

NEW COVENANT ^a CHURCH, 12 pgs

a. Covenant refers to a formal description of the relationship between God and his people. The OT and the NT form the contexts for their respective covenants, that is, the testaments relate the historical setting of each covenant. They are the surrounding body of literature (canons) within which the covenants are embedded. [see New Covenant Theology & Baptist Distinctives]

A Reborn People

... the LORD declares, I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors ... This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time, I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people ... **they will all know me** ... For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more, **Jer.31:31-34** [The NC would succeed the OC].

... I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols [signifying a spiritual purification and renewal]. **I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you** [representing a profound inner cleansing by God foreshadowing blessings of the New Covenant]; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And **I will put my Spirit in you** and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws [a complete transformation]. Then ... you will be my people, and I will be your God, **Ez.36:24-28**.

The New Covenant

... the new covenant of which Jesus is mediator is superior to the old one, since **the new covenant is established on better promises** ... But God found fault with the people [**Jer.31:31-34**] and said ... By calling this covenant “new,” he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear, **Heb.8:6-13**.

God ... made us competent to be servants of a **new covenant** not based on [attempting to keep] the letter [of the law] but on [living by] the Spirit ... how much more glorious will the ministry of the Spirit ... that produces righteousness [that replaced the law] excel [abound] in glory! ... Therefore, since we have such a hope, we behave with great boldness [proclaiming the gospel]. But the minds of the sons of Israel were closed [hardened]. For to this very day, the same veil remains when they hear the old covenant read because only in Christ is it taken away [eliminated]. But until this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds [lit, hearts], but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed [**Ex.34:34**], **2 Cor.3:6-16**

the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven ... in the true message of the gospel ... **the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world**—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace ... For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins ... For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Christ, and through him to reconcile to himself all things ... by making peace

through his blood, shed on the cross, **Col.1:5-20** .

¹² ... Christ entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood , thus obtaining eternal redemption ... ¹⁴ How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! ¹⁵ **For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant** , that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant ... ¹⁹ Moses ... took the blood of calves ... and sprinkled ... all the people. ²⁰ He said, This is the blood of the covenant ... ²⁶ **Christ has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself** ... ²⁸ he was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many ... **Heb.9:**

⁵ Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me [**Ps.40:6-8**] ... ⁹ ... He sets aside the first covenant to establish the second . ¹⁰ we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all ... ¹⁴ **For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.** ¹⁵ The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this ... he says: ¹⁶ This is the covenant I will make with them after that time [**Jer.31:16-17**] ... ¹⁸ And where [their sins and lawless acts] have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary. ¹⁹ Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body ... **Heb.10:**

The Lord's Supper

¹⁴ When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. ¹⁵ And he said I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover [meal] with you **before I suffer** . ¹⁷ After taking the cup [of wine] , he gave thanks and said, Take this and divide it among you. ¹⁸ For ... I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine **until the kingdom of God comes.** ¹⁹ Then [Jesus] took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, This represents my body, which is given for you . Do this in remembrance of me. ²⁰ And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, **This cup that is poured out for you represents the new covenant in my blood** (Lk.22:). [in contrast to the old or former covenant with Israel in the blood of animals, Mt.26:26-29; Mk.14:22-25]

THE CONFUSION

Many Christian churches include a statement like *We believe all Scripture is authoritative in matters of faith and practice* as part of their doctrinal beliefs. Ours does also except where others usually use the word “practice” we use the stronger word obedience. This statement by itself is not as clear as it first appears. Our **Biblical Distinctives** document doesn't help by saying *We believe the Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience ...* ^b Just to avoid any misunderstanding we carefully elaborate in **Basic Bible Truths** that all 39 books of the Old Testament (OT) and the 27 books of the New Testament (NT) are the written Word of God. Therefore they alone carry the authority of God and are the only certain, infallible, and sufficient rule in all matters of faith, saving knowledge, obedience, counseling, and life. **Such**

statements as these exhibit a basic misunderstanding of Scripture.

What in the OT do we as Christians “obey” or “practice”? Wisdom from Proverbs? Maybe. Are proverbs commands or applicable to the NC church? There are plenty examples where they contradict NC church experience, ie. *When a man's ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him (Prov.16:7).* This may not be the case with the persecuted church of our day [see GT#2, p.4] - it wasn't so with the apostles and early disciples many of whom were murdered for following Jesus. **The arrival of the Christ makes all the difference.**

Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you, 1 Jn.3:13.

