

# THE “DRAWING” OF THE FATHER

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Jesus, as the master teacher, always fitted his teachings to the minds and hearts of his hearers. He drew his illustrations from their own life's experiences, and as a rule, his illustrations were simple ones because the people he addressed were mostly hard-working ordinary people. He often addressed them from concern for the basic necessities of life. He once filled the stomachs of those in his audience and he soon learned that they were a materialistic crowd (John 6:1-14). Jesus rebuked them for their materialism (v. 26), but he also used the opportunity to teach an important spiritual lesson.

Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent. <sup>30</sup>They said therefore unto him, What sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee? what dost thou work? <sup>31</sup>Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat. <sup>32</sup>Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. <sup>33</sup>For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. <sup>34</sup>Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. <sup>35</sup>And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst (John 6:29-35).

To eat the “bread of life” is to believe in Jesus and receive his teachings. The one who eats this bread will soon discover that he has lost his appetite for the unholy and sensuous. He will find great delight and happiness in his new-found relationship with Jesus and his teaching.

But these people were still sense bound. When they brought Moses into the conversation by way of comparison, it became evident that they were missing the great opportunity of their life. Helen Hosier has well said, “It is not want of evidence that keeps a man away from belief in Christ, it is want of heart. Plainly these people had not lacked for signs and proofs of Christ's Messiahship. How true it is that ‘none are so blind as those that will not see’” (*Jesus: Love in Action, the Caring Jesus in the Gospel of John*, p. 59).

## Faith and Reasoning

The Jews began to find fault with Jesus' claim. How could he be that “bread of life” that had come down out of heaven? They knew his parents were Galileans, so how could he be from heaven? See John 6:41-42. Their *reasoning* began to get in the way of belief in him as the Messiah. This is not to say that faith is blind. It is not. It *is* more reasonable to believe in Jesus Christ than to disbelieve. But too often man in his unbelief reasons away all possibility of belief. Reasoning oftentimes proves to be a stumbling block to faith.

Paul made it his practice to enter into the synagogues and “reason” with the Jews from the Scriptures (Acts 17:2; 18:4; 19:8). He persuaded some, but most of them had a veil over their faces so that they could not see Christ in those Scriptures: “But their mind was hardened,”

Paul says, “for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ” ( 2 Cor. 3:14, NASB). The only way they could possibly understand the Scriptures Paul was using as he preached Christ to them was for them to come to see Christ in them.

Looked at from the human point of view alone, it was not reasonable to these Jews that one whose parents they knew to be Galileans had come down from heaven as the “bread of life.” But the “unreasonable” had in fact happened! He *IS* the “bread of life” who has come down out of heaven—reasonable or unreasonable, believed it or not. Had he come as a conquering king, with wealth and honor, they would have willingly enough received him. But one who seemed to be nothing more than a poor, lowly, ordinary man? Never!

### Does “Draw” Mean “Drag” In John 6:44?

Maybe the reason these Jews *would not* believe on Jesus was because they *could not* believe on him. When this statement is put in the form of a question, the answer to it is both a yes and a no. He can’t but he can. In commenting on that part of v. 44 which says that “no man can come to me, except the Father which has sent me draw him.” Alva Hovey gets it right when he says, “The inability to come to Christ, which is here affirmed of every man, left to himself, is intrinsically moral, and may be identified with unwillingness or disinclination. The sinner cannot, because he will not” (*Commentary on the Gospel of John*, p. 156).

Jesus often attributed the cause of unbelief on the part of those who heard him to *unwillingness* on their part: “And ye *will not* come to me, that ye might have life” (John 5:40); “If any man *will* to do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself” (John 7:17); “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye *would not*”— [not “could” not!] (Matt. 23:37).

The extreme Calvinist of course will tell us that the word “draw” in John 6:44 means “drag” in the sense of force. R. C. Sproul, for example, rejects the meaning of “woo and entice men to Christ” for this word and insists that the word means to “drag.” He says, “The Greek word used here is *elkō*. Kittle’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* defines it to mean to compel by irresistible superiority. Linguistically and lexicographically, the word means “to compel.”” (*Chosen By God*, p. 71). After defining the word in this way, he then cites two examples where the word has this meaning. In James 2:6 James tells his readers that “the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts,” and in Acts 16:19, we find that Paul and Silas were “dragged” into the marketplace to the authorities. In both of these places the word used is *helkō*, the same word used by Jesus in John 6:44.

