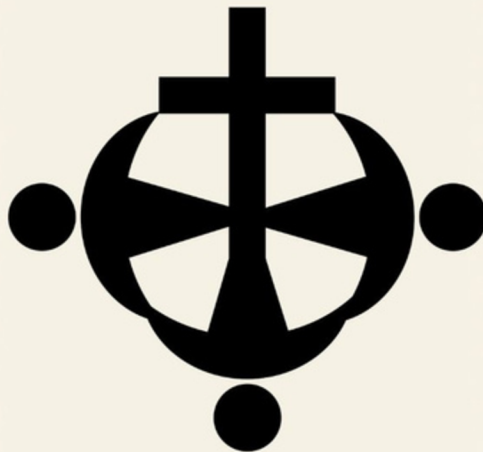


NEW COMMAND THEOLOGY

A CHRISTOCENTRIC RENEWAL
PROGRESSIVE THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK



A DOCTRINAL FRAMEWORK FOR
A CHRISTOCENTRIC, LOVE-DRIVEN FAITH

*"BY THIS EVERYONE WILL KNOW THAT
YOU ARE MY DISCIPLES, IF
YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER."*

— JOHN 13:35

New Command Theology

A Doctrinal Framework for a Christocentric, Love-Driven Faith

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March 15, 2026**

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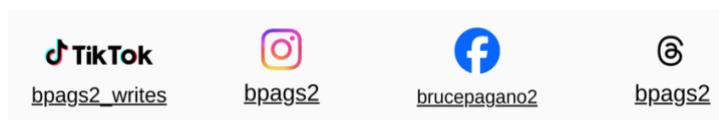


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Summary Statement:

This document articulates the foundational theological convictions of New Command Theology (NCT), a Christ-centered, forward-looking expression of Christian faith rooted in Jesus' "new commandment" to love one another as He has loved us (John 13:34-35). It draws on the Christocentric Renewal Progressive tradition, integrating insights from the Gospels, early church theology, and contemporary scholarship to present a coherent, grace-based, justice-oriented vision of faith, discipleship, and community.

Key Themes:

- **Christ as the ultimate revelation of God**
- **Love as the central ethic of Christian life**
- **Faith as communal, transformative, and forward-moving**
- **The Sermon on the Mount as the kingdom manifesto**
- **Salvation as participation in God's renewing kingdom**
- **Justice and mercy as love-in-action**
- **The Bible as a Christ-centered narrative, not a legal code**

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

~ John 13:35 (NRSVUE) ~

Christocentric Renewal Progressive Theological

For the last fifteen years, I have been exploring, thinking through, deconstructing, reconsidering, and rebuilding my theological orthodoxy, seeking an orthopraxy that aligns with our call from Jesus as we navigate this world. While several theological frameworks were attractive and made sense, I found myself drawn to some of the elements, but not others, and struggled to find a theological umbrella that they fit under. After all that time, I feel comfortable gathering those elements under a theological covering called Christocentric Renewal Progressive Theology (CRPT). Within that framework, I've further distilled my orthodoxy and orthopraxy into what I've come to call New Command Theology (NCT).

CRPT centers on Jesus as the full revelation of God, reads all Scripture through the lens of his life and teaching, and connects his work to renew all of creation and repair systems, so that love, mercy, justice, and inclusion become the fruits. CRPT takes Jesus at his word that the New Command, "love one another as I have loved you, so others will know you're my disciples," is the measuring stick of Christian faith. The Gospels set the tone for how we read the rest of the Bible. We maintain a non-coercive, relational vision of God, we speak the truth about harm, and we practice mercy as a form of resistance to policies and patterns that harm our neighbors. Orthodoxy manifests as orthopraxy, characterized by doing truth in love toward one another, empathy with boundaries, and nonviolence in both word and deed.

CRPT is grounded in seven core anchors, formulated through the lens of Christ and enriched by complementary theological streams. These anchors form a practical and theological roadmap for living out Christian faith:

- 1. Christ as the interpretive key:** Jesus, His life, teaching, death, and resurrection, becomes the norm through which all Scripture and doctrine are interpreted.
- 2. New Covenant Priority:** The Old Covenant finds its fulfillment and limit in Christ. His cross and resurrection reframe the story of God's people.
- 3. Love as the ethical test:** The mark of true faith is Christ-like love, especially toward the poor, excluded, and wounded.
- 4. Renewal as an ongoing process:** Repentance, spiritual formation, and institutional repair are not optional extras; they're the normal Christian life.
- 5. Open and relational posture:** God's love is persuasive, not coercive. Human freedom is real. Prayer invites us into participation with God's ongoing work.

6. **Prophetic mercy:** The Church resists harm and injustice while honoring the dignity and worth of every person.
7. **Public discipleship:** Discipleship is never partisan, yet never neutral to injustice. It is peaceable, courageous, and kingdom-centered.

I. How CRPT reads Scripture

CRPT approaches Scripture with a Jesus-centered hermeneutic, allowing the Gospels, particularly the life, teachings, and character of Jesus, to inform the interpretation of the rest of the Bible. Difficult or troubling passages are tested against the ethic of the New Commandment: “Love one another as I have loved you.” The interpretive trajectory shifts decisively from exclusion to reconciliation, from sacrifice to mercy, and from retaliation to love for one’s enemy. As a final safeguard, CRPT applies the “Christocentric Ethic of Love” standard: if a particular reading of Scripture consistently leads to cruelty, contempt, or dehumanization, it is considered a failed interpretation, because it does not reflect the heart of Christ.

II. What CRPT does in practice

- **Personal:** Deep formation, healing work, peacemaking speech, truth with empathy, boundaries that protect the vulnerable.
- **Communal:** Churches that repent, repair, and include.
- **Public:** Policy engagement that favors mercy, equity, and nonviolence. No demonizing, no shrugging at harm.

III. The CRPT “Umbrella”: Who fits and how

Think of CRPT as a home with a Christ-centered roof and “renewal-shaped” rooms. Many families can live here if they keep Jesus at the center and love as their guiding principle.

1. Strong fits

- **New Command Theology (NCT)**
The plumb line is explicit. CRPT is a natural home. After this section, the remainder of this document will detail this theological view.
- **Anabaptist or Peace-church**
Enemy-love, discipleship in community, nonviolence.

- Guardrail:** Keep explicit LGBTQ+ inclusion and gender equity.
- **Wesleyan–Holiness, tuned for social holiness**
Sanctification as growing in perfect love that spills into justice.
Guardrail: Keep grace first, avoid moralism.
 - **Red Letter Christianity**
Sermon on the Mount ethics, mercy for the poor, truth to power.
 - **Cruciform or “cross-shaped” theology**
God is revealed in self-giving love, not domination. Ethics mirror the cross.
 - **Open and Relational Theology**
A genuine relationship with God, an open future, persuasive love, and meaningful prayer.
Guardrail: Emphasize God’s faithfulness and the deity of Christ, not a diminished God.
 - **Open Theism (“Openist”)**
Some future outcomes are undetermined because love honors freedom.
Guardrail: Keep pastoral assurance, God’s wisdom and presence are steady, Christ remains the lens.
 - **Girardian and other nonviolent atonement views**
Expose scapegoating, re-read sacrifice through the lens of the victim who forgives.
Guardrail: Keep sin, liberation, and new creation concrete, not merely symbolic.
 - **Liberation theologies, including Black, Womanist, and Mujerista**
Preferential care for the oppressed, systemic repair.
Guardrail: Keep Jesus explicit as God’s decisive self-revelation.
 - **Kingdom ethics, Sermon-on-the-Mount ethics**
Peacemaking, truthfulness, enemy-love, and fidelity to the poor.
 - **Practical and Public Theology**
Faith lived for the life of the world, churches that do repair.

2. Good conversation partners who often fit

- **Feminist and Queer Theologies**
Dismantle patriarchy and exclusion, pursue full personhood.
CRPT posture: Receive their justice lens, keep Jesus as the interpretive key.
 - **Postcolonial and Decolonial Theologies**
Expose the empire’s grip on the church and text.
CRPT posture: Join the liberating arc that matches Jesus’ upside-down kingdom.
 - **New Perspective on Paul and “apocalyptic Paul”**

Reframe law, grace, and belonging in light of Christ's faithfulness and new-covenant inclusion.

