

The Promises of God--No. 5

by Charles Finney

The promises of God are not fulfilled in us because the Church has not believed and applied them according to their real import.

Scripture: Matthew 7:7, Hebrews 10:23, James 1:5, 2 Peter 1:4

Topics: "Faith in God's Promises", "Divine Nature and Transformation"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the significance of God's promises in his sermon 'The Promises of God--No. 5', explaining that these promises are designed to help believers partake in the divine nature and escape worldly corruption. He identifies reasons why these promises often go unfulfilled, including ignorance of their existence, misunderstanding their application, and a lack of faith in their full meaning. Finney urges the Church to recognize and claim these promises, asserting that they are conditional upon belief and personal application. He encourages believers to anchor their faith in the promises of God, highlighting the importance of perseverance and the need to overcome personal limitations and doubts. Ultimately, he calls for a deeper understanding and acceptance of the fullness of God's grace and the transformative power of His promises.

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 some of my last lectures, I examined a few of the promises, with the design of showing that they are sufficiently full and explicit to cover the whole ground of our necessities; and that they afford us abundant means of entire conformity to the divine nature or image--that we have only to realize in our own experience the fulness of the promised blessing, and to believe and receive all that is actually promised, in order to know by our own blessed experience, what it is to be made partakers of the divine nature. I might extend this examination of the promises to almost any length, as every attentive reader of the Bible knows. I have only quoted such specimens of the different classes of promises, as seem to me to afford a fair illustration of the extent and fullness of the salvation promised in the Gospel.

According to my plan, I am now to show,

IV. Some of the reasons why the promises are not fulfilled in and to us.

1. They are overlooked in a great measure by the Church. They seem as a body not to know that there are any such promises as these in the Bible. Now as the fulfillment of a promise must depend upon our knowing, understanding, and believing it, there is a very obvious reason why to multitudes the promises are never fulfilled.

2. Many who know that such promises are in the Bible, do not at all understand their application. I was amazed, not long since, to hear a minister contend, that the promise of the New Covenant, which I have so often quoted, was made to the Jews--that inasmuch as Israel and Judah are mentioned, we had no right to apply the promise to any but the Jews. He seemed entirely to overlook the fact that these promises were made to the Israel of God, and more especially to the Christian Church than to the Jewish Church. Now it is perfectly manifest that where such ignorance as this prevails (and it does very extensively prevail in the Christian Church) that there is a natural reason why the promises are not fulfilled--are not plead, believed, and applied by the Church to their own case. Therefore they are as ineffectual to them as the Gospel provisions are to sinners who starve to death with the Gospel feast before them.

3. Another reason why they are not fulfilled to many is, they will not believe the promises mean all they say. They reason thus: as a matter of fact, say they, the Christian Church is not wholly sanctified and never has been--that very few, if any, believers in Christ have ever been wholly sanctified in this life. Therefore, as a matter of fact, either they do not mean to promise entire sanctification, or God has not kept his word. They therefore suffer themselves to fritter away the meaning of the promises. Now if the objection that the promise cannot mean entire sanctification, because, as a matter of fact, entire sanctification has not taken place, in the Church, be good for anything, it must amount to this--that nothing more is promised in the New Covenant than the Church have actually realized. For the whole force of the objection lies in this, that if God has not fulfilled all that he promised, then he has forfeited his word. Therefore, the New Covenant does not mean entire sanctification; but these promises of the New Covenant, and all the promises which I have quoted, mean nothing more than the Church has actually realized. Now if this objection amounts to anything, it is this--that nothing more is promised than has been fulfilled--that the Gospel has done for the Church all that it can do in this world--and that every Christian has actually been at every moment just as holy as there was any provision for him to be. Now the first absurdity involved in this objection is that it would make the promises mean more or less to different individuals, just according to the measure of grace which each one has had. For according to the objection, if the promise has not been fulfilled, then God has broken his word. And if one Christian has had more holiness than another, it must be because God has promised more to one than to another. For in this objection, let it be remembered, it is contended that he has fulfilled all his promises.

A second absurdity is, it assumes that these promises are without any condition, or that the condition has been complied with by every Christian. For certainly it would not be assumed that God had violated his promises, if he intended to promise entire sanctification, unless it were assumed either that they are without condition, expressed or implied, or that the condition had been complied with. But these promises are all made on conditions, either expressed or implied. They are to be recognized, and plead, and believed. The conditions are often expressed along with the promises; and when not expressed, are always implied. The conditions are not arbitrary, but there is a natural necessity that they should be understood, and believed, and a personal application made of them, as the indispensable means of getting that state of mind that constitutes the divine image or nature in man.

