

The Place of 'Place' in the New Covenant
or
*The Struggle for Possession of Jerusalem
in Light of the New Covenant*

Christ came into the world to bring the old covenant to its God-appointed end, including all its shadows – sabbath, tabernacle (temple), sacrifices, priest, altar and feasts. Christ accomplished this by fulfilling those shadows, rendering the old covenant obsolete by establishing the new. Christ himself is the head and substance of the new covenant, the fulfilment, embodiment and reality of all the old-covenant shadows:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished (Matt. 5:17-18).

Now if [since] the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses' face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory. Indeed, in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all, because of the glory that surpasses it. For if what was being brought to an end came with glory, much more will what is permanent have glory (2 Cor. 3:7-11).

In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one [that is, the Mosaic covenant] obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away (Heb. 8:13).

And this means that the believer is not under the old covenant, but released from it, having died to it:

The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17).

You are not under law but under grace... We are not under law but under grace... (Rom. 6:14-15).

My brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God... Now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code (Rom. 7:4-6).

The law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:2).

Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes (Rom. 10:4).

Through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God (Gal. 2:19).

Before [the] faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that [the] faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith (Gal. 3:23-26).

Brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman [that is, we are no longer under the law]. For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery (Gal. 4:31 – 5:1).

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ (Col. 2:16-17).

You have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given: 'If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned'. Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said: 'I tremble with fear'. But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the

judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (Heb. 12:18-24).¹

As a consequence, it is utterly wrong for believers to take old-covenant principles, practices and shadows, and try to run their lives and the *ekklēsia* by such. Alas, this is frequently done, with disastrous results, both personally and corporately. The Fathers played a major role in this catastrophic step when they went to the old covenant, took its principles, and applied them to the governance of the churches, and, by forging a union between State and Church, constructed a monstrosity – Christendom – with sacramentalism and sacerdotalism at its very heart.² Christendom, which has proved the biggest curse Satan ever inflicted on men, has ruled the roost for the past 1800 years. Millions of men, women and children have lived and died in spiritual darkness and bondage under its tyranny. Millions still do. Believers have to be constantly on the lookout, and be resolute in maintaining their precious position in the new covenant, leaving Christendom to its degenerate self:

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said: ‘I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty’ (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

¹ As always, it is essential to read the immediate context and also to keep in mind the wider context of the book in question. For my arguments on all this, see my *Christ is All: No Sanctification by the Law*.

² See my *The Pastor: Does He Exist?; The Priesthood of All Believers: Slogan or Substance?*

Come out of [Babylon], my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities (Rev. 18:4-5).

This last extract is taken from Revelation 18. What a chapter! In the last day, Babylon the great – the great curse of the earth – will fall, with the shattering of all her hopes, and the end of all the expectations of those whose life is bound up with hers. What does God say to his people: ‘Come out of her’!

Nothing better illustrates the fact that Christendom has gone to the old covenant – though it was rendered obsolete by Christ – and taken it into the very heart of its system, than Christendom’s emphasis on ‘place’ as something of spiritual importance. And how!

Let me explain what I mean. Adoration of ‘place’, love of ‘holy sites’ and the like, is endemic in fallen man. It pre-dates Christendom. Witness the many stone circles, burial mounds, henges and pilgrimage shrines we find throughout the world. Think of the manual labour expended in the construction of such sites. Nobody can deny that veneration (in the sense of reverence) of ‘place’ comes naturally to natural man. It is a fundamental aspect of paganism. Now Christendom, as is its wont, has cashed in on it. And does so today, and with a vengeance.³

As for Israel under the old covenant, ‘place’ was important. Indeed, by God’s commandment, more than important; it was vital. Israel’s temple, God’s temple, so ran the law of the LORD, had to be in Jerusalem – and nowhere else. Any attempt to move the centre of worship – the house of God – to Bethel or Dan, for instance, was heinous in God’s sight. Jerusalem was the ‘place’, God declared, and Jerusalem it had to be. All the sons of Israel had to appear at Jerusalem three times every year. When the children of Israel were denied access to Jerusalem,

³ Rome (as the CEO on Christendom’s board) has mastered this ‘art’ to perfection. Time and again it has shown how adept it is in adopting and adapting pagan principles, absorbing them into its system. But with what detestable results!

