

“All That the Father Gives Me...”

John 6 and the Pastoral Implications of the Doctrines of Grace

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Those who profess the doctrine of unconditional election and the doctrines of grace more broadly cherish them as a comfort and a hope. They hold that these truths humble the proud heart, encourage a believer weak in faith, and provide fuel for the flame of worship. James Boice and Philip Ryken write, “The doctrines of grace help to preserve all that is right and good in the Christian life: humility, holiness, and thankfulness, with a passion for prayer and evangelism.”¹ They view these doctrines as having pastoral implications that are transformative for the Christian life. Examples of authors and pastors expressing this idea could be multiplied.

However, it is clear that not everyone who has come into contact with the doctrines of grace feels this way. Roger Olson, in his recent book *Against Calvinism*, contends that the Calvinistic understanding of God renders him indistinguishable from the devil.² Certainly Olson would not agree with the claim that the doctrines of grace stimulate worship of God! Likewise, one author asserts that Calvinism will have devastating effects on a believer’s spiritual health: “Nothing will deaden a church or put a young man out of the ministry any more than an adherence to Calvinism. Nothing will foster pride and indifference as will an affection for Calvinism. Nothing will destroy holiness and spirituality as an attachment to Calvinism.”³ In sum, he believes that the “doctrines of Calvinism will deaden and kill anything: prayer, faith, zeal, holiness.”⁴

¹ James Montgomery Boice and Philip Graham Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace: Rediscovering the Evangelical Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2002), 180.

² Roger Olson, *Against Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 23.

³ Laurence M. Vance, *The Other Side of Calvinism* (Vance Publications, 1991), viii.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

How can these radically divergent opinions be deciphered? Of course, as is the case with anything regarding doctrine and life, Scripture alone can determine truth from error, right from wrong practice. In the Scriptures, God has given the church a sufficient rule of faith (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Therefore, it is imperative that faithful study of the teaching of the Bible and its implications would decide the matter.

This essay will be an examination of John 6:36-45 as to whether the key tenets of the doctrines of grace are asserted in this text, accompanied by a discussion of the implications of these doctrines for pastoral theology. The first question that will be answered is, “Are the doctrines of Calvinism, broadly speaking, *true*?” Naturally, the presupposition of this method of answering this question is that if something is asserted by the Holy Scriptures, it is in fact true.⁵ The second question follows from the first, “*If* the doctrines of grace are true, what does this mean for the Christian life?” These questions will not be taken in turn but answered together along the way as the text of John 6 is investigated.

The Context Considered

The text at hand (John 6:36-45) is in the context of the Bread of Life discourse, which directly follows the pericopes of the feeding of the five thousand and Christ’s walking on water (v. 1-15; 16-21). Both miracles, along with all of the signs in John’s Gospel, are intended to reveal something of the identity of Jesus. The first of these signs that John records is the wedding at Cana, in which Jesus is said to have “manifested his glory”⁶ (v. 11). In response, it is said that there the disciples “believed” in Jesus, although the unfolding Gospel narrative will make clear

⁵ The doctrines of grace are a feature of systematic theology and therefore are not built upon merely what one text teaches but are a summary and systemization of all of the teaching of Scripture. Indeed, it is unlikely that in John 6 one will find all of the five points of Calvinism fully articulated! However, systematic theology does rely upon the exegesis of individual texts.

⁶ John summarizes his entire Gospel account in this way: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and *we have seen his glory*, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (1:14; ESV, emphasis supplied).

that their understanding of Christ's person and work at this point is inadequate.⁷ Likewise, although the crowd makes an expression of faith in Jesus in response to his feeding miracle (v. 14), the following discourse (or, more appropriately, the *dialogue* between Jesus and his audience) will sharpen a dividing line between genuine and spurious belief.

This section begins with the crowd whom Jesus fed crossing the lake and entering Capernaum, "seeking Jesus" (v. 24). However, what they are seeking, Jesus asserts, is not Christ himself but a free meal (v. 26). They do not hunger for Jesus but for the things that Jesus can give them. This, according to John, is evidence of unbelief. Though this point is not *distinctively* Calvinistic, here already is an implication for pastoral ministry. All expressions of the "prosperity gospel" which emphasize the blessings of Christ over Christ himself are condemned by this text. Ministry in the local church is not like spreading a table of delicacies on which people feast while seated next to Jesus ("here, have a better marriage, or doesn't having obedient kids taste good, or this is what it's like to live successfully"). Rather, *Christ* is the meal.

