

A VERSE THEY CANNOT MAKE FIT

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When a child of God begins serious Bible study, he or she soon discovers that there are some verses that just do not “fit” with the popular doctrines as preached by most of today's “evangelicals.” If you are satisfied with only skimming the Bible and listening to “top-water preaching” and can ignore much of what the Bible says, the popular scheme of decisional salvation will satisfy you. To be clear in this matter, let us agree that the popular doctrine regarding salvation today is this in a nutshell: God loves everyone and wants to save everyone, but He cannot unless they will let Him. God must not only have man's cooperation, but lost individuals must make the first move toward God and only then will He do the rest. They must of their own freewill reach out and take Christ by “making a decision” or “praying the sinner's prayer,” or “opening their heart's door to Jesus,” or whatever term is popular at the time. Let us say it in one sentence: today's popular scheme says that man has a free will and must exercise that free will in choosing Christ. Today's “evangelicals” believe that based upon the proper human act, God has promised to save those persons who do whatever it is that they must do – i.e. “believe,” “pray,” “make a decision,” etc. We believe this is a plain and fair assessment of what most professing believers in Christ believe today. Stated another way, most of today's “evangelicals” (including most people called Baptists) believe that man has the ability to come to Christ for salvation. They believe that he is able to come of his own free will if he can just be persuaded to do so.

But what did the Lord Jesus Christ say about this very thing? First of all, did He not make it clear that all are welcome to come when He said, **“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”**? (Matthew 11:28). Certainly He did. But our point is not who is welcome to come, but rather who is able to come. A great banquet may be prepared for a multitude of people. All are welcome, but it may be that there are some who – though perfectly welcome to come – are unable to do so. So the issue here is not whether all are welcome to come to Christ or not, but rather do all have the

ability to come. Being welcome – indeed being invited – has nothing to do with possessing or lacking the ability to come. We would be left to our own theories and ideas if Christ had not revealed the truth about this matter in His Word. In John 6:44 we read these words of the Savior: **“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day”** (John 6:44). Now that is a plain statement. All the words are of one syllable except two. And those two have only two syllables and are simple and frequently used by the average English speaker. There is no excuse for not understanding what the Lord Jesus said here. The meaning of the words Christ uttered in our text are easily understood. We could furnish other verses which teach the inability of men to come to Christ, but for the purpose of this article we will cite only this verse and examine it. (Perhaps we should ask how many times God has to say a thing for it to be true, but surely every honest person will admit that one time is enough.) We think also that all thinking people will agree that in order to arrive at Bible truth we must (1) gather all the passages that bear upon a particular subject, (2) make a proper exegesis of each passage – i.e. draw out the meaning of each of all those passages, and (3) only then can we make a statement of truth that is in harmony with what is said in all those passages. In this way we can know and say what God says about a thing. It will not do to ignore any verse or passage that bears upon the subject of our study whatever it may be. In our study of the Bible regarding man's ability to come to Christ we dare not ignore John 6:44, our text quoted above. We shall briefly make an honest exegesis of this verse as follows.

First of all let us make four observations about the meaning of this verse. (1) Number one, consider this: while in contemporary speech we sometimes use the words “may” and “can” interchangeably, they do not mean the same thing. “May” means to have permission to do something while “can” means to have the ability to do something. This preacher's high school English teacher, in response to, “Can I sharpen my pencil” often replied, “You can, but you may not!” (Yes, we really did use pencils in high school back then!) She was teaching us the difference between the two words “may” and “can.” She said in effect, “you have the ability, but you do not have permission.” Christ said, **“No man can come to me.”** He did not say “no man may come to me.” He was not dealing with the

matter of permission or of being welcome to come. In this verse Jesus speaks of ability and says that no man has the ability to come to Him. His words can mean nothing else, now can they?

(2) The second thing here is that man's inability to come in a saving way to Christ can only be overcome by the Father drawing the sinner. Christ said **"except the Father which hath sent me draw him."** The Merriam Webster Dictionary gives some synonyms for "except." Let us see if we can use some of them to make the meaning clearer. We could say, "apart from the Father drawing," or "aside from the Father drawing," or "except for the Father drawing," or "outside of the Father drawing," etc. So then, the term "except" is exclusive. We could say unless and until the Father draws a man he cannot come. The word "draw" is the Greek word "helkuo" (pronounced hel koo - o). In John 18:10 this word is translated "drew" in the following context: **"Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus."** Peter did not just attempt to draw his sword. Neither did the sword make the first move and somehow jump into his hand. He actually took hold of that sword and exerted enough power to pull it out. Another usage of this Greek word is in Acts 21:30 where it is written, **"And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut."** Again we would point out that there was not merely an unsuccessful attempt made to drag Paul out of the temple. They took hold of him and pulled on him with sufficient force to move him from one place to another. There are other instances of this word in the New Testament, but these two are sufficient to show that the word "draw" means pulling something by sufficient force as to move the object. Neither the sword nor Paul expended energy in moving. We could say that both the sword and Paul were overcome of a power greater than themselves. In drawing men to Christ we do not mean that God violates the will of the individual or that He does violence to anyone. But God can and does act upon whom He will in an inward way effectively drawing men to Christ. This is made clear by Philippians 2:13 where we read: **"For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."** God's Word also says, **"Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power..."** (Psalm 110:3). The Spirit

of God that moved upon the face of the waters in Genesis 1:2 and shook the earth so that Mount Sinai was moved (Psalm 68:8) is able to give life to the dead spirit of a man **“and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?”** (Daniel 4:35) for **“The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit”** (John 3:8). The God of the Bible is able to draw whom He pleases to Christ. To deny that is to blaspheme God and slander His name!