they knew they had to pray towards the temple there, since all acceptable worship took place at Jerusalem, the temple. As countless scriptures prove, the temple at Jerusalem (which replaced the tabernacle) was ‘the house of God’ for Israel.⁴ As a result, ‘place’ – above all, Jerusalem – was vital in the old covenant.⁵

But what of ‘place’ in the new covenant? Now that Christ has fulfilled the old covenant and rendered it obsolete by establishing the new, what place remains for ‘place’? Nothing could be easier to answer. In these days of the new covenant, ‘place’ has no place. For the believer, ‘place’ is utterly irrelevant.⁶ Christ could not have more explicit. During his conversation with the woman at the well in Samaria, she raised this very point: ‘Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship’. ‘Place’ clearly mattered to the Jews and the Samaritans. It definitely mattered to this woman, and it mattered a great deal! It was all a question of ‘place’. Was it Jerusalem or Gerizim?

She was in for a surprise, however, a big, big surprise. Jerusalem or Gerizim? Neither! Jesus could not have been more categorical:

Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth (John 4:20-24).

⁴ Though, as Solomon acknowledged, it is impossible to confine God to a building, however magnificent (1 Kings 8:27).

⁵ See, for instance, Deut. 12:5; 16:16; 1 Kings 8:22-66; 12:26-33; 1 Chron. 15:3; 23:25; Dan. 6:10. For more in this vein, put ‘Jerusalem’ or ‘Zion’ into any search engine.

⁶ This is not to say the believers may not have treasured life-memories associated with locality. It is the attachment of *spiritual* importance to ‘place’ that is heinous.

Centuries before, the prophet had predicted this radical change of covenant:

From the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts (Mal. 1:11).

We must get this right. The prophet was not predicting the burning of literal incense. God does not want that under the new covenant!⁷ Malachi's words must be understood spiritually. The prophet was stating that in the coming new covenant there would be no special places, but that true spiritual worship would be offered to God – and received by him – 'in every place'. Whenever two or three – *wherever* two or three – would be gathered in the name of Christ for spiritual purposes, God would be there by his Spirit (Matt. 18:20). That is what Malachi was speaking of.

When Jesus disabused the woman at the well, it is surely unnecessary to point out, he was not *forbidding* worship in Samaria or Jerusalem in the time of the new covenant, or declaring that men would *not* worship at those places. No! Rather, he was making it clear that new-covenant worship would not be *restricted* to those places, that there would be nothing special about those places; indeed, *that in the days of the new covenant 'place' would be utterly irrelevant*. That is what he was stating, and stating loud and clear. What is more, speaking of the time of his inauguration of the new covenant – in his death and resurrection – Jesus announced that 'the hour' for this momentous change was very close, after which time all talk of Samaria or Jerusalem would be out of the question.

Or should be. In the new covenant, God has no interest in 'place'. From the time of Christ's death and resurrection, the

⁷ Anticipating my conclusion to this article, here is another way in which misunderstanding of, or deliberate breaking of, the scriptural revelation of the new covenant, or going to the old covenant, leads to disastrous consequences for believers and the *ekklēsia*. Look at the abominable corruption that incense burning (and associated practices) has brought about in the church of God.

clear scriptural requirement is for ‘true worshippers [who] will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for’, Jesus declared, ‘the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth’ (John 4:23-24). Consequently, since that time all thought of ‘place’, as special in a spiritual sense, should be anathema to every true believer.

Alas, Christendom has ignored Christ’s teaching on this explicit point. Worse still, it has worked directly against it. While Christendom has little to say about what Christ meant by ‘spirit and truth’, it has a great deal to say about ‘place’, drawing on both paganism and the old covenant for its doctrine. And many believers today have become grievously tainted in the process. ‘Place’, for most professing believers today, carries religious old-covenant overtones, heavy ones at that.

Let me illustrate. Take the meeting house. How many believers virtually reverence the meeting house, calling it ‘the sanctuary’, ‘the house of God’! How many believers think in terms of ‘the house of God’ when they speak about worship, confining worship to what goes on in that ‘sacred space’! And by the phrase, ‘the house of God’, they mean a building, even though, when it talks in new-covenant terms of ‘the house of God’, Scripture means the *ekklēsia*, the people of God (both individual and corporate):

Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple (1 Cor. 3:16-17).

We are the temple of the living God; as God said: ‘I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people’ (2 Cor. 6:16).