Jesus exhorts them not to labor for food that perishes, but for "the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal" (v. 27)⁸. He directs their attention to his own identity, but this statement precipitates a question from the crowd: "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" (v. 28). By "works of God" (τὰ ἔργα τοῦ θεοῦ) they mean "the works that God requires."⁹ They presume that

⁷ John uses the aorist tense to refer to the disciples' belief (ἐπίστευσαν), which might be intended to contrast with his use of the present tense-form of πιστεύω in the Gospel for genuine, ongoing belief (cf. 3:15, 16, 18, 36; 4:24; 6:35, 40, etc.). In fact, later in chapter 2 John uses the same form to refer to the many who "believed" (ἐπίστευσαν) in Jesus since they saw his signs, but to whom Jesus did not entrust himself, since "he knew what was in man" (v. 23-24). Of course, this should not be viewed as a conclusion *necessitated* by the aorist tense-form, since John also uses this to refer to genuine belief as well (2:22).

⁸ Lengthy Scripture quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001).

⁹ D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 285.

whatever standard God might set, they have the ability to meet it.¹⁰ Christ again directs them to himself: the work of God is to believe the one he has sent (v. 29). At this, the unbelief of the crowd becomes explicit, and they demand a sign from Jesus to validate his radical claim. Jesus gives, not a sign, but himself: “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” (v. 35). Yet here is this crowd, which largely is *not* coming and *not* believing.¹¹

A Theological Explanation of Unbelief

This sets up our text at hand (v. 36-45), in which Jesus provides a theological explanation for their unbelief. Jesus says, “But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe” (v. 36). The fact that the statements of Christ that follow are given in reference to the unbelief of the audience is an important feature for understanding the text accurately. The themes that mark Christ’s statements are the inability of humanity and the sovereign work of God. These become obscured when the context of unbelief is abandoned in interpreting the passage.

There are two primary ways that Christ’s assertions in this text have been understood, which represent the divergent Calvinistic and Arminian perspectives generally. On the one hand, Calvinists see in this text the particular work of God for his elect people. On the other hand, Arminians read several of Christ’s statements as applying not only to the elect but to all individuals as well (such as v. 44-45). It will be demonstrated that the Arminian reading is untenable and does not do justice to what Christ actually asserts, but at the outset it should be considered which of the two is more *prima facie* likely given the fact that Christ is providing a

¹⁰ The crowd’s question, therefore, was a functional denial of the doctrine of *total inability*, which Jesus will soon correct. Carson comments, “They display no doubt about their intrinsic ability to meet any challenge God may set them; they evince no sensitivity to the fact that eternal life is first and foremost a gift within the purview of the Son of Man (v. 27)” (Ibid.). This is the Pelagian maxim: “If I ought, I can.”

¹¹ Verse 35 illustrates that throughout the discourse Jesus uses “coming” and “believing” interchangeably. He expresses these actions by the use of parallel masculine singular present participles, ἔρχόμενος and ὁ πιστεύων respectively.

theological explanation for unbelief. If Jesus is explaining unbelief, is he more likely to emphasize what God has done for every individual to position them to believe, or is he more likely to emphasize human inability and God's gracious provision for his own people, which the crowd does not display? Clearly the latter is more likely and underscores the unity and development of Christ's thought.

“All That the Father Gives Me...”

While the present crowd is not coming to Christ, “all that the Father gives” to Christ *will* come to him (v. 37). In other words, the unbelieving resistance of the people is not evidence of failure in Christ's mission or frustration of the purposes of God. The Father has sovereignly guaranteed a people for Christ by giving them to him, and the result of their being given is their coming in faith to Christ.¹² The decisive factor in Christ having a people is the elective work of the Father. Christ's statement excludes the possibility that an individual can be “given” and not respond in faith, since *all* that are given *will* certainly come. This is unconditional election and effective grace. By implication, the unbelief of the crowd is shown to be evidence of the fact that the Father has not given them to Christ (or at least, as verse 44 will state, has not yet drawn them to Christ). “Christ says that the reason for their obstinacy is that they are reprobate and do not belong to God's flock.”¹³ Thus, the doctrine of election is given to explain their resistance.

