

The Promises of God--No. 4

by Charles Finney

The New Covenant is perfection itself, and it is the means by which God makes the Old Covenant with the soul, or by which he inclines the soul to close in with, and obey the Old Covenant.

Scripture: Jeremiah 31:31-34, Ezekiel 36:25-27, John 8:32-36, Romans 6:1-14, Romans 8:1-4, 1 Corinthians 15:56, Galatians 4:2-6, Galatians 5:1, Hebrews 7:19, 2 Peter 1:4

Topics: "Spiritual Transformation", "New Covenant"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the transformative power of the New Covenant compared to the Old Covenant, highlighting that the Old strengthened sin while the New offers freedom and the promise of a new heart and spirit. He explains that the New Covenant is not merely about outward morality but about an inward change that leads to true holiness and a relationship with God. Finney asserts that the promises of God enable believers to partake in the divine nature, escaping the corruption of the world. He stresses that faith in Christ is the condition for receiving these promises, which are essential for spiritual growth and sanctification. Ultimately, he calls for a deeper understanding of these promises to fully experience the freedom and life offered through Christ.

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 resuming the subject of the contrast between the Old and New Covenants, I remark,

13. The Old Covenant was the strength of sin. 1 Cor. 15:56: "THE STRENGTH OF SIN IS THE LAW." In this passage, and in others, the Apostle plainly teaches that the Old Covenant, or law, strengthened depravity, instead of annihilating it. But the New is represented as the death of sin. Ezek. 36:25-29: "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 ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. I will also save you from ALL YOUR UNCLEANNES." Rom. 6:1-14: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are DEAD to sin,

LIVE any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his DEATH?

Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into DEATH; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should WALK IN NEWNESS OF LIFE. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection. Knowing this, that our OLD MAN IS CRUCIFIED with him, that the body of SIN MIGHT BE DESTROYED, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that IS DEAD IS FREED FROM SIN. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: knowing that Christ, being raised from the dead, dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.

For in that he died, he DIED UNTO SIN once; but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye yourselves to be DEAD indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.

For SIN SHALL NOT HAVE DOMINION OVER YOU: FOR YE ARE NOT UNDER THE LAW, BUT UNDER GRACE. Rom. 7:4-6: "Wherefore, my brethren, ye are also become DEAD to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit UNTO DEATH. But now we are delivered from the law, that being DEAD wherein we were held; that we should serve in NEWNESS OF SPIRIT, and not in the oldness of the letter."

Gal. 5:16-18: "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, YE ARE NOT UNDER THE LAW." Now as I have before remarked, if to be dead to sin be not entire holiness, then to be dead in sin is not entire depravity.

14. The Old Covenant made nothing perfect. Heb. 7:19: "For the LAW MADE NOTHING PERFECT, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God." Heb. 9:9: "Which WAS a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices that COULD NOT make him that did the service PERFECT, as pertaining to the conscience." Heb. 10:11: "And every priest standeth daily ministering, and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which CAN NEVER TAKE AWAY SINS." It is abundantly taught in this epistle that Abraham, and the other Old Testament saints did not receive the promises; i.e. they did [not] receive the fulfillment of the promises. The promises were made to them, or rather through them, to the Christian Church. But it is expressly said that they did not receive the fulfillment of the promises. Of the long list of saints mentioned in chapter 11 of this epistle, it is said, verse 13, "These all died in faith, NOT HAVING RECEIVED THE PROMISES." And in verses 39, 40, it is said: "And these all having obtained a good report through faith RECEIVED NOT THE PROMISE: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect."

The New Covenant is perfection itself. Lest this should be doubted, it may be well to inquire what we understand by Christian Perfection. Has God any where required perfection in the Bible? If so, where? Does his law require perfection? If not, what part of the Bible does? And if his law does not require

perfection, why does it not? Is it not manifestly an imperfect law? And how can it be said that the "law is HOLY, JUST and GOOD"?

But it probably will not be doubted that God's law is perfect, and that entire conformity to it is perfection itself. Now what does this law require?

(1.) Not that we should love God as much as we should be under obligation to love him, had we a perfect knowledge of all our relations. If the law required this, it would be more than any saint on earth or in heaven, or any angel in heaven could perform. None but an infinite mind can perceive all the relations that exist between God and ourselves, and between ourselves and our fellow men.

(2.) It does not require the same degree of love that we might have rendered, had we never abused our powers by sin. If it did there is not a saint on earth or in heaven that could obey the law. The law is directed to us as we are; and it says to every individual as he is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all THY heart, and with all THY soul, and with all THY strength,"--not with all the strength thou mightest have had, hadst thou never sinned. Perfection would be as impossible to saints in heaven as to saints on earth, did God require the same strength of affection that might have been rendered had our powers never been debilitated by sin.

