



The Controversy of John 6:44

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by

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‘No man can come to me, except the Father which has sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day’.

If ever there was a scripture that causes a divide, a difficulty, it is these words of Jesus in chapter 6 of John’s Gospel. The words are plain, until some begin to say what it does not say, or show other scriptures as seeming contradictions.

This author is constantly stunned but not surprised at what is accepted and not accepted even by both sides of theological divides. Ignoring the labels of ‘Calvinism’ and ‘Arminianism’ or any so called theologies in between, what does this scripture literally teach?...

The Word Study

‘No man can come’...

The literal ‘*no one can come*’ (‘*oudeis dunatai*’) is emphatic - not even one has the *power* or is able (‘*dunatai*’) to ‘*come to me*’.

‘***unless the father***’ here is a conditional negative (‘*ean mé*’). Interlinears often have ‘*if*’ or ‘*unless*’. The condition is that the Father must ‘draw’ the one spoken of in the passage.

The ‘***drawing***’ is the Greek word ‘*élkuse*’ - to *draw toward* without necessarily the notion of force (as in another Greek word ‘*súro*’ translated ‘*draw*’ or ‘*drag*’ - which rather implies force or violence - see Acts 8:3; 14:19; 17:6; Rev.12:4).

Those who create the strawman that God does not ‘force’ people to come to him are reading too much into this word ‘*draw*’. ‘*Elkuse*’ is a drawing that *induces the person to come*. The same Greek word is used in John 12:32; 18:10; 21:6,11; Acts 16:9; 21:30; James 2:6; see also Septuagint 2Sam.22:17; Ps.10:9; Jer.38:13. The ‘*elkuse*’ in John 6:44 is also Greek active voice - the action is done by God himself.

Again, some tend to overstate this ‘drawing’ as an irresistible *force*, a dragging, etc. But it will do no good to overplay the word (‘*elkuse*’) to being more like the other Greek word ‘*suro*’ (see above). As we will see, the ‘drawing’ is a *loving effectual inducement, a change of the will to being made willing to come*.

‘And I will raise him up on the last day’ - the ‘*him*’ (‘*auton*’) is the *same one drawn* by the Father and who will be resurrected by Christ.

The Context

The above simple word study must be put in context so as to interpret what is being stated here. The immediate context goes at least back to verse 37. Before this Jesus had been saying some increasingly hard things, moving from the physical food and bread, to Himself being the food and *'the bread of life...come down from heaven'* (vs.31-36). The listeners wanted a 'sign' and were murmuring at His words (vs.30,41). But Jesus does not pacify them, but rather *increases the tension* with what is the will and the role of the Father and the Son in giving eternal life.

Verse 44 is closely linked with these preceding verses: *'All that the Father gives me shall come to me; and him that comes to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which has sent me, that of all which he has given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which sees the Son, and believes on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day'* (vs.37-40).

Verses 37 and 39 clearly state the ones the Father gives *will come* and *not be cast out* (vs.37) and *none* will fail and *all will be raised* (vs.39). Verse 37 and 44 are not separated - the *giving* and the *drawing* means that *all* these people will be saved. Further, this work of the *Father drawing* and the *Son raising up* in vs.44 is repeated in vs.65: *'no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father'*. The *'given'* (vs.37,39,65) and the *'drawing'* (vs.44) are synonymous - no one can come unless granted by the Father (vs.65).

A parallel passage to this is John chapter 10 - *'But you believe not, because you are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them to me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand'* (vs.26-29). Again the Father gives to the Son those who will follow, who will have eternal life, and the same will not perish.

Objections

The context of John 6:44 clearly says that not one person can come to Christ unless the Father draws that same one. If drawn, Christ will raise that one up.

