



DIGGING DEEPER

John 6:44,65

Grace That Draws: Digging Deeper into John 6:44, 65

Sola Gratia, ἔλκω, and the Sin of Boasting

1. Introduction: Where Sola Gratia Lands Between the Pages

John 6:44 and 6:65 place an immovable pillar in the ground of our theology:

“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him...” (6:44)

“No one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.”
(6:65)

Here, Sola Gratia is not an abstract slogan but a concrete reality of truth: the very coming of the sinner to Christ is the gift of God to the sinner and the gift of the Father to Christ. The Father’s drawing and granting are not mere decorative flourishes on an otherwise human-centered story; they are *the* story! The force of the universal negative of both verse 44 and 65 – “no one *can*...” (meaning literally “is able”) especially in context, is immovable in the gospel textually. As such, it ought to be non-negotiable from a theological standpoint for anyone who seeks to honour the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. Drawn By Grace: The Force of ἔλκω (“Draws”)

Many free will or synergistic explanations of John 6 attempt to soften the force of the Greek ἔλκω (helko) by recasting it as “influence” or “persuasion.” This is done no doubt to try and soften the weight of the lexical meaning of the Greek word. But this attempt misunderstands both the lexical weight of ἔλκω and the real-world meaning of persuasion.

Lexically, ἔλκω means **“to draw, drag, pull,”** often in contexts of resistance. every place in the New Testament where is it used, it carries the explicit meaning of an outside force acting on the object that is being “drawn”: Peter “drew his sword.” The disciples “hailed the net with the fish.” The rich “drag the poor into court.” Etc. When used figuratively (John 6; John 12), it implies *effective* rather than *potential* drawing.

- ✚ Logically, “persuasion” presupposes initial resistance OR stubbornness and describes its actual overcoming. “Persuasion” would not be needed otherwise.
- ✚ Not merely offering a possibility or making a polite suggestion but *truly* winning the heart – hence the mind and then the will of the one so persuaded.

Thus, to substitute “persuasion” for “draw” *still* yields effectual grace if influence and persuasion are understood in their true strength and per their actual, dictionary meaning. “Influence: the power to be a compelling force on or to effect change in the attitudes or action of another.” Dictionary.com lists “persuasion” as a synonym and vice versa.

If no prior resistance or reluctance was present, we would not be talking about influence or persuasion since both presuppose those conditions. Instead, all we would have is *agreement*.

3. Testimonies, Language and Self-Boasting

Scripture relentlessly excludes and thereby *condemns* boasting of *self* in matters spiritual about salvation (Eph 2:9; Rom 3:27; 1 Cor 1:29–31). Yet a substantial component of evangelical testimony persistently centers on one’s own decisive act: **“I chose,” “I accepted,” “I decided.” “I persevered.” “I exercised faith.” “I overcame.”**

- ✚ In Paul’s language, this *is* boasting.

In 1 Cor 15:10, Paul spoke of what he was – a saved sinner/chosen apostle and how hard he worked for the lord – “I worked harder than the rest”. Had he left it there, this would have been consistent with the way most evangelicals talk, write, preach and believe – it would have been a boast of self. Thankfully, he wisely and immediately qualified that boast by adding the *crucial deflection* off self to grace – “yet *not I*, but *the grace of God with me*.”

This is not a mere theological “preference” Paul is expressing, as if he preferred one doctrine over another. It is Paul communicating *truth*.

“All such boasting is evil”

James 4 condemns all God-ignoring business or travel plans. When natural plans and purposes are made apart from the humble acknowledgment of God’s sovereignty over all such plans, James concludes calling such “*arrogant boasting*” and “*evil!*” James said, what the believer *ought* to say is, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” *How much more the God-minimizing retellings of salvation which likewise omit the crucial emphasis on His sovereignty.*

- ✚ To slight a finite human by not acknowledging the depth of their involvement in a crucial, life-altering enterprise is bad enough.
- ✚ To slight the infinite, thrice-holy *God* and persist in so doing, must be infinitely *more* of an affront.

Occasional sloppy phrases can and should be corrected gently and patiently. And James admits, “We all stumble in many ways.” (James 3:2) But *habitual*, routine denying the truth of God’s grace-alone-causing faith, by boasting of what is ultimately deemed an autonomous choice, is a spiritual danger. It reveals a deeper posture of the heart that is and *ought* to be very concerning.

4. The Slippery-Slope Toward Matthew 7

Matthew 7:21–23 warns that *many* will come with sincere expectations, orthodox address (“Lord, Lord”), and impressive deeds (in their own minds at least). They will protest to Him, “Have we not done...many wonderful works in your name?”—yet be rejected! They are spiritual, theological narcissists. To them, the Lord utters the most fearful words possible, “Depart from Me, for I

never knew you.” As with all truths in scripture, context shows and determines meaning. Their confidence is clearly revealed by their words, which serve as evidence - “Did not *we*...?” How very different this is from, “Lord, I know *You* did...”