(3.) Nor does the law require the same love that might be rendered, had we as much knowledge of God as we might have gained if we had always improved our time in the acquisition of knowledge. If this were required of the saints, there is not a saint in heaven that is or ever will be perfect; for there is not one that has as much knowledge as he might have possessed had he always improved his time and talents in its acquisition. What is lost in these respects is lost forever. And God no more requires us to make up the deficiency than he requires us to recall past time. Repentance for all the past, and perfect obedience in the future, with such powers as we have, is all that the law or the gospel requires. "THOU shalt love the Lord thy God with all THY heart, and with all THY soul, and with all THY strength." This is the Old Covenant. I have before said that it made nothing perfect.

I now add that the New Covenant is perfection itself. 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. 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 in 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 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 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." 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."

Rom. 8:1-4: "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me FREE from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending his own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law MIGHT BE FULFILLED IN US, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

Now if you look into the promise of the covenant in Jeremiah, you will see that it is just this--a promise to write the Old Covenant in the heart. It should be remembered, that the words old covenant and law are synonymous terms. And when God promises to write the law in the heart, he promises that the Old Covenant shall be written in the heart.

Now if the Old Covenant or Law required perfection, (and if it did not there is no requirement of perfection in the Bible,) the promise in Jeremiah is that this same perfection shall exist in the soul. And in the quotation from Rom. 8:4, it is expressly asserted that this was the object of the atonement of Christ. Now it does appear to me that the argument in favor of entire sanctification may be settled to a demonstration, by looking at what the Old Covenant required, and recognizing that as the highest perfection that God requires of man, and then seeing that this Old Covenant is to be written in the heart by the Spirit of God. If, when the Old is fulfilled in the heart, men are not perfect in the Bible sense of that term, we may hope in vain to understand what perfection is.

15. The Old Covenant gendered to bondage. Gal. 4:21-31: "Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written, that Abraham had two sons; the one by a bond-maid, the other by a free woman,[.] But he who was of the bond-woman was born after the flesh; but he of the free woman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which GENDERETH TO BONDAGE, which is Agar.--For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.

But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all,[.] For it is written, Rejoice thou barren that barest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not; for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband. Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh, persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what saith the Scripture? Cast out the bond-woman and her son: for the son of the bond-woman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman.

So then, brethren, we are not children of the bond-woman, but of the free." Here the Apostle represents all men under the law as being in a state of slavery and rendering merely the service of fear. But the New Testament is liberty itself. Gal. 5:1: "Stand fast, therefore, in the LIBERTY wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." John 8:32-36: "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you FREE. They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in

bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?

Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin, is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house forever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you FREE, ye shall be FREE indeed." Rom. 6:14: "For SIN SHALL NOT HAVE DOMINION OVER YOU; FOR YE ARE NOT UNDER THE LAW, BUT UNDER GRACE." Gal. 4:2-6: "But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in BONDAGE under the elements of the world: but when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to REDEEM THEM that were under the law, that we might receive the ADOPTION OF SONS.

And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father." Isa. 61:1: "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek: he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to PROCLAIM LIBERTY to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." Rom. 8:21: "Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the GLORIOUS LIBERTY of the children of God." 1 Cor. 8:9: "But take heed, lest by any means this LIBERTY of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak." 2 Cor. 3:17: "Now the Lord is that Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is LIBERTY." Gal. 5:13: "For, brethren, ye have been called unto LIBERTY; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another."

16. The Old Covenant produced only outward morality, while it aggravated the sin of the heart. Matt. 23:25: "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for ye make clean the OUTSIDE of the cup and of the platter, but WITHIN THEY ARE FULL OF EXTORTION AND EXCESS." Rom. 7:8: "But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, WROUGHT IN ME ALL MANNER OF CONCUPISCENCE." The New Covenant is the purifying of the heart. 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. 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." 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."