The passage does not state that there will be no ‘resistance’. At least from a human perspective there may well be resistance, considering all unsaved are already resisting, being in a state of depravity, a *slave* to and *dead* in sins, by *nature* a child of wrath (Jn.8:34; Eph.2:2-5; Col.2:13), *unable* to obey the law of God (Rom.8:7,8; Jn.6:37-44,65), having *no understanding* of the things of the Spirit of God (1Cor.2:14), with eyes *blinded* by Satan (2Cor.4:4), a heart *wicked* to the core and *blinded* (Jer.17:9; Eph.4:18), and with a righteousness as ‘*filthy rags*’ (Is.64:6-8)!

However, *any resistance will be overcome* considering *the one drawn will be saved*. There is no mention of resistance to such grace ending in any failure to be saved here because of man’s ability, his will, or anything else.

Some say that God draws everyone and then it is up to the person to choose or not choose any grace given, therefore not all will come. However this premise is reading *a premise from silence into the text*. There is nothing in the text that states that any have the power to resist this drawing. Added to this, how can they thwart the surety of being ‘raised up’ when the text promises this as a *result of the cause - the drawing*?

Some pit John 12:32 against John 6:44. ‘*And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me*’. Firstly, the question needs to be answered - does this passage contradict the clear teaching of John 6:37-44? The answer is ‘no’, and any *clear must interpret the seemingly unclear*. Secondly, the word ‘*men*’ is not in the Greek. The word ‘*all*’ is ‘*pantos*’, translated in many interlinears as ‘all peoples’. So, who are the ‘all peoples’? It is not every single person, or else all would be ‘*raised up*’. Many see the context in verses 35,36 with the ‘*light unto the world*’ as referring to a general call to all people groups (cp. Is.42:6 ‘*light of the gentiles*’ and Rev.5:9 - God has redeemed out of ‘*every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation*’). Verses 39 of John 12 also speaks of God who after performing miracles, *blinds the eyes and*

hardens hearts - obviously this is not referring to drawing all to a salvation!

Again, John 6:44 is *clear* - the verse summarised literally states that *not one has the power to come to Christ except on the condition that the Father has drawn that same person; then Christ promises to raise that same person up*. Again this is backed by the verses beforehand - verse 37 limits the people involved to the redeemed whom the Father has given to the Son! *The Father draws* (vs.44), *gives to the Son* (vs.37,39,65), *the Son raises the same ones to eternal life* (vs.39,40).

If John 12:32 is taken as everybody is drawn and are *able to come*, then Jesus *must raise every person up* on the last day, according to John 6:44! This is the heresy of ‘universalism’ and it contradicts scriptures which state only ‘few’ will be saved or chosen (Matt.7:14; 20:16; 22:14). John 6:44 either teaches the salvation of all those who are drawn, (some call this the ‘elect’), or it teaches the salvation of every person (universalism).

Some say that ‘*John 6:44 does not say that all who are drawn must come, but that all who come must have been drawn*’. This is semantics of what is *not stated* and is too often the product of bias thinking. The text simply describes an *inability to come unless drawn by the Father*. The necessary precondition for any ability to come to Jesus is the Father drawing that person.

Others say God’s drawing doesn’t cause the coming, it only makes the coming possible, and then the one who comes provides the decisive impulse, or cause. However, the cause of the coming is the ‘drawing’, for without the drawing ‘*no man can come*’! Added to this, where in scripture does it state that man ‘provides the decisive impulse or cause’? Is man the instigator of a prevenient grace?

Such arguments from *silence* or *semantics* as to what the text otherwise *might say* too often amount to convoluted gymnastics with God’s Word. The bias then seems evident - to have man with some ability, which *the text speaks against*!

God does not draw those who are not ‘*of God*’ and not his ‘*sheep*’. Jesus said to some of the Jews ‘*He that is of God hears God’s words: you therefore hear them not, because you are not of God*’ (Jn.8:47; 10:11,1,15,26,27). ‘*Hearing the words of God*’ would surely be hearing

with understanding and synonymous with responding with faith or coming to Jesus. No one can come to Christ unless they are *'of God'* and the *Father draws them to Christ*.

How Does God 'Draw'?

