

New Covenant Theology



Questions Raised by New Covenant Theology



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What are the competing theological systems to New Covenant Theology?

What questions do these competing views raise that we need to evaluate and consider?

Competing Systems to New Covenant Theology

- Last week we began doing a “*side by side*” *comparison** of the two major competing theological systems to New Covenant Theology:
 - Dispensationalism
 - Covenant Theology
- After each comparison, we discussed the position that we would take in holding New Covenant Theology.
- So far we compared the three systems on the following topics:
 - Calvinism Versus Arminianism
 - Literal Versus Figurative Interpretation of the Bible
 - The Use of the Term “Israel” in Scripture
 - The Phrase “Israel of God” in Galatians 6:16
 - Israel and the Church
- This week we continue this process of comparing the three systems on a number of additional topics.

Framework for Viewing Human History

- **Dispensationalism:**
 - Believes God has divided human history into several distinct time periods or “dispensations” (from the Greek word OIKONOMIA – 1Cor 9:17; Eph. 1:10) during which man is tested in respect to obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God.
- **Covenant Theology:**
 - Views the history of God's dealings with mankind under the framework of three overarching ***theological*** covenants:
 - The Covenant of Works
 - The Covenant of Redemption
 - The Covenant of Grace
- **New Covenant Theology:**
 - Views the history of God's dealings with mankind under the framework of the major Biblical covenants (i.e. covenants that the Bible actually ***specifies*** as “covenants”).
 - NCT believes that all the major covenants find their ultimate fulfillment in the New Covenant.

The Promised New Covenant of Jer. 31:31-34

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

- **Dispensationalism:**
 - Believes that the promise of a “New Covenant” in Jer. 31:31-34 is primarily to the physical descendants of Israel and will ultimately be fulfilled in a future thousand year period (known as “the Millennium”) when Christ will rule on earth and, at which time, they believe physical Israel will have become a believing nation.
- **Covenant Theology:**
 - Believes the promise of a “New Covenant” in Jer. 31 is for spiritual Israel, as the NT writers teach.
 - CT views the New Covenant as one of several “administrations” under the Covenant of Grace.
- **New Covenant Theology:**
 - Believes the New Covenant is fulfilled in the church, which is the new spiritual Israel.
 - As stated earlier, NCT believes that all the major covenants find their ultimate fulfillment in this New Covenant.

The Proper Use and Applicability of the OT Law

- **Dispensationalism:**

- Believes that the OT Law has been abolished for the Church. But when the Church is taken away, and God returns to His original people, physical Israel, they will once again be under the OT Law.

- **Covenant Theology:**

- Believes in a three-fold division of the Law:
 - The **Ceremonial Law**, which have been abolished
 - The **Civil Law**, which have been abolished except maybe to give general guidelines as to what is just in government
 - The **Moral Law** is given in the Ten Commandments and is binding on *all* of God's people in *all* ages.
 - CT believes the Moral Law continues to have three uses:
 - To convict unbelievers of sin and lead them to Christ
 - To restrain sin in society
 - To instruct Christians in godliness.

- **New Covenant Theology:**

- The OT Law is there to instruct us in the way God dealt with His people in the OT.
 - **Christ** is our new law-giver and by obeying Christ, we **fulfill** what the OT law ultimately pointed to (Rom.13:8-10).

Determining the Applicability of the OT Law

- **Dispensationalism:**
 - Believes OT laws are no longer in effect unless *repeated* in the NT.
- **Covenant Theology:**
 - Believes the OT laws are still in effect unless *abrogated* in the NT.
- **New Covenant Theology:**
 - Believes, as Dispensationalism, that OT laws are no longer in effect unless repeated in the NT.
 - **But** I would add this caveat: OT laws *can* sometimes be helpful in defining eternal moral principles that are applicable in all ages and therefore binding on us as well.

Eschatology and the Millennium

- **Dispensationalism:**

- Tends to view references to “the Kingdom of God” as references to the a future thousand year period when Christ will rule on earth, a period that they refer to as “the Millennium”.
- Dispensationalist are:
 - **Always** Premillennial (i.e. they believe Christ will return to earth prior to reigning for a thousand years on the earth)
 - **Usually** Pretribulational (i.e. they believe the church will be removed (i.e. “raptured”) from the earth prior to a horrible seven year period of “tribulation” on the earth. They believe this seven year Tribulation is described in the book of Revelation)

