

The Promises of God--No. 1

by Charles Finney

The promises of God are fulfilled in us when we receive them by faith, and they become a reality in our lives.

Scripture: Psalm 34:17-19, Isaiah 41:10-14, Isaiah 44:3, Jeremiah 31:31-34, Ezekiel 36:25-27, Matthew 11:28-29, Mark 11:24, Hebrews 11:13, James 1:5, 2 Peter 1:4

Topics: "God's Promises", "Faith and Assurance"

Description

In his sermon 'The Promises of God--No. 1', Charles Finney emphasizes the significance of God's promises as exceeding great and precious, intended for the Christian Church and its individuals. He explains that these promises are designed to help believers partake in the divine nature and escape worldly corruption, while also addressing why they may not be fulfilled in our lives. Finney highlights that the promises are applicable to all believers, regardless of their circumstances, and stresses the necessity of faith and understanding in claiming these promises. He encourages the congregation to recognize the vast array of promises available to them, which cater to every need and situation they may face.

Transcript

Text. 2 Pet. 1:4:--Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

I. I SHALL PREFACE WHAT I HAVE TO SAY UPON THIS SUBJECT WITH SEVERAL PRELIMINARY REMARKS, WITH REGARD TO THE PROMISES OF THE SCRIPTURE.

II. SHOW THE DESIGN OF THE PROMISES.

III. SHOW THAT THEY ARE ADEQUATE TO THAT FOR WHICH THEY ARE DESIGNED.

IV. SHOW WHY THEY ARE NOT FULFILLED IN US.

I. I am to make several preliminary remarks upon the nature of the promises.

1. The promises made to the Church under the old dispensation belong emphatically to the Christian Church. Thus the promise made to Abraham was designed more for his posterity, and for the Christian Church than for himself. That part of the promise which related to the temporal possession of Canaan never was fulfilled to him. He lived and died "a stranger and sojourner in the land of promise." In Heb. 11:13 we are expressly informed that Abraham did not receive the fulfillment of the promises, but that they

belonged especially to Christians under the New Testament dispensation. "These all died in faith not having received the promises--but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth," i.e. Abraham and the patriarchs died without receiving the fulfillment of the promises. Again, verses 39, 40--"And these all having obtained a good report, through faith, received not the promises; God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect." So the New Covenant in Gen. [Jer.] 31:31-34 "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand, to bring them out of the land of Egypt; (which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord;) but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more, every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, know the Lord; for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, saith the Lord, for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Also, Jer. 32:39, 40--"And I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever for the good of them, and of their children after them; and I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me."

Also, Ezek. 36:25, 27:--"Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." And numerous other kindred promises, made to the Church under the Old Testament Dispensation, belong particularly to the Church under the Christian Dispensation. Consequently the Apostle in Hebrews 8:8-12 maintains that the covenant in Jer. 31:31, 32 respects particularly the Gospel Dispensation. --"Behold the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts, and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."

2. The promises made to the Church as a body, belong to individuals of the Church. The Church is composed of individuals, and the promises are of no avail, any further than there is an individual application of them.

3. Promises made to the Patriarchs, and Individuals, under the Old Testament Dispensation, as well as under the new, belong to all individuals, in every age and land, under similar circumstances. Thus we find the inspired writers recognizing the principle, every where, in their writings, in the use they make of the promises. As an illustration, see Heb. 13:5--"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." If you turn to Gen. 28:15, you will see that the promise which the Apostle applies to all Christians, was originally made to Jacob, on his way to Padan-aram. "And behold I am with thee, and will keep thee, in all places, whither thou goest, and I will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, till I have done that which I

have spoken to thee of." So in Heb. 13:6--the Apostle continues, "The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." This also is quoted from Ps. 56:4, 11, --"In God I have put my trust; I will not fear what man can do unto me."

Let these serve as specimens of the manner in which inspired writers make an application of the promises. In the experience of every Christian, it is manifest that the Spirit of God makes the same application of the promises to their minds. And thus the promises are a kind of common property to the saints. Who has not been edified, and refreshed in reading the biographies of highly spiritual men; by observing the copious use of the promises which the Spirit of God makes in refreshing the souls of the saints.

4. The promises made to Israel and Judah, in the Old Testament, are promises made to the whole Christian Church, both Jews and Gentiles. Thus the Church of Christ is called the "Israel of God." And the Apostle expressly affirms that "they are not all Israel which are of Israel." But this fact is abundantly confirmed, that the true Israel of the scriptures, is the true Church of God, in every age--to whom, collectively and individually, all the promises of the Bible belong.