This sounds pretty impressive, but to my knowledge no one denies that the word as used in the two examples cited has a *literal* meaning. But what Sproul fails to point out is that almost all the lexicons also give a *metaphorical* or *figurative* meaning to this same word in both John 6:44 and 12:32. For example, Arndt and Gingrich say, “*drag, draw* . . . **1.** trans. **a.** lit. . . . Acts 21:30 . . . 16:19 . . . Js 2:6 . . . **b.** fig. of the pull on man’s inner life . . . *draw, attract* J 6:44 . . . 12:32” (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 251).

This same source points out that this word is also used *in a figurative sense* in the Septuagint version (Greek) of the Old Testament in Jeremiah 38:3 and Song of Solomon 1:4. So

the lexicons recognize a difference of meaning in the word when used literally as over against a figurative use of the word. When used in a literal sense (as in Acts 16:19 and James 2:6) it means “drag, draw,” but when employed figuratively (as in John 6:44 and 12:32) it means “draw, attract.” Sproul’s statement that “linguistically and lexicographically, the word means ‘to compel’” is simply not true. By the term “compel” he means “drag” or “force,” and he is saying that this is the only meaning given to the word in the lexicons.

### Why Not “Draw”?

As the reader surely knows, the only reason Sproul will not allow a figurative use of this word is that he believes in, and is defending, an “irresistible call” for all the elect, and only for the elect. He, as do all hard-core Calvinists, believes that only the elect will be saved, and all who are among the elect have from eternity already been chosen by God to be saved eternally. He ridicules the idea that God would only “woo” or “entice” men to be saved. He rejects this meaning of the word because, as he puts it,

man has the ability to resist this wooing and to refuse the enticement. The wooing, though it is necessary, is not compelling. In philosophical language that would mean that the drawing of God is a necessary condition but not a sufficient condition to bring men to Christ. In simpler language it means that we cannot come to Christ without the wooing, but the wooing does not guarantee that we will, in fact, come to Christ.

We are not surprised that in his discussion of the “drawing” of God Sproul never once makes reference to John 12:32, another passage where this same word is used by Jesus. Why would he completely ignore Jesus’ use of this same word in that passage? Because he believes that God will “drag, force, compel” only the elect to come to Jesus, but in John 12:32 Jesus says, “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.” Now notice it: if “draw” (*helkō*) always means “drag, force, compel,” then here Jesus states that he will “drag or force” ALL men to come to him! If the definition Sproul gives to this term is correct, then John 12:32 teaches the doctrine of universalism—all men will be saved. As a matter of fact, however, *all who are drawn do not come* to Jesus. The fear that Sproul has in giving the meaning of “woo” to the term “draw” is a justified fear, at least in view of his erroneous doctrine of election. If he were to force the literal meaning of “draw” upon John 12:32 it would destroy his theory of election. But that is exactly what he has done when he insists that only the literal meaning can be given to the term in the New Testament.

But if not by force, how does the Father “draw” men to the Son? He does it by *moral* persuasion, as we have already indicated. Paul was doing this very thing with Felix and Agrippa, and so was Peter with the Jews on the day of Pentecost—but with differing results. When Paul preached of “righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come” before Felix, we are told that he “trembled” as he heard Paul’s message (Acts 24:25). Although Felix put off and waited for a more convenient time, it is obvious that God was doing some “drawing and attracting” through Paul’s preaching. The same was true with Agrippa who was “almost persuaded” (Acts 26:28). In Acts 2, however, some 3,000 of Peter’s listeners were “drawn” to the point of believing in Christ, and they also acted on their faith in repenting and being baptized as

Peter had commanded (Acts 2:38, 41).

### **Hearing, Learning, Coming**

But why would not Jesus' statement which is recorded in the very next verse (John 6:45) show that this is what Jesus means when he says that the Father "draws" men to the Son? Read it and see: "It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall be all taught of God.' Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." I know the Calvinists apply this verse only to those who have already been drawn to Christ, but how can that be when the very last statement of this verse says, "cometh unto me." How would one who has already been drawn to the Son still be "coming" to him? Surely the "coming" in v. 46 is the coming due to the "drawing" described in v. 44. That being the case, note how the drawing is done and the order in which it is described: The ones who "come" to the Son are those who have "learned" of the Father. But none can learn of the Father except they first be "taught," and the one who is taught must "hear" in order that he might learn. Just as the drawing is done by the Father, so the teaching in this verse is also attributed to the Father, even though v. 46 suggests that it is the Son who is teaching for him. It seems clear that this is how the Father draws men to the Son. He draws all who will hear what the Father is making known to them through his Son. Those who hear, learn, and those who learn, come to the Son.