

The Promises of God--No. 2

by Charles Finney

The promises of God are adequate to the perfecting of the saints, and sanctification can take place in this life through the gospel.

Scripture: Jeremiah 31:31-34, Ezekiel 36:25-27, Matthew 11:28-29, Matthew 25:21, John 1:16, John 15:11, Romans 5:5, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Hebrews 12:10, 2 Peter 1:4

Topics: "Sanctification", "Divine Nature"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the significance of God's promises, explaining that they are designed to make believers partakers of the divine nature, which includes moral attributes and sanctification. He clarifies that while we do not become divine beings, we can embody God's moral perfections through the Holy Spirit. Finney contrasts the Old and New Covenants, asserting that the New Covenant provides the means for complete sanctification and perfect obedience, which was unattainable under the Old Covenant. He encourages believers to embrace the transformative power of God's promises, which lead to holiness, love, joy, and peace. Ultimately, Finney reassures that the promises of God are sufficient for our spiritual growth and sanctification in this life.

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.

In continuing this subject, I am to show,

II. The design of the promises.

The design of the promises, as stated in the text, is to make us partakers of the divine nature. I will state what I do not, and what I do understand, by being made partakers of the divine nature.

1. I do not understand, that we are to be made partakers of the spiritual essence or natural attributes of God. For this would,

(1) Destroy our personal identity.

(2) It is naturally impossible, as it would be, in effect, making us divine beings.

(3) There is no such change promised in the Bible.

(4) Such a change would not be a moral, but a physical change.

(5) The promises have no tendency to change our constitution--to destroy our personal identity--and make our spiritual existence identical with that of God.

I do understand our being made partakers of the divine nature, to mean,

1. That we are to be made partakers of the moral nature, or attributes and perfections of God. By this I mean, that the moral perfections of God cause the like moral perfections in us--so that the same exercises, in kind, that are in the divine mind, are, by the Spirit, through the promises, begotten in our minds. In other words, that the exhibition of the moral character, nature and attributes of God, as exhibited by the Spirit, transforms us into the same image. Thus the Apostle expresses it, in 2 Cor. 3:18--"We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." The Bible everywhere abounds with declarations and representations to this effect. It represents us as participating deeply, in his exercises, both of holiness and of happiness. I will quote a few of the many passages that might be given to sustain this position.

(1) We are called partakers of his holiness--Heb. 12:10--"For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his HOLINESS."

(2) We are made partakers of his love. Rom. 5:5: "And hope maketh not ashamed, because the LOVE of God is shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

(3) We are called partakers of his fulness. John 1:16--"And of his FULNESS have all we received, and grace for grace." By this I understand that the graces in Christians, are answerable to the graces in Jesus Christ, i.e. that the Christian graces are the same in kind, that existed in the Son of God.

(4) We are partakers of his joy: Matt. 25:21--"Enter thou into the JOY of thy Lord." John 15:11--"These things have I spoken unto you, that my JOY might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." John 17:13--"And these things I speak in the world, that they might have my JOY fulfilled in themselves."

(5) We are made partakers of his rest. Ps. 95:11--"Unto whom I swear in my wrath, that they should not enter into my REST." Ps. 116:7--"Return unto thy REST, O my soul." Matt. 11:28, 29--"Come unto me all ye that labour 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 soul." Heb. 3:11--"So I swear in my wrath, that they shall not enter into my REST." Heb. 4:1, 3, 9, 11--"Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his REST, any of you should seem to come short of it. For we which have believed, do enter into REST. There remaineth, therefore, a REST for the people of God. Let us labor, therefore, to enter into that REST."

(6) We are made partakers of his peace: John 19[14]:27: "PEACE I leave with you, my PEACE I give unto you." John 14:33--"These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have PEACE." Phil. 4:7--"And the PEACE of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Col. 3: 15--"And let the PEACE OF GOD rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body."

(7) We are made partakers of his happiness. Ps. 36:7, 8--"How excellent is thy loving-kindness, O God. Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy PLEASURES." Ps. 16:11--"Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy: at thy right hand there are PLEASURES FOREVERMORE."

Let these serve as specimens of the scripture representations on this subject. By a careful examination of the Bible, it will be found that every feature of the moral nature and character of God is begotten in the Christian, by the provisions of the gospel.

2. A state of entire sanctification is also included in the idea of being made partakers of the divine nature. The principal proof of this, I shall examine when I come to show, under the next head, that the promises are adequate to that for which they are designed. But here I would suggest the following considerations, in support of the position, that entire sanctification is included in being made partakers of the divine nature.