3. Qualified fit with clear lanes

- **Process theology**

- **Fit:** Non-coercive, persuasive love, creation as a dynamic, shared work of renewal.
- **Guardrails:** Maintain a robust, personal faith in God, as revealed uniquely in Jesus, with the incarnation, cross, and bodily resurrection as decisive. Let the Gospels norm speculative metaphysics.
- **CRPT phrasing:** God lovingly persuades within creaturely freedom, and in Jesus we see the clearest lure toward self-giving love that renews people and systems.

4. Dealbreakers for the umbrella

- Downgrading Jesus to a mere exemplar instead of God's definitive self-revelation.
- Treating God as an impersonal force or fate.
- Collapsing love and truth into niceness that refuses to name harm.
- Embracing coercion as God's primary tool rather than persuasive love.
- Abandoning the cross and resurrection as the pattern and power of renewal.

IV. FAQ, fast answers

- **Is this liberal or conservative?**

It is Christ-centered and love-measured. It will look conservative where Jesus calls for fidelity, and progressive where Jesus calls for mercy and justice. The metric is the New Command, not a party line.

- **Do you still believe in sin and salvation?**

Yes. Sin is what deforms love and harms neighbors. Salvation is God's renewing work in Christ, personal and systemic, leading to wholeness and beloved community.

- **What about judgment?**

Judgment is God's truthful naming of harm and God's refusal to let harm have the last word. In Christ, judgment serves mercy, restoration, and the making right of all things.

- **How do you handle hard texts?**

Read them through Jesus, the cross, and the New Command. If a reading produces cruelty, contempt, or partiality, start over.

New Command Theology

A Central Expression of Love

Within Christocentric Renewal Progressive Theology, one of the most defining features is what we can call **New Command Theology**. This approach highlights Jesus' "new commandment" from John 13:34-35:

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

The emphasis on this command helps to shift our focus toward two ends:

1. Centrality of Love

- **Christ-Like Love:** Rather than "loving others as yourself" (the typical reading of Leviticus 19:18), this new command calls believers to love others *as Christ loves* —a self-giving, sacrificial love that redirects attention away from ourselves and extends beyond mere reciprocity.
- **Sign of Discipleship:** In New Command Theology, love is the defining mark of following Jesus (John 13:35), not adherence to the older laws. This aligns with Christocentric Renewal Progressive Theology's focus on Christ over covenantal legalism.

2. Relationship over Ritual

- **Priority on Relationships:** Both Christocentric Renewal Progressive Theology and New Command Theology emphasize that genuine faith is manifested in *how we treat one another*, more so than in ritual observances or selective OT legal codes.
- **New Covenant Ethic:** This ethic is shaped by *Christ's example* rather than detailed instructions from the Old Covenant. While the OT is illuminating, it is not the final authority for Christian doctrine or practice.

I. Comparing New Command Theology and Greatest Commandment Theology

Both **Greatest Commandment Theology** and **New Command Theology** share core themes but approach them from slightly different angles:

1. Source Texts

- *Greatest Commandment Theology*: Roots love in the synthesis of Deuteronomy 6:5 (“Love the Lord your God...”) and Leviticus 19:18 (“Love your neighbor as yourself”).
- *New Command Theology*: Stresses John 13:34-35 (“Love one another as I have loved you”) as the standard of Christian love and community.

2. Nature of “Newness”

- *Greatest Commandment Theology*: Sees Jesus reaffirming and condensing key OT laws into two primary commandments.
- *New Command Theology*: Sees Jesus as initiating a radically new ethic, not just re-rooted in the OT but redefined by His example of love and mercy.

3. Vertical and Horizontal Dimensions

- *Greatest Commandment Theology*: Balances love for God (vertical) and love for neighbor (horizontal).
- *New Command Theology*: Places more explicit focus on the *horizontal practice* of love in community as a reflection of Christ’s own love. The vertical dimension is implicit; when practicing reciprocity of love in a Christian community, we are better equipped to love our neighbors, and in doing so, we also love God more fully.

II. Why This Fits within a Christocentric Renewal Progressive Theological View

1. **Christ at the Center**: Both emphasize Jesus as the supreme revelation of God’s nature, will, and love.
2. **Forward Movement**: By adopting the *new command*, believers transcend the selective enforcement of OT laws, shifting toward a renewed vision of Christian ethics grounded in grace, inclusivity, and Christ’s sacrificial model.
3. **Progressive Embrace**: This approach naturally questions rigid or harmful applications of ancient legal codes, such as the misuse of Levitical laws to marginalize LGBTQ+ people and instead focuses on the NT’s call to radical love, relationship, and welcome.
4. **Renewal and Restoration**: It promotes an ongoing journey of faith, where the Holy Spirit continues to guide believers into creative and restorative actions in line with Jesus’ call.

III. Summation of Concept

By naming this perspective as **New Command Theology** within the broader umbrella of a **Christocentric Renewal Progressive Theological framework**, it articulates a faith that:

- Affirms the OT's value in historical and cultural context yet refuses to bind modern Christians to outdated or selectively enforced laws.
- Grounds Christian life and doctrine in the transforming love of Christ as revealed in the NT.
- Encourages a dynamic, ever-renewing theological journey that makes love, specifically *Christ-like love*, the guiding rule for ethics, community, and mission.

In short, **New Command Theology** is a succinct way of designating the heart of a Christocentric Renewal Progressive framework: a forward-looking faith that keeps Christ's call to self-giving love at its core, embracing an inclusive and transformative understanding of what it means to be God's people here and now.

Jesus's Death

New Command Theology emphasizes Jesus as the “Good King” whose crucifixion was the inevitable result of His radical ministry, and whose resurrection embodies victory over death. This approach pulls together strands from Christus Victor, Moral Influence (or “Example”) theory, and newer “nonviolent” or “narrative” atonement models. It also draws inspiration from Scot McKnight’s “*King Jesus Gospel*,” highlighting the kingdom dynamics at work in Jesus’ death and resurrection.

I. Points of Departure From Other Retributive Theories

1. Crucifixion as Inevitable

- Jesus’ relentless confrontation of unjust systems and His proclamation of God’s kingdom as an alternative to earthly power dynamics made His death all but certain.

2. Rejecting Traditional Substitutionary Frameworks

- NCT does not subscribe to penal substitutionary or ransom theories, which hinge on transaction or payment.
- There is, however, an appreciation of *Christus Victor’s* emphasis on Christ’s triumph over the powers of sin, evil, and death.

3. King Jesus as a New Kind of King

- In an ancient world where kings sent their subjects to die for the kingdom’s expansion, Jesus, the “Good King,” went to die on the cross Himself, demonstrating the ultimate act of sacrificial love.
- NCT makes room for the possibility that Jesus’ death may not have been an absolute requirement for salvation, but rather a profound demonstration of His solidarity and grace.

4. Resurrection as the Triumph

- NCT affirms the resurrection as the pivotal event that shows Jesus’ victory over death and reveals God’s power to bring new life.

II. Other Influential Theological Lenses

- 1. Nonviolent or Narrative Christus Victor:** A modern adaptation, sometimes referred to as “narrative Christus Victor” (associated with theologians like J. Denny Weaver),

reframes the classical Christus Victor theory within a narrative of nonviolence. It emphasizes:

- **Conflict with the Powers:** Jesus' preaching and example of God's kingdom inevitably clashed with unjust earthly powers (both religious and political).
- **Inevitability of the Cross:** Because of this clash, Jesus' crucifixion was a predictable outcome of His radical, inclusive, and love-centered ministry.
- **Victory in Resurrection:** While human authorities killed Him, God's raising of Jesus declares that sacrificial love overcomes oppressive systems and even death itself.

Why it fits within NCT: This approach maintains the cosmic perspective of Christus Victor (the defeat of death, evil, and sin) but dispenses with the penal or transactional elements. It also foregrounds the idea that Jesus *chose* the cross as an expression of self-giving love, not because God demanded a payment.

2. Girardian "Scapegoat" Theory: René Girard's understanding of the atonement centers on how societies unify themselves by scapegoating a victim. Jesus' death unmasks and overturns this scapegoating mechanism:

- **Inevitable Conflict:** Jesus' message of love threatened the violent "us vs. them" dynamics that hold societies together.
- **Exposure of Violence:** His innocence exposes the fundamental injustice and violence of scapegoating.
- **Resurrection:** The resurrection demonstrates that God vindicates the victim, shattering the legitimacy of the scapegoat mechanism.

Why it fits within NCT: Girard's theory emphasizes that Jesus' death was the expected outcome of confronting the powers, not a requirement imposed by God. It also aligns well with a vision of radical love and a new covenant community.

