

CHOSEN, BORN AGAIN, AND BELIEVING: HOW ELECTION, REGENERATION, AND FAITH RELATE TO EACH OTHER IN THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN

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This article inductively examines what key passages in the Gospel According to John say about election, regeneration, and faith (John 1:9–13; 3:3–8; 6:36–40, 44, 63–65; 8:45–47; 10:14–16, 26–29; 12:37–40; 13:18; 15:16, 19; 17:2, 6–9, 20, 24; 20:30–31). Then it deductively synthesizes how the Gospel According to John contributes to a systematic theology of how election, regeneration, and faith relate to each other: (1) Unconditional election logically and chronologically precedes faith. Faith is not the basis of election. (2) Monergistic regeneration logically precedes and enables faith. Faith is not the basis of regeneration. (3) God’s absolute sovereignty regarding election and regeneration is compatible with human responsibility regarding faith. The article concludes with an observation, a warning, and an exhortation.

Some humans are (1) chosen by God, (2) born again, and (3) believe in Jesus:

- God the Father chooses to save some humans (John 17:6–9). That choice is *election*.
- God gives spiritual life to spiritually dead people (3:3–8). That new birth is *regeneration*, or being born again.
- Jesus gives eternal life to those who believe in him (10:28; 17:2; 20:31). That trust or dependence is *faith*.

We who affirm these glorious realities do not all agree on how election, regeneration, and faith relate to each other. We treasure the triune God and unswervingly trust the Bible as God-breathed, entirely true, and our final authority. We love God’s words, and we are eager to submit to and obey them. But we do not all agree on precisely how to define election, regeneration, and faith—and

particularly how they relate to one another. (1) Is election based on our faith that God foresees? (2) Does faith precede regeneration? (3) Is God's sovereignty regarding election and regeneration contingent on our faith?

It would take a series of books to thoroughly examine what the whole Bible says about election, regeneration, and faith. The goal of this concise article is more modest. It attempts (1) to inductively examine what key passages in the Gospel According to John say about election, regeneration, and faith; and then (2) to deductively synthesize how the Gospel According to John contributes to a systematic theology of how election, regeneration, and faith relate to each other.

What Is the Meaning of Key Passages on Election, Regeneration, and Faith in the Gospel According to John?

This section considers key passages in John's Gospel that address election, regeneration, and faith.¹

John 1:9–13

⁹ The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:9–13)²

Jesus is “the true light” (1:9; cf. 8:12). The incarnate Word discloses God to humans, who are rebelling against the Creator. By shining on everyone (1:9), Jesus divides humans into one of two groups: humans respond to Jesus either by *rejecting* him or by *receiving* him (1:10–13; cf. 3:19–21).³ To receive Jesus is to believe in his name—that is, to welcome, trust, and submit to him.

¹ For my concise perspective on John's Gospel as a whole, see D. A. Carson and Andrew David Naselli, “John,” in *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 1886–1937. I repackage some of those notes in this article. Much of those study Bible notes condense what is arguably one of the finest commentaries available: D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991). Carson's commentary builds on his Ph.D. dissertation, which he later updated for publication: see D. A. Carson, “Predestination and Responsibility: Elements of Tension-Theology in the Fourth Gospel against Jewish Background” (Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 1975); D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994).

² Scripture quotations are from the ESV, unless otherwise noted.

³ The Wesleyan view of prevenient grace is that God gives saving grace that is universal, enabling, and resistible. See David T. Fry, “Grace Enough: An Exposition and Theological Defense of the Wesleyan Concept of Prevenient Grace” (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2014), see 294–319 on John 1:9. I agree with Jim Hamilton: “In the context of John's Gospel, 1:9 does not support the notion of prevenient grace, as though by his coming Jesus has given light to everyone in the sense of somehow lifting them out of deadness in sin to have the opportunity to believe. John explains what does that in verse 13—not the coming of Jesus to give prevenient-grace-light to all, but the new birth. What separates those who receive Jesus from those who reject him is the new birth (cf. vv. 10–13).” James M. Hamilton Jr., “John,” in *John–Acts*, vol. 9 of *ESV Expository*

God gives those who receive Jesus the right to become God's adopted children (1:12).⁴ John then describes God's adopted children as those "who were born ... of God" (1:13). This suggests that they were born of God logically prior to receiving Jesus. The final sentence (1:12–13) undermines the view that faith causes the new birth. The three contrasts in 1:13 emphasize that God—not a human—causes the new birth:

1. Born of God—not "of blood" (i.e., natural descent, especially being Jewish under the old covenant).
2. Born of God—not "of the will of the flesh" (i.e., what a person wants; possibly sexual desire).
3. Born of God—not "of the will of man" (i.e., what an adult human male wants; possibly a husband's initiative in sexual intercourse).

