

## How God Draws People to Salvation

*John 6:44* “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.”

This verse points to God’s sovereign work that brings people to Jesus Christ, and from the context of John 6, they evidently believe in Him for eternal salvation. Some think this verse teaches that God draws people in such a way that they cannot resist. They understand the word *draw* to mean *drag*. But would God force His salvation on people against their will? Is God’s grace irresistible? The passage, its context, and other Scriptures help us understand that God draws people to faith in Christ in a number of ways.

**God uses man’s ability to respond.** This does not diminish God’s sovereignty, but recognizes that He has sovereignly designed man to have free will which allows him to respond to God (for a related discussion on election see Grace Notes 72). Since the Bible teaches that man does not seek God on his own (Rom. 3:11), God must take the initiative. He reveals Himself in creation, and though man knows this, he still refuses to honor God (Rom. 1:19-21). So God, in His love, seeks us out (Luke 19:10; John 3:16; 1 John 4:9-10). But how should we understand the word *draw* as it is used in John 6:44? The range of meaning for the word *elkuō* includes to *draw*, *pull*, or *attract*. It is found five times in the New Testament, four of those in John. Though the literal uses in John and Acts clearly mean *drag* or *pull* (John 18:10; 21:6; Acts 16:19) the two figurative uses in John 6:44 and 12:32 are better understood as *attract*. The context shows why. In John 6, eternal life is spoken of as a gift that is received by believing in Christ (6:27-29, 32-35, 40, 47, 51). The idea of a gift assumes the freedom to accept or reject it. The motive behind this gift assumes God’s love (John 3:16). This is consistent with how the Greek translation of the Old Testament (Septuagint) sometimes uses *elkuō* in a context of love’s attraction: “With loving kindness I have drawn you” (Jer. 31:3; see also Song of Solomon 1:3-4). In other ancient Greek literature, this verb is used to describe a mother drawn by love to her sons (4 Maccabees 14:13; 15:11). The idea of God forcing someone irresistibly is contrary to His loving nature and manner. No man getting married wants to force his partner to the altar, but rather woos and loves her to come willingly. So also God does not force people in a direction they are not already inclined to take. His drawing in verse 44 is in the context of those who willingly believe (vv. 40, 47, 65). God’s will does not preclude man’s will and freedom to respond, but includes it. If man does not have this freedom, then why does God judicially blind the Jews or use parabolic language to hide His truth? It would be like putting a blindfold on a corpse.

**God uses Jesus’ work on the cross.** Jesus explained his role in drawing people to Himself for salvation: “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself. This He said, signifying what death He would die” (John 12:32-33). The word “peoples” is not in the original Greek, but is supplied in the English translation. “All” could speak of the extent of Christ’s work providing for all people, both Jew and Gentile. Or it could speak of all people realizing that while all are drawn to some extent, some will resist and refuse to believe. Either way, this is not speaking of compulsion, but of a moral pull on the inner person. The cross is proof of God’s love, our sin, His righteousness, and the coming judgment (John 16:8-11). A similar reference to Christ being lifted up in John 3:14-15 refers to the story in Numbers 21:4-9 when those who looked at the bronze serpent on the pole were healed. In both passages, the provision of salvation is available to whoever believes.

**God uses the Word to teach.** The teaching of God’s Word is designed to draw people to Christ. Following John 6:44, verses 45-46 say, “It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.” The quotation from Isaiah 54:13 is in the context

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of God wooing Israel back to Himself as a woman or wife is wooed (Isa. 54:6). The process is that God teaches, people hear and learn, then people respond by coming to Christ for salvation (In John, the phrase “come to” Christ obviously refers to coming to him in faith for salvation; cf. John 5:40; 6:35, 37, 65; 7:37). Only those who have listened and learned believe. A receptive attitude towards God’s Word is always rewarded with more truth (Mark 4:24-25). Many, however, will reject the truth about Christ just as many rejected Moses’ teaching (John 5:45-47; cf. Luke 16:27-31) and just as the crowd did in John 6 in spite of seeing a great miracle and hearing the greatest Teacher. We also know that Judas Iscariot was constantly taught by Jesus, yet evidently never believed (John 6:64). Today, the Gospel is the power of God to salvation (Rom. 1:16). As we teach and preach it, it draws to Christ those who listen and learn from it.

**God uses the Holy Spirit to convict.** According to John 16:8-11, the Holy Spirit convicts of truth (*elegchō* can also be understood as *exposes* or *convinces*): “And when He [the Holy Spirit] has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.” As Christ draws all men through His work on the cross, the Spirit exposes to all and convinces all (“the world”) of that truth as the Word of God is taught. The Spirit uses divine persuasion to convince, reprove, disturb, draw, and love a person. But that does not guarantee that all who are convinced of the truth will receive it. A person can understand the truth, yet reject it (John 5:39-40). But whoever responds positively and seeks God will be rewarded (Heb. 11:6).

**God uses people as instruments.** God has chosen to use people as agents for teaching the Word of God which the Holy Spirit uses to convict the world. In addition to His work on the cross, Jesus also taught the gospel. The apostle Paul reminds the Corinthian church that the first thing he made known to them was the gospel (1 Cor. 15:3). He reasons with the Romans “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? (Rom 10:14).

God draws people to Christ using these various means in collusion; they are not in conflict with one another. Before Jesus speaks of the Father’s drawing in John 6:44, He twice says the Father gives people to Him (vv. 37, 39). The context suggests that the Father gives people to Christ so that they will be secure--in v. 37 Christ will never cast them out, and in v. 39 Christ will not lose any but guarantees their resurrection. In verses 40 and 44 He also guarantees their resurrection. But before that day, v. 40 explains that the Father has given people to Christ that they may “see the Son” and believe in Him for everlasting life. So here we have the collusion of God’s sovereign work directing people to Jesus so that they will believe in Him for salvation. A good example of God drawing someone with various means is the story about Lydia in Acts 16:13-15. Lydia goes to a prayer meeting (Is she drawn by her own initiative or God’s—or both together?) and hears Paul teach (the gospel). We read, “The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul” (v. 14). God worked, Paul taught the gospel, the Spirit convinced, and Lydia responded by believing and so was baptized.

## Conclusion

God does not force His salvation on anyone. He uses various means to draw people to respond with faith in Jesus Christ. If people have to be dragged to salvation because they have no ability to believe, how could anyone be held responsible for not believing? Their condemnation would be God’s fault, not their own. Ultimately, our seeking after God is our response to Him seeking us. We should therefore preach the gospel of God’s gracious gift of eternal life relying on the Holy Spirit to convince people of its truth and draw them to Christ.