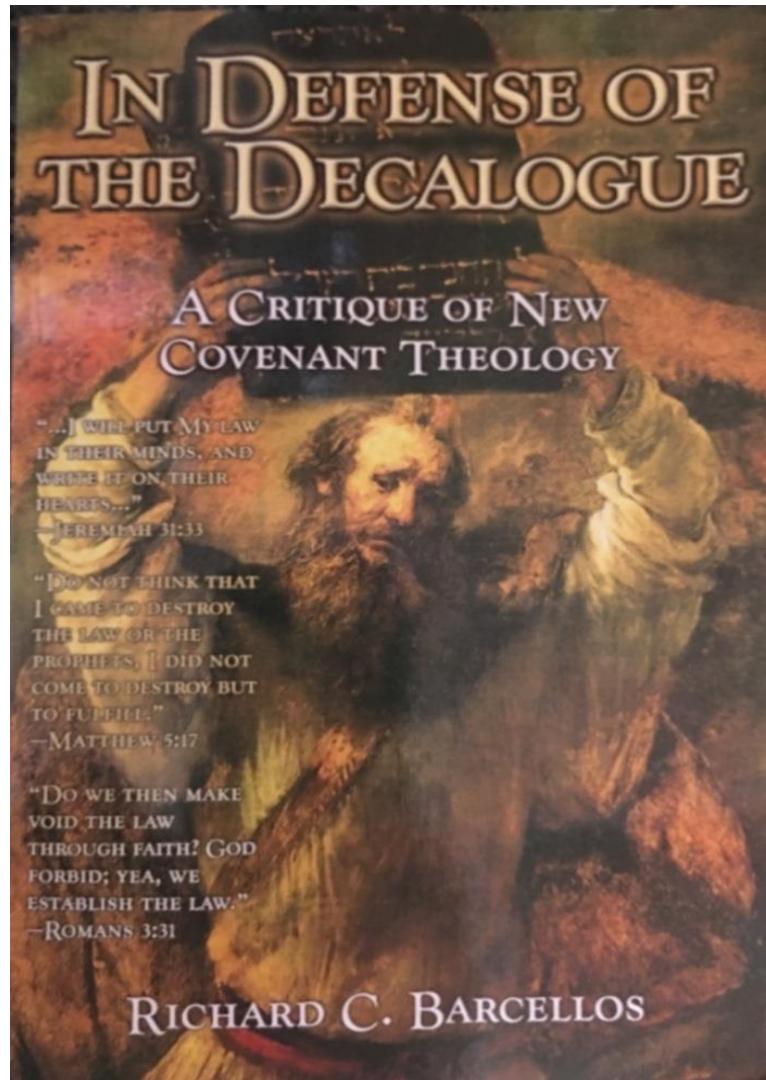
- **Covenant Theology:**

- Tends to view references to the “Kingdom of God” as references to the Church, which they believe began immediately after the Fall.
- Those holding to CT are usually Amillennial (believe there is no literal thousand year reign on the earth) or Postmillennial (believe Christ will return after a thousand year period of blessing on the earth); although a few are Premillennial.

- **New Covenant Theology:**

- Same as CT, except they believe the Church began in the NT, rather than immediately after the Fall.

An Examination of Reformed Baptist Arguments Against New Covenant Theology



An Examination of Reformed Baptist Arguments Against New Covenant Theology

- Some interesting Observations about the book and its author:
 - Barcellos graduated with a Master of Divinity degree from Master's Seminary (1989)
 - Barcellos was awarded a Master of Theology degree by Whitefield Theological Seminary for his critique of New Covenant Theology
 - Several esteemed writers and theologians have made commendations in the front of the book, including:
 - George W. Knight, III – a Presbyterian author of several books, including an outstanding commentary on the pastoral epistles
 - Sam Waldron – who wrote a modern exposition of the 1689 London Baptist Confession
 - Fred Zaspel – who has written several books on NCT, complimented Barcellos for advancing the discussion on this topic.

An Examination of Reformed Baptist Arguments Against New Covenant Theology

- **Preface:**

- Describes NCT as seeking to “strike a middle ground” between:
 - The stress on *continuity* and in the traditional Reformed theology
 - The radical *discontinuity* of some older forms of Dispensationalism
- Contends that:
 - “Some of the major tenets of NCT are not biblical” (p.7)
 - “NCT is troublesome because it produces a reductionistic, myopic, and truncated view of Christian ethics” (p.7)
- Points out that it is somewhat difficult to critique NCT because:
 - There is some variation among those who hold to NCT.
 - NCT is a relatively new school of thought and there is not yet a definitive work defining the beliefs of NCT.
- Promises to:
 - Direct his critique towards things that are in print and on which NCT theologians seem to be in general agreement
 - Offer exegetically based answers on the issues discussed

An Examination of Reformed Baptist Arguments Against New Covenant Theology

- **Introduction:**

- Describes NCT as a “movement within conservative, Evangelical, and Calvinistic Baptist circles, which seeks to steer a middle road between traditional Covenant Theology and Dispensational Theology” (p.11).
- Acknowledges that NCT “attempts to base its conclusions on the exegesis of key texts that speak to the issues of continuity and discontinuity in both the Old and New Testaments” (p.11).
- Recognizes that “there are many facets of NCT that all ought to appreciate” (p.12):
 - Its high view of scripture
 - Its respect for the sovereignty of God in salvation and providence
 - Its attempt to understand the nature of and relationship between the various biblical covenants
 - Etc.

An Examination of Reformed Baptist Arguments Against New Covenant Theology

- **Introduction:**

- He applauds those who believe in NCT for being “zealous students of the Bible”, but believes that some things about NCT “should disturb us and are worth challenging” (p.13).
- Specifically, in this book, he intends to challenge NCT’s view concerning:
 - The Promise of the New Covenant
 - The Identity of the Old Covenant
 - The Abolition of the Old Covenant
 - The Sermon on the Mount
 - The Identity of the Moral Law
 - Hermeneutical Presuppositions
 - Canonicity
 - Historical Theology

For Next Time...

- If you haven't already done so, I encourage you to *download* a copy of Barcellos' book from my website (<http://www.purifiedbyfaith.com/>) and read Chapter 1 before we meet again next week.

Other Questions?