It is indeed a short hand method of frittering away the promises of God, to overlook the conditions upon which they are made, and contend that they can mean no more than has been actually realized by the

Church, because on any other supposition, God has not performed his word. Now the reason, and a sufficient reason, why entire sanctification has not been realized by the Church, is that she has not believed and applied these promises according to their real import.

I don't know how to leave this objection without saying it is truly ridiculous. Upon the principle assumed in the objection, there is no promise in the Bible that has become due that can be or ought to be plead by Christians, inasmuch as the promises must be already fulfilled, else God has violated his word.

But to what I have said, it may be objected--that the New Testament times have really come--that the New Covenant has been actually made with the Church--and that those who have actually received it have not been entirely sanctified. To this I reply--that the Church may have received more or less of the New Covenant precisely according to their understanding of the fullness of the promised blessings, and their faith in the promises. When God had promised the New Covenant, he said, "Nevertheless I will be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them." Now it is nowhere asserted in the Bible that the New Testament, or Covenant, has been fully received, although the time has come when it is offered to the Church. Under the New Covenant dispensation, it is promised that the fullness of the Gentiles shall turn to the Lord, and that the Jews themselves shall be converted and receive this covenant. Now the fact that the Church has not actually received the blessing of sanctification, no more proves that that blessing is not fully promised in the New Covenant, than the fact that the Jews and Gentiles have not been converted, proves that no such thing is promised. It is certain that the promises are not fulfilled in regard to the world's conversion, for the very reason that the Church and the world have not believed and applied these promises. The same is true of the New Covenant blessing of sanctification. This blessing has been received to a very limited extent by the Church because she has neglected to believe and apply the promise.

4. Another reason why the promises are not fulfilled in us, is that we often fail to search out the one that is applicable to our circumstances. There are promises adapted to all our circumstances and states of mind, as I have before shown. No one will answer our purpose for the time being, but the one that is applicable to our state of mind. I have often been struck with this, in endeavoring to help anxious souls out of their difficulties. After inquiring as clearly as I was able into their state of mind, I have presented one, and another, and another of the promises, and found that they would instantly perceive that these promises did not exactly meet their case. But when the Spirit of the Lord directed to the selection of the right promise, I have often been amazed and delighted to see how instantly they would recognize it as exactly suited to their case--as made to one exactly in their state of mind--as meeting them where they are, and affording them just the aid they needed. It is often most refreshing to see with what a grasp the mind in such a state will lay hold upon such a promise, and how, in a moment, it becomes as an "anchor to the soul, sure and steadfast," and how easily the mind when anchored down upon such a promise, can look out upon the storm that rages without, and smile through tears of joy. It is one of the great and sweet employments of the ministry, to search out and apply the blessed promises to the different states of mind in which their people are--to feed the lambs and sheep with food suited to their age and spiritual health; and he is surely but ill-instructed in the oracles of God, who has not sufficient spiritual discernment, experience, and knowledge of the Bible, and of the laws of the human mind, to know how to search out the real state of different persons, and apply the promises that belong to them. It is a most divine employment, and if ministers were much better fitted for it, than they are, the weak ones of the flock would soon be strong.

5. Another reason is that we do not anchor down in naked faith upon the promises. We are waiting for some state of mind to precede the exercise of faith, which we suppose must be had before we are at

liberty to lay hold on the promise. And often the very state of mind which we suppose must precede the exercise of faith, is to be the effect of faith, and can only be produced by it. When I speak of anchoring down upon a promise in naked faith, I mean that we should take the promise and believe it, as a matter of fact, as the word of God, as infallible truth, entirely irrespective of any state of mind in which we may be at the time. Take an illustration of what I mean. A young man not long since, had been for a long time anxious, and going to one and another, and inquiring into their experience, and how they obtained the blessing. When one had told him, he would think now I must get just into that state of mind and then I shall have the blessing. And when another had related his experience, he would strive to imitate that; and so he went from one to another, but all in vain. Finally he came to this conclusion, that what the Bible said about Christ Jesus were matters of fact, that there he would begin by taking these things as facts--that he would not inquire about this or that man's experience, but would take the facts about Christ Jesus and the promise as certain truths. Now this is what I call naked faith. This immediately brought him into the state of mind after which he had been seeking, and which, it seems, he expected in some degree at least, to realize before he exercised faith in the promises. Now if we ever expect to receive the fulfillment of the promises, we must not wait for appearances or any indications that God is about to fulfill his promises, but must anchor right down upon them in naked faith because they are the word of God.

