

WHO HOLDS YOUR HAND?

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“I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not” (Isa. 41:13).¹

How Can You Teach Your Dog to Do a Trick?

You probably can't, for he won't want to learn unless you reward him every time he does it. Watch closely: when you see people showing off their pets who do these funny things, they always slip the pet a little treat. Even horses or other big animals won't learn unless you reward them with something special each time.

That makes us ask, Why do we serve Jesus? Is it because we'll get a reward? Why do we keep the Sabbath? Pay our tithe? Go to church? Get baptized? Become missionaries?

Most people will confess, “It's because I want to go to heaven. I don't want to be lost.” And of course those are good reasons; nobody wants to be lost at last.

Be Honest With Yourself.

Let's hope you help at home to keep your house clean and running. You do your part washing the dishes, vacuuming the rug, taking out the garbage, washing the car, mowing the lawn—whatever. Children do you pout if your parents don't give you a special treat for doing it? I hope not! I hope you are ready and willing and cheerful when it comes your turn to help—all simply because you love your parents and you love others in the home, and

because you know it's the right thing to do whether you get any special reward or not. To tell the truth, you can't be happy at home unless that is the reason why you help!

Do you think your parents could be happy if they knew that the only reason you do anything is to get paid for it?

Let's not forget: Jesus Christ is a real person. He has feelings like we have. He can be hurt, just as we can. We can make Him happy or we can cause Him pain.

He has done something that makes the world marvel because no one else since time began has done it. He has died our second death in our place. He gave Himself with no idea of getting a reward for doing so. When He died our “second death,”² that meant He had given up all thought of a reward.

Someone very wise has told us that as He hung on His cross, He could not see through the gates of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave as a reward for suffering and dying in our place. When He chose to die for us, it was to be goodbye forever. That is love! Isaiah tells us that “He hath poured out His soul unto death” like you turn a bottle upside down and drain every drop out of it (Isa. 53:12).

But at the end of His suffering on the cross, He was happy, and His face lighted up like the sun when He shouted, “It is finished!” But what made Him so happy was not that He thought He would get some reward in heaven; He had given all that

¹ “The Wonder of It All,” “He Leadeth Me.”

² As the Bible describes it, Rev. 2:11.

up. What made Him happy was that you and I will live forever!

Honestly, this is a love like nobody else in the world had ever thought of! And this is the secret reason why so many people have wanted to give everything to Jesus!

In these last days God is preparing many people who are learning to understand the love of Christ, which moves them to follow Him. What they have is a new reason or motivation—moved by His love, not moved by fear.

And among those people, there are many young people. They are as important as any grown-ups. You are one, aren't you?

* Children are very important people who need Good News, not Bad. Jesus is very severe with people who abuse children spiritually—that is, pastors, or parents, or teachers who tell them Bad News instead of the pure, true “gospel” that He commanded us to tell everybody.³

When it's our turn to tell the children's story in the church service, we must beg Him to help us do it right, to tell them something that will turn their little feet toward the kingdom of God, and not vice versa.

Sometimes I like to make it into a game that a child can play with me. If one volunteers, I tell him/her that all I want him to do is to go for a walk with me down the aisle of the church, and he/she hold on to my hand. That's all!

So, the trusting child, smiling a bit sheepishly, stands with me there in front of everybody, and

tremulously holds my hand. Whereupon I take off in top gear down the aisle with the child left there behind, not having taken a step, because of course there was no hanging on.

Then, after “berating” the child for not holding on to my hand as I told him/her to do, I say, “Now let's try it again; and this time instead of you holding on to my hand as we go for a walk, let me hold you by the hand. Then we take off and I hold on tight.

Then I make my point: being saved in God's kingdom does not depend on you holding on to God's hand, because you and I and all of us are too weak to hang on. But it depends on us believing that He is holding tight to our hand.

He says so: “I, the LORD your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, ‘Fear not, I will help you’” (Isa. 41:13).

The idea is not that we must take the initiative in our salvation and start the process going; we must believe that His love for us takes the initiative; it's an important point that must not be twisted or distorted. It's “God [who] so loved the world that He gave . . .” It's not we who persuaded Him to love us! You and He are crossing this busy street of worldly traffic and you are the little child. “Father” is not going to let you run across on your own. He is going to hold you tight by His hand. True, if you are perverse, you can wriggle yourself out of His hand; a child can do that, and get hit by the traffic.

You don't want to do that, do you? So you respond to His constant gripping of your hand.

³ Mark 15:16; Matt. 18:6.