(1) If the saints are ever sanctified, it is plain that it must be done through the influence of the promises, including the whole revealed will of God. That the truth, and especially the truth contained in the promises, is the Spirit's grand and indispensable instrument for the saint's sanctification, no reader of the Bible can deny.

(2) If they are not sanctified in this life, there is no reason from the Bible to believe that they ever will be sanctified. The provisions made for the sanctification of the Church, whether adequate or inadequate, are for this life: and I know of no reason to believe, that these means will follow them into eternity, to change their characters there.

(3) In Eph. 4:11-13 we have the following declaration--"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Now here the perfecting of the saints is said to take place under this ministry, and these are the means by which this work is actually accomplished, until they come "unto a PERFECT man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Where is this ministry to be exercised? This work is to be completed in the same world in which the ministry is exercised--the ministry of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

(4) If the gospel has not provided for the entire and permanent sanctification of the saints, then no such provision is made any where that we know of.

(5) But if the gospel has made such provision, then sanctification must take place in this life, for it is in this life that the gospel must do its work.

(6) I recently saw a letter which had a remark to this effect, "that she [the writer] had seen so much of the depravity of her nature, that she believed she could not be wholly sanctified, except by the sickle of death." Perhaps the form of expression here is somewhat singular; but the idea is a common one. Many believe that death is to complete the work of sanctification. It has been a common remark, that one great reason why we should be willing to die, is, that by death we shall get rid of sin. Now I would ask, do any of the inspired writers ever urge this as a reason for being willing to die--that by death, or at death, we shall be rid of sin? "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord," says John; "Yea, saith the Spirit, for they shall rest

from their labors, and their works do follow them." Now it is manifest, that that from which they rest follows them. Does John here mean to say that men rest from their sins, and that their sins follow them?

I cannot but think, that one reason, and the prime reason for thinking that death only can terminate our sins, is that the bodily appetites are supposed to be in themselves sinful; and that every excitement of men's constitutional propensities is in itself a sin. This opinion would naturally lead to the conclusion that the destruction of the body, and the annihilation of the bodily appetites alone, could free us from sin. I do not suppose that we have any promise in the gospel, or any means that can make a physical or constitutional change in soul or body. And those who believe that the change required is a constitutional one, would naturally conclude, that death, and not the promises is the means of our sanctification.

III. I am to show that the promises are adequate to the effect ascribed to them.

It appears to me that the reason why so much doubt is entertained upon the subject of the entire sanctification of the saints in this life is, that the grand distinction insisted upon in the Bible, between the Old and New Covenants is overlooked--that because saints under the Old Testament were not perfect, it is inferred that they will not be under the New--that inasmuch as the legal dispensation was not able entirely and permanently to sanctify saints, it is inferred that the Gospel Dispensation cannot sanctify them, even when administered by the Holy Ghost. If I understand the Bible, the difference between the two dispensations, and covenants is exceedingly great--that what was lacking under the Old Covenant, is abundantly supplied by the New--that the New Covenant was designed to secure what the Old required, but failed to secure. Because the Old Covenant made nothing perfect, it was therefore set aside, and the New introduced, founded upon better promises.

In order to show distinctly the difference between the two covenants, I will lay before you the scripture declarations of the peculiarities of each. By thus contrasting them step by step, you will be able to see whether the promises are adequate to the perfecting of the saints.

I am to show that the first, or Old Covenant was the law written on the tables of stone. This was the substance of the covenant, to which was added the Ceremonial Law. Ex. 34:27, 28-- "And the Lord said unto Moses, Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel. And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, and the ten commandments." Deut. 9:9-15: "When I was gone up into the mount, to receive the tables of stone, even the tables of the covenant which the Lord made with you, then I abode in the mount forty days and forty nights; I neither did eat bread nor drink water: And the Lord delivered unto me two tables of stone, written with the finger of God: and on them was written according to all the words which the Lord spake with you in the mount, out of the midst of the fire, in the day of the assembly. And it came to pass, at the end of forty days and forty nights, that the Lord gave me the two tables of stone, even the tables of the covenant. And the Lord said unto me, Arise, get thee down quickly from hence; for thy people which thou hast brought forth out of Egypt have corrupted themselves; they are quickly turned aside out of the way which I commanded them; they have made them a molten image. Furthermore the Lord spake unto me, saying, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiff-necked people: Let me alone, that I may destroy them, and blot out their name from under heaven; and I will make of thee a nation mightier and greater than they. So I turned, and came down from the mount, and the mount burned with fire; and the two tables of the covenant were in my two hands." Heb. 9:4--"Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod, that budded, and the tables of the

covenant." These, with many other passages, that might be quoted, show what we are to understand by the first or Old Covenant. It should be known that the words covenant and testament mean the same thing, and are only different translations of the same original word.

