

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
Reformation Sunday  
October 26, 2025  
Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl  
**God's covenant gives freedom**

Yes, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. <sup>32</sup> It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers, when I took them by the hand and led them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant of mine, although I was a husband to them, declares the LORD. <sup>33</sup> But this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD. I will put my law in their minds, and I will write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. <sup>34</sup> No longer will each one teach his neighbor, or each one teach his brother, saying, "Know the LORD," because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD, for I will forgive their guilt, and I will remember their sins no more.

—Jeremiah 31:31-34 EHV

Did you notice how often Jeremiah uses the word "covenant" in this reading? Four times in those short verses, referring to two different covenants. I wonder if our society knows what a covenant is. I would guess that we prefer terms like "contracts" or "agreements." But those words just don't have the gravitas of the word "covenant."

Maybe the best example that we have in our society to a covenant is marriage. A man and a woman enter into this relationship together. It's more than a contract. It's more than an agreement. It's a commitment that they will be married to each other for life. Married for life. "No matter what, I will be your husband; I will be your wife." It's a strong bond, a covenant.

So, it makes sense then why God uses marriage as an example of his relationship with the Israelites in the words of the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah says that God was "**a husband to them.**" God took on the role of the provider and the protector in their relationship. Just think about what he did for them. He swooped in and carried them out of slavery in Egypt. He provided for them and cared for them. He promised to take them to the land of the promise.

Not too long after God did this, he led them down to Mt. Sinai. This is where the groom showed his bride what he wanted her to do for him. We call this the bilateral, or two-sided covenant. Moses went up on top of Mt. Sinai where God gave him the Ten Commandments and also the ceremonial and civil laws. And there were a lot of laws, detailing every aspect of an Israelite's life. And even though the stipulations of this covenant were difficult for the people of Israel, they were ready to jump into this covenant with God. "We will. Yes, we will do it," they said.

This was their husband-wife relationship. God would give them wonderful success and prosperity in the Promised Land if they continued to worship him and follow what he told them to do. God was 100% committed to this covenant, and he expected the same from them.

But here's the problem with that covenant that God made with the Israelites at Mt. Sinai. The people didn't live in that relationship. Even before Moses walked down from Mt. Sinai with the First Commandment broadcasting "**You shall have no other gods,**" the Israelites were down on the bottom of the mountain worshipping a golden calf.

Words were easy. The people said they would be committed to that covenant, but they broke it. And that's kind of the history of the people of Israel. The people just kept walking away from God and walking away from this covenant. And things went from bad to worse.

When you read through the book of Judges and when you see what happened under Solomon and Jeroboam and many other kings, it's a sad story indeed. The people are constantly walking away from God, and God is constantly reaching out to them.

That's why he sent the prophets, you know. He sent guys like Jeremiah to call them back to him. He wanted them to repent of their sins and find solace in his loving arms as their husband.

But they wouldn't. So, God pronounces the reality of what their relationship had become. "**They broke that covenant of mine, although I was a husband to them, declares the Lord.**" And what was looming over their heads was captivity in Babylon. They would not be free. They would be captive. Why? Because their hearts were against God. They pushed him away. They broke that covenant with the Lord.

But maybe before we become too judgmental about the Israelites, it would be good for us to do our own self-examination. Many of us stood before the Lord, not at Mt. Sinai, but perhaps on front of this altar, and we declared, "Yes. I will be faithful to you all the days of my life." We promised that we would live as God's lights in everything we say and do. Just look at your lives from the various vocations God has called you to. Husbands, do you always

unconditionally love your wife and put her interests above your own? Wives, do you always unconditionally respect your husband and seek to help him and support him? Children, do you always obey and respect your parents with kind and endearing words? Do you always give a perfect witness that you are a follower of Jesus when you are at your job, at your work?

“Yes, Lord, I will be faithful to you and live my life for you at all times,” we promise. But we have failed. We have sinned. We have broken our promises to God just like the Israelites did.

But here’s where we see God do something that is completely unpredictable. The prophet Jeremiah says, **“Yes, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.”** He’s promising a new covenant, a future covenant, with his people. Here’s what he will do.

**“But this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord. I will put my law in their minds, and I will write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will each one teach his neighbor, or each one teach his brother, saying, “Know the Lord,” because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord, for I will forgive their guilt, and I will remember their sins no more.”**

My friends, this is an impossible kind of forgiveness for us. We can say, “I forgive you,” and we can try to forget, but the truth is that we just don’t have the ability to do that. Not to this level. How many husbands could ever forget seeing their wives cheat on them? Honestly, it would be impossible!

But that’s the incredible thing about this new covenant that God makes with us. He says, “I am simply going to forgive you and forget that you were ever unfaithful to me.” Imagine that! Those sins that you can’t seem to forget, God says that he really doesn’t remember them! How could God, who has a perfect memory, not remember your sins?

How could this be? It’s true because of a new covenant God gives to us. You see, **God’s covenant gives forgiveness.** The forgiveness of sins was accomplished in the covenant God made with himself in Christ. Forgiveness means that God has absorbed the sin into himself.

You know how this is on a micro-level. When someone sins against you and you forgive that person, you are essentially taking the sin or wrongdoing into yourself. You are stating, “I will never bring this up again.” It’s buried with you.

That’s what God has done with you. He has absorbed all your sins into himself and nailed them to the cross. And he says, “I will never bring them up again. I remember them no more.”

All of the aspects of this covenant are bound to the action and power and mercy of God. He doesn’t force his way in, but he gently comes into our hearts and our minds. Just think about how awesome this is! There’s absolutely nothing we can do to mess up this covenant. We can’t do anything to change it. It’s already been made and done on the cross. We can’t climb into God’s mind and change it. He’s already decided.

He enters us at baptism and makes us his own. When God covers us in Jesus’ blood, it puts us all on an equal playing field. I’m saved by Jesus alone, and so are you. I look to Christ for my salvation, and so do you. I have faith, trust, in Jesus, and so do you.

When God brings us to this faith, we now understand what love really is. Love is found in the unconditional sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Love is found in the forgiveness of Christ. This love that God had for us permeates our brains and our hearts. Now we do everything with love in our hearts and minds. It naturally fills us from baptism on.

We see this love every time we come to the Lord’s Supper. You aren’t doing anything. You and I come with the baggage of our sins, but Jesus does everything. He gives his very body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins. He lifts that baggage off of you and gives you peace.

This is all a gift of God’s grace. If you know Jesus and his love for you, then you know the new covenant. God says I’m giving you that. That’s what the good news of Christ does for us. It frees our hearts so that we want to serve under the new covenant of grace. So, **God’s covenant gives forgiveness which then gives freedom.**

You see, freedom, true freedom, is the ability and the capability of living in a right relationship with God. That’s what Christ gives. We are no longer bound by our sins. They don’t shackle us anymore. We are no longer oppressed by laws we can’t fulfill. We have been set free from the consequences of those laws because Jesus has set us free.

Just let these words of this new covenant shake the foundation of your life and let them hold you firmly through this life, **“I will forgive their guilt, and I will remember their sins no more.”** That truth truly sets you free. Amen.