* When any of us meet Jesus face to face and look in His eyes, we will not feel like praising ourselves. We will confess ourselves “unworthy servants.”

But the most marvelous thing will happen: He will want to praise us! It seems incomprehensible that He should want to do that, for the honest truth is that we are indeed “unworthy,” even the best of us, whoever that might be!

It seems almost incomprehensible to me that the Divine Son of God should deign to say something nice about our work!

But there is nothing He will take more joy in saying than His words of praise to us, “Well done, good and faithful servant! Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!” (Matt. 25:21).

Not one of those “servants” will feel that he deserves those words of commendation.

Each will be shocked to hear them; they may even turn around to see if there is someone else that the Lord is speaking of; “no, I mean you,” He will remonstrate.

Let Me share with you this inexpressible joy that is Mine, He will say; I can’t imagine how I would feel if I heard Him say those words to me!

He says those words only because His heart is so full of *agape*-love that He can’t hold them back!

He doesn’t want even one person to crawl into the New Jerusalem like a dog with its tail between its legs; every one will have only “entrance . . . ministered . . . abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:11).

Why? Because even one of us may deserve it? No, only because of the “much more abundant” grace of Jesus.

No, we are not saved by works, we don’t earn a place there; but we begin even here and now in learning to appreciate that grace of Jesus. That word “appreciate” is closely related to the word “believe.” You believe in Jesus not when you raise your hand in a meeting to show people you are okay; no, you believe when your heart is moved by His love (*agape*), when you sense that He went to hell to save you, that He poured out His soul unto death—even the second death (Isa. 53:12)! You sense that He bought you with the price of His eternal life, and you are “constrained henceforth” to serve Him gladly, with no thought of earning a reward.

Youth often think it is “hard” to follow Christ; but if they are privileged to hear the pure, true gospel presented, they are “constrained” to yield themselves heart and soul, and all they have, unto Him. It’s the furthest thing from a works trip you can imagine.

Is it hard to be saved? Is it hard to make any sacrifice of worldly pleasures for His sake? If it seems hard to you, dear youth, it’s because you have no idea what it cost Him to save you.

* Suppose you have done something or said something that is wrong and you know it. You feel burdened; the joy of life is gone. Now it’s a dark and cloudy day. What do you do?

Well, first of all, welcome to the world-wide club of people who know they are sinners. Maybe you

didn't know you had the capability of doing or saying what you did that is wrong. The truth is, there is no end to our capability for sin. A wise writer says that when Jesus was hanging on His cross, He realized how bad a person can become. That is why He cried out, "My God, why have You forsaken Me?" If our Saviour were to let go of our hand, we could fall, fall, fall. There's no end to the depth we would go. Remember, your salvation does not depend on you holding on to His hand; it depends on your believing that He is holding on to your hand. So, what do you do now?

You find a chance as soon as possible to get on your knees before the Saviour,—not some earthly priest, or psychiatrist please,—and you confess your sin to Him. The whole thing; with no attempt to justify yourself or any plea bargaining. Tell Him that you are Peter sinking in the waves in the storm on Galilee, and you join him in crying out, "Lord, save me or I perish!"

Secondly, you ask Him to forgive you your sin.

Thirdly, you believe what He says in 1 Jn. 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins."

Fourth, you believe what else He says there, "and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." The true forgiveness kit comes complete with a brand—new attachment—a new hatred for the sin itself. That little gift that comes in the package is not based on fear, but heart-sorrow for wounding the Savior. It is a new evidence to you personally of a miracle. So, from now on, any doubt that He loves you personally is washed away by this new personal

miracle—utterly impossible for "sinful you" unless the Holy Spirit has worked in your heart. You don't naturally hate sin; naturally, you love it; so this newly implanted hatred for the sin is personal evidence for you that Christ is risen from the dead, He's alive, and He is your High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary. Yes, that is Good News.

* Some more highlights from Paul's Letter to the Galatians, which is as fresh as if he wrote it this morning. To "walk in the Spirit" is to believe He is holding on to your hand, not vice versa (5:16-25). But the common idea is that you've got to hold on tight to God's hand or you'll be lost. Get it straight: you must believe He is holding on to your hand! (Isa. 41:10, 13).

We cannot truly help someone else unless we can put ourselves in his place—"there but for the grace of God go I." That's the basic principle of corporate guilt and corporate repentance (Gal. 6:1-6). The final mark of the beast will be "persecution for the cross of Christ." "The truth of the gospel" as it is in Galatians will therefore be part of the final "loud cry" message that will lighten the earth with glory (Gal. 6:12, 13; Rev. 18:1-4).