3. Moral Influence or "Good King" Example: Historically, Peter Abelard is credited with the "Moral Influence" atonement view, where Jesus' life and death serve as the ultimate demonstration of God's love, intended to transform human hearts. In this adaptation:

- **The Good King:** Jesus models a different kind of kingship, one defined by self-sacrifice rather than conquest.

- **Invitation to Follow:** Believers are inspired by Christ's example to embrace sacrificial love in their own lives.
- **No Required Sacrifice:** The cross isn't a transaction but rather the climactic demonstration of God's love and a call to follow in the way of that love.

Why it fits within NCT: Abelard invites us to consider that Jesus' death teaches us how to live rather than paying a debt to God. Because NCT affirms aspects of *Christus Victor* (overcoming death), a combined moral influence + Christus Victor perspective resonates deeply with this theological view.

III. The Cross as Exposure and Invitation

The atonement frameworks (Narrative Christus Victor, Girardian Scapegoat, and Moral Influence) converge on a deeper insight that NCT names explicitly: the cross is not primarily a transaction to be accepted but an event to be confronted. It exposes something true and devastating about the human condition, and it extends an invitation to a fundamentally different way of being human.

1. **Fear as the Root of Violence:** The cross, read through a Christocentric lens, unmask the most persistent and destructive pattern in human experience: the cycle of fear-driven violence against the innocent. Regardless of its particular form—political anxiety, religious self-protection, social scapegoating, jealousy, or the fear of displacement—human violence follows a recognizable logic. We perceive a threat, real or constructed, and we move to eliminate it. The result is always the same: the innocent bears the cost of the threatened.

This is not merely the pattern of Rome or of first-century religious elites. It is the pattern of Cain and Abel, of empire and prophet, of crowd and innocent. The crucifixion is its clearest, most unambiguous expression: the embodiment of self-giving love, stripped, condemned, and executed by the very systems (religious, political, social) that fear produced and fear sustained. In standing before the cross, we do not merely observe an injustice done to Jesus. We recognize ourselves in the crowd, in the silence, in the complicity. That recognition is not guilt in the legal sense; it is grief, the grief of seeing clearly what fear does when it is given power.

2. **Grief as the Proper Human Response:** NCT does not locate the primary human response to the cross in cognitive assent or legal confession, but in grief; the grief of

seeing clearly, perhaps for the first time, what the violence of the world costs the innocent, and our own place in that violence. This is not a sentimental or abstract grief. It is specific: we grieve that the innocent suffer. We grieve our silence. We grieve our complicity, active or passive, in the systems that crucify what is good.

This grief also exposes our need. Standing before a Messiah who bears the full weight of human violence with love and forgiveness rather than retaliation reveals something we cannot carry alone: the burden of living in a world where fear generates harm, where we participate in that harm, and where we cannot, by will or effort, break the cycle ourselves. The cross exposes our need for shalom; for the goodness, love, and forgiveness that are both the world's deepest longing and the thing our fear most consistently destroys.

- 3. Surrendering a False God:** The cross also demands a reckoning with our understanding of God. Much of Christian history has presented a God who is, at the core, wrathful; one whose anger must be appeased, whose justice must be satisfied before love can be extended. But the cross, read through NCT's Christocentric lens, tells a different story entirely. Here is a God who does not stand at a distance, demanding payment. Here is a God who enters fully into the violence of the world, absorbs its worst, and responds not with retribution but with forgiveness. "Father, forgive them" is not a legal transaction; it is a revelation of character.

To stand before the cross in grief, then, is also to surrender a retributive image of God—the God of wrath who keeps score and demands appeasement—and to receive in its place the God revealed in Christ: patient, long-suffering, self-giving, and oriented always toward restoration rather than punishment. This is not a diminished God; it is a more demanding one. A God of wrath is ultimately manageable; satisfy the requirements, and the threat is neutralized. A God of relentless, non-coercive love requires something far deeper: the transformation of the one who encounters it.

- 4. Love as the Antithesis and Antidote to Fear:** If fear is the engine of the violence the cross exposes, then the New Commandment, "love one another as I have loved you," is both its antithesis and its antidote. This is the theological force behind scriptures that NCT reads as diagnostic rather than merely aspirational. "Perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18) is not a spiritual platitude; it names an incompatibility. Fear and love cannot occupy the same motivational space. We run on one or the other. "Love your enemy" (Matthew 5:44) is not moral heroism; it is the precise refusal to let fear of the other govern our

response to them. Each of these commands targets the root system that produces the violence the cross lays bare.

Fear also drives the identity crisis that NCT identifies at the heart of sin. When we are afraid (of scarcity, of the other, of diminishment, of being displaced), we cease to perceive the image of God in those around us and begin to perceive them as threats. Violence follows almost inevitably from that failure of recognition. Love, practiced with the quality Jesus modeled, is therefore not simply an ethical standard; it is a theological condition that restores the vision fear distorts.

- 5. The Resurrection as Vindication of a Love That Does Not Fear:** In this framework, the resurrection is not merely a miracle appended to the story of the cross. It is the vindication of the entire posture Jesus embodied: love that refuses to be governed by fear, even when the cost is death. The resurrection declares that this was not foolishness. It was not naïve. It was not defeated. Love that bears violence without becoming violent, forgiveness that absorbs betrayal without retaliating, self-giving that does not protect itself at the expense of others; these are not strategies that lose. They are, the resurrection announces, the grain of the universe itself.

Together, the cross and the resurrection reframe what an encounter with God requires of us. Not the performance of a transaction, but the surrender of the fear-driven self (the self that protected itself through silence, through complicity, through the slow accumulation of violence against others) and the reception of a love strong enough, and patient enough, to bear what that self could not.

Why this fits within NCT: This framework integrates and extends all three of NCT's primary atonement lenses. It deepens the Girardian insight by naming fear as the engine of the scapegoating mechanism. It enriches the Narrative Christus Victor reading by specifying what is overcome: not only death as an abstract power, but the fear of death and loss that drives human violence. And it extends the Moral Influence model by clarifying what Jesus' example actually teaches; not a general ethic of kindness, but the specific displacement of fear by love as the animating posture of human life.

It also connects directly to NCT's understanding of sin as identity crisis (the forgetting of Imago Dei, driven by fear), of salvation as communal and ongoing (requiring the continued practice of fearless love within the body of Christ), and of justice as love applied to systems (dismantling

the fear-structures that harm the innocent). The cross, on this reading, is not the end of a theological argument. It is the beginning of a way of life.

IV. Alignment with New Command Theology

1. Jesus' "New Commandment" of Love

- The crucifixion becomes the ultimate demonstration of "Love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34-35). He "loved to the end" by laying down His life, even for enemies.

2. Forward-Looking, Not Transactional

- Instead of focusing on sin-penalty transactions rooted in OT legal frameworks, NCT sees the cross as the place where Jesus embodies the new covenant ethic of self-giving love and invites us to do the same.

3. Kingdom Expansion by Self-Giving

- *In a world where kings send others to die, Jesus dies for us to expand the kingdom.* This subverts conventional power, consistent with a forward-moving, inclusive approach to theology.

4. Resurrection as Divine Vindication

- The resurrection is the proof that love is stronger than death, that God's power works through sacrificial love rather than violent force, and that the *old system* of scapegoating, legalism, and domination has been superseded.

V. Summation of Concept

"New Command Atonement" Perspective: The crucifixion of Jesus was the inevitable result of His radically loving, justice-seeking, and inclusive ministry; a ministry that directly confronted the fear-driven systems of power, exclusion, and violence that hold human societies together. At the cross, those systems did what fear-driven systems always do: they crushed the innocent. And in doing so, they exposed themselves.

To stand before the cross is to be confronted with that exposure; to recognize, with grief, the violence of the world and our own place within it, whether through action, silence, or complicity. This grief is not abstract. It is the specific grief of seeing what fear costs the innocent, and of acknowledging that we cannot break that cycle from within ourselves.

The cross also demands a reckoning with how we understand God. The God revealed at Golgotha is not the God of wrath who demands appeasement before love can be extended. This is the God who enters fully into the world's violence, absorbs its worst, and responds with forgiveness. To encounter the cross honestly is to surrender a retributive image of God and, in its place, receive the One Jesus actually revealed: loving, patient, long-suffering, self-giving, and always oriented toward restoration.

Against the fear that drives violence, Jesus sets love, not as sentiment, but as the precise displacement of fear as the animating force of human life. "*Perfect love casts out fear.*" "*Love your enemy.*" These are not moral aspirations; they are the diagnosis and the cure, addressed to the root system the cross lays bare.