6. Again, we do not receive them as belonging to us, as in the case that I have mentioned, where one supposed that the promise of the New Testament was made only to the Jews. Now multitudes seem never to have understood the promises made to individuals and to the Church under the Old Covenant, as belonging still more emphatically to the Church and to individuals under the Christian dispensation. They seem entirely to have overlooked the fact that Christ and his apostles always treated the promises of the Old Testament, as more emphatically belonging to Christians under the New dispensation. Now here is a sufficient reason for their not receiving the fulfillment of the promises, that they do not understand them as made to themselves. Consequently they do not believe nor apply them.

7. It does not seem to be generally understood, that the promises mean all that they say--that they are to be interpreted by the same rules by which the commandments, and other parts of scripture are to be interpreted, e.g. the promise "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," does not seem to be understood to mean as much as the command "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength." It is a matter of amazement and grief that so many individuals, who will contend for the literal meaning of the commandments, will fritter away the promises when the same terms are used, as meaning infinitely less, than the language in the commandments means. Just as if an infinitely bountiful God meant less by the promises of grace than by the requirements of justice. If that man is to be accounted least in the kingdom of God who shall teach men to cast away one of the least of the commandments of God, what shall be said of him who not only casts away himself, but teaches others to cast away the promises of God? Were this the place, it could be easily shown, that it has been a common thing with those who have written against the doctrine of entire sanctification, in this life, to interpret the promises by a very different rule from that which they applied to the commandments.--Now I would humbly ask where is their authority for doing this? Is not such a course manifestly a violation of the word of God?

8. Another reason is, we are so prone to limit their meaning to our own experience, or to the experience of others whom we esteem to be eminent saints. How common is it for persons to inquire, if these promises mean this, why did not President Edwards or his wife, or Mrs. Isabella Graham, or Dr. Payson understand them and experience their fulfillment? Now we are apt to suffer such cases as these to stumble us, by

assuming that they understood and applied the promises in all their length and breadth. It should be understood that no man's experience is the standard of truth. We are not to interpret the Bible by the experience of any man, but bring the experience of every man into the light of the Bible. The plain meaning of the Bible as it reads, is the standard, whatever we may have experienced to the contrary notwithstanding. It is the practice of some men, in these days, when the full meaning of the promises of the gospel is contended for, to reply, by demanding an example. They say, show us an example of a perfect man. To this I reply,

(1) That should such an example be produced, its perfection would not be acknowledged. Christ claimed and really possessed perfection. But his claim was set aside by the religious teachers of his day, and he was considered as a blasphemer, and as one possessed with a devil. I verily believe that examples have been produced, and that some have all along existed in the Church, and now exist, who enjoy the blessing of entire sanctification, as I understand that term, and who nevertheless, have been and still are looked upon, even by the mass of professors of religion, as being so far from a sanctified state, as to render it very doubtful whether they have any religion at all; certainly the most holy persons that I have ever seen have been the most maligned and persecuted, and denounced, even by many of the Church, as being almost any thing else than what they ought to be. And this is exactly according to the word of God. "If any man will live godly in Christ Jesus, he shall suffer persecution."

(2) But another answer to this call for an example is, that if no such example were known to us, this would no more prove that they did not exist, than the fact that Elijah did not know that God had reserved seven thousand men, that had not bowed the knee to Baal, proved that they did not exist.

(3) If no such example did exist, or ever has existed, it would prove nothing more than that the gospel has not yet done all for the world and the Church, which it was designed to accomplish. And who I would humbly ask, believes that it has? Who believes that either the Church or the world has experienced all that the gospel is designed to effect? If no case can indeed be found, where entire sanctification is enjoyed, by any saint, it certainly does not prove that the promises mean no more than is enjoyed, but only that they are not believed, and the fullness of their meaning realized in the experience of the Church.

9. Another reason why the promises are not fulfilled in us is a want of perseverance. The Bible insists largely upon the importance of perseverance in prayer. The case of the "woman of Canaan" is recorded in the 15th of Matthew; and that of the unjust judge in the 18th of Luke, and many other instances recorded in the Bible, set the importance of perseverance in prayer in a strong light. It is often the case, that individuals will pray with confidence for blessings for a short time; but becoming discouraged because the blessing does not come, or supposing perseverance to be unnecessary and that the blessing will come in its time without it, they cease their efforts and wrestling, and, in this respect, restrain prayer before God. Now it is very often the case, that perseverance is naturally indispensable to our obtaining the blessing--that nothing else can prepare our minds to receive it; and it is often the case that it cannot be granted, but through our own agency and protracted and agonizing efforts. Some obstacle may be, to be overcome, either within or without ourselves, that can be overcome in no other way. As Christ said on a certain occasion, "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting."