To understand and believe this gospel of the cross delivers one from captivity to worldliness in all its forms. The mall, the showrooms of the new cars, the dress shops, all will lose their charm for you if, like the Galatians who heard Paul preach, you "see" Christ crucified for you (Gal. 3:1; 6:14). "The third angel's message in verity" is the full liberating truth of the new covenant (Gal. 4:16-31). Salvation by faith cannot be understood unless faith is

understood as that which “works by love [*agape*]” (Gal. 5:1-6). Proclaiming “the truth of the gospel,” the kind that lays the glory of man in the dust, always brings persecution on its proclaimer (Gal. 5:11, 12). Genuine liberty inherent in true faith never produces licence. It produces the glorious liberty inherent in self-control (Gal. 5:13, 14).

Just as light is stronger than darkness, love is stronger than hatred, grace is stronger than sin, so the Holy Spirit is stronger than the “flesh” with all its sinful addictions. Therefore, if one understands and believes Paul’s “truth of the gospel,” he finds it easy to be saved and hard to be lost (Gal. 5:16-18; compare Mt. 11:28-30; Acts 26:14).

This is shocking to most Christians, but it is what Galatians says. This book is dynamite! Once let Paul have his say, and people will love it or hate it. Nobody can sit on the fence after understanding Galatians.

Are you holding on to God’s hand? Or is He holding on to your hand? When Jesus says, “As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can you, unless you abide in Me” (Jn. 15:4), does He mean that the “Vine” (which is Himself) does nothing to maintain the connection but leaves that “abiding” to the initiative of the branch? In other words, does your salvation depend on you holding on to God (“abiding in Him”), or to your believing that He is holding on to you? Or, to put it in even more simple language, does your salvation really depend on your own works?

Jesus says something here in John 15 that needs closer attention: “Abide in Me, and I in you.” For us

to abide in Him requires our own initiative; He will not force us; but He also says, “I abide in you.” Does the branch do the abiding in the vine, or does the vine do the abiding in the branch?

Well, the answer is obvious: all the sap and nutriment for the branch come from the vine and its root. The branch cannot live on its own. Life comes from the vine, not vice versa!

A little later in John 15, Jesus explains what it means for Him to abide in us: “If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, you shall ask what you desire” (vs. 7).

What He says is Good News all the way through. He is the Vine, we are the branches; only our own perverse choice can separate us from Him. The sap is constantly flowing from the root through the Vine to the branch—don’t stop it! Don’t cut it off.

The missing link of Good News truth is found in Colossians 3:16: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.” Jesus had already promised us in John 14:26 that He is giving us the *gift* of the Holy Spirit who will “bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (Jn. 14:26). In your darkest moment when you cry out “My God, why have You forsaken me?” that Holy Spirit is pressing upon your conscience, your memory, the “word of Christ.” Welcome it! Cherish it! Choose to receive it! “Let it abide in you”! Thank God for that “word”! He says, “I the Lord God, will hold your right hand” (Isa. 41:13). It’s tremendously important to know who is who here—Who does the holding?

* Why do we have bad dreams in which we do things that horrify us when we wake up? When we

regain consciousness, our whole soul revolts against the doing of the thing that we have just dreamed that we did! Sometimes we pray, “Lord, don’t let me again have a bad dream like that!” And then we have one. What’s going on?

Perhaps an inspired apostle may help us, Paul in Galatians 5. The bad things we do in our dreams are an illustration of “the works of the flesh” being “manifest, which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, seditions,” etc., etc. A synonym of “the flesh” is “sinful nature,” which we all have by birth from Adam. Don’t be deceived into thinking that you have “holy flesh” when you are converted; you have no natural righteousness of your own, not even 1%. You are wholly dependent on the righteousness of Christ.

“The flesh” has a reservoir of evil things it can do and which you and I would do but for the grace of Christ. Peter never dreamed that it was possible for him to deny Christ with cursing; and he was an ordained apostle! It was “the flesh” that motivated him to do what he did. King David had never dreamed that it was possible for him to commit the double sin of adultery and murder; it was “the flesh” that took over control. You and I have no idea of the evil that we could do if the Savior were to abandon us. So, thank Him from the depths of your heart that it was “only a dream,” and choose again to “go for a walk with the [Holy] Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16-19).

Yes, the flesh will tempt you, and try to allure you; but remember Peter and remember how weak you are of yourself. The Lord has promised to “hold your

right hand” (Isa. 41:10, 13), and that is the only reason you don’t fall. Now, don’t wriggle your hand out of His hand like a rebellious child crossing a busy street. Let Him hold you by the hand; respond to His constant promptings. And when your race is over at last, you will thank Him for saving you 100%.