5. The promises mean all they say; in other words, they are to be interpreted by the same rules by which we interpret the commandments. e.g. the promise in Deut. 30:6, --"And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live," is to be interpreted by the same rule by which we interpret the commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul." So the promises in Ezek. 36:25-26 --"Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh," is to be understood as implying just as much as the commands in Ezek. 18:30-31 --"Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions, so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, and make you a new heart, and a new spirit." So also the promise, "I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them," is to be construed as meaning just as much as the commands, "walk in my statutes," and "keep my commandments" mean.

6. We never keep the commandments, only as we take hold of the promises. By this I mean, that grace alone enables us, from the heart, to obey the commandments of God. It is, therefore, only when we lay hold of the promise, by faith, and receive its fulfillment in ourselves, that we really, in heart, obey the commandments of God; e.g. we never love the Lord our God, according to the first great commandment, only as we lay hold on, and receive the fulfillment of some such promise as this: "I will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live."

7. The promises are held out to all who will believe them.

8. The promise of spiritual blessings cannot be fulfilled to us, without the exercise of faith on our part. This is naturally impossible.

9. The promises cannot be believed, unless they are known to exist. This is self evident.

10. They cannot be believed, unless their application is understood.

11. Promises of particular blessings cannot be believed, without a general confidence in the character and truth of God. Our confidence in any specific promise of any being, must depend upon our confidence in his truth, willingness and ability. Thus if a man come to God to plead any promise, it is indispensable, in the outset, for him to believe that "God is, and that he is a rewarder of those that diligently seek him."

12. There are promises in the Bible of all kinds of blessings, suited to all our wants and circumstances, temporal and spiritual.

13. There are promises suited to all classes and conditions of men.

14. There are promises suited to all possible states of mind.

Upon these last thoughts I shall have occasion to enlarge under another head.

15. Some of the promises are without any condition, expressed or implied. The fulfillment of these does not depend, in any degree, upon our own agency.

The covenant made with Noah is an example of this kind. "While the earth remaineth, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease."

16. There is, however, almost always some condition, at least, implied in every promise--a condition which though not expressed, arises out of the nature of the case; e.g. should I promise to pay a sum of money, for value received--here, although no condition is expressed, yet it is plain that the individual must consent to receive it. So if a testator leave a legacy to an heir, the terms of the bequest may be absolute, and without condition, yet it is always implied, that the heir believe that a bequest was made, and take the necessary steps to enter into the possession. So with the promises of God. Many of them appear to be absolute, because there is no expressed condition. But a condition is implied, viz. that we believe the promise, and are willing to receive the proffered blessing.

17. Multitudes of the promises of God are made upon expressed conditions. Thus the promises in Ezek. 36:25-27 --"Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them," seem to be expressed in full, without any condition. Yet in the 37th verse this condition is expressed --"I will yet be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them, saith the Lord." So in James 1:5 you find this promise --"If any of you lack wisdom let him ask of God who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him." It seems to be expressed without condition; but in the sixth verse the condition is expressly annexed --"But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering," and we are informed that without faith it shall not be fulfilled.

In Matt. 7:7 you have another illustration of the same principle--"Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you." Here asking (of course in faith) is made the condition of receiving.

18. I have already said that many of the promises are made to particular states of mind, and applicable only to persons in that state, e.g.

(1.) There are promises made to the impenitent sinner. Isa. 55:7--"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Now the conditions of these promises are that the sinner "forsake his way" and "return unto the Lord." Without the fulfillment of this condition, the sinner can never receive the benefit of the promise. In Isa. 1:[18 &] 19 there is a promise to the sinner--"Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be like wool." And in the 19th verse the condition is expressed, "if ye be willing and obedient."

(2.) Again, there are promises to the backslider. As in Hosea 11:7-9. "And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they (the prophets) called them to the Most High, none at all will exalt him. How shall I give thee up Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set the[e] as Zeboim? my heart is turned within me--my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim, for I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee, and I will not enter into the city.["] And in chapter 14:4-9: "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel; he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine, the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon. Ephraim shall say, what have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him; I am like a green fir tree. From me is thy fruit found. Who is wise and he shall understand these things? prudent and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them." Also in Jer. 3:12, 15, 22, "Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord, and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you, for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep mine anger forever. Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers, under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the Lord. Turn, O backsliding children, for I am married unto you, and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion. And I will give you pastors according to my heart, who shall feed you with knowledge and understanding. Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." In both of these passages the conditions lie upon the face of the promises.