10. Again, we hold on too long, i.e. we do not go from promise to promise, taking hold on them as they rise one above the other. Now it is manifest to those who have experience on the subject, that the promises are adapted to all possible states of mind, from the lowest degree of grace, and from the lowest depths of despondency, step by step, up to the highest degrees of holy confidence and triumph of which the human

mind is capable. It often comes to pass, that when individuals have taken hold on some of those promises, designed to reach the christian in his most languid state, such as "He giveth power to the faint, and to him that hath no might he increaseth strength." "The bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench till he bring forth judgment unto victory" that here he rests, and being comforted by these promises he does not proceed to take hold on promises suited to his state of mind as he rises, and thus rise quite out of the murky regions of his unbelief and selfishness, but contents himself with hanging upon that one, or those of that class, without rising any higher. It is impossible that a believer should remain stationary. He must go from strength to strength, or he will certainly insensibly decline. The promises are like a ladder that reaches from earth to heaven; and the cry continually is, come up higher, come up higher, and unless the mind is taken up with viewing the heights still above, and what is still to be attained, it is apt to become giddy with looking down upon those below, and dwelling upon its own attainments, and being lifted up with pride, falls into the condemnation of the devil.

11. We do not duly consider how intimately God's glory is connected with our receiving all that the promises mean. We are apt to be taken up with a sense of our unworthiness, and be discouraged by a consideration of it, and not duly to consider that this very unworthiness would render it exceedingly honorable to God to give us the fullness of his grace, and wholly to transform us into his own image. I love to contemplate the grace of God as manifested in Paul--once a Saul--a raging persecutor, breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the infant Church--afterwards so changed by the grace of God as to become the wonder of the world in his remarkable resemblance of the Son of God.

God's glory is his reputation or renown. And if to bestow great and transforming grace upon the children of men who are in the image of hell, is calculated to convey a high idea of the patience, forbearance, goodness and moral omnipotence of God, then certainly his glory is intimately connected with our receiving the full meaning and power of his promises.

12. We do not sufficiently consider the importance of our becoming living illustrations of the power and grace of God. There should be among Christians, a holy ambition, each one to become a living, standing illustration of the full meaning of the promises, and of the provisions of the gospel to transform the soul into the divine image, and make it a partaker of the divine nature. Who that has read the life of Mrs. President Edwards, has not been encouraged and edified and strengthened to press after higher attainments in holiness when they have seen what grace can do and what it actually has done, even in modern times, to transform and elevate the soul. Now as we prize the glory of God--as we desire to do good to the Church, instead of being satisfied with small attainments, we should reach after the highest measure of grace, and try the full strength and intent of the promises, and ask God to give us for his own glory all that he meant to promise--that the unbelief of the Church may be rebuked, and that we might so illustrate in our own experience the fullness of gospel salvation, that the frittering away of the promises and paring them down to the legal experience of the Church in her present state may be done away forever.

13. Another reason is the concealing the grace of God which we actually have received, either through the suggestion of [S]satan that we shall lose the present blessing, or through fear that we shall be thought egotistical and proud, if we declare what God has done for our souls. Says the Psalmist, "I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart. I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation. I have not concealed thy loving-kindness and thy truth from the great congregation." And when he had been brought up from the horrible pit of miry clay, and his feet set upon a rock, his goings established, and a new song put into his mouth, he said, "Many shall see it and shall fear, and shall trust in the Lord." Christ has said that "men

do not light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that it may give light to all that are in the house." "Even so," he adds, "let your light so shine that men may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

Now it is not enough that we should merely behave ourselves aright, but we should be prompt, and plain, and simple-hearted in ascribing all our good works to the grace of God within us, else ourselves and not God will have the glory in the estimation of men. If we conceal the lovingkindness of the Lord, if we are ashamed, or afraid, or for any cause neglect to give him glory and tell what the Spirit hath done for our souls, we may expect that to overtake us which was spoken by the prophet, "If ye will not hear and if ye will not lay it to heart to give glory unto my name, saith the Lord of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings."

