “theology must always be undergoing reformation, [because] the human understanding is imperfect” and [because] “*covenant theology, notwithstanding the finesse of analysis with which it was worked out and the grandeur of its articulated systematization, needs recasting.*”<sup>8</sup> This book is an introductory attempt on behalf of New Covenant Theology to that end—to provide a more accurate way than that taught by Covenant Theology.

The remainder of this book will question Covenant Theology in starting with Chapter 2 which presents a condensed historical background to the rise of Reformed Theology’s system of Covenant Theology. Separate chapters will then be devoted to questioning Covenant Theology’s teaching on its three theological covenants in the historical order in which they were developed: Chapter 3 on the Covenant of Grace; Chapter 4 on the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Redemption; Chapter 5 will question CT’s teaching on the covenantal administration of the law of God. Chapter 6 will address and question the teaching of those Reformed Baptists who subscribe to a modified version of Covenant Theology’s one covenant of grace theological system as expressed in the Second London Baptist Confession (1689). Chapter 7 will then summarize what NCT is and conclude that it is time for a more accurate way to interpret the Bible.

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This chapter is a draft extract from a book now in the process of being written (April 2011) entitled: “New Covenant Theology: What It Is and How It Differs from Covenant Theology,” by-

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<sup>8</sup>John Murray, *The Covenant of Grace* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1954), 5; emphasis mine.

## APPENDIX D

### A Brief Personal History Leading to New Covenant Theology

In January 1962, I was converted to Christ in Berlin, Germany when I was stationed there as a Regular Army Field Artillery Officer. Following the completion of seminary studies (1965-1972), I returned to active duty in the U.S. Army at Fort Hood Texas, and while there I began to rethink some issues pertaining to eschatology and the Law and the Gospel. Then, on Sundays my wife, Barbara and I started a small fellowship in Copperas Cove, Texas called Grace Reformed Fellowship. While there I preached through the Book of Galatians and a number of other texts and we organized and hosted an annual sovereign grace doctrinal conference in Salado, Texas beginning in 1974 (which continued annually ending in 2004). The conference became known as the Salado Conference where S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., my seminary mentor, and I were the only speakers for the first two or three years thereafter. In January 1975, I was re-stationed to the Pentagon and while there for two years taught in a small work called Grace Abounding Ministries in Sterling, Virginia. These events covered some five years of my post-seminary schooling. During these years, I had come into contact with and became friends with Pastors Albert Martin and Walter Chantry and with Ernest Reisinger and others at the John Bunyan Conference including John Reisinger. Having by God's grace come to believe the doctrines of grace in 1964 in Columbia, Missouri, through the ministry of a country Baptist preacher named Stanley Owen before attending seminary, these men and the Bunyan Conference greatly encouraged me in the faith. In 1977, I left active duty military service and moved to San Antonio, Texas where, after a brief ministry in a local church, I began a writing ministry in 1979 called Sovereign Grace Ministries of San Antonio, Texas (not affiliated subsequently with the present-day "*Reformed and charismatic*" teaching of Sovereign Grace Ministries of Gaithersburg, Maryland). The Salado conferences continued where John Reisinger, Lewis Johnson, Ron McKinney (at that time, the editor of "Sword and Trowel" magazine), myself and others regularly spoke.

In this 1977-1980 period of the first generation of NCT—during the days of electric typewriters and word processing machines, but before the expanded *computer, web-blog age* today—the beginnings of present-day *New Covenant Theology* (a term not used at that time) began to formulate. In addition to the second edition of the First London Baptist Confession of Faith (1646) located in Appendix II to Volume 1 of Crosby's *History of the English Baptists*, I discovered the text of Benjamin Cox's 1646 Appendix to the First London Confession located in the microfilm archives at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth Texas. I found it to exude Christ and copied it for use as a confession of faith in Sovereign Grace Church in San Antonio, Texas where I pastored for a period of time. In examining the First London Confession, differences over the "*Law and the Gospel*" were evident as taught by Reformed Theology in the Westminster Confession of Faith (approved and ratified in 1647-1649) and the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (adopted in 1689). As a result, in 1980 I prepared the 1646 edition for publication (including the 1646 Appendix by Cox) with a preface where I stated that "*there is a distinctive New Covenant emphasis concerning biblical law in the both editions (1644 and 1646) of the First London Confession that is distinctly lacking in the Old Covenant emphasis of the Westminster and 1689 London Confessions.*" Both of the latter two theological systems teach that there is *one overarching covenant of grace having different administrations of the biblical covenants* (i.e., the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic and New Covenants). This was not the teaching of the First London Confession in which the term *New Covenant* is used, but not once does the term *the covenant of grace* occur. Only once does the term *the new and everlasting covenant of grace* occur in the First London Confession, but it

refers explicitly to the “new covenant” citing Hebrew 9:15. However, this term never occurs in the Second London Confession of 1689.

