

NEW COVENANT THEOLOGY

Weighed and found wanting



Kevin McGrane

CONTENTS

Foreword	i
Introduction	1
1. Introduction to New Covenant Theology	9
2. Presuppositions and Methods	37
3. Abolishing the Law of God	63
4. The Early Church and the Decalogue	93
5. The Unreasonableness of New Covenant Theology	113
6. Replacement Lawgiver, Replacement Law	143
7. Sanctification, Assurance and Antinomianism	173
8. Justification, and the New Yoke of Bondage	199
<i>Principal NCT works cited</i>	233
<i>Index</i>	235

INTRODUCTION

MUCH OF THE MATERIAL presented in this book originally appeared in issues of *The Gospel Magazine* during 2015 and 2016, and is here compiled into book format at the request of readers and the trustees. To fit a magazine format certain material had been eliminated to reduce length, and other material consigned to footnotes to save space, but with a book format much of this content has been restored to the main body. Two additional chapters are included that did not appear in print previously, detailing relevant material from the Early Church, and consideration of presuppositions and methods.

This work does not purport to be an exhaustive analysis of New Covenant Theology; neither is it primarily a defence of Reformed theology. An enterprise to do justice to either of those aims would result in a work longer and more systematic than the present. What the Reformed faith teaches is clearly set out in its confessions of faith and catechisms, as well as in works of systematic theology. In the Reformed church generally, office bearers are required to subscribe a confession of faith, and there is therefore a presumption that a Reformed presbyter will be teaching a body of divinity that is publicly known and stated. His doctrine may be considered Reformed only insofar as it accords with Reformed standards, and not otherwise. The situation is entirely different with New Covenant Theology: there are no widely accepted confessions or catechisms of this movement, nor are there works anything like approaching a systematic theology, nor are there any common subscriptions; indeed, there is significant resistance to all of these. Consider, for example, the following remarks by leading proponents of New Covenant Theology:

Someone sent an email requesting the ‘Five Points’ or ‘Eight Doctrines’ of New Covenant Theology (hereinafter NCT). I have neither. ... NCT does not have a completely developed theology. ... Actually, we are not sure we even want such a thing! In some cases we know more about what we don’t believe than about what we do believe.¹

If any of us should be silly enough to try to capture new-covenant theology in some definitive, final statement ... then we would be working directly against the very spirit of new-covenant theology. ... To turn new-covenant theology into a system would be a contradiction in terms.²

[C]ovenant theologians complain that since there is no definitive new-covenant theology Confession, they cannot really engage in any serious debate with those of us who stand for that theology. ... Well, if this is how things stand ... then they will have a long wait if they want to debate with me. I won’t be signing such a Confession any time soon. ... You see, I am unable to reach an absolute, definitive, final, unchangeable statement on what I understand the Bible to teach about the new covenant.³

In evaluating New Covenant Theology (NCT), therefore, we have no alternative to citing the writings of the movement’s leading published proponents as representatives of NCT, and this in

1 John G. Reisinger, *What is New Covenant Theology?* <http://gospelpedlar.com/articles/Bible/n_c_theology/nct_1.html>

2 D. Gay, *Redemption History through Covenants* (2016), p12.

3 D. Gay, *‘No Confession? Nothing to Debate!’* (2016). These comments suggest one of two things: either that Scripture is not complete, so additional truth has to be drawn from outside of it whenever it becomes available; or the tenets of NCT are not ‘necessary truths’ that can be deduced from the propositions of Scripture, but rather bold suggestions based on an inductive approach. Or both. We shall see in Chapter 2 that these statements align closely with the new hermeneutic of liberal Protestantism and of Roman Catholicism since Vatican II.

itself requires some judicious selection. We would prefer a more impersonal, collective and church-based approach, but this proves impossible as there is no widely adopted confessional position.

Continually citing the writings of named individuals does not meet with universal approval and has drawn criticism, but as explained above, we have no alternative for setting forth the doctrines of NCT. The reader may be assured that only the published views of these authors are cited. In doing so there is no personal animus or invective associated therewith, and we expressly repudiate any suggestion or suspicion that anything in these pages does or is intended to reflect on the spiritual state of these authors. Their publicly promoted views, however, are another matter, and in a work such as this it is right and proper to expose, and where necessary deprecate them. This is particularly the case where certain NCT authors have variously attacked the Reformed faith as ‘dangerous’, ‘unbiblical’, ‘based on fear’, and the like, and are on record as misrepresenting what the Reformed faith actually teaches, suggesting that the Reformed widely profess beliefs that are plainly contrary to their confessions.