The resurrection vindicates the entire posture. Love that refuses to be governed by fear, that bears violence without becoming violent, that forgives rather than retaliates; this is not foolishness. The resurrection declares it to be the grain of the universe itself.

This approach has strong affinities with ***Narrative Christus Victor*** (nonviolent victory over death and evil), ***Girardian/Scapegoat*** (exposing and overturning the violent systems fear produces), and ***Moral Influence/Example*** (Jesus' fearless, self-giving love transforms those who truly encounter it). Together, these lenses are not competing accounts but complementary angles on a single reality: Jesus, the Good King, dies rather than kills, forgives rather than retaliates, and rises, declaring once and for all that love is stronger than the fear that crucified it.

The defining mark of Christian discipleship remains what He said it would be: "*Love one another as I have loved you. This is how they will know you are mine.*"

Jesus's Resurrection

NCT sees Jesus' resurrection as forward-looking and love-centered. Here are some points for consideration:

I. Resurrection as Inauguration of a New Creation

1. Emphasize that the resurrection isn't just a one-time event but the start of God's new creation breaking into the world (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:17). Jesus' rising from the dead shows that the power that once held humanity in bondage, sin, violence, and death has been decisively undermined.
2. This forward movement resonates with the *renewal* aspect of NCT, where Jesus' triumph makes it possible for believers to participate in that ongoing *newness* of life.

II. Resurrection as Validation of Love

1. The resurrection vindicates Jesus' sacrificial, enemy-loving posture. It serves as proof that "*loving unto death*" (Revelation 12:11) is not naive or futile but actually aligns with God's ultimate plan.
2. This dovetails with the New Command emphasis: if the cross displayed the depth of His love, the resurrection ensures that *love truly wins*.

III. Resurrection as Empowerment for Discipleship

1. The risen Christ breathes the Holy Spirit on His disciples (John 20:22) and empowers them to live out the new command as the fulfillment of the Old Covenant.
2. This underscores that the call to "love one another as I have loved you" is not a moral code we muster up on our own but is instead energized by Christ's living presence and Spirit.

IV. Resurrection as Cosmic-Level Hope

1. Beyond personal salvation, the resurrection points to the ultimate restoration of all things, healing for creation itself (Romans 8:19-21).

2. From a CRPT perspective, this grounds a vision of *ever-expanding love and justice* flowing from the power of the resurrection, transforming both individuals and communities.

V. Summation of Concept

In NCT, the resurrection does more than confirm Jesus' identity; it kick-starts the new covenant reality: a kingdom defined by self-giving love, radical hope, and dynamic participation in God's ongoing creative and restorative work.

Heaven, Hell, and Punishment (Eschatology)

Within NCT, the doctrine of last things (eschatology) is shaped not by coercion or fear, but by Christ's radical ethic of love, God's unwavering hospitality, and a consistent refusal to separate justice from mercy. The "Eternal Choice" model (sometimes referred to as Open Gates Eschatology) naturally emerges from this framework, holding together the reality of judgment, the hope of reconciliation, and the freedom of love.

While a complete theological framework must account for judgment, hell, and punishment, these are not central to the lived practice of Christian faith within NCT. Following Jesus is not driven by fear of damnation but by the invitation to participate in the kingdom of God through self-giving love, mercy, and justice. Eschatology, then, serves not as a system of threat or finality, but as a continuation of the gospel's call to transformation, restoration, and communion. The focus remains on Christ's love-command, the foundation and fulfillment of God's eternal purposes.

I. Core Concept: Eternal Invitation, Eternal Freedom

NCT views heaven and hell not as arbitrary destinations or binary fates, but as dynamic realities shaped by our relationship to Christ's self-giving love.

- **Heaven** is participation in God's kingdom, beginning now and fulfilled in the age to come.
- **Hell** is real, tragic, and a self-enacted choice to remain outside of the kingdom and is never God-imposed torment.
- **Divine punishment**, properly speaking, targets the cosmic forces of evil and death. In relation to humanity, it functions as restorative judgment, not punitive wrath, oriented toward purification, revelation, and transformation.

Key convictions:

1. **Love Never Coerces:** God honors freedom eternally. No one is forced into the kingdom, nor annihilated for refusing.
2. **Judgment as Hope:** God names and resists evil, but always with the purpose of healing, not endless wrath.

3. **Fire with Two Outcomes:** God's fire consumes evil (the "second death") but purifies those made in God's image (1 Cor. 3:13–15).

II. Biblical and Theological Foundations

- **Revelation 21-22:** Gates of the city never shut; nations still coming in; leaves for the healing of the nations, suggesting ongoing invitation beyond final judgment.
- **Matthew 25:41:** The fire is "prepared for the devil and his angels," not humanity: evil is destroyed, not people.
- **1 Corinthians 3:13-15:** Human works are tested by fire; persons are saved "yet so as through fire," a vision of refining judgment.
- **2 Peter 3:9:** God desires that none perish; divine patience implies ongoing opportunity.
- **Romans 2:4:** God's kindness, not fear, leads to repentance.
- **Hebrews 12:29:** "Our God is a consuming fire." God's own love burns away what cannot remain.
- **C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*:** "Hell's doors are locked from the inside." People can leave; many choose not to.
- **Brad Jersak, *Her Gates Will Never Be Shut*:** Offers a vision of judgment that is just, but never final, in God's hospitality.

* **Theological Note on Matthew 25:41:** "Depart from me... into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" is often cited as proof of eternal damnation. However, in NCT, this verse underscores that hell was **never intended** for humanity. It was created to deal with **radical evil**, not image-bearing people. Those who resist love align themselves with what is anti-kingdom, but the gates remain open for return. The same fire that destroys evil may purify the human heart. This is a **warning**, not a final decree, and even judgment can become an invitation.

III. How This Preserves God's Character

1. **Christocentric Non-Coercion:** Jesus never coerced. Hell is not "believe or burn," nor is it "believe or be annihilated." Instead: "believe and live, or resist, and remain outside, though the gates are open."
2. **Love as the Purpose of Judgment:** God's consuming fire purifies the person and destroys the deception, violence, and sin that keep them enslaved.

3. **Faithful to the Parables of Jesus:** Jesus depicts God as an ever-inviting host (Luke 14), a waiting father (Luke 15), and a truth-teller about consequences (Matt. 25)—but never a coercive tyrant.

IV. Contrast with Other Views

1. **Eternal Conscious Torment (ECT)**

NCT Response: Incompatible with God's character of love; relies on coercion and fear. Rejected in NCT.

2. **Annihilationism/Conditional Mortality**

NCT Response: Respects human freedom but still ends in finality; risks presenting a love that runs out.

3. **Universalism**

NCT Response: Overly optimistic in ways that may collapse human freedom; makes eventual salvation inevitable.

4. **Eternal Choice/Open Gates**

NCT Response: Balances love and freedom. God's love endures. The invitation remains. Judgment is real, but hope is never foreclosed.

V. The "Layered Afterlife" in NCT

1. **This Present Life**

- Heaven and hell are already breaking in. Participation in the kingdom now leads to flourishing. Resistance creates alienation and relational fragmentation.

2. **Death and Judgment**

- All face the truth of Christ's love. Deeds are tested. What is false is burned away; what is true remains.

3. **Lake of Fire**

- A real reality for evil, death, and the devil. For humans, it is the experience of purifying love or painful separation, never arbitrary or eternal torment.

4. Ongoing Invitation

- Revelation shows open gates, healing leaves, and nations coming in. Even after judgment, the kingdom remains accessible.

5. Final State

- Evil is destroyed. God's people, refined, renewed, dwell in the fullness of love. Whether all enter is a hope, not a doctrine. But God's love never stops inviting.

VI. Ethical and Pastoral Implications

1. **Evangelism:** Becomes an invitation to life, not a threat of doom.
2. **Discipleship:** Emphasizes joining the kingdom community now, not just escaping hell later.
3. **Pastoral Care:** Offers hope even in the midst of grief. Hell is real, but not God's last word.
4. **Restorative Naming:** Rather than "preaching judgment," NCT calls out sin as misaligned identity and invites healing through truth. Divine judgment is not condemnation, but the fire that restores what love desires to save.

VII. How This Fits Within NCT

1. **Christocentric:** Jesus is our lens. He warned of judgment, but always pointed toward grace, healing, and the open door.
2. **New Command of Love:** Love is patient, open, non-coercive, even into eternity.
3. **Progressive Revelation:** Final judgment is re-read through the character of Christ. Hell is not torture or annihilation, but a tragic distance from love.
4. **Communal Kingdom Focus:** Salvation is belonging to the city of God. Hell is standing outside it, tragically.
5. **Hopeful Posture:** Our hope is that all may one day say "yes" to love. However, we do not control the timetable, nor do we limit God's hospitality.