The basis of the new birth is not who your parents are or what you desired. John Calvin soundly infers, "Faith is not produced by us but is the fruit of spiritual new birth."⁵ Even if we cannot pinpoint with certainty what the three contrasts in 1:13 refer to, the main idea is clear: *the new birth is an act of God*, not an act of a human (cf. 3:3–8). Humans are unable to cause the new birth. The birth-metaphor itself excludes that our will in any sense causes the new birth. Did your will have anything at all to do with your physical birth?⁶ "The act of regeneration," Lloyd-Jones explains, "being God's act, is something that is outside consciousness."⁷

John 3:3–8

³ Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."⁴ Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"⁵ Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not marvel that I

Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 39. See also Thomas R. Schreiner, "Does Scripture Teach Prevenient Grace in the Wesleyan Sense?" in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 229–46; William W. Combs, "Does the Bible Teach Prevenient Grace?" *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 10 (2005): 3–18.

⁴ Both John and Paul distinguish between the sonship of believers and the unique sonship of Jesus. In John's Gospel, the believer becomes God's *child*, and only Jesus is God's *Son*. Paul describes both Jesus and believers as God's *sons*, but believers are characteristically sons by adoption (cf. Rom 8:15). This builds on how the OT frequently calls Israel God's children (e.g., Deut 14:1). Cf. D. A. Carson, *Jesus the Son of God: A Christological Title Often Overlooked, Sometimes Misunderstood, and Currently Disputed* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

⁵ John Calvin, *John*, ed. Alister McGrath and J. I. Packer, Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 24. Cf. Edward W. Klink III, *John*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 105.

⁶ Cf. John Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 99.

⁷ David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Experiencing the New Birth: Studies in John 3* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 43. Contra David Allen on John 1:12–13: "The act of being 'born of God' was initiated by God and the one being 'born' is the recipient of God's act. However, one should not conclude that this excludes any participation by man." David L. Allen, "Does Regeneration Precede Faith?" *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* 11, no. 2 (2014): 39.

said to you, ‘You must be born again.’⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (John 3:3–8)

To be “born again” (3:3, 7) is to be born from above—that is, to be born of God (cf. 1:13) and thus to become a child of God (1:12). John repeatedly describes believers as those who are born of God (1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18).⁸

Two additional phrases parallel “born again”: “born of water and the Spirit” (3:5) and “born of the Spirit” (3:8). Jesus emphasizes a single Spirit-produced birth. To be “born of water and the Spirit” means to experience a new birth that cleanses and transforms.⁹ Since Jesus expects Nicodemus to understand what he means (3:7, 10), the background to the concept is previous Scripture. In the OT, water often refers to cleansing or purifying, and the most significant OT connection that brings together water and spirit is Ezekiel 36:25–27. In that passage, water cleanses from impurity, and the Spirit transforms hearts. And immediately after Ezekiel 36:22–38, God’s Spirit sovereignly gives life to dry bones (Ezek 37:1–14). Likewise, in the new birth, explains John Piper,

The Spirit unites us to Christ where there is cleansing for our sins (pictured by water), and he replaces our hard, unresponsive heart with a soft heart that treasures Jesus above all things and is being transformed by the presence of the Spirit into the kind of heart that loves to do the will of God. (Ezek. 36:27)¹⁰

The principle is that *like* generates *like* (John 3:6). In other words, humans physically produce more spiritually dead humans, but only God’s Spirit can produce spiritual life.¹¹

The effects of the wind are evident, but humans can neither control nor fully understand the wind’s invisible origin and movement (3:8a). “So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit” (3:8b). Humans can neither control nor fully understand the Spirit’s invisible origin and movement.

John 6:36–40, 44, 63–65

³⁶ “But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.”³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.
³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing

⁸ This new birth is what Paul calls “the washing of regeneration” (Titus 3:5). Peter refers to this when he praises God: “According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope” (1 Pet 1:3; see also 1 Pet 1:23).

⁹ For other interpretations and a defense of this one, see Carson, *John*, 191–96; Robert V. McCabe, “The Meaning of ‘Born of Water and the Spirit’ in John 3:5,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 4 (1999): 85–107.

¹⁰ John Piper, *Finally Alive: What Happens When We Are Born Again*, in *The Collected Works of John Piper*, ed. David Mathis and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 7:365.

