A Logical Analysis - John 6:44

By Brian Bosse

A debate between two theological positions has raged. Arminianism, which questioned the doctrines of the Dutch Reformed Church in the late 16th – early 17th centuries, insisted upon fallen man's ability to choose God apart from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. The Dutch Reformed Church, which embraced the theology of Calvinism, responded by re-affirming that man is in such bondage to sin that apart from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit he would never choose God. The Biblical passage of John 6:44 was at the heart of this issue, especially the nature of God's drawing. Arminians believe that God's drawing of people to Himself is universal, yet is not effectual. That is to say, even though God draws all people, they do not necessarily come. God's drawing is seen as an invitation that can be accepted or refused independently of God. Calvinists, on the other hand, believe that God draws only the elect, this drawing is part of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, and it is effectual. That is to say, God's drawing is irresistible so that everyone who is drawn necessarily comes.

This paper is a logical analysis of John 6:44 followed by the implications for both the traditional Arminian and Calvinist positions. It is divided into four sections. Section one will deal with the Greek text and translation; section two will be a logical analysis of the text – ending with John 6:44 expressed in semi-formal terms; section three will explore the consequences of the logical analysis regarding Arminianism and Calvinism; and section four will be the conclusion. The conclusion reached is that under Arminian assumptions one is left with universalism; whereas, under Calvinist assumptions, Calvinism is found to be consistent.

Section One – The Greek Text

John 6:44 (UBS): οὐδεὶς δύναται ἐλθεῖν πρός με ἐὰν μὴ ὁ πατὴρ ὁ πέμψας με ἐλκύσῃ αὐτόν, καὶ ἐγὼ ἀναστήσω αὐτὸν [ἐν] τῇ ἐσχάτῃ ἡμέρᾳ.[1]

Any translation of an ancient language begins with the verbs. It should be noted that there are five verbs in the verse: δύναται, ἐλθεῖν, πέμψας, ἐλκύσῃ, and ἀναστήσω.

Δύναται

Δύναται is the 3rd person singular deponent[2] indicative form of δύναμαι. A deponent verb is one that has a middle/passive voice form but is active in meaning.[3] The translation of this verb would be "he, she, or it is able," speaking of ability. Most translations use the word 'can,'[4] which certainly captures this meaning, especially if the 'can' versus 'may' distinction is kept in mind. However, to avoid possible confusion, the more explicit 'able' will be used to indicate that ability is what is being communicated. Please note for future reference that this verb is a present tense verb.

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[1] Kurt Aland, Et al., *The Greek New Testament* – Fourth Revised Edition, published by the United Bible Societies, © 2001 (UBS). There are two minor textual variants in the passage. ℵ, 𝔓 75, and the *Textus Receptus* omit the ἐν, and some manuscripts have κἀγὼ – a *crasis* of καὶ ἐγὼ – instead of καὶ ἐγὼ . A *crasis* occurs when two words are "pushed together" to make one. In this case, καὶ ἐγὼ has been pushed together to form κἀγω. They both carry the meaning of "and I." These variants do not affect the analysis.
[2] Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, ©1996, pg. 430.
[3] Richard A. Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek – A Linguistic and Exegetical Approach*, Broadman and Homan, Nashville, TN, ©1994, pg. 135. The term 'deponent' comes from the Latin 'deponere' – meaning "to put down." The idea is that these verbs "put down" their active forms.
[4] NASB, NKJ, KJV, NIV, ESV, NRS, etc…

Ελθεῖν

Ελθεῖν is the second aorist active infinitive of ἔρχομαι. It is considered a complimentary infinitive, and is acting as an adverb modifying the verb δύναται. This is simply translated as "to come." [5]

Πέμψας

Πέμψας is the aorist active nominative masculine singular participle of the verb πέμπω, and is acting in the second attributive position modifying the noun πατὴρ. This can be translated as "having sent."

Ελκύση

Ελκύση is the subjunctive aorist active 3rd person singular of ἔλκω. Most translators translate this verb as "draws." Please note that ἐλκύση is in the subjunctive mood.

Αναστήσω

Αναστήσω is the future active indicative 1st person singular of ἀνίστημι. It can be translated as "I will raise up."

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[5] William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, ©1993, pg. 296.

At this point, there is one other word we need to consider before presenting the translation – the subordinate conjunction ἐάν, which indicates the *protasis*[6] of a conditional sentence. That is to say, the ἐάν found in John 6:44 marks the beginning of an "if…then…" conditional statement.