* There is a neat illustration of how the Samaritans were correct when they said that Christ is already “the Saviour of the world” (Jn. 4:42): According to the Bible . . . on the cross Jesus paid the penalty for the sins of all human beings who ever lived or ever will live. But each human being must accept the gift. . . . God has handed every human being a “check” called eternal life, and we have a right to that eternal life—in a very real sense we own it—from the moment we enter the world. But we do not possess it until we “cash the check” . . . through faith in Jesus.

As *Steps to Christ* says, “The sinner may resist this love, he may refuse to be drawn to Christ, but if he does not resist, he will be drawn to Jesus” (p. 27). The lost will be lost not because Christ did not die for them or pay the penalty for their sin or do less for them than He did for the saved ones, but because they have rejected the gift He gave them in Himself.

Ever since Augustine, many Christians have been afraid that such truth makes the Good News too good. But the Bible is clear: (a) Christ died “every man’s” second death (Heb. 2:9). Why then should any have to die it? Answer: the lost person has resisted, refused, to be “drawn” by Christ’s much

more abounding grace. (b) Christ “is the propitiation . . . also for the sins of the whole world” (1 Jn. 2:2).

Why then isn’t “the whole world” saved experientially? Answer: they have refused to “cash the check.” (c) Christ is present tense “the Saviour of all men” (1 Tim. 4:10). Why then will some be lost? The text tells us he is “especially [the Saviour] of those that believe.” Answer: the lost “believed not” (Jn. 3:18). They are “Esau” who have in their hands the God-given “birthright,” but they “despise” it and sell it for “one morsel” of foolishness (Heb. 12:16). Lord, please hold us by Your hand (Isa. 41:13)!

* You’d think it would be the easiest thing in the world to do—just believe, “God loves me.” Actually, it’s hard to believe, maybe the hardest step we ever had to take.

People much wiser than I am say so. Paul says, “The carnal [natural] mind is enmity against God” (Rom. 8:7). And yes, everybody has the problem for he also says that the whole world is alienated from God for he begs everybody, “Be ye reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20). He adds, there is “not one” of us who “understands,” who is naturally “at one” with God; we’ve every one of us strayed out of the path (Rom. 3:11-12). The father in Mark 9 burst into tears, “Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief” (vs. 24). He is us.

We’re afraid to pray, “Lord, take charge of my life,” for we think He will lead us where we won’t be happy. Don’t kid yourself into thinking you’re naturally better than all the rest of us; you and I need to be changed from the inside out so we can

be “reconciled to God.” Then and only then can we pray without being a hypocrite, “Lord, please take charge of my life.” You won’t be afraid to let Him hold you by your hand as He has promised, “I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not” (Isa. 41:13).

A very wise writer once wrote that we hesitate to consecrate ourselves to Him because we fear the consequences of a total surrender to Him. Deep down inside, there lurks that inarticulate idea that our Savior is Mr. Kill-joy. Ever since we were born some people have unconsciously taught us that—they didn’t mean to do it but they did.

What to do? I’d say do like I did once—take a day off for prayer. But if you think you’re too busy, you can’t, then take an hour. Yes, give Him an hour—alone. An hour, not five minutes. Kneel. Read a Psalm of David. Ask, seek, find. An hour—alone. Wait for Him.

* Why is that when you decide to follow Christ, it seems you have so many heartaches and disappointments? Often everything goes wrong. If God is with you, why all this?

Job wondered that also. He did what was right, but suffered terribly. He was also “disfellowshipped” by his “church” of his day—his three “wise” friends who made his pain worse. He was sorely tempted to give up as his wife urged him to do, to “curse God and die” (2:9). But someday you will thank Job for writing his book—it’s a blessing to us all.

David believed that “the Lord is my Shepherd,” yet look at the sufferings he had to endure. His “church” also virtually disfellowshipped him—“the anointed of

the Lord,” Saul, tried to kill him. Again, David wrote psalms that have been a blessing to us all. Thank you, David!

The Lord called Jeremiah to be His special messenger even before he was born (1:5). Endless pain and sorrow were his lot, it seems right to the day of his death. But again, thank you, Jeremiah, for that book you wrote.

And so it has been all through history, right down to our time.

