

What is NCT.

What is New Covenant Theology?

Usually the debate concerns the relation of the New Testament Christian to the Old Testament laws, sacrifices and ceremonies, and the relation of Israel to the Church. From an evangelical point of view, there are three major alternatives.

a. Synthesis — God has made one covenant with fallen humanity (the covenant of grace), which is administered in two different dispensations (law and gospel). God's moral law is unchanging, but ceremonial and civil law (both called "positive law") change according to the dispensation. God has only one people, which in Old Testament times was called Israel, but now is called the Church. This view is called Covenant Theology.

b. Division — God has dealt with humanity in different ways in different ages or dispensations (the number of these divisions may vary). What God requires of mankind varies in each dispensation (God's law is different in every age). God has two peoples, Israel and the Church, which are distinct in law and hope. This view is called Dispensationalism, whether in its classic or modified forms.

c. Progression — God has one purpose in Christ, which he is working out through a progression of ages and covenants. Through the ages God has progressively revealed his will from the Garden to the old covenant to the new covenant. God's law has a basic ethical continuity with changes in positive law leading to the finality of Christ's law. God has only one people, those who believe in Christ. This view is called New Covenant Theology.

3. It is a mistake to equate any of these views with any exact millennial viewpoint, though Dispensationalists are Premillennial. Both Covenant Theologians and New Covenant Theologians may be Amillennial, Postmillennial or Premillennial.

#### I. Principles of interpretation

A. Use Biblical words and phrases whenever possible, and use them in their Biblical meanings.

B. Build the framework for understanding the Bible around Christ rather than lesser matters.

C. Recognize the progressive nature of special revelation.

D. Realize that since Christ has fulfilled the old covenant and set it aside, the new covenant now regulates the life and worship of the people of God, from the cross and through all eternity.

E. Understand that human history is divided into certain ages, but see these ages in relation to the person and work of Christ.

#### II. Important ideas of Christ-focused or New Covenant Theology

A. God has only one eternal purpose and one elect people. His purpose is to save his chosen people of all ages through the Lord Jesus Christ for his own glory. Since God's purpose focuses on his Son, Christ is the theme of the Bible (Ephesians 1:9-10,22-23; Luke 24:27,44-45; John 5:39; Revelation 19:10).

B. The importance of Abraham is not that he is the father of the Jewish nation, but that he is the father of the nation that will bring forth Christ (Romans 9:4-5; etc.). The establishment of Israel as God's nation under the old covenant was only a means to the

fulfillment of his one eternal purpose, and not a separate end in itself. God has only one people, those saved by faith in Christ in whatever age, which share together in the promised inheritance (Ephesians. 2:11-16; 3:6; Hebrews 11:39-40; Romans 11:11-32; Revelation 1:5-6; 5:9-10; 7:9,14; 21:24; 22:2).

C. The Old Testament Scriptures must be interpreted in the light of the fuller and complete revelation of the New Testament Scriptures. We thus interpret Old Testament prophecies in harmony with the methodology of the New Testament Scriptures. The focus of the New Testament Scriptures is on Christ as the fulfillment of the law and of the promises made to Israel. Christ has a superior ministry and a better covenant with better promises. Christ supersedes and replaces Moses as lawgiver in exactly the same sense that he supersedes and replaces Aaron as priest (Matthew 5:17; John 1:17; Acts 3:17-18; 26:6; Ephesians 3:8-11; Colossians 2:13-17; Hebrews 1:1-2; 8:6; 1 Peter 1:10-12).

D. The relationship between the Old and the New Testament Scriptures is (1) of promise, shadow and type found in the Old Testament (2) to fulfillment, substance and antitype in the New Testament. Therefore, on the one hand, the way of salvation is the same in both Testamental periods — by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Believers in Old Testament times embraced Christ in the promise by faith, and we believers in New Testament times embrace Christ as the fulfillment by faith. On the other hand, the lifestyle of the Old Testament believer was one of immature position in God's family and of incomplete revelation, while that of the New Testament believer is one of mature position in God's family and completed revelation (Hebrews 10:1; Romans 4:13-16; 15:8-9; Galatians 4:1-7; Ephesians 2:19-22).