If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: A servant is not greater than his master. [Since] they persecuted me, they will persecute you also, Jn.15:18-20.

How about the 10 commandments? *Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy ... On it you shall not do any work, neither you nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates (Ex.20:8-10).* **NO!** Working on the Sabbath [the sign of the covenant between Israel and God] was forbidden in the strongest terms (Isa.56:2) and people have been penalized by stoning to death [Num.15:32-36; See **CHRIST OUR SABBATH – The Year of the Lord's Favor**].

Some Reformed theologians refer to the decalogue (10 commandments) as the eternal law of God. But that's not what the Bible says. **The decalogue is a summary or perhaps the core of the OC** that was given to stipulate the relationship between God and another people in another time. It was temporary, intended to give way to fulfillment with the coming of Christ (**Acts 13:38-39; 2 Cor. 3:14-15; Heb.8:13**).

¹⁷Therefore, **if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:** *The old has gone, the new is here!*

¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of **reconciliation**: ¹⁹that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, *not counting people's sins against them.* **2 Cor.5:**

b. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for **teaching**, for **reproof**, for **correction**, and for **training in righteousness (2 Tim.3:16)**. This passage is quoted in a footnote in support of our statement of belief. Notice that **it doesn't mention the concept of obedience**.

MUDDLING THROUGH THE MURKY WATERS

THE NEW TESTAMENT ^a—THE LAW OF CHRISTIANITY From **Baptists and Their Doctrines chap.1, Distinctive Baptist Principles** by B.H. Carroll, edited (1913) [c.f. New Covenant Theology & Baptists Distinctives]

The first and basic premise of NCT is that the NT Scriptures are the documents upon which the life and worship of the Church is built. All the New Testament contains the Law of Christianity. The New Covenant is all the Law of Christianity. This does not deny the inspiration or profit of the Old

Testament or Covenant, nor that the New is a development of the Old. It affirms however that **the Old Covenant, as a typical, educational, and transitory system, was fulfilled by Christ**, and as a standard of law and way of life was nailed to the cross of Christ and so taken out of the way. The principle teaches that **we should not go to the Old Testament to find Christian law or institutions**. **Not there do we find the true idea of the Christian church, or its members**, its ordinances, government, officers, sacrifices, worship, mission, ritual, or its priesthood. **The overwhelming majority of Christendom**, whether Greek, Romanist or Protestant, **borrow from the Old Testament much of their doctrine of the church**, including its members, officers, ritual ordinances, government, liturgy, and mission. When Baptists say that the New Covenant is the only law for Christian institutions they part company with most of the Protestant world as well as from the Greeks and Romanists. [see What is New Covenant Theology?] ...

I have a book entitled **ALL OLD TESTAMENT LAWS CANCELED: 24 reasons why all OT laws are canceled & all NT laws are for our obedience** by Greg Gibson (2009) 142pp. Unfortunately this book, though it is very worthwhile, starts with the same error noted above and continues it throughout. Jn. Reisinger ^c correctly notes in the preface ... *the author does not make a sharp enough distinction between the OC and the OT. I would title the book **All Old Covenant Laws Canceled***. The OT and the NT form the contexts for their respective covenants, that is, the testaments relate the historical setting of each covenant. **They are the surrounding body of literature (canons) within which the covenants are embedded**. My church, Grace Fellowship is a baptistic NC church ^d categorized as Christocentric, known as **promise-fulfilled or New Covenant Theology**. Our doctrine is based on the finished work of Christ. This governs our understanding of Scripture and practice of our faith because we are Christians under the NC, not Israelites under the Old or Former Covenant [or Gentiles without a covenant. see Beginning At Moses, **p.262-268** for a complete argument on the incompatibility of Law and Gospel.]

c. I recommend 3 of John's books as pertinent to this subject: **Abraham's Four Seeds: a biblical examination of the presuppositions of covenant theology and dispensationalism** (1998) 144p; **Tablets of Stone: & the history of redemption** (new edition, 2004) 146p; **But I Say Unto You** (2006) 172p.

d. I recommend **New Covenant Theology** (2002) by Tom Wells & Fred Zaspel 294p to get a good look at NCT. There are several more recent books on the subject that I have not yet read. GR

NCT is the opposite of Theonomy (late 20th century) - a form of government in which society is ruled by divine law, particularly the judicial laws of the Old Testament. It rests upon the presumption that the Old Covenant judicial laws given to Israel have not been abrogated, and therefore all civil governments are morally obligated to enforce them (including the specific penalties); that all civil governments must refrain from coercion if Scripture has not prescribed their intervention.