14. A voluntary humility may prevent us from receiving the fulfillment of the promises. Many individuals seem afraid to hope or expect to attain to any but the lowest measures of grace, on account of their great unworthiness. They feel as if it would be aspiring and getting out of their place to ask for the children's bread, and therefore suppose themselves to be doing God service, in consenting to live upon the crumbs under the table. They read of the attainments of others, but ah! they think, these are not such great sinners as themselves. They thus dishonor the grace of God, by somehow imagining that it was because they were not so great sinners that they have been so highly exalted. In other words, they insult the grace of God by accounting for the attainments of those of whom they read, upon the score of justice rather than grace--supposing that it was because they were not so ill-deserving as themselves. Now what is this but wicked and shocking unbelief, depreciating the grace of God, and ascribing that to justice which is only the result of infinite grace? and besides, a most self-righteous keeping down in the dust, by a most God-dishonoring idea that our worthiness and not unworthiness is to recommend us to the grace of God? Now it should be forever understood that worthiness recommends us to the justice and not to the grace of God, and that our deep unworthiness, while it lays us under the condemning sentence of justice, recommends us to the grace of God. Let no one therefore suppose himself to be pleasing God, when he voluntarily consents to grovel in the lowest attainments, when he ought to rise into the full sun-light of God's countenance, and to be filled with all the fullness of God.

15. Another reason is a God-dishonoring unbelief, and a blasphemous putting in of but, and if, when pleading the promises of God, which imply insincerity on the part of God in making the promises, e.g. Christ has said "God is more willing to give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him than parents are to give good gifts to their children." Suppose we pray for the Holy Ghost, and preface and conclude the petition by saying, if it be thy will, &c. Now wherever there is an express promise, to put in an if in this way, is to call in question the sincerity of God. Where he has made no conditions, we are to make none, unless we would be guilty of adding to or subtracting from his word.

16. Another difficulty is, very few have ever learned how to use the promises. They have so little faith in them as not to select them, nor have committed them to memory, nor arranged them in any order in their own minds. And to them, the weapons of their spiritual warfare are about as useless as if they were locked up in an armory.--Now the promises of God should be so pondered, selected, arranged, and remembered, as to be ever ready at hand, that the one that is needed may be presented at any time to quench the fiery darts of the wicked. To understand how to use the promises of God is a science of vast extent, and it requires the highest exercise of the human faculties, always to be able to seize upon the one we need, for our own or for others edification and support. I regard this as one of the principal qualifications of ministers. We need to know how so to apply the promises of grace, as to bring the Church from her low

estate to those heights to which the promises were designed to elevate her.

17. Another reason is that the ministry to a great extent, are frittering away instead of applying the promises of God to the help and edification of the Church. My soul is often sick to see how the promises are understood, and how they are explained away, and the Church robbed of its heritage, and the sheep starved to death by those who are set to feed the flock of God.

18. Another reason is, we regard iniquity in our hearts. If any sin is cherished there, if any lust is spared, if any unholy indulgence is pleaded for or defended, or pride or sin of any kind, the Lord will not hear us. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."

19. Another reason is, a disposition to defer the fulfillment of the promises to the Millennium. In my apprehension, this is the very reason why the Millennium has not already come, because the Church are waiting for the effect to precede the cause. The Millennium will be the fulfillment of these promises. Before they can be fulfilled they must be believed and plead. But the Church seems to be waiting for the Millennium first to come, and then they will lay hold of the promises. How long shall the Church thus act? How long shall the promises that are conditioned in their very nature upon our faith, remain a dead letter in the Bible because the Church is waiting for their fulfillment before they are believed?

20. Many are doubting whether these promises are to be fulfilled until we get into eternity. e.g. Of the promise of the New Covenant it is said by some that no time is specified when it shall be fulfilled, and consequently we know not that we have a right to expect the blessing until we arrive at heaven. Now to this a multitude of answers might be given. But at present I will only say,