In the Greek language there are distinctions made regarding the semantic categories of conditional sentences. In Daniel Wallace's *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* he lists the ἐάν found in John 6:44 under the category of 3rd Class Conditionals.[7] Regarding 3rd class conditionals, Mounce states in *Basics of Greek Grammar*, "Third class conditional sentences always have a *protasis* introduced by ἐάν and a verb in the subjunctive. The verb in the *apodosis*[8] can be any tense or mood."[9] As noted above, ἑλκύσῃ is a subjunctive verb, and is the subjunctive verb in the *protasis* of our conditional statement.

There are two subdivisions of 3rd class conditionals: *future more probable* and *present general*. For a conditional to be the present general case the verb in the *apodosis* must be in the present tense.[10] As we noted above δύναται, the verb in the *apodosis*, is a present tense verb. Our conditional fits the form of a present general conditional, and the

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[6] The *protasis* of a conditional sentence is the antecedent of the conditional sentence. Consider the following conditional sentence: If you believe, then you will be saved. "You believe" is the *protasis* (antecedent) of the conditional.

[7] Wallace, pg. 699.

[8] The *apodosis* of a conditional sentence is the consequent of the conditional sentence. Consider the following conditional sentence: If you believe, then you will be saved. "You will be saved" is the *apodosis* (consequent) of the conditional.

[9] Mounce, p. 288.

[10] Ibid., p. 288.

context points to this. Present general conditionals state "a general truth, an axiomatic truth."[11] Therefore, what is being communicated in verse 44 of John 6 is an axiomatic truth regarding man's ability/inability to come to Jesus. The passage is now able to be translated.

Translation: **(A)** No one is able to come to Me **(B)** if not the Father – the One having sent Me – draws him, **(C)** and I will raise him up on the last day.

At first blush, many will notice that section B is translated differently than what is commonly found in most translations. Section B is the *protasis* of the 3rd class present general conditional.[12] As such, the above translation is a very literal translation capturing the full force of the conditional. In English, this translation is a little awkward, and consequently, the other translations attempt to smooth it out. Suffice it to say, the translation presented is very faithful to the text, even though it may read a bit rough. Please note that the *apodosis* of the conditional is section A. The *apodosis* preceding the *protasis* is a little unusual, but it certainly is not unheard of. This is exactly what the grammar of the sentence dictates.

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[11] Ibid., p. 288.

[12] Wallace calls this type of conditional a 5th class conditional rather than distinguishing between two types of 3rd class conditionals as does Mounce.

Section Two – A Logical Analysis

The verse is grammatically set up into three sections labeled **A**, **B**, and **C** as indicated the above translation. What will be determined is the logical relationship between these three sections. To help with the logical analysis the three sections will be put into a semi-formal form, which will require a little revision of the translation.

Original: (A) No one is able to come to Me...

Revised: (A1) He is not able to come to Me…

A1 does not change the meaning of our verse. "No one is able" has been converted into "he is not able." Someone might balk at this in that "no one" is more general than "he," but in terms of the passage with the Father drawing "him" and Jesus raising "him," changing the "one" to match these pronouns does not change the meaning of the verse. If q represents "he is able to come to Me," then **A1** is represented symbolically by: $\neg q$.[13] Now we will turn our attention to section **B**.

Original: (B) …not the Father draws him…[14]

Revised: (B1) …the Father does not draw him…

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[13] The symbol ' $\neg$ ' designates the negation of what follows. The negation of "he is able" is "he is not able."

[14] The phrase "…the One who sent Me…" has been purposefully left out. It modifies the Father (ὁ πατὴρ), and will not matter in terms of the logical analysis. Therefore, for the sake of simplicity and clarity it has been left out. Also, the 'if' has been left out for the moment because conditional statements in logic have their own symbol to designate the 'if.' This symbol will be used once we are ready to bring the 3 sections together.

If p represents "the Father does draw him," then **B1** is logically equivalent to $\neg p$. Our last section can be represented as follows…

Original: (C) … I will raise him up on the last day.[15]

If r represents "I will raise him up on the last day," then C is logically equivalent to r. Pulling all of this together, we may now symbolically represent John 6:44 as follows…

Revised John 6:44: $\neg q$ if $\neg p$ and r.