UNTANGLING THE MESS

The mixing of the covenants is one of the main reasons there are so many different denominations, discrepancies, and errors within Christianity. Different theological systems naturally give rise

to different interpretations of Scripture and doctrines. Christ and the apostles make it crystal clear that the coming, death, resurrection, and return of Jesus was the entire focus of the OT teachings, laws, and covenants.^e Once he had been crucified and raised from the dead the prophecies in the OT and OC were mostly fulfilled [leaving only the 2nd coming and end of the age prophecies yet to be fulfilled]. When Jesus inaugurated the NC with his death ["blood" is used as a metaphor for "death" and connects it to the OT animal sacrifices], the OC began to fade and was succeeded by the NC fulfillment. Christians live between the times - in the present evil age as the new age invades history.

The New Era

In a little while you will not see me; again after a little while, you will see me ... you will weep and wail ... you will be sad [Jesus is referring to his crucifixion], but your sadness will turn into joy [at his subsequent resurrection] ... you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you [because Jesus will always be with us, Mt.28:20], Jn.16:19-22.

The Pharisees and their experts in the law said to Jesus, John's disciples and those of the Pharisees frequently fast [fasting accompanies mourning] and pray, but yours continue to eat and drink. So Jesus said to them, *You cannot make the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them [this calls for celebration, the occasion dictates the mood]. But those days are coming, and when the bridegroom is taken from them, at that time they will fast. He also told them a parable: No one tears a patch from a new garment [representing the NC] and sews it on an old garment [the OC]. If he does, he will have torn the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins and will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed [the new covenant is incompatible with the old].^f Instead new wine must be poured into new wineskins. No one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, The old is good enough, Lk.5:33-38; Mt.9:14-17; Mk.2:18-22.*

¹⁸*You have not come to a [physical] mountain that can be touched [like the Hebrews did - contrast between the two ages] and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm [like Moses did when he received the law, Ex.19:9-24] ... ²²But you have come to Mount Zion [metaphor for heaven], to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem ... to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, ²³to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, ²⁴to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant and to the sprinkled blood [with which comes "mercy"], that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel [which cried for vengeance], Heb.12:*

[historian George Fisher, Reformation publication p.223-224] ... what an incalculable amount of evil has been wrought by Catholics and Protestants, from a mistaken belief in the perpetual validity of the Mosaic civil legislation, and from a confounding of the spirit of the old dispensation with that of the new.

Spiritualist Sebastian Franck (1499-1543) bringing a charge against both the church fathers and their descendants [Catholics and Reformers] wrote: *They mix the NT with the Old, as also today their descendants do. And when they have nothing with which to defend their purposes, they run at*

once to the empty quiver [OT] and from it prove [the legitimacy of] war, oath, government, power of magistracy, tithes, priesthood; and praise everything ascribing this all forcibly to Christ without his will.⁹

There is always confusion where OT laws, rituals, and requirements are incorporated into the NT like: priestcraft – apostolic succession; hierarchy of priests; priestly garments, and ceremonies; keeping of the Sabbath; tithing; and circumcision. There are derivative doctrines and practices like infant baptism^h that emerge from those same OT roots as well as many other things that don't have anything to do with the NT. Among these are Catholic doctrines such as absolution; indulgences; immaculate conception; prayers to Mary and other saints; and penance. There are other non-biblical practices as well like isolation; vows of silence; self-flagellation; lent; indulgences; the list goes on [see Church Practices].