Jesus follows this by saying “and whoever comes to me I will never cast out” (v. 37). He uses the aorist subjunctive of strong negation (οὐ μὴ ἐκβάλω) to articulate emphatically the security of the one who is given by the Father; Christ will *certainly never* cast out the one who

¹² To locate the *basis* for the Father's giving action in the coming of the people, so that the *reason* the Father gives them to the Son is because he knows that they will come to the Son (foreseen faith), is to turn the text on its head. Jesus does not say, “All that come to me will be given to me by the Father,” but “All that the Father gives to me will come to me.” The Father's action of giving is expressed not only as the temporal precursor to the coming of believers but as its effective cause.

¹³ John Calvin, *John: Crossway Classic Commentaries*, ed. Alister McGrath and J.I. Packer (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1994), 160.

comes to him. The positive counterpart to this negative expression is not merely that Jesus welcomes whoever will come (although that is true) but that Jesus will *keep* the one whom he *has* (the one who comes, the one who is given).¹⁴ The elect, therefore, have the twin security of both the sovereign determination of the Father and the preserving activity of the Son.

It is obvious that this doctrine should function as a tremendous comfort for the believer. The first question of the Heidelberg Catechism asks, “What is thy only comfort in life and death?” The answer it supplies begins with this: “That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.” We belong to Christ with surety because the loving Father has entrusted us to him. “We have been committed into His care! The great Second Person of the Trinity has received us from the hand of the Father!”¹⁵ The Father will not fumble the pass, and the Son will not drop us when we are his. In this text, Jesus will soon make clear that the sovereign activity of the Trinity in salvation means that the believer has the comfort of knowing that God holds him securely from beginning to end. John Newton expresses this eloquently:

While Christ is the foundation, the root, head and husband of his people, while the word of God is Yea and Amen, while we have a Mediator and High Priest before the throne, while the Holy Spirit is willing and able to bear witness to the truths of the Gospel, while God is wiser than men, and stronger than Satan, so long the believer in Jesus is and shall be safe. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but the promise, the oath, the blood, on which my soul relies, affords me a security which can never fail.¹⁶

Here too is an implication for Christian ministry in the local church. The ministry of Christ makes clear that success or failure is never determined simply by the number of responses. This discourse concludes with several of Christ’s disciples abandoning him (v. 66). However,

¹⁴ This is suggested both by the context and by the use of ἐκβάλλω (someone must be “in” in order to be “cast out”). Cf. Carson, 290.

¹⁵ James R. White, *Drawn by the Father* (Lidenhurst, NY: Reformation Press, 2000), 28.

¹⁶ John Newton, “Letter Nine: On Election and Final Perseverance,” *The Works of the Reverend John Newton, V. I* (London, 1808), 166.

verse 37 teaches that God's redemptive program has a one hundred percent success rate, despite the sinful rejection of some. What God requires is faithfulness to his message of salvation.

The Will of the Father

Jesus then states that the *reason* (ὅτι) he will preserve God's elect people is because of the *purpose* (ἵνα) of his incarnational ministry: "For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day" (v. 38-39). Quite simply, the Father's will is that the Son would save perfectly. Here Jesus makes the eschatological result of his preserving activity explicit; those whom he "will certainly never cast out" (v. 37) will in fact be raised up "on the last day" (v. 39). Not one will be lost along the way, for that would suggest that Jesus could somehow fail to accomplish the Father's will! This not only underscores the safety of the believer (and by consequence his perseverance in faith) but also makes clear that the group of individuals given by the Father to the Son is not inclusive of every person in the world, since those who are given and those who are raised up on the last day are co-extensive. Unless Jesus' statements are to be taken in a universalistic sense (which would be problematic not only for the Gospel of John but also for the rest of the Bible), then election is here in view.

Jesus, nevertheless, also expresses the Father's will from the perspective of human responsibility: "For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day" (v. 40). In contrast to the Jewish crowd who had "seen" (ὄραω) Christ and yet not believed in him (v. 36), the Father wills to give eternal life to those whose beholding (θεωπέω) the Son results in *belief*. Although this verse is sometimes read as if those who "look" and "believe" are an undetermined

number (as if verse 40 and its “whosoever” language¹⁷ conveyed in some translations overturns what the previous verses have already asserted), there is no reason to understand it in this way. Jesus is simply describing from another perspective the same group he has already defined as those given by the Father to the Son. Here Jesus is teaching that “the way to obtain salvation is to obey the Gospel of Christ.”¹⁸ God’s sovereign work in salvation does not undermine our duty to repent and believe, for it is through that means that the Father accomplishes his will.

