

Announcement: I Have Changed My Understanding of “New Law”

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January 2019: I recently revisited some articles I wrote several years ago and made some necessary changes. These center on what Jesus was doing when He gave His “But I say unto you” statements in Matthew 5. Or, to put it another way, these changes concern whether Jesus was giving Christians a new law to obey.

The Reformed or Covenant Theology position is that when Jesus said “But I say unto you” in Matthew 5, He was refuting misunderstandings of the Pharisees. The early proponents of New Covenant Theology rightly saw that the Bible did not support this idea. New Covenant Theologians further taught that Jesus was giving new law, the Law of Christ or Law of the New Covenant. I was among those who taught this, and this is the position I took in the original versions of these articles. Over the years, however, I became more and more uncomfortable with this idea of a new law.

The “new law” position of New Covenant Theology rids us of the obvious error of Covenant Theology, but it introduces other questions. If the purpose of the law was to reveal sin, if the law actually incited sin, if the law held us in bondage, if the law was a yoke that no generation of the Jews could bear and which the apostles decided not to put on the Gentiles (Acts 15:10-11), and if Jesus came to free us and lighten our yoke and fulfill the law; why would Jesus give us a new law with commands that are even harder to obey than those of the Old Covenant? Further, New Covenant Theology’s “new law” stance ignored the fact that the Bible draws a sharp dichotomy between law/works and grace. Saying that the law of the New Covenant is gracious is nonsense akin to saying that black is white. Law is not grace. It demands works of obedience and punishes disobedience. Grace is unmerited favor. It makes no demands of obedience, freely forgives, and gives unmerited gifts. Grace is well-illustrated in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Law would have demanded that the prodigal son be punished. Instead, the father, acting in grace, freely forgave the son, rejoiced over him, and gave him undeserved gifts.

Clearly, Jesus did not come as a new lawgiver, but as a grace giver: “For the law was given through Moses. Grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). The “law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2) is not a new law at all. The word law is being used in the informal sense of principle or rule of life.

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Christ living in us is that rule of life. We fulfill Jesus Christ's rule of life by acting in love toward others.

And so, I have now written new articles and edited old ones to reflect the teaching that Jesus did not come to give a new law. He came to give grace. As part of that goal, He revealed God's perfect and humanly unattainable standards, primarily so that we would all-the-more see our need for trusting in Him as our Savior. Secondly, we can use these standards, not as commands of a new law, but as ideals to try to imitate. It is my prayer that all who hold to New Covenant Theology will reassess the teaching that Jesus gave us new law in light of the evidence I give in these articles.

Revised articles:

[Dead to the Law](https://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wp/dead-to-the-law/) (<https://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wp/dead-to-the-law/>)

[The New Covenant and the Decalogue](https://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wp/nct10c/) (<https://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wp/nct10c/>)

[The Sermon on the Mount](https://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wp/sermon-on-the-mount/) (<https://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wp/sermon-on-the-mount/>)

[Must We Obey a New Law?](https://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wp/new-covenant-neonomian/) (<https://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wp/new-covenant-neonomian/>)