(3) We come to the third thing about John 6:44: notice the phrase, **“No man.”** This inability is universal. No good man, no wise man, no rich man, no nobleman, no politically powerful man – indeed all Adam's race are included in this negative statement. This is an absolutely universal statement: no person can initiate his or her own salvation nor do anything towards causing it. In order to be saved the sinner must come to Christ, but he cannot. The Savior told Nicodemus, **“ye must be born again”** (John 3:7). Just as an infant in its birth process exerts no causative power towards its own delivery because it does not have that power or ability, so it is in the matter of coming to Christ. Indeed, it is not the unborn infant that initiates his own birth, determines the time of his birth, or acts in any way in the birth process. In fact, while the infant is a participant in the birth process, it is the mother who goes into labor: not the infant. So it is clear, then, that no offspring of Adam has the ability to come to Christ.

Consider the old New Hampshire Baptist Confession of Faith written in 1833. This confession was once very popular among Baptists especially in the South and West. It states clearly the cause and effect of the new birth or regeneration. Article 7 says: “We believe that, in order to be saved, sinners must be regenerated, or born again; that regeneration consists in giving a holy disposition to the mind; that it is effected in a manner above our comprehension by the power of the Holy Spirit, in connection with divine truth, so as to secure our voluntary obedience to the gospel; and that its proper evidence appears in the holy fruits of repentance, and faith, and newness of life.” The old Baptists across America believed that regeneration was the cause and that “voluntary obedience to the gospel” was the result. They believed that in order to be saved, a sinner must be born again or regenerated. They believed that regeneration or

the new birth resulted in "repentance, and faith, and newness of life." There is no place here for man doing something in order to be born again. Most modern Baptists teach just the opposite of what the old Baptists believed. Today's Baptist believes that "exercising your faith" by believing in Christ causes God to birth you into His family. Today's Baptists have reversed the order according to the Bible and according to this old confession. They have substituted an effect for the cause. And so it is that many people are deceived. They think by producing "faith" themselves they will be born again. The Bible teaches that the new birth is a work of the Holy Spirit (John 3:6) and that faith is a gift given only to certain individuals (Ephesians 2:8; 2 Thessalonians 3:2). Salvation by human effort – the product of man's hands – is as old as Cain who sought to sacrifice a bloodless offering that was the product of his labor. First he and then his offering were rejected.

(4) So we come to the fourth thing we wish to observe in our exegesis. Christ said, **"and I will raise him up at the last day."** Here is the Savior's sacred promise: those who are drawn by the Father to the Son will be raised by Christ in a blessed resurrection. Praise be to God! What man cannot do in the matter of salvation, God does for him! Since man can do nothing toward his salvation, God does all! And those upon whom God acts in drawing them to Christ shall enjoy a blessed resurrection in a glorified body like unto His glorious body. Such a promise does not allow the fanciful interpretation that the Father only attempts or "pulls on" men in an unsuccessful manner. No! Those whom the Father draws will be resurrected by Christ! God is not to be reckoned as some colossal failure who cannot do what He tries to do! Never consider such a blasphemous thought! It is as true as the eternal Word of God: Paul wrote, **"Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ"** (Philippians 1:6). What God begins He finishes!

In conclusion we can boldly affirm that **"...Salvation is of the Lord"** (Jonah 1:9). The total inability of every fallen son of Adam is no obstacle to Jehovah. It is He who works all things **"together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of**

his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be against us?*" (Romans 8:28-31). Those verses do not "fit" the modern scheme either, but they are nevertheless true! God has given those whom He has drawn to Christ an "understanding-faith" for the Bible says **"Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear"** (Hebrews 11:3). And so it is that through faith we also understand that it is God who chose **"...us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved"** (Ephesians 1:4-6). And in time, His time, even as He arrested Saul of Tarsus, so He arrests each of His elect in the midst of their mad fleshly oriented careers, drawing us to Christ in an effectual or successful way. His was not a mere attempt to get us to come to Christ – but He brought us to Christ whom having not seen we love. (see: 1 Peter 1:8). As the shepherd came home successfully bearing his lost sheep upon his shoulders (Luke 15:5) so our Good Shepherd found us when we were hopelessly and helplessly lost. We charge you! Glorify not man's supposed ability in our hearing! We do not want to hear such thing! Our experience of grace will not allow us to boast of things beyond our measure. Our glory is in Christ and our rejoicing is in God who laid hold upon us and worked in us, drawing us to Christ in such a way that we gladly followed on. Take whatever credit for your salvation that you dare, but we ascribe all our change to Him! You who hold to human ability – consider John 6:44. This one verse cannot be made to fit with your humanistic, freewill scheme. For if your scheme is to work, man must have the ability to come in a saving way to Christ apart from Divine intervention. For if there be even the slightest intervention by God in those who come to Christ then we must raise this question: why does God intervene in the spiritual lives of some and not in all? And we know that those who subscribe to

the freewill scheme seldom wish to enter upon that area: namely a discussion of God's election of some to eternal life while bypassing others. Why? Because what the Bible says about unconditional election does not fit with their scheme either. But to return to our point: while there are many other verses which modern "evangelicals" cannot make fit with John 6:44, if God be pleased to enlighten a man, this one verse is enough to prove that it is God who does the saving – that man has no ability and cannot contribute one particle to his salvation. As the songwriter of a past generation put it: "'Tis done: the great transaction's done! I am the Lord's and He is mine; He drew me and I followed on, charmed to confess the voice divine."