E. The proper way to view the progressive revelation made by the living God in the Bible is to see the structure built around God's purpose in Christ. In the Scriptures we see a revelation that increases in clarity and fullness of mankind's need of Christ, God's promise of Christ (the Seed, the Covenants, the Servant, etc.), Christ's accomplishment of revelation, Christ's present ministry as Mediator of the new covenant, and Christ's still future restoration of all things.

III. The structure of the Bible according to New Covenant Theology, contrasted with Covenant Theology and Dispensationalism.

A. Dispensationalism views history as divided into unrelated dispensations or time periods. In classic Dispensationalism there are seven of these eras. According to this view, they do not necessarily build on each other, but God is demonstrating in each one mankind's need for grace. Though the cross divides the dispensation of law from that of grace, in the structure of history, it is not the high point of God's plan. The high point occurs at the end of the dispensational period.

B. Covenant Theology views history divided into two periods that are governed by two covenants. Mankind failed to keep the covenant of law, and so immediately after the fall, God made another covenant, the covenant of grace. Though the cross is important in the covenant of grace, in the structure of history, it merely divides the administration of law from the administration of the gospel. The turning point of history was really the giving of the covenant of grace in the garden.

C. Christ-focused Theology sees all history in relation to God's purpose in Christ. All the ages before the cross (what the New Testament calls "the

ages past”) were in preparation for the coming of Christ. The ages after the cross (“the present age” and “the coming ages”) derive their character from and reach their goal through Christ, the mediator of the new covenant. This present age reveals his grace in the preaching of and living according to his gospel. The coming ages will reveal his glory.

#### IV. The benefits of New Covenant Theology

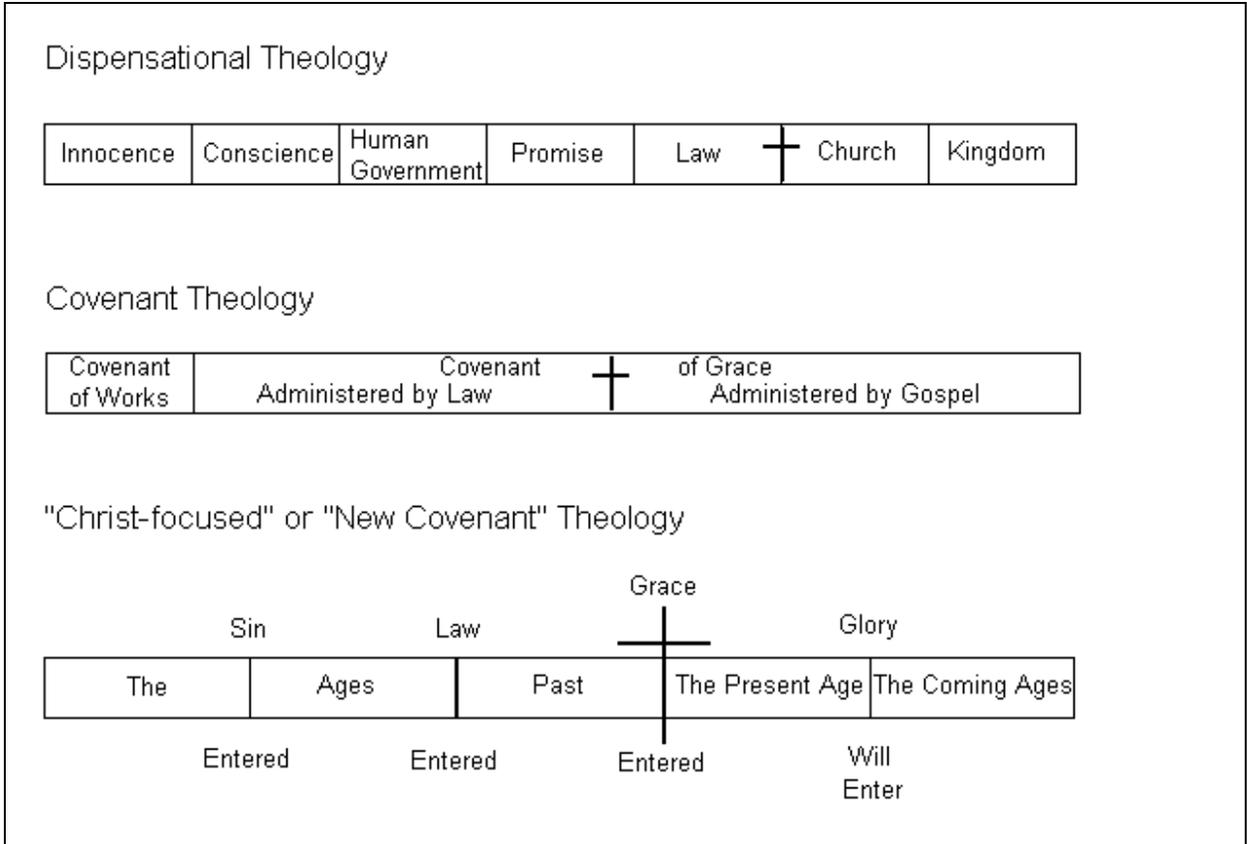
A. Christ-focused Theology takes seriously Christ’s teaching that the Scriptures speak of him (Luke 24:25-27; John 5:36-47). This frees us from using the Bible as textbook on law or ethics or from using it as a clue book to figure out the relationship between prophecy and current events. Instead, we can simply and clearly say, “Here is God’s plan in Christ. You had better know the Risen and Ascended Lord the plan presents for your attention.”