I will now show what we are to understand by the New Covenant. 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 unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Jer. 32:39, 40--"And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and 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." Heb. 8:8-12--"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." 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." Here, then, we have the two covenants distinctly spread before us.

I will now refer you to those passages which set them in contrast; and point out, step by step, wherein they differ, as laid down in the Bible itself.

1. The Old Covenant was mere law, to which was added a typical representation of the gospel. Heb. 10:1--"For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices, which they offered year by year continually, make the comers thereunto perfect."

The second or New Covenant is the writing of this law in the heart.

The first said "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind and strength."

The New as promised in Jer. 31:31-34, is the fulfillment of what the Old required. "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 unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Heb. 8:8-12--"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, 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." Here, then, it is plain that the New is the fulfillment, in the heart, of what the Old required, and of all that the Old required.

2. The Old Covenant required perfect obedience on pain of death. Deut. 27:26--"Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them: and all the people shall say, Amen." Deut. 28:15--"But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes, which I command thee this day, that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee." Gal. 3:10--"For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them."

The New Covenant is the CAUSING God's people to render perfect obedience. 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 ." Heb. 8:8-11--"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." Jer. 32:39, 40--"And I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me for ever 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."

Now it should be observed that the New Covenant is not a promise, but it is the thing promised; i.e. the promise itself is not the New Covenant, but the state of mind produced by the Spirit of God writing the law in their hearts, and CAUSING them "to walk in his statutes and keep his judgments and do them." The "new heart," and the "new spirit"--these are the New Covenant itself, and the promise of this New Covenant is quite another thing. The New Covenant and the promise differ as a promise and its fulfillment differ. The New Covenant is a fulfillment of this promise. Jer. 31:31--"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." Here is the

promise of a covenant to be made. Now what is the covenant to be made? This is it, "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." It cannot be too distinctly understood that the New Covenant is neither law nor promise, but the very spirit required by the law produced in the heart by the Holy Ghost.

3. The Old Covenant required a holy heart. Ezek. 18:31--"Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

The New is the giving of this holy heart. Ezek. 36:26--"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." 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 unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

4. Obedience was enforced under the Old Covenant by penal sanctions. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." The New is the production of this obedience in the heart, by the Spirit of God. Ezek. 36:27--"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." 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 unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." and Heb. 8:8-11--"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."

5. The Old Covenant promised life only upon the conditions of perfect and perpetual obedience. Lev. 18:5--"Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments; which if a man do, he shall live in them; I am the Lord." Ezek. 20:11, 13, 21--"And I gave them my statutes, and shewed them my judgments, which if a man do he shall even live in them." "But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness: they walked not in my statutes, and they despised my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; and my Sabbaths they greatly polluted: then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them in the wilderness,

to consume them." "Notwithstanding, the children rebelled against me: they walked not in my statutes, neither kept my judgments to do them, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; they polluted my Sabbaths: then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish mine anger against them in the wilderness." Luke 10:28--"And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live." Rom. 10:5--"For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them." Gal. 3:12--"And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them."

The New is the producing of this perfect and perpetual obedience. That it is perfect see Deut. 30:6--"And the Lord thy God will circumcise thy 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." Ezek. 36:25--"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." Jer. 50:20--"In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve." 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." Jer. 24:7--"And I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart." Jer. 33:8--"And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me." That it is perpetual, see Ezek. 36:27--"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." 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." 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." It has been objected, that this last is a mere prayer, and may not be answered; but the 24th verse promises "will do it."

Now if this covenant is to be everlasting, so that "they shall fear him for ever," that "they shall not depart from him"--if to cleanse the Church from "all her idols," "from ALL iniquities, and ALL sins," so that when her "iniquities are sought for, NONE shall be found"--if to "give her a new heart and a new spirit," and "cause her to walk in his statutes"--if "to sanctify her wholly, body, soul, and spirit, and preserve her blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus"--if these are not perfect and perpetual obedience, I know not in what terms such obedience could be expressed.

It has been objected by some, that the promises in the Old Testament were made to Jews, and applied only to the Jews. I answer, it is plain, that these promises respected the whole Church under the New Covenant dispensation, and that the New Covenant included the Gentile nations. The Christian Church is the Israel of God, as I have shown in a former lecture.

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