



THE QUESTION.

"Could you please explain Jesus' statement, that, **"No-one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him"**, John 6:44, and the corresponding statement in verse 65, **"No-one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."** (The quotations are taken from the 'Revised Standard Version, which you may find a little clearer than the 'Authorized Version').

A MISAPPLICATION OF THE STATEMENTS

First, I would point out that these two verses are of particular interest and importance, not only because they are the words of the Lord himself, but also because they have frequently been used by certain religious groups as they have attempted to prove that only the '*predestined*' will be saved, since only they are 'drawn' by the Father and granted, by Him, the privilege of 'coming' to Christ.

This is what Augustine and later, John Calvin, taught as they emphasized 'the Divine initiative' in salvation. By this they meant that because man is, (according to their view), born in a state of '*inherited total depravity*', he is unable even to believe the Gospel unless '*the direct operation of the Holy Spirit*' makes faith possible. Therefore, they argue, God Himself chooses those who are to be saved. These are the ones whom He '*calls*', and once they are '*called*', because of '*irresistible grace*' they *must* be saved. Apostasy is impossible. They have '*eternal security*' and nothing they may ever do can cause them to be lost.

In simple terms, this doctrine amounts to what is usually described as '*Once in grace – always in grace; once saved – always saved*'. Presumably, the theory was meant to honour and stress the role of the sovereign grace of God in effecting Man's salvation, but in fact, it is demeaning to both God and Man, and to use the two verses referred to in our question in this way, is to fail completely to understand what the Lord was saying.

THE ORIGINAL SETTING

To reach a proper understanding of the verses we must first consider them in their proper context. This 6th chapter in the Gospel according to John records the conversation held between Jesus and the Jews which resulted from the feeding of the 5000. Mark's account in Mk. 6:30, tells us that earlier the Lord had proposed to his disciples, that they should withdraw '*and rest awhile*', because they had been so busy that they had not found time even to eat. But the plan was frustrated when the crowd discovered their intended destination and flocked to hear him. There then followed the miraculous feeding of the multitude.

When it became clear that, because of this miracle, there was a popular move to take Jesus by force to make him their King, he first sent away his disciples, and then left to spend time alone in prayer. The crowd, however, searched for him and eventually found him, and, with their thoughts still full of the loaves and fishes and probably thinking of the possibilities that the miracle had opened up, they reminded him that, during the Wilderness Journey, God had fed their fore-fathers for forty years with Manna -'*bread from Heaven*' – an expression which occurs four times in the narrative.

When they asked him, "*What sign do you show?*" they were really asking, '*Can you do anything like that?*' There then followed his discourse on the Bread of Life, a discourse which, incidentally, I may point out, includes the first of the 'I Ams', but when he claimed to be "**the bread which came down from heaven**" (v.40), this proved too much for them and they grumbled at him. After all, they were quite sure they knew where he came from! "**Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven?'**"

This was not an enquiry, not a question. It was an assertion that they believed was incontrovertible. Now, we should notice that they obviously understood what he was claiming, and they were disturbed, even shocked by it. This was a claim which they felt came very close to blasphemy, and, indeed, if they were right in what they believed about his origin, they were also right in rejecting his claim to have '*come down from heaven*'. However, their initial assumption was inaccurate, and, consequently, their conclusion was also inaccurate.

JESUS REVEALS THE REASON FOR THEIR IGNORANCE.

Notice that the Lord did not offer a solution to their problem. He did not attempt to prove his heavenly origin. Instead he revealed the reason for their inability to believe in him and to come to him. He did this in the statement with which our question begins, by pointing out that only those '*drawn*' by the Father are able to come to the Son, and by reminding them that their own prophets had declared, "**And they shall all be taught by God.**" (verse 45). I consider this to be the pivotal verse in this chapter, and the key to a correct understanding of the two verses that form our question, because the quotation reveals the vital difference between the Old and New Covenants. It is the vital difference between Law and Faith.

'DRAWN BY GOD' – WHO? AND HOW?

The quotation used by the Lord, comes from Isaiah 54:13 and is amplified and explained by the familiar passage in Jer.31: 31-34. In those verses God, through the prophet Jeremiah, revealed that when the New Covenant was enacted, his Law would not be engraved on stone tablets, for He would put His law *within* men, and write it on their hearts. You will remember that the old Mosaic Covenant was entered by *the right of physical birth*. One must be born a descendant of Abraham, the father of the Hebrews, and children born of Israel's race must then be taught to understand what it meant to be a descendant of Abraham. The must be taught to '*know the Lord*'.

But, the prophecy declares that with the New Covenant it would be very different. Those who came into a New Covenant relationship with God would be those who had been first '*taught by God*', and who, having been taught, had been '*drawn*' to Him. In other words no longer 'born into Abraham's family, and then taught', but 'first taught, and then born into God's family'.

The Lord was pointing out to these Jews, that the reason why they did not believe him was because they were rejecting the teaching – God's message, brought by His Son - which would have led them to believe. Remember that the Lord spoke of men being *drawn* - not *compelled* - to come to him.

The opportunity to be taught by God already existed for the people to whom Jesus was speaking, because the Son's first ministry was to them. He stated that he had been sent to "**the lost sheep of the house of Israel**" (Matt.15: 24), and he even instructed his disciples not to go to the Gentiles or the Samaritans, but "**go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.**" (Matt. 10:5-6). But, as we know, they rejected him.

On a later occasion, as John 12:21 records, when certain Greeks wished to meet Jesus, he indicated that this was not the time for such a meeting, but that time would soon come when not only Jews, but men of all races and nations, would be drawn to him. His opening words in response to this enquiry reveal what was uppermost in his mind at that moment: "**The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified**" (John 12; 23). His closing words reveal the manner of his glorification, and its universal effect: "**I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.**" (v. 33). Verse 33 also explains *where* the drawing-power lies: "**He said this to show by what death he was to die**".

The message of the love of God, revealed in the sacrifice of Jesus the Christ, is the divine magnet by which all men may be drawn back to God.

(Questions please to: Frank Worgan, 11 Stanier Road, Corby, Northants. NN17 1XP)