6. Refining Fire: What is impure is burned away; what is true is preserved. God's justice is restorative, not retributive.

VIII. Summation of Concept

In NCT, eschatology is not a system of final threats but a vision of love's enduring invitation. Heaven, hell, and punishment are not the center of the Christian life; Christ's love-command is. The kingdom of God is open, the gates never shut, and God's justice is always restorative, never retributive.

Heaven is the flourishing life of God's kingdom, available now and in fullness to come. Hell is a tragic but self-chosen separation from that kingdom, real, but never sealed. Divine judgment is real, but not wrathful vengeance; it is love's fire, purifying what is human and consuming what is evil. God's justice does not terminate freedom; it reveals truth and invites healing.

Eschatology, in this vision, reinforces what the gospel always proclaims: that love never ends, never coerces, and never gives up. The final word is not fear, but the faithful welcome of Christ, whose arms remain open even beyond the judgment, not to erase consequences, but to redeem what remains. In NCT, eternity is not a fork in the road; it is the continuation of love's pursuit.

Hell is not the last word. Love is.

The Politics of the Kingdom of Heaven

NCT views the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) as the definitive expression of the Kingdom’s politics, revealing how heaven’s values are to be embodied presently on earth. As the “Kingdom Charter,” the Sermon on the Mount emphasizes growth out of Jesus’ new commandment (John 13:34-35) and His invitation to embody divine love and justice in the present moment.

I. Kingdom Ethic in Action

1. The Sermon on the Mount outlines the radical ethic Jesus envisions for His followers: non-retaliation, love for enemies, humility, and a servant’s heart.
2. NCT sees these teachings not as lofty ideals for a future heaven but as practical guidelines for shaping society according to God’s heart *today*, an integral part of “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

II. Spiritual, Social, and Political Implications

1. The Sermon addresses interpersonal relationships (forgiveness, reconciliation), religious practices (prayer, fasting), and social behaviors (justice, mercy).
2. NCT interprets these instructions as the political or cultural agenda of the kingdom of heaven, standing in contrast to worldly power structures and legalisms (e.g., selective usage of OT laws).

III. New Commandment Embodied

1. While “loving one another as Christ loves” is the heart of NCT, the Sermon on the Mount fleshes out *how* that love manifests in daily life.
2. From resisting vengeance to giving generously, each element of Jesus’s sermon reflects the new command of sacrificial love in practical terms.

IV. Fulfillment of the Old, Foundation for the New

1. Although Jesus references OT laws within the Sermon (e.g., “You have heard it said...but I say to you...”), His authority to reinterpret and fulfill them underscores NCT’s belief that the new covenant transcends and redefines OT legalism.
2. In NCT, the Sermon on the Mount is thus the clearest window into the renewed and Christ-centered ethic by which Christians are called to live.

V. Empowered by the Spirit

1. NCT also emphasizes the Holy Spirit’s role in enabling believers to live out the Sermon’s teachings, as it is not merely a moral code but an invitation into Spirit-led transformation.
2. This aligns with NCT’s broader vision of a progressive, forward-looking faith where believers grow into deeper Christlikeness over time.

VI. Summation of Concept

For **New Command Theology**, the Sermon on the Mount is both the **manifesto** of the kingdom of heaven and the **practical outworking** of Christ’s new commandment. Whenever the concepts of kingdom, inviting heaven to earth, or godly work arise, **Matthew 5–7** stands as the primary reference point, ensuring that Christian practice remains grounded in Jesus’ radical vision of self-giving love, humility, and transformative justice.

The Bible

Within **New Command Theology**, the Bible is *authoritative*, yet neither infallible nor inerrant. This framework synthesizes:

- **Neo-Orthodox** influences,
- **Tim Mackey's** literary-and-narrative approach, and
- The broader commitment to a **Christ-centered, forward-looking** understanding of Scripture.

I. Authority Defined Through a Christocentric Lens

In NCT, the Bible derives its primary authority from its emphasis on pointing to Jesus and His new commandment of love. This echoes Tim Mackey's idea of a unified narrative that culminates in the Messiah, understood by NCT as:

- **Progressive Revelation:** Scripture's story builds progressively, finding its fullest meaning and *authoritative climax* in the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus.
- **Christ as the Interpretive Key:** The Gospels and the New Testament serve as the lens through which Christians interpret the rest of the Bible. Thus, while the OT is historically and culturally significant, it is "authoritative" primarily in how it reveals and foreshadows Christ.

Why this fits within NCT: Rather than claiming the text is *factually flawless*, NCT sees Scripture's authority rooted in its Christ-centered message. This allows for human elements (such as editing and cultural context) while affirming that God used these human processes to convey divine truth.

II. Neo-Orthodoxy and Divine-Human Synergy

A **neo-orthodox** perspective holds that the Bible is both **divine revelation** and a **human artifact**:

- **Divine Inspiration:** God inspired and guided human authors, but did not override their cultural, literary, or personal contexts.

- **Human Participation:** Just as Jesus is fully God and fully human, Scripture might be seen as both divine and human, reflecting a synergy rather than a dictation.

Why it fits within NCT: Neo-orthodoxy emphasizes encounter with God (Relational Revelation) through the text. For NCT, encountering Christ in the pages of Scripture is precisely where the Bible's authority is evident, as it calls believers to fulfill the new commandment of love. Since NCT already moves beyond strict OT legalism and literalism, a non-inerrant viewpoint reinforces the need to interpret ancient texts carefully, guided by the Spirit and the ethic of Christ's love, within a communal setting.

III. Literary Approach

Tim Mackey reminds us that the Bible is a carefully curated and edited library designed to reveal God's overarching story:

- **Narrative Cohesion:** Threaded together over centuries, the biblical texts converge on the promise of a Messiah, fulfilled in Jesus.
- **Literary and Historical Context:** Recognizing genre, authorship, audience, and cultural backdrop is crucial to interpreting biblical books faithfully.

Why this fits within NCT: For NCT, Mackey's framework highlights how every piece of the biblical library ultimately points to Jesus (Christ-Centered Narrative), confirming that the *end goal* of Scripture is to reveal Christ's kingdom ethic. While the OT is an indispensable background, NCT affirms that the *new covenant*, found in the New Testament, is the final and most authoritative revelation of God's will (Focus on the NT), which the narrative momentum of Scripture was leading toward all along.

IV. Implications for NCT Practice

1. Bible Study and Teaching

- **Contextual Reading:** In NCT communities, believers approach Scripture by asking, "How does this text reflect or anticipate Jesus and His 'new commandment'?"
- **Living Document:** The Bible remains "alive" by continually challenging and renewing believers through the Holy Spirit, rather than being a static rulebook of inerrant facts.

2. Application of OT vs. NT

- OT as Context, NT as Fulfillment: Consistent with a NCT stance on focusing more on the teachings of Jesus, the OT holds authoritative context but is not the final word on Christian doctrine or practice.
- Avoiding Selective Legalism: Because the Bible is viewed as authoritative in a holistic, narrative sense, cherry-picking OT laws to justify moral stances (e.g., against certain groups) is inconsistent with NCT's Christ-centered ethic of love.

3. Unity in Diversity

- Embracing Complexity: The biblical library spans varied genres and eras. NCT affirms that Scripture's unity resides not in uniform literal precision but in its coherent witness to God's redemptive plan, centered on Jesus.

V. Summation of Concept

In **New Command Theology**, the Bible is **authoritative** because it faithfully and uniquely reveals God's redemptive plan leading to Christ, without requiring the categories of inerrancy or infallibility. This perspective:

- Draws on neo-orthodoxy to acknowledge both divine inspiration and human contribution.
- Echoes **Tim Mackey's** literary approach, seeing the Bible as a curated and edited narrative that leads to Jesus.
- Stays rooted in a **Christocentric** hermeneutic, where Jesus' new command of love reigns supreme, shaping how believers interpret and live out Scripture.

Thus, this view of Scripture aligns naturally with NCT by elevating Christ's revelation above all, while respecting the Bible's historical, cultural, and literary complexity, a balanced stance that upholds the Bible's spiritual authority without claiming perfection in its human expressions.

Soteriology

New Command Theology emphasizes both personal choice and communal participation in God's Kingdom. This understanding extends to salvation as personal, communal, ongoing, and grace-based. This understanding is built out of continuing dialogue with prominent theologians, biblical scholars, and historical traditions.