Observe: Jesus said there will be *many* in this group who stand before Him and will be rejected. Therefore, this is not a mere fringe element of a “few” people Jesus is speaking of a lot of people. Not from the unbelieving world but the profession of faith. Not who did occasional good work “in His name”, but who did *many* wonderful works. Yet, *rejected!* They are denied His presence – “Depart from Me.” He disavows relationship with them – “I never knew you.” Not you did not know Me or about Me, but *I never knew you.*

“Workers of iniquity”

Jesus calls this group of many “evil doers.” How can this be? They devoted themselves to “many wonderful works” done in His name. They would not dare boast of sexual immorality, theft, murder, haughtiness in business etc., before Him. So, these “works” they tout are no doubt what most believers would affirm as being “good works” – yet they are rejected and Jesus calls them workers of iniquity. The answer comes from the illumination shed upon a by-grace alone-humbled heart – *God only recognizes as “good” what He is acknowledged as the sufficient cause of.*

The Greek is emphatic. They appeal to their *resumé*. This is synergism’s logic fully matured. *Self*-salvation is iniquity. And workers of *self*-determined good works/salvation are “workers of iniquity.” Not by this author, but the Lord of glory Himself.

A necessary caveat:

Not every believer who says “I chose Jesus” stands in the “many” of Matthew 7 who are rejected on that great day. **There is a necessary difference between genuine ignorance or confusion and open hostility to and denial of God’s truth.** Lack of true preaching, teaching or having never heard is one

thing. **But the logic of a habitually defended claim that denies the practical truth of grace-produced repentance and faith, despite having been shown the truth, follows along the same continuum to a very slippery slope!** Follow it far enough, persistently enough and without true humble acknowledgement of Sola Gratia – not merely as gracious pardon, but as salvation-producing, transforming power, and all one is left with is appealing to one’s own actions at the judgment seat. A scarier scenario, I cannot truthfully imagine!

5. When Worship and Doctrine Clash

I am convinced that most who live, worship, and fellowship within synergistic circles sincerely *believe* they treasure grace. I have sat in enough of their services to attest to this. They sing with genuine emotion:

“All to Him I owe,”

“Nothing but the Blood,”

“Amazing Grace,”

“Love moved first”

“In Christ Alone.”

And in their singing, they *surely appear* to embrace those truths wholeheartedly. And *if* their singing was the sum total of their doctrine, it would be perfect and aligned with truth.

But then comes the *staggering* contradiction - the disconnect that few ever acknowledge:

- ✚ **They move directly from singing of sovereign grace to preaching a salvation ultimately conditioned on *human will, human choice, and human perseverance.***
- ✚ **In direct opposition to what they just sang *to God*, they preach *to people* it’s opposite!**

It is a massive, unspoken “elephant in the room.”

This begs the question: Which one is the *real* truth they believe?

If they *truly* understood a line like:

“T’was grace that taught my heart to fear...”

they would *never* feel compelled to qualify it with: “But I still had to choose to accept or cooperate with it.”

The consistent confession would be: “And as *a result of grace* so working in me, I did choose.” That affirms what they just sang; the former contradicts it.

The contradiction when persistently, intentionally done by them now reveals the heart. And this is both where and why it becomes *very* serious.

For when someone *habitually* resists grace-centered correction - when they in their preaching, teaching, testimony and beliefs persistently minimize what *grace alone* accomplishes in those it truly transforms, that resistance becomes a trajectory in a particular direction.

This trajectory, if not soon by-grace abandoned, is a *very* slippery downward slope!

...And the bottom of that slope looks hauntingly like Matthew 7.

I say this not because I presume to be the one who will sit in judgment. God forbid. I say it because I fear the One who will say what He said in Matthew 7.

✚ They can *emotionally resonate* with grace in a song of “praise” or “worship” but *theologically resist* grace in doctrine.

6. The Seam Between Ignorance and Rebellion

Acts 19 shows very *new*, very ignorant disciples at a transitional moment in divine revelation – meaning, prior to the gospels and epistles being written and circulated, who were lacking knowledge of the person of the Holy Spirit. This lack of knowledge was unintentional and genuine – “we have not heard there was a Holy Spirit.” Despite this lack, they had teachable hearts. Paul instructs them and they joyfully receive the truth. Thus, evidencing their “calling and election” – a thing Peter admonished his readers to “make certain”. Not by a works-based, self-boasting way of self-evaluation. But by firm and genuine adherence to the gospel of Sola Gratia.

Imagine this scenario. Several months later, word reaches the Apostles that this same group had now formed a church and were publicly teaching that there was no Holy Spirit, that God was not a Trinity. What would the posture of the Apostles be *then*? You see, what began as genuine ignorance in having never heard of the Holy Spirit would now have transitioned into open hostility and falsehood by denying Him.

