

In light of the arguments put forth in parts 1 and 2, I will offer some questions for consideration:

1: Adam was given one positive law in the Garden, the restriction against eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. In the Bible, there is no historical preface to this exchange showing us how the Decalogue was given to Adam. Yet, are we to assume that had Eve gotten on Adam's nerves at some point thus driving Adam to kill her that there would have been no ramifications? Are we to believe that there had been no preexisting moral prohibition against murder in place by which to judge Adam's action sinful?

In fact, the very next generation of humanity experienced murder. But in Genesis chapter four there is no indication that Cain was unaware that he had done anything wrong after slaying his brother. He does not reply back to God, "Lord, how was I supposed to know that murder was sinful?" In both pre and postlapsarian environments, God's moral law was self-evident.

2: If the moral law was not in place until the Mosaic Covenant, by what standard did God judge the antediluvian world when He deemed them worthy of complete annihilation (Gen. 6:5-7)?[1]

3: How do Christians respond when accused of cherry-picking laws out of the Bible as they call out the abominable and satanic culture in which we live (Eph. 5:11)? Recall Barack Obama's tactic in seeking to undermine Scripture's authority over all mankind:

"Which passages of Scripture should guide our public policy? Should we go with Leviticus which suggests slavery is OK, and that eating shellfish is an abomination? Or we could go with Deuteronomy which suggests stoning your child if he strays from the faith, or should we just stick to the Sermon on the Mount, a passage that is so radical that it's doubtful that our own defense department would survive its application....

*Now I may be opposed to abortion for religious reasons, to take one example, but if I seek to pass a law banning the practice, I can't simply point to the teachings of my church or invoke God's will. I have to explain why abortion violates some principle that is accessible to people of all faiths including those with no faith at all."***[2]**

What is the problem with this line of reasoning? Is it not the case that the former president's argument against using Scripture to guide public policy depends on an implicit denial of the threefold division of the law? I wonder how some Christians would respond to this argument without appealing to a distinction between positive laws given to a now defunct theocratic Israel under the Mosaic Covenant and a transcendent moral law which "doth forever bind all" (2LCF 19.5). Obama is deliberately conflating God's eternal moral standard with "*indifferent* things prescribed or proscribed for a particular time, place and people".

The simple answer to Obama's sarcastic and mocking deprecation of Scripture is this: The laws he randomly extracts from the OT regarding shellfish and stoning your children are positive laws given to a now defunct body-politic. They are no longer binding on anyone. Abortion, on the other hand, is murder, a clear violation of the sixth commandment in the Decalogue, which remains binding upon all mankind. Lacking the grace of God, the imputed righteousness of Christ and subsequent membership in the New Covenant, all parties complicit in acts of infanticide will stand before God having to answer for unjustly slaughtering fellow image-bearers, and *not* for having regularly dined at Red Lobster.[3]

The only consistent way to prove that abortion does, in fact, "violate some principle that is accessible to people of all faiths"[4] is to appeal to God's natural and immutable moral law. It is no wonder that a government and society which have manifested such venomous hatred for natural law—despite an endless array of worthless and self-serving positive laws—is awash in moral relativism.

4: What is meant by "the law written on the heart" in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and its NT exegesis in Hebrews chapter 8? Considering that this is a clear passage expounding on the inauguration of the New Covenant, (which entails the abrogation of the Old) it is inconceivable that Jeremiah had in mind the ceremonial laws of the Mosaic covenant (which served as types and shadows prior to Christ), nor is it possible that he had in mind the civil laws and penal code of theocratic Israel. Surely those positive laws, in contrast to the natural/moral law had expired with the Mosaic Covenant. The moral law is written on the heart of members of the New Covenant in a new and glorious way as a rule of life for the believer, guided by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them,

says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (Jer. 31:31-34).

A clarification here is in order: I argued earlier that the natural/moral law was written on the heart of man at Creation. Lest there be any confusion stemming from the announcement in this passage that New Covenant members have God's law written on their hearts, note the difference between the Jeremiah passage above and the "work of the law" in Romans 2:15. Fred Malone elaborates:

"Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:26-27 describe the work of the Holy Spirit in the New Covenant as being the writing of God's law upon the heart (Hebrews 8:8-12; 10:16), something the Israelites could not do for themselves. This is the essence of regeneration by the Spirit, the creation of a new heart that delights after God and His law (Romans 7:14-8:4).