The First London Confession with the appendix written also in 1646 by Benjamin Cox began to circulate and be diversely received in *Reformed Baptist* circles in the United States during the last two decades of the 20th century. As a result, I wrote two more prefaces to the 1646 Confession and had it, with the appendix by Cox, republished in 1985 and 2003. In contrast with the 1646 Confession, both the Westminster and 1689 London Confessions teach that *the Ten Commandments, the Decalogue, are eternal moral law*, including the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment, the Sabbath Commandment. Indeed, the Sabbath Commandment is said to be binding upon all mankind forever. And so, in the late 1970s differences arose *within* the Reformed Baptists, especially over the Sabbath and its being eternal *moral* law. (*Reformed Baptists* is a title that has to be explained as referring primarily to *soteriological Calvinism* not *ecclesiological Calvinism*; see e.g., Kenneth H. Good’s 1986 publication of: “*Are Baptists Reformed?*”) The differences began to result in some *Reformed Baptists* teaching that the Sabbath was eternal moral law, most of whom preferred the 1689 London Confession and others (including myself) who did not, and who began to be called *Sovereign Grace Baptists* preferring the 1646 London Confession. Charges of Antinomianism (against law) from some Reformed Baptists who held to the 1689 Confession began to be directed at some of us who did not agree with their understanding of the covenantal system of Reformed Theology and its teaching of one overarching covenant of grace. The charges were especially directed against John Reisinger in his writings (in the *Sword and Trowel* magazine later called *Sound of Grace*) and evangelistic preaching, which included messages he delivered at the end of the 1970s at the Salado Conference. In February 1980, to help defend John from what I believed to be unjust charges, I published a doctrinal pamphlet entitled, *The Christian Sabbath Lord’s Day Controversy*, teaching that the Sabbath was not a creation ordinance. (Soon to be placed on Providence Theological Seminary’s web site; see below.)

Then, as misguided accusations were becoming more intense, the first two Councils on Baptist Theology in Dallas, Texas were held in 1980 and 1981 to address the accusations and to set forth more clearly what was not then but is now called NCT. The Councils were sponsored by the *Sword and Trowel Magazine*. I was one of several speakers at both meetings. At the first Council in 1980, I presented an exegetical paper addressing the central text used by Theonomy—Matthew 5:17-20 (a text that is foundational to understanding the covenantal administration of the law of God). In brief, Theonomy teaches that God’s law, essentially the whole law of God in the OT (minus some ceremonial laws), is still binding upon mankind today. My paper was published in 1981 with the title *Biblical Law and Ethics: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Matthew 5:17-20*. It was in exegeting that passage that the principles of NCT became fully engrained in my understanding of the Scriptures, namely, that *the law of God* is both *Absolute and Covenantal*.

At the second Dallas Council in 1981, I presented a theological paper entitled *Adam: Mankind’s Representative Head* showing that there was a pre-fall covenant relationship with Adam, but that it is not to be explained as does Reformed Theology’s Covenant of Works. In 1982, there was a third Council on Baptist Theology held in a suburb of Chicago where, as the chairman of the doctrinal committee, I presented for adoption, the First London Baptist Confession of Faith, 1646 Edition, as a convenient summary of the doctrinal beliefs for those who assembled there. From 1982 to 1989, I completed 22 years of active military service while continuing the Salado Conferences through 2004, dealing heavily with Redemptive History from a NCT perspective. In 2002, I also wrote a book entitled *Context! Evangelical Views on the Millennium Examined*. It was written to set forth NCT’s hermeneutic for interpreting Bible

prophecy and to help break down some fifteen doctrinal variations concerning the millennium and Bible prophecy as taught by recognized theologians representing Premillennialism, Postmillennialism and Amillennialism. The result of the book was that *consistency* of NT interpretation of the OT results in NCT teaching a *non-premillennial* understanding of the doctrine of the last things.

In 2003, I was approached by Pastor Joe Kelley of Killeen Bible Church in Killeen, Texas and Pastor Jackson Boyett of Dayspring Fellowship in Austin, Texas to lead in establishing a graduate-level seminary to help unify and enhance the development of NCT as a theological system. By 2007 steps had been taken to organize and form such a seminary in Colorado Springs, Colorado. With the name of *Providence Theological Seminary*, it completed its 4<sup>th</sup> year of academic studies in May 2011. Details concerning its doctrinal emphasis upon NCT, the Doctrines of Grace and Baptist Theology, degrees offered (B.Div., B.Th., and M.Div.), resident faculty qualifications, relationship with Toronto Baptist Seminary and other matters may be found on our website [www.ptSCO.org](http://www.ptSCO.org).