The revised version of John 6:44 above reads, "He is not able to come to Me, if the Father does not draw him, and I will raise him up on the last day." The next step is to represent 'if' and 'and' more formally. However, an interesting issue arises. As seen from the grammatical discussion above regarding ἐάν with the subjunctive, the relationship between sections A and B has been defined. Section A is the *apodosis*, and section B is the *protasis* of a conditional statement. In terms of symbolic logic this would be stated the following way: $\neg p \rightarrow \neg q$.[16] This would read, "If the Father does not draw him, then he is not able to come to me," and carries the same meaning as does the original verse. The issue that faces us is how the "and r" relates to the conditional sentence. Is 'r' part of the *protasis*, and if so, does μὴ (not) negate both 'p' and 'r', or

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[15] The 'and' of section 3 has been purposefully left out because it is uniquely represented in symbolic logic, and will be used when we bring the 3 sections together.

[16] The symbol '→' indicates implication in logic. An implication is simply an "if…then…" conditional statement. Therefore, $p \rightarrow q$ would read, "If p, then q."

just the '*p*'? Is '*r*' part of the *apodosis* in our conditional sentence? Or, is '*r*' simply an additional proposition following our conditional statement? In other words, there are four possible relationships '*r*' might have with '*p*'and '*q*':

(1) $\neg\ p \wedge r\ \rightarrow \neg q$ [17]

(2) $\neg p \wedge r\ \rightarrow \neg q$

(3) $\neg p \rightarrow\ \neg q \wedge r$

(4) $\neg p \rightarrow \neg q\ \wedge r$

Possibility One: $\neg\ p \wedge r\ \rightarrow \neg q$

This sentence reads, "It is not the case that if [the Father draws him, and I will raise him up on the last day][18], then he is not able to come to me." By the logical law of *contraposition* $\neg\ p \wedge r\ \rightarrow \neg q$ is logically equivalent to $q \rightarrow\ p \wedge r$.[19] This is logically equivalent to $q \rightarrow p\ \wedge\ q \rightarrow r$, which says, "If you are able to come to Me, then the Father draws you, *and* if you are able to come to Me, then I, [Jesus], will raise you up on the last day." These ideas are theologically interesting, but there are some grammatical arguments against this reading.

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[17] The logical symbol ' $\wedge$ ' indicates a conjunction, i.e., 'and.'

[18] Brackets will be used to make explicit the meaning of the formal statement when translated back into English. In this particular instance, the brackets make explicit that ($p \wedge r$) represent the *protasis* of the conditional.

[19] The logical law of *contraposition* simply states that $p \rightarrow q$ is logically equivalent to $\neg q \rightarrow \neg p$. This is intuitively obvious as the following will illustrate: "If you believe (*p*), then you will be saved (*q*)" is logically equivalent to "if you are not saved ($\neg q$), then you did not believe ($\neg p$)."

Because the text is a 3rd class conditional, if possibility one were the case, then both verbs in our *protasis* would need to be in the subjunctive mood, and the verb in our *apodosis* would need to be in the past tense. In other words, the reading would be, "It is not the case that if [the Father draws him (subjunctive) and I raise him up on the last day (subjunctive)**]**, then he was not able to come to Me (past tense)." However, the verb ἀναστήσω is in the indicative and not subjunctive mood, and the verb δύναμαι is in the present and not past tense. Therefore, possibility one is ruled out.

Possibility Two: $\neg p \wedge r \rightarrow \neg q$

This is very similar to possibility one, but logically it carries a different meaning. It reads, "If [the father does not draw him, and I will raise him up], then he is not able to come to Me." There are theological and philosophical issues with this statement. Assuming this condition is possible to be fulfilled, then there are three things being stated: (1) Jesus raises up some who are not drawn by the Father; (2) those whom the Father has not drawn, but Jesus raises up are not able to come to Jesus; and (3) not being able to come to Jesus is dependent upon the future action of Jesus raising this person. Regarding (1), both Arminians and Calvinists would agree this is inconsistent with the context of the passage. (2) The raising up on the last day is a rising up to eternal life as the context indicates – see John 6:40; 47. Both Arminians and Calvinists would deny that there are some who are raised on the last day that did not come to Jesus. (3) Philosophically, it is problematic to have the consequence of a person not being able to

come to Jesus occur as a result of the future event of Jesus raising that person up on the last day. All of these problems render this formalization very unlikely. However, not even considering the theological and philosophical issues raised, this statement is precluded for the very same grammatical reasons possibility one was precluded.