Human Inability Expressed Through Grumbling

In response to these statements, the unbelieving resistance of the Jewish audience is heightened, and it translates into grumbling skepticism (v. 41-42). “The grumbling was not only insulting, but dangerous: it presupposed that divine revelation could be sorted out by talking the matter over, and thus diverted attention from the grace of God.”¹⁹ As previously indicated (v. 28), the crowd’s prideful rejection of Christ manifested in the assumption that they were able to assess the matter, discover what God requires, and perform whatever duty was necessary. Jesus rebukes their grumbling by asserting exactly the opposite: “Do not grumble among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (v. 43-44). Jesus’ cure for the grumbling heart is the doctrine of total inability. Their cynical response to Christ’s teaching was not an expression of their spiritual discernment but of their inability to understand and believe in Christ.²⁰ The fact that they had witnessed Christ’s miracles and heard him offer

¹⁷ “Whosoever” is a legitimate idiomatic rendering of the $\pi\alpha\varsigma \delta\acute{\omicron}$ + participle construction, which might be more woodenly rendered as “every looking one,” “every believing one,” etc. However, the “whosoever” language should not obscure the fact that Christ has a particular group of individuals in mind which he variously describes as the *given* ones, the *beholding* ones, *believing* ones, the *drawn* ones, the *raised* ones, and so on.

¹⁸ Calvin, 162.

¹⁹ Carson, 292-293.

²⁰ Since coming is a metaphor for belief, Jesus’ statement that “no one is able to come” ($\text{o}\ddot{\upsilon}\delta\epsilon\iota\varsigma \delta\acute{\upsilon}\nu\alpha\tau\alpha\iota \acute{\epsilon}\lambda\theta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu$) is equivalent to asserting that no one is able to *believe* in Jesus apart from being drawn by the

himself as the Bread of Life and yet considered him to be something common is further evidence of their spiritual blindness.

This is the condition of every person apart from sovereign grace: we are incapable of doing what God requires, totally unresponsive to him, unwilling and hostile in our wickedness, locked in our rebellion. This implies the humbling reality that we are utterly dependent upon the work of God to rescue us from this condition. That is the solution Christ provides; no one can come “unless the Father who sent me draws him” (v. 44). This is the divine remedy for human inability. Because all of humanity is dead in sin and unable to come to Christ, the Father must awaken life in his elect people and bring them to faith. This means that the *decisive* factor in a willing response to Christ is not found in the individual believer but in God alone. “If we do not start to come to Christ until we have been drawn by the Father, neither the beginning of faith nor the preparation of faith lies in us.”²¹

In this doctrine there is the potential for tremendous impact on Christian living. In contrast to the spiritual pride of the unbelieving crowd, Christians must recognize that their faith in Christ is the result of a divine gift. Calvinists, although this is unfortunately not always the case, ought to be the humblest of people.

“Election is humbling. Those who do not understand election often suppose the opposite, and it is true that those who believe in election sometimes appear prideful or smug. But this is an aberration. God tells us that he has chosen some by grace entirely apart from merit or even an ability to receive grace, precisely so that pride will be eliminated.”²²

Knowing that our conversion was not the result of any spiritual insight or moral superiority in us is the medicine for the pride-infected heart. Self-righteous boasting or critical judgments upon

Father. This is analogous to Paul’s statement that the natural person “does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand [οὐ δύναται γινῶναι] them” (1 Cor. 2:14).

²¹ Calvin, 165.

²² Boice and Ryken, 110.

unbelievers or believers who struggle in their faith is absolutely excluded by the doctrines of grace.

The Father's Irresistible Draw

However, not everyone who has read John 6:44 sees in this text unconditional election or irresistible grace. Some maintain that while it is true that mankind is unable to believe in Christ without a work of God, God in fact draws every individual, so that he has provided everything that is needed for someone to then make a free-will decision to come to Christ. So they see in verse 44 something akin to the Arminian doctrine of prevenient grace, citing passages such as John 12:32 that suggest that Christ draws "all people" (taken to mean "every individual exhaustively").²³ God's drawing activity, therefore, is not distinguishing but generic; it is not limited to the elect but extends to all of humanity. His drawing makes salvation *possible*, but it does not effectively and necessarily result in the salvation of anyone in particular. It is a resistible call.