17. The Old Covenant had only a shadow 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 New is the inwrought effect of the gospel. Let it be understood that the New Testament is not the Gospel itself; but is that which is to be effected by the Gospel. The New Testament and the Gospel are by no means to be confounded the one with the other. The New Testament or Covenant is that work in the heart which is wrought by the Holy

Ghost, by the instrumentality of the Gospel. Most professors of religion, in speaking of the New Testament, mean by it the book containing the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the Epistles and the Apocalypse. Now these are not the New Testament; for the New Testament and Covenant, you understand, are the same thing. These books are the Gospel. And, as I have said, the Gospel is only the means by which God makes the New Covenant with the soul, or by which he inclines the soul to close in with, and obey the Old Covenant. Now the whole object of God in the Gospel is not to abrogate the Old Covenant, but to bring men into obedience to it; i.e. to be perfectly conformed to the law of love. The Gospel is as distinct from the New Covenant, as the means are distinct from the end. And for an individual to suppose he has received the New Covenant because he has the Gospel in his hands, or because he lives under the Gospel dispensation, is a dangerous and fatal error. A man may live under the Gospel, may understand and believe many of its truths, and yet the Gospel may never have been so fully received by him, as effectually and permanently to have written the Old Covenant or law in his heart.

It has been said that regeneration is all that is included in the promise of the New Covenant, and that every real Christian has received this New Covenant. Now if this be so, in what sense did not Abraham and the Old Testament saints receive the promises and their fulfillment? Were they not regenerated? See Heb. 11:13: "These all died in faith, NOT HAVING RECEIVED THE PROMISES." Also verses 39, 40: "And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, RECEIVED NOT THE PROMISE: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect." Now here many of the most distinguished saints under the Old Testament dispensation are mentioned by name, and it is expressly said of every one of them, that they "died in faith," but "had not received the promises." It is not meant that they had not heard the promises, for to them the promises were given. It must therefore mean, that they did not receive their fulfillment. But who will doubt that they were regenerated? Now I cannot resist the conviction that to suppose regeneration to be the receiving of the New Covenant or New Testament, in the sense in which it is promised in the passages so often quoted, is a great and dangerous error. It appears to me that the Bible abundantly teaches that these promises are made to believers and not to unbelievers--that they are made to the Church, and not to the world, and that it is after we believe that we are to be sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. Eph. 1:13: "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also AFTER THAT YE BELIEVED, YE WERE SEALED WITH THAT HOLY SPIRIT OF PROMISE." I have been ready sometimes to ask, can it be possible that those who maintain that the promise in Jeremiah means nothing more than regeneration, have thoroughly considered what they say and whereof they affirm?

18. The condition of the Old Covenant was perfect obedience to law. I have so often quoted the passages to prove this, that I need not here repeat them. The condition of the New Covenant is faith in Christ. Gal. 3:14: "That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit THROUGH FAITH." Now it is naturally impossible that the New Covenant should be received, or the Old written in the heart upon any other condition than faith. Without confidence or faith there can be no love; and there cannot be genuine faith that does not produce love.

These are only a few of the exceeding great and precious promises of which the Apostle speaks in the text. Every student of the Bible knows that I might extend this examination indefinitely, and write a volume as large as the Bible itself, should I quote all the promises, and remark upon them only to a limited extent. Some of them I have quoted over and over again for the purpose of showing their particular bearing upon the different propositions I have laid down. Those which I have quoted are only specimens of the promises, and designed only as illustrations of the truth that the promises are sufficient to accomplish the

great work of making us partakers of the divine nature. The Lord willing, I design ere long to take up a more direct examination of the question whether entire sanctification is attainable in this life, and enter more into detail than would be proper in these discourses on the promises. In my next, I design to present some reasons why the promises are not fulfilled in, and to us.

In the mean time, I wish to call your attention to what I regard as a settled truth, viz: that the doctrine of sanctification is so spiritual a subject that no mind will understand it that is not in a truly and highly spiritual state. No man ever understood discourses on regeneration, and especially on the evidences of regeneration, and the exercises of a regenerated heart, who had not himself been regenerated. Nor will a man understand any course of reasoning on the subject of sanctification, who has not experience on that subject. By this I do not mean, that he may not have sufficient intellectual perception to understand some things about it. But I do mean that he will not understand the fullness with which the Bible teaches that doctrine until his spiritual perceptions are made clear and penetrating; e.g. no man ever believed that Jesus was the Christ who was not born of God. It is expressly asserted in the Bible that "whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God" and that "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." Now it is not intended in this passage that a man may not settle the abstract question to some extent, as a matter of science and evidence respecting the divinity of Christ. But it is intended that none but a spiritual mind can have any knowledge of Christ as God. And to me it seems plain that the more spiritual any truth is, the more certainly it will be misunderstood by any but a spiritual mind; for the natural man discerneth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned. The utmost that I expect to do by any thing that I can say, and by any scriptures that can be quoted, with minds not in a truly spiritual state, is so far to convince their understanding as to convict their heart of being wrong, and thus to bring them to search after the true light.

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