I use this only as an analogy. The truth in Acts 19 that was unknown was the person of the Holy Spirit. That is not my point. I am not merely “calling out” those who reject the Trinity. I am saying, the *principle that passage reveals* is what matters:

✚ We can excuse ignorance due to having never heard some things up to a point. To the point of teaching and correcting ignorance or error. We cannot and must not do the same for those who have heard, yet persist in not mere questioning, but *open hostility to and denial of it.*

A person saying, “I hear what you are saying regarding John 6:44, 65 and Romans 9, and I see it clearly in the texts, but I still have some questions,” is completely acceptable and needs to be met with patient, loving, gentle instruction. Openly, habitually, persistently denying it is *something else entirely!*

Ignorance is curable. But when clear teaching is *persistently* resisted, ignorance can and does morph into rebellion. It's the classic case of slow death that the science project student learns in High School. To boil a frog, slowly heat the water so the frog does not perceive the danger too soon and leap out of the pot. By the time the frog could discern the danger, it is too late. So, while ignorance can be excused – to a point, the latter must never be. I said, “to a point”, reminded of the prophet's warning – **“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have *rejected* knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest.” (Hosea 4:6).** “Destroyed” God said...not merely “in error.”

Note: Hosea's “lack of knowledge” is not innocent unawareness, it is the ***rejection*** of true biblical knowledge. *That* is what Hosea said transforms ignorance into defiance and moves from grace into judgment.

This dividing line between genuine ignorance and rejection of truth is a biblical “seam” between the two, and this seam is where Sola Gratia – Grace Alone, falls between the pages of scripture and lives.

7. The Pastor's Burden and the Theologian's Task

Paul rebukes the members of the churches for desertion from the absolute of Sola Gratia, but reserves “anathema” – condemnation at judgment, for *teachers* who “distort” grace (Gal 1:6-8). Wherever the hinge of salvation shifts from God's monergistic “drawing” alone – hence, true “Sola Gratia”, to human decision as being *the decisive factor*, boasting is reintroduced. And wherever the “Sola” of Sola Gratia is reduced, it is in actual fact, denied. For Paul, *any* addition to grace is really a subtraction from it – the “Sola” matters!

The word “Sola” – “alone” is not a take it or leave it add-on to the doctrine. It is an essential without which the doctrine becomes “distorted” as Paul said. The word *alone* is a closed door theologically. It allows *nothing* else or less in. It also leaves nothing essential out. Ephesians 2:5 – “*By grace you have been saved.*” It leaves nothing out. It is theologically complete. The more often cited verses 8-9

of the same chapter merely explain and unpack the all-inclusive, theologically complete statement of verse 5. They do not introduce other necessary elements, they merely explain verse 5 in broader form. Both statements exclude all grounds of self-boasting – including the only element which someone *could* assume was “of themselves”, which is faith. Sola Gratia denies this. *It was intended to!*

“Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you **will ensure salvation** both *for yourself* and for *those who hear you*.” (1 Tim. 4:16 - emphasis added)

Paul here absolutely links the all-importance of doctrine to salvation itself! Teachers who systematize human decision as *the decisive element* in salvation, deny the force and meaning of the Lord’s words in John 6:44, 65. In doing so persistently, they move dangerously near “another gospel.”

Sheep confused by such teaching must be approached with patience, not presumption as to their saved or lost status. Those however, who after being exposed to the truth, stubbornly persist in defending their system of self-boasting turned into doctrine are on a very precarious edge. Their *only* hope is that God may grant them repentance, so that they come to their senses, acknowledge the truth and escape the snare of the evil one who holds them captive. This is what Paul says concerning all who “oppose the truth” (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

8. Systems and Souls: Tearing Down Strongholds, Tending Sheep

The theologian must tear down strongholds (2 Cor. 10:5), which the text defines as “every lofty thing raised up *against* the knowledge of God”. The pastor must feed sheep (John 21). Systems /doctrine must be repudiated and rebuked sharply when they obscure grace; confused individuals must be discerned and instructed with care – “Feed My sheep, tend My lambs” was the commission Christ gave to Peter. Defiant rebels must be rebuked and prayed for “in the hope that God may grant them repentance” as we saw above.

- Denounce the system relentlessly. Shepherd those caught within it patiently. Pray earnestly.

9. Conclusion: When Grace Truly Gets the Glory

Grace that successfully “draws” is grace that gets *all* the glory. Not mere lip-service which says grace gets all the glory then turns and denies it by claiming, “But we still need to do our part” or similar, but truly and humbly agrees with Paul’s summation – “But *by His doing* you are in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor. 1:29-30).

✚ Anything less is not the grace of John 6.

✚ The vocabulary we use reveals *our theology* - and our theology reveals *our boast* - and our boast reveals *our heart*.

As it is written, “Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord”...*always*.

Sola Gratia – Soli Deo Gloria.