In context, the only law that God wrote in the Old Testament by His own hand was the Ten Commandments. Therefore, it is my belief that the law written on the heart in the New Covenant is the very same moral law that is summarized in the Ten Commandments and was first written on Adam's heart as the law of nature. This is why even ignorant Gentiles show the remaining evidence of the 'work of the law' (Romans 2:14-15) in their hearts, their conscience bearing them witness. Which law? That natural moral law that was later revealed more clearly in the Sinai Covenant as the Ten Commandments written by God's own finger. It is only fitting that God should write these laws now on human hearts instead of tablets of stone. These Ten Commandments are summarized by Christ as the two great commandments to love God and man (Matthew 22:37-39)...[5]

Tom Hicks also elaborates on the "work of the law" which exposes the iniquity of all mankind versus the law put in their minds and written on their hearts in Jeremiah 31 and Hebrews 8:

*"[The 'work of the law' in this sense is a standard], and its primary work is to show you when you violate it. That's the work of the law, to expose transgressions against the law, to spotlight every violation. The work of the law shows you when you've broken it, that's what the law does. And the Gentiles have this 'work of the law' written on their hearts."***[6]**

5: What law did Christ satisfy when He manifested the perfect obedience that humanity's federal head failed to keep (Rom. 5; 2 Cor. 5:21)? Dr. Renihan recalls his interaction with one particular NCT proponent who

*"...denies the doctrine of [the] active obedience [of Christ] and he denies the doctrine of the imputation of the active obedience of Christ for the Christian believer. Now that's central to the doctrine of justification, and this was posted on the front page of what I think is probably the largest New Covenant Theology website on the internet."***[7]**

6: And finally, moving to the truly practical import of this subject, are believers today prohibited from appealing to the Ten Commandments when evangelizing the lost since the Mosaic Covenant has expired? And if so, what law *are* we to appeal to in making our case that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23)? Schreiner and NCT proponents speak of "the law of Christ" given to those who are born again. But what law is the measuring rod used to convict and/or condemn those which were never apart of the Mosaic Covenant and those with whom we come in contact today who are presently outside the New Covenant? What law are they guilty of breaking?

Walter Chantry comments:

*"Righteousness described under the Covenant of Grace is precisely the same code of conduct prescribed under the Covenant of Works."**[8]** If that were not so, the NT would have no message for sinners. God's Spirit begins to work grace in the heart by convincing men of sin. Objectively, the Spirit makes use of the law, the moral law, in this work of conviction. We do not preach to sinners some new law of Christ. They are not in Christ. They are not under the New Covenant [nor under the Old] They have no obligation to obey the terms of a covenant that does not apply to*

them. Nor are they guilty for disobeying laws that were never theirs to obey.

But, the moral law taught by Christ happens to be one and the same as the law in the Garden given to Adam and to his posterity.... But the same law is still the high standard which all unbelievers are expected to keep in order to earn blessing in Adam. The more a sinner sees the code, the less hope he has of his ever keeping it. He must find a Mediator to provide active righteousness for him. He must find a Mediator to bear the curse for him. He must find a Mediator who can crush the head of the serpent and empower him to become holy.”[9]

Jim Renihan’s observations and interaction with one who opposes the perpetuity of the moral law are noteworthy:

“If there is no universal law to which men are held as an eternal standard, what law are they guilty of breaking? What law will condemn unconverted men on the Day of Judgment? As I said, I once asked a question like this to one of the major proponents of New Covenant Theology.... I proposed this question to him, and his answer was something like this: ‘Whatever law happens to be in force when and where he lives.’ Now, I was absolutely astounded by that response. Do the standards of righteousness and judgment change?

...Or to put it another way if we apply this to the doctrine of the atonement, what law did Jesus die to satisfy? Did He die to satisfy the traffic laws of Mansfield, Texas? What were the righteous demands of His Father for which He was crushed? ...When we change the doctrine of the moral law—brothers and sisters perhaps without knowing it—we begin to change the doctrine of the atonement.”[10]

When I was a Dispensationalist, I recall that some in that camp had no use for the Ten Commandments because they, in a somewhat similar fashion, regarded it as a vestige of an abrogated covenant (or “previous dispensation”). This seems to explain why Dr. Renihan alleges that NCT is “an attempt to wed Calvinism with a kind of Anabaptist ethic”.[11] Affirming the perpetuity of the moral law, Voddie Baucham comments on one of its practical uses for the Christian:

“Unfortunately, I have had to explain and defend the fact that the moral law applies to everyone to Christians more than unbelievers. It’s as if someone has poisoned the well and started an epidemic that has Christians believing that God requires righteousness only of believers. I get questions such as, ‘Why are we surprised at the sinfulness of sinners?’ and, ‘Why do we judge the behavior of those outside the church?’ The idea behind these statements is that God has one standard of righteousness for Christians but another for the heathen. Leviticus 18 makes it clear that this is not the case! There is but one standard of righteousness, and all people and nations will be judged by that standard. This is also the message of Revelation 20:12-13....

*Notice that it does not say that they are judged merely for rejecting Christ. They are judged for their deeds, and whether those deeds were righteous. Of course, there are no righteous deeds apart from Christ, thus everyone will miss the mark apart from him (Rom. 3:23)”.***[12]**

Those who perish are not judged unrighteous merely because they rejected Christ and His gospel. This should be obvious since they would have no need of the gospel had they not already been guilty of breaking God’s law. They—like those who have lived prior to and outside of the Mosaic Covenant—are judged because, set against God’s righteous standard as revealed in His ever-abiding moral law, they are weighed and found wanting.