¹¹ Cf. Jonathan Edwards, “Treatise on Grace,” in *Writings on the Trinity, Grace, and Faith*, ed. Sang Hyun Lee, vol. 21 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Yale Edition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 154–55.

of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.⁴⁰ 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. ...⁴⁴ No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. ...⁶³ It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.⁶⁴ But there are some of you who do not believe.” (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.)⁶⁵ And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.” (John 6:37–40, 44, 63–65)

Jesus is not surprised that some do not believe in him (6:36). Their unbelief does not mean that Jesus is failing to accomplish his mission. Rather, Jesus is confident that the Father will fully accomplish his saving purposes by enabling specific individuals to come to Jesus (6:37, 39, 44, 65). People come to Jesus because the Father previously gave them to Jesus (cf. 6:39, 65; 10:29; 17:6, 9, 24; 18:9), and Jesus will keep or preserve them (6:37–40; cf. 10:28–29).

“For” (6:38) indicates that what follows is the reason Jesus will perfectly preserve all those whom the Father has given him: Jesus came to earth to do the Father’s will—namely, not to lose a single person the Father had given him (6:39).

Those the Father has given to Jesus look to and believe in the Son (6:40). God’s sovereignty (6:37) does not mitigate human responsibility.

In 6:44, Jesus expresses the negative counterpart of 6:37a. A human cannot come to Jesus on his or her own initiative. The decisive cause of one’s coming to Jesus is the Father. The Father must enable a human to come to Jesus by *drawing* him or her. “Draws” (6:44) translates ἐλκύω, which occurs six times in the NT (italics added):

1. John 6:44a: “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me *draws* him.”
2. John 12:32: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, *will draw* all people to myself.”¹²
3. John 18:10: “Then Simon Peter, having a sword, *drew* it and struck the high priest’s servant and cut off his right ear.”
4. John 21:6: “He said to them, ‘Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.’ So they cast it, and now they were not able *to haul* it in, because of the quantity of fish.”
5. John 21:11: “So Simon Peter went aboard and *hauled* the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them. And although there were so many, the net was not torn.”
6. Acts 16:19: “But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and *dragged* them into the marketplace before the rulers.”

¹² “Lifted up” combines two notions in John’s Gospel: Jesus is physically raised up on the cross, and Jesus is gloriously exalted (cf. 3:14; 8:28, 12:34). Jesus will draw “all people” to himself in that he will draw all kinds of people. That is, Jesus will draw all people without distinction (i.e., not just Jews but also Gentiles) rather than all people without exception (see the judgment theme in 12:31; cf. 3:17; 5:22–30). It is significant that Gentiles were present on this occasion (12:20). Cf. 4:22–23, 41–42; 10:16; 11:52.

According to BDAG, the primary sense of ἐλκύω is “to move an object from one area to another in a pulling motion, *draw*, with implication that the object being moved is incapable of propelling itself or in the case of person(s) is unwilling to do so voluntarily, in either case with implication of exertion on the part of the mover.”¹³ I would qualify “unwilling to do so voluntarily” in the context of John 6 as *unwilling to do so voluntarily until God changes what you want* (cf. Jer 38:3 LXX). That is, God does not draw people to Jesus against their will, kicking and screaming; no, he draws people by changing their nature so that they *want* to come to him. Piper explains,

Irresistible grace never implies that God forces us to repent or believe or follow Jesus against our will. That would even be a contradiction in terms because believing and repenting and following are always willing, or they are hypocrisy. Irresistible grace does not drag the unwilling into the kingdom; it makes the unwilling willing. It does not work with constraint from the outside, like hooks and chains; it works with power from the inside, like new thirst and hunger and compelling desire.¹⁴

The Father draws select individuals by giving them the desire and ability to come to Jesus. Calvin explains John 6:44, “Faith is not dependent on man’s will, since it is a gift from God.”¹⁵ “When he [i.e., God] compels belief,” explains Carson, “it is not by the savage constraint of a rapist, but by the wonderful wooing of a lover.”¹⁶ And every person without exception whom the Father draws comes to Jesus because Jesus will resurrect them (6:39–40, 44). That means that the Father’s drawing is flawlessly effectual; one-hundred percent of the people he draws come to Jesus. His drawing is always successful.

In 6:63–65, Jesus reiterates 6:44. Apart from God’s Spirit, humans cannot experience eternal life (6:63; cf. 3:5–8). Unbelief does not surprise Jesus (6:64; cf. 2:23–25; 6:36). Because Jesus knew in advance that many would reject him, he explains that the Father must draw those whom he has given to the Son and enable them to believe (6:37, 44, 65).

¹³ BDAG, 318.

¹⁴ John Piper, *Five Points: Toward a Deeper Experience of God’s Grace*, in *The Collected Works of John Piper*, ed. David Mathis and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 8:568.