I. Core Elements

1. Personal Decision, Communal Reality

- NCT affirms salvation involves a personal acceptance of Jesus' invitation (Romans 10:9).
- NCT maintains that salvation is then lived out and fully realized within the kingdom community, like citizens who experience security only once they're inside the protective walls.

2. Ongoing Nature ("Being Saved")

- Citing Paul's language about believers "being saved" (1 Corinthians 1:18, 2 Corinthians 2:15), NCT sees salvation as dynamic and progressive, not merely a one-time event.
- NCT affirms that salvation is by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9), not earned by works. The ongoing dimension reflects *sanctification* or *growth* in kingdom living.

3. Kingdom & Body Imagery

- The idea of belonging to "the body" (the Church) and "the kingdom" is central. This communal dimension is where salvation's benefits (love, protection, transformation) are fully experienced and come to life.
- This ties directly into a broader theological framework: the Sermon on the Mount sets the ethic of the kingdom, the New Command focuses on love, and the community embodies these teachings.

II. Key Biblical and Theological Supports

1. New Testament Emphasis on Communal Identity

- **Pauline Letters:**
 - *Body of Christ* (1 Corinthians 12:12-27): We're saved into a living body, each part essential to the whole.
 - *Citizenship in Heaven* (Philippians 3:20): Salvation reorients our primary allegiance, forging a *collective* identity.
 - *Being Saved* (1 Corinthians 1:18, 2:15): Points to salvation as *both present and ongoing*, aligning with my "active and ongoing state" emphasis.
- **The Gospels:**
 - Jesus repeatedly describes the kingdom as a communal reality: a feast to which people are invited (Luke 14:15-24), a city on a hill (Matthew 5:14), or a small seed growing into a large tree that gives shelter (Matthew 13:31-32).

2. The Early Church and Patristic Tradition

- **Early Church Fathers** often stressed the communal aspects of salvation:
 - *Ignatius of Antioch* spoke about unity in the church as vital to salvation.
 - *The Cappadocian Fathers* (Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus) highlighted the church's communal life as central for growing in Christlikeness.
- While these fathers didn't ignore personal repentance, they placed heavy emphasis on **the body's** role in spiritual formation and preservation.

3. Contemporary Scholars and Theologians

- **N.T. Wright**
 - In works like *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* and *Surprised by Hope*, Wright emphasizes the **communal and future-oriented** nature of salvation.
 - He frequently notes that Paul's language of *justification* or *salvation* is about **belonging to the covenant community** (the redefined Israel now centered on Christ).

- **Scot McKnight**
 - In *The King Jesus Gospel*, McKnight argues that the good news is about **Jesus the King** bringing the kingdom, and that individuals find salvation by becoming part of this *kingdom community*.
 - This emphasis complements my own stance: a personal acceptance of Jesus leads one into a communal, kingdom-focused story.

- **James D.G. Dunn and the New Perspective on Paul**
 - Dunn highlights the **corporate** dimensions of Paul's theology, noting how "faith" unites believers into one **people of God**.
 - This supports the view that personal faith is the entry point, but the real experience unfolds in the community.

- **Eastern Orthodox Voices**
 - While the term "theosis" might not be central to a NCT approach, Orthodox theology strongly emphasizes salvation as a **communal journey** in the body of Christ.
 - **John Zizioulas** (Being as Communion) underscores how personhood and salvation are intrinsically tied to *being in relationship*, with God and with others.

- **Liberation and Social-Gospel Influences**
 - The **communal dimension** is also strongly represented in Liberation Theology (e.g., Gustavo Gutiérrez) and the Social Gospel tradition (Walter Rauschenbusch), though these movements heavily emphasize socio-political liberation.
 - Their focus on **collective well-being** can be a constructive reminder that salvation is not purely individualistic.

III. Distinguishing an NCT View from "Works-Based" Salvation

- NCT affirms that salvation is a gift of grace (Ephesians 2:8-9) accessed through faith.
- The ongoing, communal dimension doesn't *earn* salvation; it *manifests* salvation. As believers participate in kingdom life and relationships, they experience the fullness of salvation that began at personal confession.

IV. How This Fits New Command Theology

- **Christocentric Focus:** Salvation is entry into Christ's kingdom, the communal reality shaped by His new command of love.
- **Forward-Looking Ethic:** Emphasizing "being saved" means believers continue growing in the kingdom ethos, pushing forward toward God's restorative vision for the world.
- **Renewal and Fellowship:** God's plan for renewal is not for isolated individuals but for *people* who embody Jesus' loving reign, consistent with this broader theology of a new covenant community.
- **Practical Outworking:** Participation in the **Sermon on the Mount** ethic and **New Command** love is a daily enactment of salvation, an active demonstration that we truly are "in the kingdom."

V. Summation of Concept

NCT sees salvation as a personal choice to follow Christ that immediately places an individual into a communal reality called *the kingdom* or *body of Christ*. This salvation is ongoing, "we are being saved," as believers grow in Christ-like love within the supportive context of kingdom community. It is by grace through faith, not by works, but it flourishes in the shared life of the redeemed.

VI. Recommended Voices

Key Voices to Explore Further

- **N.T. Wright** (covenant community emphasis)
- **Scot McKnight** (*The King Jesus Gospel*)
- **James D.G. Dunn** (corporate soteriology in Paul)
- **Eastern Orthodox** insights on communal spiritual growth (e.g., John Zizioulas)
- **Patristic Fathers** for early examples of communal salvation

By weaving these perspectives into a New Command Theology, it situates salvation as a relational, grace-based, and progressively realized reality that anchors personal faith in the life-giving fellowship of God's kingdom people.

On Justice

Love Made Restorative

I. Love as the Engine of Justice in NCT

In NCT, justice is not an abstract legal ideal or a detached virtue; it is love in action. Rooted in Jesus' "new command" to *love one another as I have loved you* (John 13:34), justice becomes the visible, systemic outworking of self-giving love.

- **Love is the foundation** (John 13:34)
- **Justice is its outworking** (Micah 6:8)
- **Shalom is its goal** (Isaiah 32:17 & Psalm 85:10)

This framework echoes James 2:17, "*Faith without works is dead,*" and applies it to love: *Love without justice is hollow.* The love Jesus modeled does more than comfort the wounded; it also dismantles the systems that cause the wounding.

NCT says, "The work of love is to make justice real."

Justice in NCT is not merely reactionary or corrective; it is restorative, prophetic, and participatory. It aligns with the biblical vision of *shalom* (Isaiah 32:17, Psalm 85:10): not merely peace as the absence of conflict, but the fullness of harmony, right relationships, and communal wholeness under God's reign.

II. Theological Foundations

1. **Jesus as the Just One:** In Christ, God does not issue judgment from a distance but enters into the suffering of the marginalized (Luke 4:18). Justice is not retributive punishment but restorative action, patterned after the cross, where love confronts evil, absorbs its blows, and rises with healing.
2. **Kingdom Ethics as Public Witness:** The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) is the public ethic of the Kingdom, a blueprint for just living. Non-retaliation, enemy love, peacemaking, economic generosity, and truth-telling are all practices of public justice rooted in Christ-like love.

3. **Shalom as the Goal:** Justice aims not at punishment but at wholeness. The end goal is always *shalom*, right relationships between people, communities, creation, and God.

III. Implications for Practice

To obey Christ's new commandment means to *disrupt* injustice wherever it denies the image of God in others. NCT calls followers of Jesus to:

1. **Dismantle injustice:** Whether economic inequality, racial discrimination, colonialism, gender oppression, or exclusionary religion, every system that harms or marginalizes must be opposed as antithetical to Christ's reign.
2. **Repair and restore:** Justice is also about reparative action, redistributing resources, amplifying silenced voices, and rebuilding broken relationships.
3. **Live liturgically:** Justice-making is not secular activism imported into faith; it is a form of worship. As we do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly (Micah 6:8), we proclaim that the kingdom of God is here.

Justice in NCT is love applied to systems. It is how the Church embodies Christ's reign "on earth as it is in heaven."

How This Fits within NCT: In NCT, justice is not peripheral; it is central. Here's why:

1. **Christocentric:** Justice is modeled after Jesus' own life, healing the sick, challenging religious hypocrisy, flipping tables, feeding the hungry, forgiving sinners, and dying for enemies.
2. **Progressive and Renewing:** Justice is an ongoing process. As love calls us deeper, the Spirit continually reveals new areas of needed reform and liberation.
3. **Communal and Transformative:** Justice happens *within* and *through* the body of Christ. We are not isolated actors but a Spirit-formed people bearing witness to a new way of being human together.
4. **Nonviolent and Prophetic:** NCT justice rejects coercive power in favor of prophetic resistance, peacemaking, and nonviolent solidarity with the oppressed.