Through [Christ] we both [that is, believing Jews and Gentiles] have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him

you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit (Eph. 2:18-21).

...you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15).

Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope (Heb. 3:6).

We have a great priest over the house of God (Heb. 10:21).

As you come to [Christ] a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:4-5).

It is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? (1 Pet. 4:17).

All talk of a literal building as 'God's house' by believers, therefore, is nothing but a return to the old covenant, abhorrent to God. And it should cease. At once. Believers do not 'go to church' in the sense of travelling to a building; in assembly, they are the church. William Cowper put it this way:

*Jesus, where'er thy people meet,
There they behold thy mercy seat;
Where'er they seek thee, thou art found,
And every place is hallowed ground.*

*For thou, within no walls confined,
Inhabitest the humble mind;
Such ever bring thee where they come,
And going, take thee to their home.*

Does it matter? Of course it does. Anything and everything which undermines the new covenant should be out of the question for believers. Anything and everything which contradicts Christ, and the desire of the Father, however trivial

such things may appear in themselves,⁸ must be rejected, root and branch, not least because the consequences of disobedience are devastating. In particular, I am referring to the wrongness of importing old-covenant principles and practices (not to say, pagan principles and practices) into the life of the believer and the *ekklēsia*.⁹

Nothing better illustrates the wrongness of the emphasis on ‘place’, *and the dreadful consequences which follow*, than the tortured history of Jerusalem itself.¹⁰ I admit, of course, that Jerusalem’s history has been extraordinarily dramatic, and I am not suggesting that every departure from biblical principles will inevitably lead to correspondingly dire results. But the principle stands.¹¹ Any departure from Scripture leads to serious consequences – both in this life and eternity.

Yes, as I have acknowledged, Jerusalem was all-important to God and the Jews during the days of the old covenant. But not in the new! Jerusalem now has no spiritual significance whatever. It is wrong to give it any. For believers today to

⁸ It is ‘the little foxes that spoil the vineyards’ (Song 2:15).

⁹ But did the apostles not refer to the old covenant when writing to believers? Certainly! But every time the apostles quoted the law, the old covenant, they always drew *spiritual* lessons and paradigms. They never imported old-covenant practice into the life of the believer or the churches. Take one example, the Passover: ‘Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth’ (1 Cor. 5:6-8). Observation of the Passover today should be unthinkable to members of the new covenant. Indeed, it should be repugnant to them. Rather, they should be thinking in terms of their spiritual cleanliness and consecration to God. And this is just one example of scores which would make the point.

¹⁰ This was forcibly brought home to me by Simon Sebag Montefiore’s *Jerusalem: The Making of a Holy City*.

¹¹ Very much the same as the precise dramatic circumstances of Paul’s conversion at Damascus are not the norm. Nevertheless, unless a man is converted, he will perish (Matt. 18:3).

practically venerate Jerusalem is the utmost folly. And worse. Even so, down the centuries professing believers have got heavily involved in the sordid history of Jerusalem, the stain of which nothing can expunge.

Yet Christ could not have been clearer. Having stated that in the new covenant ‘place’ would hold no spiritual significance (John 4:20-24),¹² it should have caused his immediate disciples no surprise to hear him declare that the temple, having come to its God-ordained end with his death and resurrection, would be destroyed (Matt. 24:1ff) – as it was by the Romans in AD 70. By then, another of Christ’s predictions was well on its way to being fulfilled:

Repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:47-49).

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8).

The disciples had to open their gospel ministry in Jerusalem: it was the Jews (Rom. 1:16; 2:9-10), especially the people of Jerusalem, who had witnessed and who (some of them at least) had been responsible for the crucifixion of Christ, who had to be the first to hear of forgiveness.¹³ But this was only the first and very temporary step in the spread of the gospel. The good news had to be taken to all, taken to all the world, in order to fulfil the Lord’s command:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matt. 28:18-20).

¹² I presume that the disciples heard what Christ was saying to the woman (John 4:27). John must have.

¹³ See John Bunyan’s *The Jerusalem Sinner Saved*.

With the death and resurrection of Christ, therefore, Jerusalem ceased to have any significance in the eyes of God. And that should have been the end of it. But, alas, this was not to be. These past 2000 years, no place on earth has seen as much conflict as Jerusalem. How many times has the city changed hands, and usually with terrible violence and at immense human cost? How much blood has been shed trying to re-take it? The city is drenched in gore. What treasure has been wasted, and what havoc wreaked, by men determined to keep hold of it? And all for what? For political ends, yes, but in the main for the sake of religion.