We have selected for more detailed treatment the writings of Steve Lehrer, Gary Long, John Reisinger, and David Gay, all leading NCT proponents respected within the NCT community, each with a substantial corpus of published material on NCT.

Steven Lehrer was editor of *The Journal of New Covenant Theology*, and is the author of the highly influential book *New Covenant Theology: Questions Answered*.

Gary D. Long is the President of Providence Theological Seminary, Colorado Springs, an institution teaching New Covenant Theology. He is author of *New Covenant Theology: Time for a More Accurate Way*.

John G. Reisinger has authored over two dozen works, including *Abraham’s Four Seeds; Continuity and Discontinuity; In Defense of Jesus, the New Lawgiver; New Covenant Theology and Prophecy*, and many others.

David H.J. Gay, who operates in the UK, has authored numerous books on New Covenant Theology, including *Christ is All: No Sanctification by the Law*; *The Glorious New-Covenant Ministry*; *Four 'Antinomians' Tried and Vindicated*; *Grace not Law!* and many others.

Other influential NCT authors mentioned along the way include Jon Zens (effectively the founder of the modern movement, and who coined its name), A. Blake White, Geoff Volker, Tom Wells, and Fred Zaspel.

Because there is no widely accepted confessional statement of New Covenant Theology it is impossible to engage adequately with all its doctrines. Some of the aforementioned authors have produced short documents reducing NCT to its 'essential' points, but we find that these disagree not merely on what is essential, but in holding contradictory and mutually exclusive positions. In analysing NCT, we have spent little time playing one proponent off against another to show that they cannot agree among themselves, for such an approach is of more value to rhetoric than helpful analysis, and it merely demonstrates that some, though not necessarily all, must be wrong on particular points. Instead, we have focused on the unreasonableness of NCT and the fallacious nature of its attacks on Reformed theology: if the doctrines of NCT are unreasonable and illogical then there are no satisfactory grounds to believe they are true; and if NCT's attacks upon Reformed theology are misinformed or fallacious then there are no grounds to believe they have any substance or weight. It is not strictly necessary, then, to delve exhaustively into the theology of NCT, and write volumes of deep exposition to demonstrate that it is false: a theology that relies on the unreasonable, the paradoxical, and the fallacious is not a theology worth owning.

The Reformed faith teaches that the truth about God and man comes through revelation in God's Word—it is revealed religion, not one derived from reason. Nevertheless, it is reasonable, and not contrary to reason. There yet remain mysteries that God has

chosen not to reveal. But of what he has revealed in Scripture, the Reformed profess what is plainly taught therein, *and* what can be deduced from biblical propositions by good and necessary consequence. Surprisingly, it is on this fundamental principle that there is a parting of the ways: NCT chooses to proceed down a different track, and it is little wonder, therefore, that the NCT train speeds to a very different destination. Again, there may be little value in reporting, describing, and expressing concern at all the NCT stopping points along the way as these merely confirm the impression that the journey is likely to end very badly; and as its train ploughs on through the clearest of red warning signals, the likelihood of a wreck becomes all but inevitable. But it is at the point of departure, with NCT's idiosyncratic presuppositions and hermeneutic, that the direction of travel is determined, and it is from there that its errors flow. As is described in the text, leading proponents of NCT affirm principles of interpretation that must appal the Reformed reader, and are critical of the use of deduction by good and necessary consequence that is essential to a Reformed understanding: the principle of logical deduction from Scriptural premises is by many not consistently affirmed, and at times denied. For example, commenting on the Reformed belief that the essence of law *directly based* upon the immutable character and will of God must itself be essentially immutable, Steve Lehrer fully agrees that the Reformed view is validly deduced from Scriptural premises, yet he denies the conclusion nevertheless:

I want to say from the outset that it is a logical question. The premises and the conclusion that is drawn from them are logical. ... [But] no matter how logical an argument ... although the reasoning is logical, I don't think that it is biblical.

Thus what is 'biblical' according to NCT necessarily entails a degree of illogical argument, and can stand in direct opposition to what may be validly deduced from biblical premises. But this is to

give ear to the father of lies. What may be validly deduced is strictly determined by the laws of logic and does not add to the truths contained in Scripture, whereas the universe of illogical conclusions is unbounded. Ultimately, what NCT considers ‘biblical’ turns out to be what bolsters its presuppositions—or to state it as Lehrer does, truth is what NCT says it is, which, in the absence of a common confession, presumably means it is what *he* says it is.

Chapter 1 briefly considers the background of NCT since its modern resurgence in 1970s out of sixteenth century Anabaptist ideas, and considers some of its teachings, particularly on covenants, from the writings of Steve Lehrer. It concludes with examples of how poorly NCT grapples with quotations from the Decalogue in the New Testament.