The Anabaptist, Pilgrim Marpeck, (?-1556) along with other Anabaptists **held to the Bible as the Word of God, but made the New Testament alone normative for the Christian life**: *Marpeck's interpretation of the Bible ... was Chistocentric.ⁱ Revelation was viewed as progressive and partial before Christ. Only in Christ is the revelation of God complete. Thus, the NT alone became the rule of faith and practice for the Anabaptists. Marpeck saw all sorts of dire consequences for Christendom in the failure to interpret the OT properly. The Munsterites as well as Calvin were to be blamed in this regard. They had mistaken [confused] the foundation of the house [OC] for the house itself [NC]. They had based their theocracies on a revelation which was only preparatory and never intended to be final.ⁱ*

e. Christianity has split into 3 main theological systems or frameworks: **Covenant Theology** as a fully systematized structure began to form during the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century and was formalized reaching its peak in the 17th. It is primarily embraced by the Reformed tradition, including Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Reformed Baptists; **Dispensationalism (DT)** began as a formalized theological system during the 1830s – 40s. It is popular in many Evangelical, Pentecostal, and Charismatic churches, especially within Baptist (like some Southern Baptists), non-denominational Bible churches, the Assemblies of God, Christian and Missionary Alliance, and Plymouth Brethren, etc. **Both these systems are hopelessly flawed** [RPCD – Chapters; RPCD – Appendices; AFS Theological Notes]

Progressive Covenantalism is a futile attempt to bridge the divide between CT and DT. Happily there is **New Covenant Theology** [aka Promised Fulfilled Theology] which correctly **focuses on the radical newness of the New Covenant age**. It emerged as a distinct system in the late 1970s [Abraham's Four Seeds; New Covenant Theology & Baptist Distinctives]. There are only a hand-full of them around, which shows just how far sound scriptural understanding has been degraded. Many like my church do not include the name NCT or description in church documents, which makes no sense.

The basic tenets of NCT are: (1) One Plan of God centered in Jesus Christ [see Christ the Cornerstone]; (2) The Old Testament should be Interpreted in Light of the New Testament [see Our

Rosetta Stone]; (3) The Old Covenant was temporary by divine design; (4) There is no tripartite [moral; civil; ceremonial] division of the Law; (5) We are not under the Law of Moses, but under the Law of Christ; (6) All in the New Covenant community have the Holy Spirit. Copied from <https://crosstocrown.org/about/what-is-new-covenant-theology/> I would add (7) Individual soul liberty, the **second point** under Distinctive Baptist Principles in my essay **NCT & Baptist Distinctives**. And Freedom of Conscience, the **third point**; (8) Salvation is Essential to Baptism and Church Membership, **point four**; and I would structure the church according to the seven numbered points under the **fifth**, The Doctrine of the Church.

f. This is not to say that the OT has nothing worthwhile besides Jewish history that supplies a context for the law and the prophets. On the contrary, knowing God involves seeking him and his wisdom through his words and actions. It means learning about his ways and thoughts, **Isa.55:8-11**. Knowledge of the Lord is dispersed throughout all the Scriptures, in creation, and in life ... *every expert in the [OT] law who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven [NT fulfillment] is like the owner of a house who brings out of his treasure [of knowledge] what is new and old [the old interpreted by the new, see Our Rosetta Stone], Mt.13:52.*

g. NCT p.27-28

h. What do Jesus and the apostles proclaim as necessary for salvation? **Repentance and belief** in Jesus the risen savior - opposite sides of the same coin, turning from sin to God.

i. NCT p.28-29

SPECIFIC TEACHING NEEDED

This is no minor issue. It needs to be clarified and emphasized before membership so that we're all on the same page. The covenant under which a person lives defines and establishes that person's rule of life. With that in mind, let us correct our doctrinal statement. **As Christians, we believe all Scripture is historically accurate incorporating and illustrating many important principles, but only New Covenant teachings are authoritative for actual practice.** The history of how the early church acted on their beliefs is not necessarily prescriptive [ie, the pooling of resources in Acts 2:44-45] as a directive or model for us to follow either. Neither are various confessions and statements of faith and doctrine, catechisms, or other position documents Christians have generated through the years to be considered infallible. **A lot of Christians are confused here** which only highlights the need to deal with the issue up front for the sake of unity,^k after people turn to Christ, but before they become members of our church. By first establishing a solid base of NCT for how to approach and understand the Bible, we can begin with a unified community to build upon rather than a conflicting and diverse mixture of theological viewpoints to straighten out afterwards. It is best to expose errant views by laying out our Scriptural position **prior to membership** so candidates can see what we are about and why before they decide to apply for membership status and we decide to admit them.

