

THE NEW COVENANT  
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On Sunday mornings at Stockbridge Presbyterian Church the Adult Bible class I teach has been studying the Old Testament book of Hosea for what seems like years – long, miserable years. We're all getting pretty depressed. Throughout many of the books of history and prophecy, we see the same pattern repeatedly in the Israelites' relationship with God: The people were faithful and obedient to God, and all was well. Then they began to slip away, rejecting the God who loved them, eventually moving into idol worship. God woos them and warns them and finally, as they continue to turn away from God, trouble overtakes them and they're devastated. Finally, then, they call out to God, begging for forgiveness and reconciliation, and God forgives them and draws them close once again.

And then the cycle begins all over again.

In Hosea, the Israelites are worshipping idols and consorting with pagan temple prostitutes. God uses Hosea to warn Israel that disaster is on its way and the time to repent is now; as usual, they ignore him. God is grieving and angry. And Israel is about to be brutally conquered by the Assyrians. The cycle continues.

John 1:17 says, "The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." Yes, if we're determined, we can still keep the Old Testament cycle going even though we're living in New Testament days. We can turn away, ignore God's Spirit, and then beg for God's help when the going gets rough. And even then, we see God's grace at work. But when Jesus Christ lived, died, and was resurrected, the cycle was broken forever and we're offered a whole new way of being with God. Our sins aren't just "covered" by the blood of goats and lambs; our sins are washed away by the blood of the Lamb. We stand before God as born again, new creations, forgiven and sinless not because we're all that righteous, but because Jesus is.

When we sin, we can go immediately to God and talk to him honestly. We can confess our shortcomings and sins and weaknesses, and receive forgiveness and freedom and help for the future. We may have trouble forgiving ourselves, but God knows better and lifts us up, dusts us off, and keeps us going on the journey.

To really understand God's grace is to feel vastly relieved; it is to be filled with gratitude; it is to have a strong desire to forgive others, as we've been forgiven. To really understand God's grace means uninterrupted companionship with God through Christ and the Holy Spirit. The cycle is broken! The law fulfilled its purpose, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. Break free from the law and live in the love and freedom of God's amazing grace.