There are several reasons why this is an inaccurate interpretation of this text. First, such a reading cannot account for the fact that Jesus' statements are in the context of explaining unbelief and rebuking the crowd's prideful grumbling. This interpretation transforms Christ's assertion of human inability into an affirmation of the ability of the crowd to believe. If the Father has, in fact, enabled everyone to come, how do Jesus' statements explain why the present audience rejects him? How are they a rebuke of the proud heart that assumes its own ability to

²³ For example, Norman Geisler, *Chosen But Free: A Balanced View of Divine Election* (Bloomington: Bethany House, 1999), 93. In response to the trend to cite John 12:32, White writes, "While many have used this verse to attempt to blunt the force of John 6:44, hoping to find here a 'wooing' idea rather than the sovereign call of the Spirit of God in a person's life, just *the opposite* is to be found. The cross was a symbol *of pain and death*. It could only repulse, not attract. For someone to be 'drawn' because of the cross requires the supernatural activity of the Spirit of God. The death of Christ is beautiful only to those who are redeemed by it, who see in it the very power of God." (*Drawn by the Father*, 53). For a full discussion of John 12:32 and its bearing on John 6:44, see James White, *The Potter's Freedom: A Defense of the Reformation and a Rebuttal to Norman Geisler's Chosen but Free* (Calvary Press, 2009), 162-165.

place the person and work of Christ under scrutiny? The Arminian reading does not do justice to the coherence of the text and the flow of the thought articulated.²⁴

In fact, this understanding of the passage dislocates verse 44 from the material that precedes it and requires that the Father's drawing be a radically different work from the Father's giving, which has already been described as applicable only to the elect. However, when the passage is taken as a whole, it is seen that verse 44 is simply the negative restatement of verse 37.²⁵ While verse 37 affirms that all that the Father gives to the Son will come to him, verse 44 asserts that no one can come to the Son unless the Father draws him. Concerning both groups it is stated that Jesus will raise them up on the last day. Taking these claims together, it seems legitimate to paraphrase them by saying that *all that the Father gives/draws will come to the Son and will be raised up on the last day*. Moreover, there is no disjunction in the text between those whom the Father draws and those whom the Son raises: "...unless the Father who sent me draws *him*, and I will raise *him* up on the last day" (v. 44). The very one who is drawn is the one who is raised;²⁶ no one will be drawn and yet fail to be raised up by the Lord Jesus on the last day.

The next verse, however, completely excludes the notion that every person is drawn. Jesus cites Isaiah 54:13 ("They will all be taught by God") concerning those who are drawn, and then he states, "Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me." Everyone

²⁴ Verse 65 in the same pericope is likewise problematic for the Arminian understanding and makes clear that Christ's teaching must be framed by the unbelief of the audience. Jesus essentially restates what he says in verse 44 by saying "no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father," but he prefaces it with "This is why I told you." The context is, again, that some do not believe. Verse 64 indicates that Judas is one of the unbelievers. The implication here is that Judas does not believe because the Father has not granted it. The Father has justly left him in his greed and sin. This is given as an explanation for the unbelief of Judas, despite his proximity to Jesus and his witnessing of Christ's miraculous works. This conforms to the rest of the teaching in this Gospel. For example: "Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God" (8:47).

²⁵ "The first clause of verse 44 repeats in different language the thought in the first clause of verse 37" (F.F. Bruce, *The Gospel and Epistles of John*, [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983], 156.).

²⁶ The two "*him*"s are parallel masculine singular accusative forms of αὐτός, with only two words intervening in the text. The immediate antecedent for the second αὐτόν is the prior αὐτόν, which is a pronoun representing "the one the Father draws." *This* is the one that Jesus raises.

who is drawn is taught, and everyone who is taught comes to Christ.²⁷ Being drawn by the Father effectively results in coming to Christ with a heart of trust and belief.

Pastors and those who serve in local churches should note that it is *God* who does the teaching. It is not the responsibility of any minister of the gospel to guarantee that faith or understanding of the truth is present in his hearers. He must speak clearly, faithfully, and boldly concerning the message of salvation, but ultimately it is God who teaches. Evangelists should rest in the truth that God will infallibly accomplish his purposes to bring his people to faith. Far from an impediment to evangelism, there is perhaps nothing more motivating toward faithful obedience to the Great Commission than the confidence given by the doctrines of grace. Counselors should be freed from the delusion that it is dependent upon them to produce change in those who receive their care. People cannot “squeeze” other people into the image of Christ; it is necessary neither to manipulate others toward obedience nor to despair when they resist wise and loving concern.