Meanwhile, God is in His heaven, omnipotent, infinitely wealthy. In Isaiah 66 He tells us that the wide universe is His “house.” We can’t add a feather’s weight to His wealth. BUT—He doesn’t have all He wants. He is looking for something special to satisfy His heart-yearning: a man (or woman) “who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles [thrills] at My word” (vss. 1, 2).

What’s behind the scenes is this great cosmic controversy between Christ and Satan. It’s a grueling struggle; and unless God can “find” that man or woman, He could lose the contest. You and I are the gladiators down in the arena fighting for *His* victory. “Fight the good fight [not of works! but] of faith” (1 Tim. 6:12). Hang on to faith—that is, believing that He is holding on to your hand (Isa. 41:13; vice versa doesn’t work!). “Believe also in Me,” says Jesus (John 14:1-3). He loves you, but not like you love your dog and pity it; the Father honors you, respects you, yes, I will say it: He is proud of you as you hang on to your faith like Job, David, Jeremiah, and countless others have done. You honor, glorify Him! (Rev. 14:6, 7).

* A lady recently baptized, a new believer in Christ, asked a question in a meeting. “I’ve been hearing something from the Book of Daniel about a ‘cleansing of the sanctuary’ (8:14). What does it mean?”

The leader of the group responded in part: “Christ’s ‘sanctuary’ is His hospital where He labors as the Great Physician. Millions of angels serve Him as His ‘nurses’ in caring for people sick, not only of physical ailments, but sick of sin. They need to be healed. He is on duty 24 hours a day, seven days a week, including Christmas.

“And you are the only patient He has in that vast hospital which is His ‘sanctuary.’ So He devotes His full time to your case, as if there were not another person on earth, for He is infinite.

For nearly 2000 years He served in the “first apartment” of that heavenly sanctuary where His primary work was in preparing people to die and come up in the first resurrection, to everlasting life. And that was a wonderful work.

But now in His special work in the Most Holy Apartment where He is performing that new ministry Daniel speaks of as “cleansing the sanctuary,” He has a special work. He is preparing a body of people all over the earth to be ready to be translated without tasting death, as 1 Thess. 4:16, 17 describes, when He returns. And that is His purpose for you.

“And He will accomplish that work if you do not interpose a rebellious will to hinder Him. It’s not your work to save yourself, but you are to cooperate with Him in His work of saving you. He will hold

your hand if you do not wriggle your hand out of His (Isa. 41:13).

“This wonderful ministry of cleansing the sanctuary is being accomplished all over the earth as people from “every nation, kindred, tongue and people” (Rev. 14:6-12) are responding to His ministry being done through Christ’s Comforter, the Holy Spirit. Welcome to that happy body of people whose purpose is to stay close to Christ in His unique High Priestly ministry!”

When he was finished, she sat back, smiled, and drew a deep breath.

He asked her, “Why did you take that deep breath?”

She replied, “Because that News is so Good!”

* How much does God love you, personally? Your happiness (here and forever) depends on how you believe it. None of us was born already believing; we have all had to learn how to believe; and for that we need the Good News in the Bible. Winning the lottery is not the way to learn that God loves you; everything of human happiness you’ve been given can take wings and fly away.

You may say that “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” sounds too far away—2000 years ago. But the Bible reveals His on-going love for you. For example:

(1) Your Savior takes you by the arm to lead you “in the paths of righteousness.” He actually takes you by your hand and says, Come, let’s go to happiness! He loves you like a father loves a little son who is just learning to walk. Read it in Hosea 11:1, 3: “I taught Ephraim [My people] also to go,

taking them by their arms. . . . I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love.” No, He doesn’t force you; but He does everything possible short of it. If you don’t refuse, He will be to you the Good Shepherd of Psalm 23.

(2) Isaiah says that He actually takes you by the hand to lead you to heaven: “I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee” (41:13, 10).

(3) If you make a mistake and take a wrong path in your blindness or foolishness, He does not forsake you. He will do for you what He did for Saul of Tarsus who was hell-bent on taking the wrong path. The Lord put obstacles in his path to make the wrong way seem like kicking against the goads (see Acts 26:14). Yes, the Lord made it “hard” for Saul to be lost! Isn’t that personal love?

(4) And the Savior continually reminds you that He has made His “yoke . . . easy, and [His] burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30).

You believe it, or you *dis*-believe it; but if you are having trouble believing it, He “helps [your] unbelief” if you will let Him (Mark 9:24). In fact, ask Him to; you can never perish if you pray that prayer.

I remember when first dating holding hands for the first time. It was thrilling. A connection, a bond, that someone else felt close enough to you that they would welcome your touch. Someone Who loves you holds your hand.