Now I can quite understand Jews and Muslims attaching enormous value to ‘place’ – even to the extent of fighting over Jerusalem. Being outside the new covenant, they make idols of ‘holy sites’, which, along with the rites, relics and myths associated with such ‘places’, loom large in their religion. But professing believers? Any emphasis whatsoever upon Jerusalem as a ‘place’ ought be unthinkable for them. The only Jerusalem that matters to believers is the spiritual Jerusalem – not the literal (Gal. 4:25-26; Heb. 12:22-24).

Sadly – and ‘sadly’ is not strong enough – far too many professing believers have been emotionally caught up in the diabolical scrabble for Jerusalem, and that because of adoration of ‘place’. Yes, adoration! I do not apologise for the word. What a disaster!¹⁴ And as for professing believers being prepared to go to war over Jerusalem for religious reasons,¹⁵ words fail. Alas, down the centuries professing believers have engaged in this titanic death-struggle for possession of Jerusalem with its

¹⁴ The list of suffering and grief is endless. But more than suffering is involved. Sin is heavily involved. The history is a tale of decadence, madness (‘Jewish Syndrome’ it is known as), and I know not what. The ‘pilgrimage industry’ is probably the biggest money spinner for the city. The struggle for Jerusalem has spawned war (the Crimean, for instance) and politicians used it as a pawn in both World Wars. It is needless to point out that war over the city and the land continues to rage, even as I write.

¹⁵ Including rites, relics and myths.

‘holy sites’ and relics. And it all stems from Christendom, with its misuse of the old covenant to bring its principles into the church.¹⁶ The cost, I repeat, has been horrendous – in blood. Even more grievous, the cost to the advance of the gospel in the world has been grim indeed. Unbelievers have had a field day, pointing the accusing finger at the gospel – to God himself – as a consequence of the endless wars waged over ‘place’, as believers have too often forgotten the apostolic principle:

Though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.

Now these ‘strongholds’ are not garrisons and the like. They have nothing to do with ‘place’. They are ideas, systems or philosophies. The business of believers is not to take up physical arms to fight for ‘place’, but to use spiritual weapons – such as prayer, preaching and the pen – to overthrow anti-gospel cultures:

We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete (2 Cor. 10:4-6).

As for the repeated conquests of Jerusalem, let me list the main dates. This catalogue could be vastly expanded, but as it stands it graphically captures Jerusalem’s troubled history. Merely to scan it brings a sense of horror:

Roman Period (AD 70-324)

AD 70: Roman forces destroy Jerusalem and demolish the second temple

AD 135: Jerusalem rebuilt as a Roman city. The Jews expelled

Byzantine Period (AD 324-638)

AD 335: Church of the Holy Sepulchre built

AD 614: Persians capture Jerusalem, destroying most churches and expelling the Jews

AD 629: Byzantine Christians recapture Jerusalem

¹⁶ Not to mention the principles and practices of paganism.

First Muslim Period (AD 638-1099)

AD 638: Caliph Omar enters Jerusalem and the Jews allowed to return

AD 661-750: Jerusalem ruled under Umayyad dynasty

AD 691: Dome of the Rock built on site of the destroyed Jewish temple

AD 750-974: Jerusalem ruled under Abassid dynasty

AD 1010: Caliph al-Hakim orders the destruction of synagogues and churches

Crusader Period (AD 1099-1187)

AD 1099: First Crusaders capture Jerusalem following pope Urban's call in AD 1096

Ayyubid Period (AD 1187-1259)

AD 1187: Saladin captures Jerusalem from Crusaders and allows the Jews and Muslims to return

AD 1229-1244: Crusaders briefly recapture Jerusalem twice

Mamluk Period (AD 1250-1516)

AD 1250: Muslim Caliph dismantles walls of Jerusalem and the population rapidly declines

Ottoman Period (AD 1516-1917)

AD 1517: Ottomans capture Jerusalem

AD 1538-1541: Suleiman the Magnificent rebuilds the walls of Jerusalem

British Mandate (AD 1917-1948)

AD 1917: British capture Jerusalem in World War I

Divided City (AD 1948-1967)