This is not an easy question, as the work of regeneration for the opening of the heart is a mysterious one (Jn.3:8; Acts 16:14). Immediately after John 6:44, Jesus says: *'It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that has heard, and has learned of the Father, comes unto me'* (vs.45). The connection in the two verses appears to be that God may draw one by him being *'taught'* and *'hearing'* and *'learning'*. It does not say those who are truly taught will not come. Rather his sheep hear His voice and follow (John chapter 10).

The best we can do from the human side is to preach and teach the Gospel, lay out who God is against the plight of man, and proclaim his necessary grace.

Conclusion

Most agree that salvation requires a divine work of grace to begin with and that man responds to that. The difference in doctrines is in the *effectualness* of the calling, drawing, and in the ability or inability of man to refuse God's drawing and grace. But John 6:37-44 speaks of nothing of *mans ability*, but of *God's plan of salvation*.

There has to be a *'drawing'* because *man is unable* to come (Rom.8:7,8; Jn.6:37-44,65), being lost in the *slavery* and the *deadness in sins*, by nature a *child of wrath* (Jn.8:34; Eph.2:2-5; Col.2:13), having *no understanding* of the things of the Spirit of God (1Cor.2:14), with *eyes blinded* by Satan (2Cor.4:4), a *heart wicked* to the core and *blinded* (Jer.17:9; Eph.4:18), and with a righteousness as *'filthy rags'* (Is.64:6-8)!

Oh how wonderful grace is for the unsaved man! *'That he [man] was unwilling before, is no hindrance; for God gives him the will, so that he is then of a willing mind. Thus every heir of Heaven must be saved, because the Spirit is put within him, and thereby his disposition and*

affections are moulded according to the will of God (C.H. Spurgeon, Sermon *'The Holy Spirit in the Covenant'*, 1856).

Did Jesus go to the cross and die so that the Father could give grace, draw, and Christ raise up, but yet this all can be thwarted by man? God forbid! *'He which has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ'* (Phil.1:6).

John 6:44 refers to an *efficacious work of grace* by which God lays hold of a sinner who is enabled, made willing. The drawing is a sole mysterious effectual work of God that induces a person to come to Christ so they understand the grace that has made their dead nature come alive (Eph.2:2-5; Col.2:13), opening and regenerating their heart (Tit.3:5; Acts 16:14) and giving an imputed righteousness (Rom.4) that is not theirs but wrought by the saving Christ in a once and for all atonement upon the cross to satisfy a holy and just God (2Cor.5:17-19)!

The teaching here in John 6:44 is not new. It has been taught down the running centuries by Reformers, the Puritans, in Awakenings, revivals and in the major Confessions of the faith (Westminster, Baptist, etc). It gives glory to God, not man.

The 'prince of preachers', Charles Spurgeon, stated: *'I should not have sought Him unless there had been some previous influence on my mind to make me seek Him...I saw that God was at the bottom of it all, and that He was the author of my faith, and so the whole doctrine of grace opened up to me...I desire to make this confession, 'I ascribe my change wholly to God'* (Spurgeon's *Autobiography*, Vol.1:168-69).

About the Author and the Ministry

Terry Arnold holds a Doctorate in Theology (Dth), a Masters degree (MABS) and several diplomas. He was founder and president of South Pacific Bible Institute, a Bible college training and equipping people for ministry. In addition he was the founder of Hervey Bay Bible Church in Queensland, Australia. He has for 25 years served as an elder and then pastor.

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TA Ministries is a non-denominational and non-profit faith ministry founded in 1989 when the book 'To Catholics Whom I Love' was written by Terry Arnold. This book went through several re-prints and served as a fruitful outreach to Roman Catholics. In 1996 the ministry became a full-time operation with the introduction of a free newsletter, later named 'Diakrisis (Australia)'. Diakrisis is published bi-monthly to teach, inform and equip the church of Biblical truths and to warn of false teaching. It has also been a valuable reference aid to hundreds of pastors/elders.