This series was not intended to address every facet of NCT or Progressive Covenantalism but only to interact with Schreiner’s position as articulated in question 14 of *40 Questions About Christians and Biblical Law*. Comments and critiques are welcome. In addition to the references used in this article, some additional resources will shortly be provided for further study of the threefold division, NCT and PC from a confessional, covenantal Baptist perspective.

Thank you to Daniel Suh for lending me Schreiner’s book and for his wisdom and fellowship. I also wish to acknowledge Michael Sabato and Brandon Adams for supplying comments on an earlier draft of what has become this three-part series, Dr. Jim Renihan for his willingness to review the final product, and everyone at Reformed Baptist Academic Press for their efforts to recover Baptists’ confessional and covenantal heritage.

[1] Make no mistake, Noah and his family also possessed no righteousness of their own. They were simply spared by God's amazing grace and saved according to the promise of the New Covenant. "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen. 6:8).

[2] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YUbf3purr_E

This speech was also referenced by Joel McDurmon in his debate with J.D. Hall, but McDurmon appears to think that such confusion stems from the threefold division. Since McDurmon is out of line with his own Confession (WCF) in his denial of the threefold division, the only solution would be to hold all OT laws as obligatory today (unless specifically rescinded in the NT). Apparently McDurmon has since abandoned this position: <http://polemicsreport.com/2016/10/21/on-joel-mcdurmons-abandonment-of-theonomy/>

[3] As a side note, many today seem to have forgotten that those in government are not exempt from God's moral law. No matter how tyrannical a government is, it is made up of individuals (organizations and departments do not make decisions, people do), and those individuals are likewise held to God's righteous standard as summarized in the Decalogue. Pleas to an unexegeted proof-text extracted from Romans 13 cannot change this simple fact. <http://reformedlibertarian.com/blog/john-w-robbins-the-moral-law-applies-to-governments-to-o/>

[4] Obama wants an ethical standard even for "those with no faith at all". Such people do not exist since to have no faith at all means that they do not believe any single proposition. If he wanted to include atheists in his imaginary ethical standard, he should have said, "those who do not believe in the existence of God".

[5] Malone, F.A., *The Baptism of Disciples Alone: A Covenantal Argument for Credobaptism Versus Paedobaptism* (revised and expanded edition), Founders Press, Cape Coral, FL, 2007, p. 88.

[6] The Perpetuity of the Moral Law of God. See also Hicks' article, The Division of Old Testament Law.

[7] New Covenant Theology [approx. 51:00 minute mark]

[8] Until this point, I have deliberately avoided use of the term, "covenant of works", so as to

focus specifically on the perpetuity of the moral law without having to define and defend additional doctrines. This has been difficult since the concepts are interrelated. The *concept* of a covenant of works made with Adam and continuing with all of his posterity excepting those who are born again and brought into the New Covenant, is not new and is found in all three of the reformed confessions mentioned at the beginning of this article. It should be noted that this is another doctrine rejected by some (not all) proponents of NCT and PC. In terms of its content, it is, as Chantry notes, “one and the same as the law in the Garden given to Adam and to his posterity.” Since the Fall, no one can keep it, and no one can gain life by attempting to keep it. Jeffrey Johnson likewise asserts that, “The moral law of God as revealed in the conscience, in the garden of Eden, or anywhere else in redemptive history is all the light that is needed for one to uncover the ingredients of the covenant of works. This is because the law and the covenant of works are essentially the same.” Johnson, J.D., *The Kingdom of God: A Baptist Expression of Covenant & Biblical Theology*, Free Grace Press, Conway, AR, 2016, p. 89, fn. 1. For an introduction to the covenant of works see Jenner, L., ‘The covenant of works’, *Reformation Today* 281:13–22 (Jan.-Feb.), 2018. In-depth treatments of the doctrine are provided by Barcellos in *Getting the Garden Right: Adam’s Work and God’s Rest in Light of Christ*, Founders Press, Cape Coral, FL, 2017, and *The Covenant of Works: its Confessional and Scriptural Basis*, Reformed Baptist Academic Press, Palmdale, CA, 2016.

[9] Chantry, W.J., ‘The covenants of works and of grace’, in Blackburn, E.M. (ed.), *Covenant Theology: A Baptist Distinctive*, Solid Ground Christian Books, Pelham, AL, 2013, p. 105.

[10] New Covenant Theology [approx. 47:50 minute mark]. Much of the content of Dr. Renihan’s lecture can be found in his book review which has been reposted on the Institute of Reformed Baptists Studies Seminary blog [here](#).

[11] Renihan, J., Session 5, “New Covenant Theology” in C410 Baptist Covenant Theology (Founders Study Center), p. 4.

[12] Baucham Jr., V., *Expository Apologetics: Answering Objections with the Power of the Word*, Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 2015, p. 132.

Photo by Aaron Burden on Unsplash

Share this:

- [Click to share on X \(Opens in new window\) X](#)
- [Click to share on Facebook \(Opens in new window\) Facebook](#)