Possibility Three: $\neg p \rightarrow \neg q \wedge r$

The rendering of this statement is as follows: "If the Father does not draw him, then **[he is not able to come to Me, and I will raise him up]**." This is logically equivalent to: $\neg p \rightarrow \neg q \ \wedge \ \neg p \rightarrow r$, which reads, "If the father does not draw him, then he is not able to come to Me, *and* if the Father does not draw him, then I will raise him up." The theological problem with this is the idea that Jesus will raise up someone who has not been drawn by the Father. As argued above, the context indicates otherwise. However, this is not the only reason this reading is able to be dismissed. The grammatical structure of the sentence is such that it is very unlikely section **C** is part of the *apodosis* of our conditional sentence. There is no parallel construction in the New Testament or Septuagint where the conjunction of the *apodosis* is separated by the *protasis*. These theological and grammatical issues dismiss this possibility leaving us with the most natural rendering of the text: possibility four.

Possibility Four: $\neg p \rightarrow \neg q \wedge r$

This statement reads, "**[If the Father does not draw him, then he is not able to come to Me]**, and I will raise him up on the last day." This possibility is logically equivalent to $q \rightarrow p \wedge r$, which reads, "**[If he is able to come to Me, then the Father draws him]**, and I will raise him up on the last day." Of all the possibilities, this one fits the grammatical structure of the sentence best. From a theological perspective, the necessary precondition for one's ability to come to Jesus is the Father drawing that person, and $q \rightarrow p$ captures this perfectly. Therefore, we conclude that John 6:44 is expressed symbolically as follows: $\neg p \rightarrow \neg q \wedge r$.

Section Three – Theological Implications of the Analysis

Having determined the logical structure of the passage, we now apply this to the Arminian/Calvinist debate discussed earlier. The Arminian position is that God draws all people,[20] and as a result of this drawing all people are *able* to come to Jesus, but all do not come to Jesus. How do these assumptions fit in with our analysis of John 6:44?

The Arminian position that "God draws all people, and therefore all people are able to come" is compatible with John 6:44; however, based on our logical analysis above, the consequence of this position is not consistent with the position that "all do not come to Jesus." It has already been established that John 6:44 is saying: $q \rightarrow p \wedge r$.

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[20] Arminians will normally appeal to John 12:32 in support of this.

Applying the assumption that "God draws all people, and therefore all people are able to come" to the verse we are left with the following:

Premise 1: [If he is able to come to Me, then the Father drew him], and I will raise him up on the last day. (John 6:44)

Premise 2: He (all people) is able to come to Me, and the Father draws him (all people).[21] (Arminian Position)

Conclusion: I (Jesus) will raise him (all people) up on the last day.

This is a very startling conclusion. If all people are able to come and are drawn (i.e., if every 'him' is able to come and every 'him' is drawn), then every person (i.e., every 'him') will be raised up on the last day. This is universalism. The Arminian will object by saying that Jesus only raises those who do come. That is to say, they want to understand the referent of 'him' in section **C** as the one who actually comes. However, there is no mention of the one who actually comes in John 6:44. This verse only mentions those who are drawn, and those who are *able* to come. The 'him' in section **C** either refers to the one drawn, or it refers to the one *able* to come. There is no referent for the one who actually comes. As such, given the Arminian position that "God draws all people, and therefore all people are able to come," John 6:44 logically entails universalism.

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[21] Technically, this premise is not in the proper form for the conclusion to follow immediately. However, the proper form that allows the conclusion to follow immediately is logically entailed by the premise.

The Calvinist, as does the Arminian, believes that all those drawn have the ability to come. The Calvinist, *contra* the Arminian, also believes that all who are drawn will necessarily come and will be raised up on the last day. Regarding those drawn, the Calvinist believes that only the elect are drawn. How does the Calvinist position hold up in light of John 6:44?

Premise 1: [If he is able to come to Me, then the Father drew him], and I will raise him up on the last day. (John 6:44)

Premise 2: He (all the elect) is able to come to Me, and the Father drew him (all the elect).[22] (Calvinist Position)

Conclusion: I (Jesus) will raise all the elect up on the last day.

This conclusion is completely compatible with the Calvinist position. In a sense, the Father's drawing is a universal drawing. It is a universal drawing of the elect. That is to say, all of the elect will be drawn. The universal affirmative conclusion that the Father draws all the elect, and that all the elect will all be raised up on the last day is articulated by Peter when he says, "The Lord is not slow about His promise…but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for *all* to come to repentance."[23]

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[22] See footnote 21.
[23] NASB – 2 Peter 3:9.

Section Four – Conclusion

Based on the aforementioned analysis, the position taken by Calvinism is consistent with the logical consequences of John 6:44. The traditional Arminian position, however, has been demonstrated to be inconsistent resulting in universalism. It is interesting to note, based on the logical analysis done above John 6:44 does teach some type of universalism. It either teaches the salvation of all the elect (Calvinism) or it teaches the salvation of all every person (universalism).

Works Sited

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