(1) That a promise in which no time for its fulfillment is either expressed or implied is void and a ridiculous mockery. Should I promise to pay A.B. twenty-five dollars without saying anything at all of the time, then he may call upon me at any time, for my obligation is considered as on demand. But if I should say at some FUTURE time, without specifying when, it would be void, as the time would never come when it would be considered as due. This is true of the promises of God. When a promise is made in the present tense it is always due or may at any time be plead--if at a future time, it is not due until that time arrives. If a promise should be found (of which there is no instance in the Bible) in which no particular future time is expressed or implied, that promise must from its nature be a mere nullity: For faith being the condition, it is plain that the condition can never be fulfilled because there is nothing on which it can rest, it being impossible to ascertain whether the time is come or when it will come that the promise was intended to be fulfilled. If it be said, as in the promise of the New Covenant, that, "after those days,"--"at that time," &c. evidently referring to some particular future time when the promise should be fulfilled--at that time it becomes due, and ever after that time it may be plead as a promise in the present tense. The particular time referred to in such cases may be learned in general by the connection in which the promise stands, or by reference to other parts of scripture: e.g.; Many things are promised to be fulfilled "in the latter day,"--"at the end of the world or Jewish age &c." From the Bible, it is abundantly evident that the latter day is the gospel day--that the end of the world when by the phrase is meant the end of the Jewish state, is also the commencement of the Christian dispensation, and that all the promises of blessings to be bestowed "in the last days" are now to be regarded as in the present tense, to be fulfilled at any time and to anyone who will believe them. This is undeniably the understanding of the Apostle, when, in Hebrews, he quotes the promise of the New Covenant from Jeremiah, as a promise to be fulfilled at the coming of Christ, who was the mediator of the New Covenant. Now the coming of Christ was the particular time at which the promise made by Jeremiah, and so often repeated in the prophets was to be considered as due,

and forever after treated as a promise in the present tense. Christ's coming did not of itself secure the fulfillment of the promise, irrespective of our own faith and agency, but it pointed out the time when the Church was to look for its fulfillment, and when its fulfillment should depend upon their pleading it in faith.

(2) If there be no particular time in which the promises of God are to be fulfilled, I mean those of them that are in the future tense, then we can no more receive their fulfillment in heaven than we can here. For without a new revelation informing us that the time has come, we can never lay hold on them as due,—we cannot believe and receive their fulfillment. If the promise is evidently future, and no time is expressed or implied, when it shall be fulfilled, when we have been in heaven myriads of ages, we shall no more be able to lay hold on the promise as due, nor so far as I can see, be any more certain that the time for its fulfillment is not yet future, than we are now.

21. Another reason why the promises are not fulfilled in us is, we are unwilling on some accounts to have them fulfilled. Such as a fear of disgrace, being called fanatics, perfectionists or something else of the kind, that we dread. Lest we should have to abandon some particular indulgence, lust, or favorite pursuit. Now it often happens, that we would be very willing to have the blessing of sanctification, if it did not imply the actual giving up of sin, under every form. Many are praying for that blessing who are after all holding on to some form of sin.

22. Selfishness in our motives. Under one form and another, selfishness is often lurking in our applications to the throne of grace for promised blessings. God cannot be deceived in this. And unless our eye be single our whole body cannot be full of light.

23. Our experience of the inefficacy of prayer, such as we have so often offered in selfishness, operates as a discouragement, and we come to God in the peevishness of unbelief. We have so often come to God in our selfishness and pleaded his promises, overlooking the wickedness of our motives, that we are ready to conclude either that we have misunderstood the promises altogether—that the time has not come for their fulfillment, or for some reason our prayers cannot prevail, and therefore we do not expect to receive the blessing. We are straitened by our wants, and cry to God, but it is in the anguish of unbelief, and we are of course denied.

24. Presumptuous misapplication of a promise. e.g.: The promise, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee," is so misapplied and misunderstood that we become presumptuous, and depart from him instead of his departing from us. So the promise in James, "If a man lack wisdom let him ask of God and it shall be given him," is sometimes so misunderstood as to lead persons to expect wisdom without research.

25. Persons often tempt God, in asking the fulfillment of a promise without performing its conditions.

I might mention a great many other reasons, but these must suffice. And now I must close this discourse by saying, that I cannot tell you how much I felt shocked, when the question came fully up whether the grace of God was sufficient as a matter of fact for the entire sanctification of Christians in this life, and it was flatly denied. The question in this shape had never come fairly and fully before my mind as a subject of distinct consideration till the last winter of my residence in N. Y. And I can never express my astonishment and grief when I found that men standing high in the Church of God flatly denied it. I have often asked myself, is it possible that these brethren can be of the opinion that if a man should believe and realize in his own experience the full meaning of the promises, and all that the gospel and the grace of God can do for a man in this world, that he would not be entirely sanctified? I would humbly ask, where is there one among them that has tried the experiment? It is no answer to this to turn around and inquire,

have you received the fullness of the promise? Are you sanctified? For if I have not, and if there were not a man on earth that has, that does not at all change the meaning of the promise, nor prove that they are not sufficient to produce entire sanctification, so long as it is true that every one of them must confess that they have never received or hardly begun to receive all that they themselves admit the promises mean.

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