B. Christ-focused Theology provides a clear and adequate way to explain the elements of continuity and discontinuity between the Old and the New Testament Scriptures. We must take 2 Timothy 3:16-17 seriously!

C. Christ-focused Theology provides us with a clear way to interpret the Christian life and experience, so that we can learn from the examples of the OT saints without retreating into their position. Therefore, both of the traditional views largely ignore the new covenant believer as an adult son under the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

D. Christ-focused Theology allows us to interpret terms and concepts in their Biblical significance. Christ-focused Theology allows us to examine texts without dragging a lot of non-Biblical into the text.

E. Christ-focused Theology leads us to rejoice in the fullness of Christ’s completed work for the glory of God and the good of his people. In Christ and his new covenant we have something better! We don’t try to put new wine into old wineskins (Covenant Theology) or wonder why Christ has two different sets of wineskins



Point of Doctrine	Covenant Theology	Dispensationalism	Christ-focused
Way of Salvation	By grace through faith in Jesus Christ	By grace through faith in Jesus Christ	By grace through faith in Jesus Christ
People of God	One	Two	One
Focus	Law or Covenants of Law and Grace	Israel	Christ
Interpretation of the Testaments	Old Testament is primary because it was first	Old Testament is primary because of literal promises	New Testament is primary because fullness is in Christ
View of Ten Commandments	Unchanging moral law	Given to Israel as a dispensational test	Part of covenant made on Sinai with Israel
View of law	Moral and positive	Changing standards	Progressive revelation
Israel and the Church	Church is Israel now	Israel and the Church separate	Israel is the type; the Church is the antitype
Progress of history	Two covenants	Seven dispensations	God's eternal purpose in Christ through ages and covenants
Old Testament Sacrifices	Fulfilled in Christ	Will be reinstated in the kingdom	Fulfilled in Christ
Beginning of the Church	Covenant of Grace (made in Gen 3:15)	Pentecost	Pentecost