

The Promises of God--No. 3

by Charles Finney

The New Covenant is the effectual sanctification by the Holy Spirit, making men holy and justifying them, while the Old Covenant was a mere outward covenant.

Scripture: Ezekiel 36:25, 2 Peter 1:4

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Covenants"

Description

In his sermon 'The Promises of God--No. 3', Charles Finney emphasizes the transformative power of the New Covenant through the Holy Spirit, contrasting it with the Old Covenant which relied on human strength and was ultimately ineffective in securing holiness. He explains that the New Covenant offers a profound internal change, where God's laws are written on the hearts of believers, enabling them to live in obedience and righteousness. Finney highlights that the New Covenant is not just a continuation of the Old but a fulfillment that provides a mediator in Christ, ensuring the promises of God are realized in the lives of believers. He stresses the importance of recognizing the distinct roles of both covenants in the believer's journey towards sanctification and spiritual 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 the contrast between the Old and New Covenants, I remark,

6. The Old Covenant left men to the exercise of their own strength. The New is the effectual sanctification by the Holy Spirit. 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." 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." I need not quote the numerous promises which sustain this point. But here let me say that this is one of the grand distinctions between the Old and New Covenants, that the New Covenant is the effectual indwelling of the Holy Spirit, producing the very temper required by the law, or Old Covenant. There is a grand and mighty difference between the Old and New Covenants in this respect; and let it be forever understood, that the difference does not lie merely, or mainly in the fact that the New Covenant is a fuller revelation than the

Old, which brings me to say,

7. The Old was a mere outward covenant, written upon tables of stone--the mere "letter that killeth." The New is an inward covenant. It is the indwelling of the Spirit of God, writing the law in the heart, begetting and maintaining the very obedience required by the Old Covenant. If this be overlooked, the New Covenant is thrown away. And herein is the great error of the Church, that they make the Old and New Covenants substantially the same thing, while, in fact, the Old Covenant was the mere requirement of that of which the New Covenant is the fulfillment, by the indwelling and effectual influences of the Spirit of God.

8. The Old Covenant had properly two parties. We find both the parties recognized in Ex. 19:8: "And all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the Lord;"--and 24:3-8: "And Moses came, and told the people all the words of the Lord, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the Lord hath said will we do. And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt-offerings of oxen unto the Lord. And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basins; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the Lord hath said, will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words." This covenant had no surety. But the New Covenant unites the parties in a mediator, who is also the surety of the New Covenant. Heb. 7:22: "By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament." Now observe the Old has no surety pledged for its fulfillment, while the New has the most ample surety pledged for the fulfillment of every jot and tittle of it.

9. The Old Covenant, I have said, was broken. Jer. 31:32: "Which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord." Now this was the grand reason why this covenant was set aside. Heb. 8:7: "For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second." 7:11, 18, 19: "If, therefore, perfection were by the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron?" "For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before, for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof. For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God." But the New Covenant shall not be broken by those who receive it. The great difficulty with the Old Covenant was, that it had not sufficient efficiency to secure holiness. And if the New Covenant is not holiness, wherein is it better than the Old? In Heb. 8:6, it is said, "But now hath he [Christ] obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises."

But see the tenor of the covenant itself. The reason why it was not faultless, was because it did not secure obedience. This was the very reason why God found fault with it, and introduced a new one, which consisted in obedience. See again Heb. 8:7-11: "For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For, finding fault with them, he saith, 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. 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." 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."

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." Ezek. 11:19-20: "And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you: and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh; That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God."

Jer. 24:7: "And I will give them an 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." To these I might add many other passages to the same effect.

10. The Old Covenant was designed to develop sin. Rom. 5:20: "Moreover, the law entered, that the offence might abound: but where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." Rom. 7:8-13: "But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, WROUGHT IN ME ALL MANNER OF CONCUPISCENCE. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, SIN REVIVED, and I died. And the commandment which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, TAKING OCCASION BY THE COMMANDMENT, deceived me, and by it slew me.

Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, WORKING DEATH in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful." Now the design of the Old Covenant, as declared in these texts, was not to make men holy, i.e. it was not expected to make men holy, but to develop their real character--to bring out their depravity to their own observation, and thus convict and condemn them, rather than make them holy and justify them.

Read the New Covenant again, 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.

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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." 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." 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 also 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 righteousness 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 also are 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." Rom. 8:2: "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." 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 by the Spirit, ye are not under the law." I continue to quote these texts, and to write them out, that you may read them attentively in the different connections in which they occur in this discourse. I wish you, by all means, to consider them attentively in all the different connections in which I quote them, and see if they prove the points for which

they are quoted.

Now I ask you, beloved, if these texts do not prove that the New Covenant is the death of sin, in opposition to the Old, which is the "STRENGTH OF SIN" 1 Cor. 15:56: "The STRENGTH of sin is the law." Now observe again, that the New Covenant is not an outward precept, nor an outward promise, nor any outward thing whatever, but an inward holiness wrought by the Spirit of God--the very substance and spirit of the law written in the heart by the Holy Ghost. Hence in Rom. 6:1-14, persons that are baptized by the Holy Ghost are said to be "dead," "crucified," "buried," &c.

I have just quoted it, but consult it again. "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 also 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 righteousness 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 also are 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.

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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 what do these passages mean, if they do not teach a death to sin? And this certainly is not spoken of a future state of existence; but is affirmed of saints in this world. If these passages do not contain an account of a state of entire sanctification.[.] I believe there are none in the Bible that contain such an account, either in reference to this world, or heaven itself.

Again, if these passages do not speak of a state of entire sanctification, then there are none that speak of a state of entire depravity. If to be "dead in trespasses and sins" is not a state of total depravity, then I do not know that the doctrine of total depravity is taught in the Bible. But if to be dead in sin is total depravity, then to be dead to sin must be total or entire holiness.

Now by what rule of biblical interpretation can this conclusion be denied or evaded?

11. The Old Covenant was the ministration of death, but the New of righteousness and life. 2 Cor. 3:6-16: "Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the Spirit: for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life. But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses, for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away; how shall not the ministration of the Spirit be rather glorious? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious. Seeing, then, that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech: and not as Moses, which put a vail over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished: But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart. Nevertheless, when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away." Here we have the two covenants beautifully contrasted by the Apostle--the Old as working spiritual death, and ending in eternal death--the New as consisting in righteousness and eternal life.

12. The Old Covenant was only a school-master to bring us to Christ. Gal. 3:24: "Wherefore the law was our school-master to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith." But the New Covenant is the reign of Christ in 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." 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."

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Rom. 8:9: "But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now, if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Gal. 4:6: "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." Gal. 2:20: "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

Rom. 8:10, 11, 16: "And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead, dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." Phil. 1:19: "For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ."

Here observe that the Old Covenant was designed to strip us of self-righteousness, and show us our need of Christ--to develop our selfishness and enmity--and our entire helplessness and dependence upon a foreign influence to incline us to holiness; and thus preparing the way for our acceptance of Christ as an indwelling and reigning Savior. Then when the Old Covenant, as a school-master, has brought us to Christ, the New enters. In other words--Christ enters the soul, takes up His residence there--writes the law of love in the heart--takes away the stony heart of flesh--makes the New Covenant with the soul--and sheds His divine influence over the entire moral being.

Now if as much as this is not taught in these scriptures, and in various other parts of the Bible, what is taught? And if these texts are to be set aside, and explained away after the common manner of disposing of scripture testimony on this subject, what doctrine or truth may not be expunged from the Bible?

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