... walk worthily of the calling with which you were called, with all humble mindedness and gentleness, with patience bearing with one another in love, being diligent to keep^l the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace ... Eph.4:1-3

may the God of endurance and comfort give you **unity** with one another in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **Rom.15:5-6**.

j. Tablets of Stone, p.14

k. unity in diversity; not uniformity

l. There are 11 Greek words in the NT translated “keep.” This one as used here means maintain, pre-serve, protect, guard, watch over.

The value of Creedal Formulations

*The church will be stabilized so that it will not be rocked by every new and devious teaching (Eph. 4:14) ... The unity demanded is rooted in truth and is jeopardized by deviant teaching. **Unity will be realized only if the church is faithful to the truth of the Gospel and avoids teachings contrary to it ...** (p.716) **New Testament Theology** (2008) by Thomas R. Schreiner.*

*from **A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith** by Samuel Waldron, 1989. **A confession of our loyalty to the Bible is not enough.** The most radical denials of biblical truth frequently coexist with a professed regard for the authority and testimony of the Bible. When men use the very words of the Bible to promote heresy, when the Word of truth is perverted to serve error, nothing less than a confession of faith will serve publicly to draw the lines between truth and error, p.12. An unwillingness to define with precision the faith that it professes to believe is a symptom that something is desperately wrong with a church and its leadership, p.21.*

***A confession is a useful means** for the public affirmation and defense of truth. The church is to hold fast the form of sound words (2 Tim.1:13), to contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to the saints (Jude 3), and to stand fast with one spirit, with one soul striving for the faith [content] of the Gospel (Phil.1:27). In the fulfillment of this task, a confession is a useful tool for distinguishing truth from error and for presenting in a small compass the central teachings of the Bible in their integrity and due proportions. [p.16-17]*

***A kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand, Mt.12:25.** [p.16]*

Figurative vs Literalistic Language

Figurative language refers to words or phrases that are meaningful, but not literally true. The **analogical faith** holds that ambiguous or complex passages should be understood in light of those passages that speak more clearly and plainly on the same subject. This approach assumes a fundamental unity and harmony in Scripture allowing for a consistent understanding of doctrine across the Bible.

Parabolic language uses simple, allegorical stories (parables) to teach complex moral, spiritual, or universal truths, often hiding deeper meanings within earthly narratives, like Jesus's parables of the Good Samaritan or the Prodigal Son, to reveal truth to the receptive while concealing it from the

indifferent. It's a symbolic form of speech, casting a relatable story alongside a profound concept for deeper understanding.

For instance **GT#2, p.1-2** reveals that the Communion Supper is a ceremonial (symbolic) observance. I translated the verb "is" as "represents" because that's its meaning as used for **the bread and wine of the passover meal**. Other passages on this subject such as **1 Cor.10:14-22** must integrate with that understanding. Christianity does not endorse magical rituals or mystical phenomena. In **Journey, p.3**, the parable of **The Sower**, the soils **represent** people who hear the Gospel [word]. To date the Christian church has continued to carry a certain amount of baggage that was never eliminated by the Reformation. Don't you think *it's about time we removed the remaining vestments of Rome from our [Christian] churches (p.iv, Abraham's Four Seeds)?*

Christianity does not apply to any one nation as did the OC. It is not Judaism. We do not worship God by bringing animals to be sacrificed because **such practices served as figures or types** meant to forecast Christ's sacrifice and were fulfilled in him [see **GT#2, p.2-3**]. Once you have been sensitized to the use of metaphorical language, you will see it everywhere in the Bible [**GT#5, note h**; NCT & Baptist Distinctives, **point IV p.7-9; point 7 p.12**; RPCD Contents & Chapters, **p.2, 3 & 10**; RPCD Appendices, **p.8 & 11**].

Guarding the Gates of a NC Church

Credal formulation is part of the public teaching task of the church; a helpful instrument in the public instruction of the congregation¹ to give our people a broad exposure to truth and instruction for their children; it serves as a framework within which our people can knowledgeably receive the preaching of the Word; as a hedge against novelty and error; a public definition to those outside our congregations of the central issues we hold in distinction from others; a public standard of fellowship and discipline to maintain peace and unity (**Eph.4:3; Rom.15:5-6; 1 Cor.1:10; Phil.1:27, 2:2**) in contrast to those who agree to differ [on critical doctrines]; a basis for ecclesiastical fellowship is a task that falls to the pastor and elders of each congregation.^m They are obliged to accept no one into membership who doesn't understand and believe central Gospel doctrines like promise-fulfilled theology, and cannot therefore function as a member of Christ's body here.ⁿ Children are no exception. In fact admitting them into membership without this makes no sense.

