

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

Vol. XXI

May 15, 2011

No. 20

Who Is Holding Whom?

(Jerry Fite)

Jesus made a remarkable statement concerning His followers and God: “. . . and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who hath given them unto me, is greater than all; and on one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.” (John 10:29-30). In the context of claiming His deity, Jesus boldly says those disciples in His hand, or in effect in the Father’s hand, are eternally safe. They will never perish. How should we interpret this saying of the Lord?

This passage is a favorite among Calvinists. They offer an illustration to explain it. Pretend you are walking along a railroad track with your son. You tell him to hold your hand tightly so he will not fall down on the track and be killed by a train. Granting that possibility, the question is asked, what is a more sure way of protecting the son from death? If the Father holds the hand of the son, the Father’s grasp is firmer than the little boy’s grasp of the Father’s hand. So, the reason no one

will perish from God’s hand is that God is holding on to us, not that the impossibility of perishing depends upon us remaining in God’s hand, firmly holding to Him.

The immediate context should help us see who is holding to whom. Those who will never perish out of God’s hand are “*His sheep*” (John 10:27). Notice the conditions of being His sheep: “*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me*” (John 10:27). God’s sheep continue to “*hear*” the voice of the Good Shepherd, and continue to “*follow*” His lead. They hear and they follow. They are holding fast to the Lord, not that they cannot be destroyed if they cease to hear and follow.

Paul asks a rhetorical question: “*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?*” (Romans 8:35). The point is that no other circumstance or being can separate us from Christ. Yet, one “*being*” is not mentioned in this list: “*You*”. We have a part to play in being victorious through God’s love. Jude writes, “*But ye,*

beloved building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the Love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life” (Jude 19-20). Eternal life is ahead for those who do not become weary of looking for the coming of the Lord. Building oneself up on his established holy faith, praying in connection with the teachings of the Holy Spirit helps one keep himself or herself in the love of God. Who is holding to whom? Jude clearly indicates the ones who will avoid eternal destruction and inherit eternal life are those who hold on the Lord. They keep themselves in the love of God.

We will never stumble when we continue to grow in our faith, (2 Peter 1:10-11). But if we do not give diligence to grow spiritually, we are like a blind man forgetting the cleansing of our old sins (2 Peter 1:9). In Calvinism, only the elect are those whose sins Jesus cleanses. Yet these same people are to give diligence in growing so they will not stumble. God has promised us security, but we must hold fast to Him.