IV. Summation of Concept

To “love one another as Christ has loved us” is to make justice unavoidable. In NCT, love is never reduced to sentiment; it is always socially embodied. And justice is never detached from grace; it is always love’s public form. Together, they bear witness to the inbreaking kingdom of God, where all things are being made new.

On Humility Love Made Lowly

Within New Command Theology, humility can be understood as both a personal posture and a communal virtue, which is essential for living out the gospel of Christ's self-giving love.

I. Here's how humility fits into this vision:

1. **A Recognition of Dependence on Grace:** Humility is rooted in the understanding that our salvation, both the initial moment of personal confession and the ongoing process of "being saved," is a gift of grace rather than a result of our own efforts. This means acknowledging that we are continually dependent on God's mercy and love. Rather than boasting in our achievements or knowledge, we remain open to the Spirit's transforming work in our lives.
2. **Living in Community as Kingdom Citizens:** In this view, salvation is not merely an individual transaction but an entrance into the communal life of the kingdom, a "citizenship" where every member contributes to and benefits from the shared experience of God's love. Humility, then, manifests as a willingness to recognize that no one stands above another. Like the early community described in the New Testament, each person's unique role is valued, and the collective growth in Christ is celebrated over individual accolades.
3. **Embodying the Ethic of the Sermon on the Mount:** The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) is central to New Command Theology, serving as the "Kingdom Charter." Here, Jesus teaches that true blessedness comes to those who are "poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:3) and who embody meekness, mercy, and a longing for righteousness. Humility is the spirit in which these teachings are lived out; it involves listening to God's word, setting aside prideful self-righteousness, and allowing ourselves to be shaped by Christ's example of sacrificial love.
4. **An Active, Relational Virtue:** Humility isn't about self-effacement or passivity. It's an active stance that involves:
 - **Listening and Learning:** Approaching Scripture and fellow believers with an open heart, recognizing that our understanding of God's will is enriched by the community's insights and by the living guidance of the Holy Spirit.

- **Service and Vulnerability:** Following Christ's example as a "good king" who served others, humility calls us to serve without seeking personal glory, embracing vulnerability as we live out the New Commandment of loving one another.
 - **Mutual Dependence:** In the body of Christ, humility fosters an environment where every member's gifts are recognized, and no one is deemed superior. It rejects the notion of self-sufficiency in favor of a shared journey of growth and transformation.
- 5. Countering Legalistic Pride:** By emphasizing a reading of Scripture that sees the Bible as a divinely inspired yet humanly mediated narrative, this framework invites us to approach God's Word with humility. We recognize that no single interpretation holds all the answers and that the text's authority lies in its Christ-centered narrative rather than in a rigid, literalistic reading. This humility keeps us open to ongoing revelation and dialogue, both within our faith communities and in our personal lives.
- 6. The Humble King as Our Model:** Finally, the ultimate example of humility is found in Jesus Himself. His willingness to enter into the vulnerability of human experience, even to the point of crucifixion, embodies the kind of humility that undergirds New Command Theology. Jesus' life teaches us that true power is expressed not in domination or self-exaltation but in sacrificial love and service to others.

II. Summation of Concept

Within this theological framework, humility is the recognition that our journey of salvation is both a personal response to Christ's invitation and an ongoing, communal process of being transformed by God's grace. It calls us to live as vulnerable, service-oriented citizens of God's kingdom, constantly open to learning, loving, and growing together in the spirit of the new command to love one another as Christ loves us.

On Sin

Love Made Clear

I. Forgetting Our Divine Identity

New Command Theology understands sin not merely as a moral misstep or violation of divine law, but primarily as an identity crisis. In Genesis 3, the serpent's deception led humanity to doubt the truth that they were made in the image of God (Imago Dei). Instead of embracing their created dignity and capacity for reflective goodness, humans became caught in a cycle of self-doubt. This doubt fuels the tendency to define what is "good" by one's own limited standards, ultimately causing harm to both oneself and others.

II. The Cycle of Self-Deception and Harm

When a person forgets or actively rejects the truth of their and others' divine image, they often seek fulfillment in ways that can harm their well-being and relationships. In this view:

1. **Self-Harm and Isolation:** The denial of our inherent worth leads to behaviors and choices that undermine our health and happiness.
2. **Relational Damage:** Without grounding our true identity, we may treat others based on flawed, self-centered criteria, which erodes authentic, loving relationships and causes undue harm.
3. **Estrangement from God:** Ultimately, this identity crisis results in a distancing from God, a failure to live into the fullness of the relationship God intended.

III. Reclaiming Identity Through the New Covenant

Within NCT, salvation is understood as both a personal and communal process; a journey of "being saved" that begins with a personal confession of faith in Christ and is fully realized within the context of the kingdom community. Part of this journey involves recovering our true identity as divine image bearers. When we:

1. **Acknowledge our wound:** Recognizing that the serpent's deception led to a distortion of our self-image,

- 2. Reclaim our identity:** Embracing the truth that we and others are made in the image of God, and
- 3. Participate in the community:** By living out our true identities within the body of Christ, we begin to heal. This healing transforms how we love ourselves, how we relate to and love others, and how we connect with and love God.

IV. Sin, Love, and the Transformative Community

Aligned with Jesus' new commandment to "love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34-35), this view of sin highlights that:

- 1. Personal Healing is Communal:** True renewal comes as individuals are nurtured in a community that reaffirms their divine identity.
- 2. Identity Reclamation Leads to Kingdom Living:** As people come to understand and live out their image-bearing nature, they contribute to a community where grace, mercy, and love are the norm, exemplifying the kingdom ethic taught in the Sermon on the Mount.
- 3. Ongoing Process:** This is not a one-time rescue, but an active, continual transformation; a journey of "being saved" where the memory of past wounds is acknowledged, healed, and then transcended by the power of God's redeeming love. In essence, we are in a continual cycle of forgetting and being reminded of who we are within a community of others who are also in the same process.

V. Theological and Scriptural Touchpoints

- **Genesis 3:** The narrative illustrates how the serpent's lie introduced a persistent doubt about human identity.
- **New Testament Themes:** 1 Corinthians 12, which describes the church as the body of Christ, emphasizes that our true identity is realized only in community. Additionally, passages such as 1 Corinthians 13:12 describe that for now, we only maintain the ability to see Christ's love dimly, which impacts the way we see ourselves and others, but that one day we will see love face-to-face.
- **Patristic and Contemporary Insights:** Many theologians, both ancient (such as Augustine, who wrestled with the nature of sin) and modern (those who emphasize the

relational and identity-based nature of human sin), support the idea that the forgetting of our divine likeness lies at the heart of sin.

VI. Summation of Concept

In New Command Theology, sin is seen as the forgetting or rejection of the truth that we are made in God's image, a truth that grounds our ability to love ourselves, others, and God. This view reorients the problem of sin from a list of do's and don'ts to a profound, ongoing identity issue. The journey toward salvation, then, becomes one of reclaiming our inherent dignity through personal confession and, crucially, through participation in a loving, grace-filled community that embodies the kingdom ethic. This reclaimed identity not only heals our individual wounds but also transforms our relationships and enables us to live into the fullness of life that God intends.

VII. Recommended Voices

Several theologians and biblical scholars offer perspectives that resonate with this view of sin as an identity issue rooted in the forgetting or rejection of our divine image. Here are a few whose work support and enrich an NCT framework:

1. J. Richard Middleton

In *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1*, Middleton argues that being made in the image of God is a foundational truth about human identity. He views sin as a distortion or rejection of that identity; a failure to live into the liberating potential of our creation. This directly aligns with the idea that the serpent's lie caused humanity to doubt its likeness to God, leading to harmful cycles in individual and communal life.

2. John Zizioulas

As a prominent Eastern Orthodox theologian, Zizioulas emphasizes that true human identity is fundamentally relational, rooted in our being in communion with God and one another. He argues that sin represents a break or distortion in that relational identity. For Zizioulas, reclaiming our identity as image-bearers of God is central to the healing process, which echoes the view that recognizing our divine image transforms our love for ourselves, others, and God.