Membership differs from baptism [New Covenant Theology, **point 7, p.12**]. **Baptism by immersion and communion [common union]** are the two **ordinances** that memorialize the themes of our **unity with Christ and each other**, prescribed in the NT. The connotations carried by applying the term **sacraments** to these vary with different church traditions but **have the common but vague element of being a means of imparting some special grace to the participants**. With baptism, the only issue is whether a person has come to Christ. Membership is a more complex practical matter of organization because it includes an understanding of the doctrines that a given church regards as fundamental and distinctive, and an acknowledgment of agreement with them. The inclusion of tenets of NCT together with the other fundamental Baptist teachings in our doctrinal statement serve as **distinctives of our beliefs** to both separate us from those with a different hermeneutic and firm up the basis for our unity.

With membership, the unity of the church is at stake. People who disagree are not welcome to spread their conflicting doctrines from the inside. **Judaizers** [*unconverted Jews who had become part of the visible church*], *became Paul's bitter enemies in the Gospel, attempting to subvert his ministry and message at every opportunity. They contended that salvation depended on keeping all the laws of Judaism as well as believing Christ. For Gentiles to be saved, they required their conversion and adherence to Judaism as well as faith in Christ.*^o

The "Reformed" idea that we are bound by the Old Covenant "moral" laws might sound good in theory until you compare it to the NT. I understand that Paul used the OT and the Law as the source of some principles/wisdom. Do wise principles have the same authority as law? Bible Study Fellowship (BSF) publishes some very fine Bible study materials. The following quotes are from **page 310** of the 2022 copyrighted lesson entitled "**Kingdom Divided.**"

A fully new creation will remove the sting of death and suffering ... God will create a new heavens and earth – a place where their former ways will not be remembered ... Though the time of this fulfillment remains in the future, God promised a "new Jerusalem" in His coming kingdom ... Jesus came as a suffering Servant and reigns as eternity's King ... [Isaiah] sets our hope on God's glorious finale - His eternal kingdom. God's covenant promises await their ultimate and certain fulfillment.

Such passages refer to heaven itself and the 2nd and final coming of Christ, not that Jesus will return to reestablish the kingdom of Israel and reign on the earth for a thousand years [*which involves many things like the reconstruction of the Jerusalem temple and return to animal sacrifices, etc*]. The creators of the BSF study made the decision not to challenge this and other errant views outright, but to let the scripture speak for itself because they are trying to include people from many backgrounds and don't want to turn people off. Ok! They are not a church! **A church,**¹ as I have argued, **needs to clarify its controlling beliefs up front by calling attention to this and other such views as incorrect.** Teaching and preaching of the scriptural position, like all instruction, necessarily requires church leaders to address, explain, expose, and correct errors. Further, I think it is prudent to use categories [see appendix **GT#1, p.11**] to give people a "heads up" when approaching such subjects [*contrast what the text means and applies to with what it doesn't*] and to specifically call people to re-examine their own presuppositions for errors they may have embraced.

m. The importance of accuracy: It's important to take the Scriptures for what they say (as opposed to what they don't say). Our statement on marriage (**Art.12**), says God wonderfully creates each person. I hear that almost every week from Janet Parshall [*In The Marketplace*] who always quotes **Ps.139:13-16** in support of each person's individual creation. What Genesis Chapters 1, 2, & 4 actually say is that **God personally created and made one man and one woman to be the progenitors of the human race** – just as he did with every other kind of animal to propagate their respective "species" [*distinct kinds*]. That's the point. He incorporated in each kind the physical mechanisms to ingest food, digest it for nourishment, heal wounds, eliminate waste, grow and mature, etc., as well as the means for reproduction of its kind.

Adam named his wife Eve [living] because she would become the mother of all the living [human beings], **Gen.3:20**.