Chapter 2 considers the matter of presuppositions, and demonstrates that at this very starting point NCT relies on a self-referential fallacy. It examines NCT’s disdain for deduction, yet its embrace of the inductive method, which cannot produce valid conclusions. The dangers of overthrowing the Reformed hermeneutic and adopting NCT’s methodology are outlined.

Chapter 3 investigates David Gay, who, to judge by his writings, sermons, and conference papers, is the most active propagator of NCT teachings in the UK. It examines NCT’s identification of the Decalogue as the very essence of a ‘covenant of death’, and demonstrates NCT’s distorted view of historical theology, particularly of the Reformers.

Chapter 4 examines orthodox writings of the Apostolic and Church Fathers from the first to the fifth century, as well as instructions for catechumens over that same period. It is shown that throughout the period the Decalogue was considered still binding upon Christians as a rule of life, that the ceremonial and civil precepts of the Mosaic law are separable from the moral law and not binding, and that the church in the Old and New Testament are one and the same; all of which doctrines continue to be affirmed by Reformed theology, but all of which are denied by NCT.

Chapter 5 explains how, contrary to NCT's assertions, there is a 'moral law', and explains how it differs from positive law, and how Scripture differentiates between them. It shows how NCT's premises on the law are derived from Jewish perversions of the purpose of law introduced to oppose Christianity. The final section in the chapter, in which the writings and methods of Steve Lehrer and Gary Long are principally examined, shows how NCT engages in fallacies to overthrow the concept of the law of God, and how it embraces irrational methods to formulate its doctrines and to counter Reformed teaching.

Chapter 6 examines John Reisinger's proof of a replacement lawgiver, and proves that the Reformed faith 'is without a foundation in its view of law and grace', demonstrating that his proofs cannot succeed either logically or exegetically. We consider NCT's claims for a proposed replacement lawgiver's replacement law, and the claim that God's law is never to be preached, showing that this contradicts apostolic practice.

Chapter 7 considers the most damaging effects of NCT, principally examining the writings of David Gay. In its effort to counter Reformed teaching it misrepresents the Reformed confessional position and practice both on sanctification itself, and the use of the law in sanctification. NCT doctrine is shown to have an impious view of sanctification that undermines assurance, and which is properly described as classical antinomianism.

Chapter 8 demonstrates how NCT undermines the doctrine of justification and seriously undermines the gospel as a consequence of its deficient view of God's law. NCT is shown to have essentially the same misunderstanding of law as Judaizers and Pelagian moralists, viewing God's law as a covenant of works. By its own definition of what is of the essence of law, it is shown that NCT's replacement law brings believers under a yoke of bondage.

I am grateful for the opportunity and the enabling under God to undertake this enterprise. It is my hope and prayer that it may

shine a light on the dangers of New Covenant Theology, and encourage readers to hold to the biblical basis of the Reformed faith.

Kevin McGrane,
Bury St Edmunds, August 2017.

INDEX

A

Abraham 3, 10, 12, 13, 17, 18, 19, 21,
23, 79, 89, 90, 100, 108, 119, 219
Abrahamic covenant 17, 81
Adultery 98, 101, 103, 106, 107, 108,
110, 137, 141, 145, 146, 147, 148,
149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155,
198
Agricola, Johannes 193
Anabaptism 11, 12, 225
Anabaptists 9, 12, 20, 25, 27, 79, 80,
81, 82, 84, 88, 123, 214
Antinomi 193
Antinomianism iii, 63, 64, 173, 174,
178, 192, 193, 195, 196, 224, 225,
233
Antinomians 4, 63, 157, 190, 193,
194, 195, 196, 197, 224, 233
Apostolic Constitutions 109
Aristides of Athens 100
Aristotle 45, 46
Augustine of Hippo 46, 78, 82, 110,
111, 188

B

Baptist Confession 1689 64
Barnabas, Epistle of 97
Bavinck, Herman 12, 41, 84, 86
Baxter, Richard 188
Bruce, Frederick F. 10, 167
Bullinger, Heinrich 82, 89, 111
Burwash, Nathaniel 56, 57, 60
Byfield, Richard 194