No one can come unless the Father draws him, and Jesus will raise him up on the last day. From beginning to end, the Triune God accomplishes salvation. Jesus is the Faithful Captain of our souls. Nothing can prevent Christ from raising his people at the end of time. No sin, no weakness, no death, no demonic forces can stay the power of his life-giving voice when he calls his own to himself.

²⁷ It will not do to drive a wedge between the “teaching” of God and the “learning” of believers (suggesting that all may be taught but only some, of their free will, *learn*). Such a division (which must be eisegetically read into the text and cannot be derived from it) would damage the connection between Jesus’ citation of Isaiah 54:13 and his commentary that precedes and follows it. “According to Jesus, the scope of ‘all’ included those who proved receptive to his teaching (6:45)...In light of the Jews’ largely negative response to his message, Jesus points out that while his ministry in fact fulfills the prophetic vision that one day—which has now arrived—all people will be taught by God, this applies only to those who are drawn by the Father, the sender of Jesus (6:44), and who subsequently come to believe in him as the Messiah. This explains Jewish unbelief in Jesus (which is the subject of further OT substantiation in 12:38-41) and at the same time affirms God’s hand upon Jesus and his mission” (Andreas J. Köstenberger, “John,” *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007], 448, 450). To expand the “all” who are taught beyond the scope of those who *learn* and *come* (so that *even the unbelieving Jews standing before Christ* are included) destroys Christ’s argument and renders his citation of Isaiah 54:13 pointless.

“Christ is not the guardian of our salvation for just one day, or even for a few days, but he will take care of our salvation to the end... So let this become fixed in our minds, that Christ has stretched out his hands to us, that he will not desert us in mid-stream, but that as we rely on his goodness we may confidently raise our eyes to the final day.”²⁸

This does not remove the responsibility of the believer to persevere in faith and repentance (v. 40). In fact, we must “work out [our] salvation with fear and trembling,” but we can accomplish this only with the confidence that “it is God who works in [us], both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12-13).

The greatest proof that we have for our assurance in Christ’s willingness and ability to save is his sacrifice on the cross. In his interaction with the unbelieving Jews, Jesus makes an amazing statement about how he will accomplish his mission. This is how Christ, the Bread of Life, satisfies our souls: “the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh” (v. 51). He has given his flesh. That is the evidence that he is both willing and able to “save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him” (Hebrews 7:25).

Doctrine for Life

The two questions that were raised in the introduction concerned whether John 6 teaches the doctrines of grace (generally speaking), and if they are asserted by this text, what difference it makes for the believer. Hopefully, it is now clear that these doctrines are, in fact, affirmed in this passage, and that they have the potential to make a *tremendous* difference in the Christian life. They should result in gratitude for God’s gracious work of salvation, awe in God’s sovereign ability to accomplish redemption, humility from the Father’s effective winning of the resistant heart, trust in Christ’s assuring promise to preserve his people to the end, confidence in

²⁸ Calvin, 162.

the Trinity's unfailing purpose to bring the elect to faith, comfort in God's providence and blessing, and obedience to the gospel call of repentance and faith for life.

All doctrine is intended to affect the Christian life in this way. It is right thinking about God that leads to appropriate *obedience to* God and corresponding *love for* God.²⁹ Ultimately, all doctrine is for worship. Sinclair Ferguson is known to begin his seminary courses by saying, "The goal of theology is the worship of God. The posture of theology is on one's knees. The mode of theology is repentance."³⁰ This is the model for all theology, including the theology commonly known as "Calvinism."

²⁹ "For if I am ignorant of the nature, extent and limits of what I can and must do with reference to God, I shall be equally ignorant and uncertain of the nature, extent and limits of what God can and will do in me—though God, in fact, works all in all. Now, if I am ignorant of God's works and power, I am ignorant of God himself; and if I do not know God, I cannot worship, praise, give thanks, or serve Him, for I do not know how much I should attribute to myself and how much to him. We need, therefore, to have in mind a clear-cut distinction between God's power and ours, and God's work and ours, if we would live a godly life" (Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. J.I. Packer and O.R. Johnson [Westwood, N.J.: Revell, 1957], 78).

³⁰ Quoted in Boice and Ryken, 179.

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