*This is the family history of Adam. When God created human beings, he made them in his own likeness ... on that day he blessed them and named them human beings ... Adam ... became the father of another son **in his likeness and image**, and named him Seth ... Adam ... had other sons and daughters ... Seth ... had a son named Enosh ... Seth ... had other sons and daughters ... etc., **Gen.5:1-7**, etc [see **Gen.4:1-2, 17-22, 25-26; chap.5**, etc]*

From Noah's 3 sons **came all the people** who were scattered over the earth, **Gen.8:18-19**.

Ps. 139 Fearfully and wonderfully made, doesn't conflict with, but compliments the Genesis account. Each "kind" exists only because God created it. Creation anticipates providence, providence suggests purpose, and purpose leads to an end goal (telos). All things continue to exist at his pleasure, **Col.1:15-17**.

*... to all who did receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. They were born, not of blood(s), or of the desire of the flesh, or of a husband's will, but born of God, **Jn.1:12-13**.* Physical life is contrasted with spiritual life. Would God create each person with original sin, a sin nature? NO!

There is no inference that God is detached from or uninvolved with his creation after he created them. Our ancestors didn't think that way ... *when Eve became pregnant and gave birth to Cain, she said, with the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man, **Gen.4:1, 25**.* Scripture contains many examples of God shutting the womb and opening it to serve his purposes.

Nor is there any reason to think that God didn't build into the genome of all living creatures the mechanism for variations within their respective kinds, and the ability to adapt to changing conditions. God ceased his creation work after each work period [day]. He made the stars on the 4th day and FINISHED. Stars cannot come into existence on their own but animals and people were made with the ability to reproduce built into their physiology.

n. Application of a principle of responsibility from the call of Ezekiel to the gatekeepers of Grace Fellowship:

Ez.3:17 Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the people of Israel; so ... give them warning from me ... ^{33:6} *if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people and the sword comes and takes someone's life, that person's life will be taken because of their sin, but **I will hold the watchman accountable for their blood**.*

Besides the biblical moral qualifications for **leadership in the church**, our chief concern ought to be recognition of the work of the Spirit in their lives. In addition, there must also be a certain level of competence in the Scriptures: *an overseer must be ... able [apt] to teach, **1 Tim.3:1-7; 2 Tim:2:22-25***; and apparent wisdom for **elders** since they are **decision makers**. Let us establish an ongoing training program for prospective leaders to mentor - to create from within the body of Grace a pool of Spirit-filled men from which to choose and rotate church elders.

Our experience leads to the conclusion that **we should not be so hasty to either baptize or**

admit to membership. There are some expectations that have always been assumed, but in today's world, *MEMBERS have a standing appointment Sunday mornings* needs to be stated. Attendance shouldn't something one has to decide every week. It should be a given! [see *Prophetic Untimeliness* by Os Guinness, **p.109-112**] A person who raised 2 girls in the church said, *Preparations for Sunday morning begin Saturday evening.*

We have admitted families into membership who had already embraced **Covenant theology** and were acclimatized to Episcopal type services. They were unhappy at Grace and eventually left and attend a Reformed Episcopal church. One of these was not an amicable separation and left behind unreconciled issues. These things need to be brought out and given time to allow people to see if they are **compatible**. The most recent family to leave influenced another related family and person they had small group with to leave as well.

I'm **not** suggesting that a highly detailed doctrinal statement be used for church membership. I have in my files 5 documents of various lengths produced by the elders of Grace Fellowship, on the subjects of what we believe and what membership in Grace Church involves. On our website <https://www.gracefwp.org/> under "about" there are three more such "abbreviated" documents. In addition we have a constitution (or church by-laws) document. **I would consolidate them and restrict the membership requirements to a few essential elements.**

o. from **p.262, Beginning At Moses** by Michael Barrett, 2001, 327 pgs. Highly recommended. For the complete argument on the incompatibility of Law and Gospel, see **p.262-268**

The church in our generation needs reformation, revival, and constructive revolution ...
Reformation and revival do not stand in contrast to one another; both words are related to the concept of restoration. Reformation speaks of a return to pure doctrine - the teachings of Scripture [I have already addressed some of these issues. See GT#6, p.1-5, the 3 tiers of truth for a more complete discussion]; revival speaks of a life brought into a proper relationship to the Holy Spirit – the Spirit-filled life [see footnote a GT#1 & p.8-9 of GT#2 address the 4 stages of life,] ... There cannot be true revival unless there has been reformation; and reformation cannot be complete without revival, [p.12, Death in the City, 1969 by Francis Schaeffer]