C

Calvin, John 25, 27, 64, 65, 80, 81,
84, 88, 89, 90, 123, 144, 156, 175,
176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 186, 204,
209, 214, 229
Carson, Donald A. 10, 11, 15, 52,
168, 171
Chrysostom, John 120, 205
Church Fathers 6, 73, 83, 84, 85, 86,
93, 119, 120, 126, 130
Circumcision 9, 21, 22, 23, 24, 101
Clemens Romanus 93
Clement of Alexandria 85, 105
Clement of Rome. *See* Clemens Ro-
manus
Cocceius, Johannes 41, 86, 87, 88
Conquest of Canaan 17, 18
covenant of death 6, 21, 23, 24, 26,
72, 73, 96
covenant of grace 9, 10, 11, 12, 13,
19, 24, 27, 28, 38, 43, 64, 77, 78, 79,
82, 84, 85, 87, 89, 96, 106, 179, 207,
208, 209, 218, 219, 221, 222, 225
covenant of works 7, 11, 13, 16, 23,
27, 28, 33, 43, 72, 73, 75, 77, 78,
90, 96, 159, 173, 180, 181, 185, 190,
203, 207, 208, 209, 210, 213, 218,
219, 220, 221, 222, 225, 228
Crisp, Tobias 195

D

Dabney, Robert L. 14, 16, 30, 64, 75,
114, 182, 183, 195, 222, 223

Decalogue 2, iii, 6, 15, 24, 27, 30, 31,
34, 66, 71, 93, 95, 97, 98, 99, 101,
102, 103, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109,
110, 111, 116, 117, 119, 121, 122,
123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129,
130, 137, 141, 145, 147, 149, 151,
152, 154, 159, 160, 162, 165, 167,
169, 188, 197

deduction 5, 6, 42, 43, 46, 47, 48, 52,
53, 54, 55, 56, 60, 134, 136, 140,
142, 200, 203

Didache, The 98, 99, 197, 198

Didascalia Apostolorum 108

Dispensationalism 9, 13, 24, 29

divorce 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152,
153

Dulles, Avery 144

E

Early Church iii, 1, 39, 84, 85, 93, 95,
97, 99, 101, 103, 105, 107, 109, 111,
172, 197, 231

Eaton, John 190, 191, 195

Ellul, Jacques 45, 60, 61

Enlightenment 56

F

Finney, Charles G. 214, 215, 217, 225,
226, 228

First Clement 94

G

Galatian heresy 207

Gay, David H.J. 2, 4, 233

*Christ is All: No Sanctification by
the Law* 4, 16, 63, 157, 161, 173,
199, 201, 233

*Four 'Antinomians' Tried and
Vindicated* 4, 157, 194, 233

Grace not Law! 4, 177, 193

*The Glorious New-Covenant Min-
istry* 4, 32, 64, 65, 70, 71, 79,
113, 163, 165, 166, 194, 195,
200, 216, 217, 224, 233

Gnosticism 136

Guilt

actual 221, 222, 223, 224

potential 222

H

Hadrian, Emperor 100, 126

Heidelberg Catechism 78, 174, 175,
194, 211, 231

Hillel 149, 153, 154

Hodge, Archibald A. 190

Hodge, Charles 11, 12, 20, 51, 80,
137, 183

I

Ignatius of Antioch 99

induction 48, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55

Inductive Bible Study 50, 57

Irenaeus 2, 103, 104, 111, 119

Islam 144

Israel 12, 13, 16, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24,
29, 72, 82, 87, 95, 97, 110, 116, 125,
127, 129, 144

Israelites 11, 13, 17, 18, 23, 24, 25, 26,
27, 33, 105, 115, 116, 117, 118, 120,
127, 129

J

Jews 12, 14, 16, 25, 32, 33, 71, 72, 75, 78, 101, 103, 104, 107, 108, 120, 121, 122, 124, 125, 169, 170
 Judaism 14, 15, 16, 84, 99, 121, 122, 124, 129, 205
 Judaizers 7, 66, 99, 206, 207, 208, 219
 Justin Martyr 102, 119

K

Kevan, Ernest 179, 186

L

lawgiver 7, 12, 132, 143, 144, 145, 170, 188
 Lehrer, Steve 3, 5, 6, 7, 10, 16, 31, 48, 136, 151, 162
New Covenant Theology: Questions Answered 3, 13, 16, 70, 134, 145, 151, 233
The Journal of New Covenant Theology 3, 16
 Long, Gary D. 3, 7, 11, 137, 140, 158, 166
New Covenant Theology: Time for a More Accurate Way 3, 96
 Luther, Martin 144, 193

M

Marcion of Sinope 9, 10, 91, 104, 160
 Marcus Antonius Felix 171
 Marcus Tullius Cicero 130, 131
 M'Cheyne, Robert Murray 65, 224
 Moo, Douglas 10, 11, 15
 moralism 197, 225
 moral law 6, 7, 11, 27, 30, 33, 64, 65, 66, 71, 72, 77, 91, 93, 97, 99, 102, 103, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 119, 120, 122, 123, 124, 131, 132,