AD 1948: State of Israel established. Jerusalem divided between Israel and Jordan

Reunification (AD 1967-present)

AD 1967: Israel captures Jerusalem's old city and Eastern half to reunite the City

To return to my main point: I have used this record of indescribable woe to illustrate – and it is, I believe, a telling

illustration – a much wider principle; namely, that it is wrong for believers to go back to the old covenant for their principles and practice, and that the consequences of such disobedience are immense.¹⁷ Any return to the old covenant is an act contrary to Christ, one which robs the Redeemer of his glory, and brings believers back under that yoke of slavery from which Christ released them. Christ is the believer's sabbath, Christ is the believer's priest, Christ is the believer's sacrifice, Christ is the believer's temple, Christ is the believer's altar. As I have observed, talk of 'place' and its consequences is but just one illustration of the way any deviation from the theology of the new covenant leads to trouble with a capital T. What I have said about the wrongness of 'place' is paralleled by believer's going to the old covenant for their understanding and practice of the principles of sabbath, priesthood, sacrifice, temple, altar.

Let me merely hint at some other areas where this is true:

When they go wrong over the new covenant, believers thereby misread the prophets and so fail to see many of the glories of the new covenant as set out in the prophets, and which are theirs by right in Christ.

To fail to grasp the covenant history of redemption leads many believers to think in terms of national Israel, not realising that the spiritual Israel, 'the Israel of God' – the elect through faith (Gal. 6:16; 1 Pet. 2:9-10) – is the new-covenant fulfilment of the shadow. Likewise, the old covenant promise of land for Israel is realised in the new covenant by the believer's spiritual rest. Getting this wrong, leads many believers to have millennial expectations for a converted national Israel, the supposed return of the Jews to the land, the re-establishment of Solomon's kingdom, with Christ reigning in Jerusalem, along with a rebuilt temple, complete with sacrifices and all the rest. In this way, the energy and interest of many believers is diverted from Christ and the gospel, and so they end up in a spiritual cul-de-sac. And that puts it mildly.

¹⁷ At the risk of wearying you, the same must be said about going to pagans, and drawing on their principles and practices.

For sinners, preparationism by the law brings torment for them, sometimes for years, and leads to their lack of assurance if and when they are converted.¹⁸

Not to understand the scriptural locus of the law in the new covenant, or go against it – that is to say, to adopt Calvin’s third use of the law (the so-called ‘moral law’) for progressive sanctification – spells bondage and lack of assurance for countless believers.¹⁹

The notion of ‘clergy’ as opposed to ‘laity’, invented by the Fathers when they drew on the old covenant for the governance of the *ekklēsia*, has produced a myriad of errors and losses for believers. As for errors, not least has been priestcraft and sacerdotalism. As for losses, most believers are clueless (practically speaking) about the priesthood of all believers.²⁰

I want to end on a positive note. The theology of the new covenant – shall we call it new-covenant theology, or NCT for short? – must not be thought of as a theological quirk, an isolated, academic subject fit for debate and nothing else. It lies at the very heart of the gospel. Indeed, any deviation from the theology of the new covenant leads to trouble – both for the sinner and the saint – and it robs Christ of his glory. And that is

¹⁸ Preparationism teaches that sinners must be prepared, made fit to receive Christ, and that this is accomplished by preaching the law. Sinners may trust Christ only after they have been prepared by the law; that is, after the law has sufficiently convicted them of their sin.

¹⁹ John Calvin argued that the law has three uses in the days of the new covenant. The first two state that the law both restrains sin in sinners and prepares sinners for Christ (see previous note). His third use states that the law serves both as a whip to smite lazy asses (believers) into progressive sanctification and is the measure of that sanctification. Calvin’s three uses of the law have dominated the Reformed and evangelical world since the mid 16th century, whether his system has been adopted knowingly or not.

²⁰ For my views on all this, see my *Christ; Assurance in The New Covenant; Pastor; The Priesthood; Romans 11: A Suggested Exegesis; The Essential Sabbath*; and my forthcoming book on the history of redemption through covenants.

why I write, and try to set out as clearly and forcibly as I can what I see as the biblical doctrine of NCT. And the sum of that is what? 'Christ is All' (Col. 3:11). Place, priestcraft, buildings...? They count for nothing, less than nothing. And worse! Christ is all!