(3.) Again there are promises especially to weak believers. Isa. 41:10-14--"Fear thou not for I am with thee, be not dismayed for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea I will help thee; yea I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness. Behold all they that were incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded, they shall be as nothing and they that strive with thee shall perish. Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, even them that contended with thee. They that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought. For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not: I will help thee. Fear not thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel, I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel." Also Isa. 35:3-10: --"Strengthen ye the weak hands and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not; behold your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense, he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing, for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And an high way shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon--it shall not be found there--but the redeemed shall walk

there. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads, they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." Also Isa. 40:29-31 --"He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might, he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall. But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint."

(4.) Again there are promises to those who are spiritually blind, and in darkness. Isa. 42:7. " To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house." Also verse 16 --"I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known, I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."

(5.) Again there are promises to those that are tempted. 1 Cor. 10:13--"God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." 2 Pet. 2:9 --"The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished."--Ps. 34:17-19--"The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all."

(6.) Again there are promises to those who are struggling to overcome sin, and are weighed down with a sense of guilt. Matt. 11:28-29--"Come unto me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest; Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

(7.) There are promises to those who are seeking for sanctification. Matt. 5:6: --"Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled." Isa. 55:1-3 --"Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; Come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." 1 Thess. 5:23-24--"And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it." See also Jer. 31:31-34 --"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; (which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord;) But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying; Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Also Ezek. 36:25-27: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall

keep my judgments, and do them."

(8.) There are also promises to those who fear future relapses into sin. Psalm 121 is a specimen of these--"I will lift up mine eyes to the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord who made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved; he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is thy keeper; the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil; he shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in, from this time forth, and even forevermore." Ps. 37:31--"The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide."

(9.) Again there are promises to those who are seeking divine influence. Luke 11:11-13: --"If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone, or if he asks a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your heavenly father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" Rev. 21:6-- "I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely." And 22:17 --"And the Spirit, and the bride say, Come, And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst, come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

That the water here mentioned is the divine influence is evident from Isa.12:3 --"Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation." John 4:10, 14 --"Jesus said unto her [the woman of Samaria] If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith unto thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." "Whosoever shall drink of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him, shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life." Also John 7:37-39. "Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive."

(10.) There are promises to those who pray for their friends. Luke 11:5-9 _"Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." One thing taught in this passage is that we may come and expect to receive blessings for our friends. So in Matt. 15:22-28 --"And behold a woman of Canaan cried unto him saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But he answered, and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord help me! But he answered, and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their masters' table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman great is thy faith. Be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour." Although in this, and the last quoted passage, encouragement is held out to perseverance in prayer, yet it is especially taught that perseverance in prayer for our friends is indispensable to secure the blessing.

(11.) There are promises to those who pray for the Church. Every promise in the Bible that relates to its future prosperity, is held out to all who will pray for the Church.

(12.) Again there are promises so general in their nature as to cover all our necessities, temporal and spiritual. Let Mark 11:24 stand as a specimen of this class of promises --"Therefore I say unto you, what things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." Of this class of promises, that cover all our desires, I remark,

(a) That we must desire right things, i.e. such things as will glorify God.

(b) It is implied that we desire them for right reasons, i.e. that we have a benevolent, and not a selfish design in wishing to obtain them. If these states of mind are implied, it is also of course implied.

(c) That the suppliant should be under a divine influence, in his request, and that his desire should be begotten by the Holy Spirit. None but the highly spiritual will ever rightly understand and apply this class of promises.

(13.) There are promises to parents for their children. Isa. 44:3 --"I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring." Now this promise is as express to every Christian parent, as it was to any parent that ever belonged to the Church of God. The Apostle expressly informs us in Eph. 2, that the Gentiles are made fellow heirs with the Jews, and inheritors of the same promises. So that if this promise could ever have been claimed and appropriated by a Jew, it can be, and ought to be so appropriated by every Gentile.

(14.) Promises are made to persons under all kinds of trials and afflictions. These promises are so numerous that I need not quote any of them.

(15.) Again there are promises to widows, and to the fatherless. Ps. 68:5 --"A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation." Jer. 49:11 --"Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive, and let thy widows trust in me." Hosea 14:3 --"In thee the fatherless shall find mercy." This class of promises is also numerous.

(16.) Again there are promises to persons in all the stations and relations of life. Let these suffice as specimens of the vast multitudes of promises in their application to all classes of persons. You who read your Bibles know, that I have quoted only a few under each head, of the great multitude of promises that are made to each of these particular classes; and that I might easily continue to an indefinite extent the quotation of promises, to all conditions of persons in all the stations and relations of life.

I must defer the remaining heads of this discourse till my next lecture.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/charles-finney/the-promises-of-god-no-1/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net