133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 143, 160, 162, 164, 165, 168, 169, 170, 172, 173, 174, 175, 181, 182, 183, 185, 186, 188, 189, 190, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 199, 201, 202, 203, 207, 208, 209, 210, 213, 214, 218, 219, 229, 230

Muller, Richard 88

Murray, John 65, 68, 69, 118, 188, 224

N

Neonomianism 224
 Neonomians 188
 New Perspective on Paul 14, 16, 204
 Nicole, Roger 53

O

Oecolampadius, Johannes 83, 84, 89
 Open Theism 136

P

patriarchs 13, 17, 18, 19, 20, 82, 112
 Pelagians 111
 Perfectionism 224, 225, 226
 Pharisees 34, 75, 121, 124, 149, 153, 219
 Philo of Alexandria 121, 122
 polygamy 154, 155, 156
 polygyny 154, 155
 positive law 7, 113, 114, 115, 116, 119, 122, 123, 130, 135, 139, 141
 presuppositions 1, 5, 6, 15, 29, 31, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 43, 44, 48, 56, 69, 71, 73, 136, 137, 140, 142, 161, 162, 230
 Process Theology 136
 Puritans 45, 46, 64, 86, 179, 186, 212, 231

R

Rabbis 66, 121, 124, 125, 126, 128
 Reisinger, John G. 3, 7, 10, 137, 143, 145, 158
 Continuity and Discontinuity 3
 In Defense of Jesus, the New Law-giver 3, 143, 234
 New Covenant Theology and Prophecy 3
 New Covenant Theology: Time for a More Accurate Way 3
 Remonstrants 187
 Reymond, Robert 54
 Riggs, John 81, 84
 Roberts, Francis 180, 194
 Roman Catholic 58, 60
 Roman Catholicism 2, 58
 Romanism. *See* Roman Catholicism
 Rome, Church of 65, 144, 231

S

Sabbath 87, 110, 113
 Sanders, Ed P. 14, 15
 Schreiner, Tom 10
 Second Temple 15, 71, 78, 124
 Sedgwick, Obadiah 28
 Servetus, Michael 9, 20, 25, 26, 27, 91, 123, 124, 214, 215, 217
 Shammai 153
 Shorter Catechism, Westminster 114, 118, 140, 173
 Socinianism 12
 Socinians. *See* Socinianism
 Socinus, Faustus 9, 91
 Synod of Dort 86, 188

T

Tacitus, Publius Cornelius 171
 Ten Commandments. *See* Decalogue
 Tertullian 107, 111

U

Ursinus, Zacharias 78, 174, 175, 194

V

Voetius, Gisbertus 41, 86
 Volker, Geoff 4, 10, 23, 72, 234

W

Warfield, Benjamin B. 44, 45
 Westminster Assembly 44, 64
 Westminster Confession 11, 27, 32, 33, 37, 39, 40, 45, 49, 59, 60, 64, 79, 85, 113, 138, 174, 175, 181, 184, 185, 192, 201, 206, 208, 212, 215, 218, 222, 230, 231
 White, A. Blake 4, 11, 37, 39, 234
 Woolsey, Andrew 9, 82, 83, 84, 85, 88, 89, 178, 179

Z

Zaspel, Fred 4, 10, 11, 43, 158, 234
 Zens, Jon 4, 9, 11, 17, 38, 41, 44, 63, 70, 152, 162, 167, 234
 Zwingli, Ulrich 80, 81, 82, 83, 89

FROM THE FOREWORD

New Covenant Theology denies the unity of the Bible, erroneously asserting radical discontinuity between the Old Testament and the New. It perverts covenant theology, reducing God's promises to Abraham to promises of material blessing only. It misrepresents God's covenant with Israel under Moses as being a covenant of works and devoid of grace. It denies that Israel was truly God's church, reducing it to a mere foreshadowing of the church of Christ. New Covenant Theology rejects the distinction between moral, ceremonial, and civil law, and teaches that the Ten Commandments are abolished under the new covenant. Torturing the text of the New Testament, it undermines the preaching of the gospel, and sanctification. It spurns the creeds and Reformed confessions of faith.

The title of the present work, *New Covenant Theology Weighed and Found Wanting*, sums up its contents accurately. The serious Christian reader, who desires a safe path through the minefield of error that is New Covenant Theology, will surely welcome this book and receive much benefit from it.

Rev. Dr Peter Naylor

Immanuel Presbyterian Church, Cardiff

THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE TRUST

1 Chaplins, Frinton-on-Sea,
Essex, CO13 0RU
www.gospelmagazine.org.uk