3. N.T. Wright

Though best known for his work on the New Perspective on Paul and the Kingdom of God, Wright's writings often stress the restoration of God's people to their true identity. He suggests that the redemptive narrative is about more than just forgiveness, it's about renewing our understanding of who we are as God's covenant community. This restoration of identity, from the old patterns of self-deception to the new reality in Christ, supports the idea that sin is fundamentally an identity crisis.

4. Miroslav Volf

In works such as *Exclusion and Embrace*, Volf examines how sin disrupts our relationships, both with God and with one another. His focus on reconciliation and the recovery of our true selves resonates with the notion that sin, by causing us to doubt our inherent worth as image-bearers, leads to harm in both our relationships and personal lives. Volf's emphasis on embracing our true identity in God can bolster the argument that healing begins with reclaiming that divinely bestowed image.

5. C.S. Lewis

While writing in a more accessible style, Lewis in *Mere Christianity* and other works discusses how pride and self-deception cause us to stray from our true nature. He sees sin as a misstep that involves forgetting our proper place as creatures made in God's likeness. His reflections on pride as the "great sin," a turning away from the truth about ourselves, can be seen as complementary to the idea that sin is about losing sight of our divine identity.

Each of these voices, in different ways, supports the view that sin is less about mere rule-breaking and more about a fundamental distortion of who we are intended to be. They stress that the root of sin lies in the failure to recognize, embrace, and live out our identity as image-bearers of a loving and creative God. Integrating their insights into NCT helps articulate a vision of sin that is both the cause of personal and communal harm and the starting point for a restorative journey back to our true selves in Christ.

On Mercy and Grace

Love Made Patient

I. Mercy as Restorative Care, Not Withheld Punishment

Traditional theology often defines mercy as "not giving us what we deserve" (i.e., not punishing us for our sins). This assumes a penal framework, where humans are inherently guilty and deserving of retribution.

But Jesus reframes mercy as compassionate action, or the compassionate care of another in distress. In the Good Samaritan parable (Luke 10:25-37), the Samaritan doesn't merely "withhold judgment" from the wounded man; he actively engages in healing and restoration. Jesus asks, "Who was a neighbor?" and the answer is, "The one who showed mercy."

Mercy, then, is not about avoiding punishment; it's about stepping into another's suffering and bringing healing and wholeness. In this way, God's mercy is not passive restraint but active restoration.

II. Grace as Healing Space and Transformative Love

Traditional theology often defines grace as an unearned legal pardon, but Jesus presents grace as an empowering transformation. NCT notes that grace is God's patience and space for us to receive love and care. In grace, God recognizes our need for healing and is patient in our acceptance of that truth and the ultimate mercy that will heal us.

Consider Jesus and the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11):

- He does not condemn her but instead creates space for her and is patient (grace).
- He invites her into healing and a new life beyond others' labels and condemnation (mercy).
- **Ultimately, He creates a space for her to heal by accepting and reclaiming her dignity.**

Grace, then, is more than unmerited favor; it is God's inclination toward us, opening the way for transformation. It is the power of divine love working toward and in us.

III. The Relationship Between Grace and Mercy

1. Grace recognizes our need and then patiently extends the opportunity for restoration and wholeness. (Like Jesus' interactions with the broken)
2. Mercy sees distress and moves to relieve it. (Like the Good Samaritan)

Both flow from love, not from a legal framework of punishment and pardon.

God's mercy sees our wounds and moves to heal. Grace is the continued space to walk in that healing and become whole.

IV. Examples of Practical Applications in Christian Living

1. In Our View of Salvation

- Salvation is not escaping punishment but being healed and transformed by God's love.
- **God's grace** recognizes our need and the distress of our separation from God and patiently moves toward us, revealing and offering closeness.
- **God's mercy** extends compassionate care, relieving our distress, and offering healing and wholeness.

2. In How We Treat Others

- **Mercy:** Seeing people's struggles without judgment and actively helping them.
- **Grace:** Offering people space to heal, change, and be their fullest selves.

V. Summation of Concept

Rather than seeing grace and mercy through a courtroom lens (legal pardon), Jesus invites us to see them through a hospital lens (time, healing, and restoration). In the kingdom of God, grace moves toward the wounded, providing the space for healing, mercy extends compassionate care, and love is the foundation of both. This understanding shifts Christian practice from guilt-driven legalism to a dynamic, healing relationship with God, one that invites us to both receive grace and extend it to others.

On Residing in the Kingdom

Love Made Flesh

I. Jesus and the End of Empire

New Command Theology (NCT) understands Jesus' mission as a radical confrontation with empire, not merely Rome, but all systems of domination that elevate power, control, and exclusion over love, service, and justice. In John 18:36, Jesus states, "My kingdom is not of this world," making clear that His rule does not operate by the principles of earthly empires. Instead of coercion, hierarchy, and militarism, Jesus' kingdom is built on self-giving love, radical inclusion, and transformative and restorative justice.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus repeatedly subverted imperial expectations:

- He entered Jerusalem not as a conquering warlord but on a donkey (Matthew 21:1-11), enacting a prophetic critique of militaristic messianic hopes.
- He proclaimed the "good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18-19), offering liberation from both spiritual and socio-political oppression.
- He resisted Satan's temptation to take control over "all the kingdoms of the world" (Matthew 4:8-10), affirming that true authority is not based on conquest but on obedience to God's love.
- His crucifixion was the ultimate rejection of the empire's claim to final power. Rome executed Him as a political insurrectionist, yet His resurrection declared that God's kingdom cannot be conquered.

Jesus' life and teachings, therefore, expose the fraudulence of empire and call His followers into an alternative way of living, known as kingdom living, which stands in direct opposition to empire-building.

II. Empire-Building vs. Kingdom Living

Empire-building is characterized by domination, hierarchy, and exclusion. It seeks to establish control, often using religion to justify its means. NCT identifies Christian nationalism, colonialism, and systemic injustice as contemporary manifestations of empire-building under the guise of faith. These expressions distort the gospel by aligning with political power rather than embodying the values of Christ's kingdom.

In contrast, kingdom living reflects the values of Jesus:

- **Love over Power:** Instead of seeking control, Jesus calls His followers to self-sacrificial love (John 13:34-35).
- **Inclusion over Exclusion:** The kingdom welcomes the marginalized (Luke 14:13-14) and breaks down divisions (Galatians 3:28).
- **Service over Domination:** True leadership is found first in servanthood (Matthew 20:25-28).
- **Justice over Oppression:** The kingdom stands with the poor and oppressed (Matthew 25:31-46).

To live as citizens of Christ's kingdom means rejecting the temptation to fuse faith with empire-driven ambitions. It requires dismantling systems of oppression rather than sanctifying them.

III. The Bible as a Tool for Recognizing and Resisting Empire

NCT views the Bible not as a static rulebook, but as a dynamic, Christ-centered revelation that helps believers discern between the empire and the kingdom. While the empire has historically weaponized scripture to justify conquest and subjugation, NCT emphasizes reading scripture communally and through the lens of Jesus:

- The Hebrew prophets condemned imperial injustice, calling rulers to account (Amos 5:24, Micah 6:8).
- The Exodus narrative reveals God as a liberator, standing against Pharaoh's empire (Exodus 3:7-10).
- The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) presents Jesus' radical kingdom ethic, rejecting violent retaliation and calling for love towards one's enemies.
- Revelation, often misread as an endorsement of divine wrath, is actually a critique of empire, exposing Rome's brutality and affirming that Jesus, not Caesar, is Lord (Revelation 18-19). This is most beneficial to us presently in helping us identify, critique, and challenge modern empires.

By centering on Christ's teachings, the Bible becomes a tool for resistance against empire-building and a guide to living in the kingdom.

IV. The Gospel as Liberation from Empire's Grip

In NCT, the gospel is not about securing individual escape from hell but about participating in the liberation of all creation from sin and systemic injustice. Jesus' resurrection signals the victory of kingdom over empire, love over violence, and justice over oppression.

Thus, the gospel is inherently anti-imperial:

- It frees people from allegiance to oppressive systems and calls them into a new citizenship (Philippians 3:20).
- It reorients values from accumulation to generosity, fear to love, and violence to peace.
- It invites believers into a new humanity, where love reigns and empire crumbles.

V. Summation of Concept

To follow Jesus is to reject empire-building in all its forms. NCT calls believers to live as countercultural witnesses of the kingdom, choosing love over nationalism, justice over authoritarianism, and service over domination. The Bible and the gospel equip us not to maintain empire but to recognize, resist, and replace it with the radical love of Christ's kingdom.

In short, Jesus doesn't just mean to tear down the empire you're trying to build; He means to replace it with something better: a kingdom where love, justice, and peace reign forever.