¹⁵ Calvin, *John*, 164. Calvin continues, “We should not be surprised if many people refuse to embrace the Gospel, since no one is ever able of himself to come to Christ unless God first comes to him by his Spirit. So it follows from this that not everyone is drawn, but that God gives this grace to those whom he has elected. This is not the kind of drawing that is violent, as if it were compelling men through external force. However, it is a powerful impulse of the Holy Spirit which enables men to be willing to follow Christ, men who had been unwilling and reluctant previously. Therefore, it is a false and ungodly assertion that nobody is drawn unless they are prepared to be drawn, as if a person could make himself obey God through his own efforts. Men’s willingness to follow God has already been given to them by God, who made their hearts to obey him.”

¹⁶ Carson, *John*, 293. Similarly, Luther explains, “When God draws us, He is not like a hangman, who drags a thief up the ladder to the gallows; but He allures and coaxes us in a friendly fashion, as a kind man attracts people by his amiability and cordiality, and everyone willingly goes to him. Thus God, too, gently draws people to Himself, so that they abide with Him willingly and happily.” Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 6–8*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Luther’s Works 23 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 86.

John 8:45–47

⁴⁵ But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. ⁴⁶ Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? ⁴⁷ Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.” (John 8:45–47)

Jesus does not say, “*Although* I tell the truth, you do not believe me.” He says, “*Because*” (8:45). The fundamental reason a human does not believe in Jesus is that he or she is “not of God” (8:47).¹⁷ Every human is either “of God” or “not of God” (8:47)—that is, one either belongs to God as his sheep or not (10:27); one is either chosen by God or not (15:19). Being “of God” explains why a person believes in Jesus. Consequently, a human who believes in Jesus does not have any grounds to boast.

John 10:14–16, 26–29

¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ... ²⁶ But you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. (John 10:14–16, 26–29)

Jesus uses a Palestinian sheep-farming metaphor (10:1–5) and expands three features: the gate (10:7–10), the shepherd (10:11–18), and the shepherd’s own sheep (10:26–30). In contrast to a hired hand who cares more about protecting himself than protecting the sheep (10:12–13), Jesus is “the good shepherd” (10:11, 14). Jesus and his sheep experientially know each other (10:3–4, 14, 16, 27). The “other sheep” Jesus has (10:16) are those outside the sheep pen of Judaism—that is, Samaritans and Gentiles (cf. 11:51–52; Isa 56:8; Rev 5:9). The one people of God are part of “one flock” (cf. Eph 2:11–22).

This remarkable sentence is jarring: “But you do not believe because you are not among my sheep” (10:26). Spurgeon remarks, “Some divines [i.e., theologians] would like to read that—‘Ye are not my sheep, because ye do not believe.’ As if believing made us the sheep of Christ; but the text puts it—‘Ye believe not because ye are not of my sheep.’”¹⁸

In the sheep-farming metaphor, a human does not become a sheep in Jesus’s flock by believing in Jesus. Rather, a human believes in Jesus *because* he or she is from God’s perspective already a sheep; that is why Jesus earlier says, “I have other

¹⁷ Murray J. Harris, *John*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2015), 179. Contra Hans Förster, “Die Syntaktische Funktion von ‘Or’ in Joh 8.47,” *NTS* 62 (2016): 157–66.

¹⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, *Faith: What It Is, and What It Leads To* (London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1903), 21.

sheep” (10:16)—sheep who have not yet believed in him.¹⁹ From God’s perspective, every human is either among Jesus’s sheep or not, and no human ever changes the status from not being a sheep to being a sheep. God considers a human to be a sheep even before he or she believes in Jesus. Being among Jesus’s sheep explains why a person believes in Jesus, and not being among Jesus’s sheep explains why a person does not believe in Jesus (10:26). Not being among Jesus’s sheep does not reduce one’s moral responsibility to believe.

Jesus gives each of his sheep “eternal life” (10:28)—that is, resurrection life of the age to come that believers experience in some measure now (cf. 17:3). Consequently, Jesus’s sheep “will never perish” in eternal judgment (10:28). Jesus powerfully keeps his sheep from harm (10:28; cf. 10:11). Their security rests with the good shepherd, who faithfully fulfills his mission to preserve everyone the Father has given to him (6:37–40). Therefore, no force or person can sever the relation between the true believer and Jesus (10:29). There is no greater security (cf. Col 3:3).

John 12:37–40

³⁷ Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, ³⁸ so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

“Lord, who has believed what he heard from us,
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”

³⁹ Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said,

⁴⁰ “He has blinded their eyes
and hardened their heart,
lest they see with their eyes,
and understand with their heart, and turn,
and I would heal them.” (John 12:37–40)

Jesus reveals the nature and inevitability of unbelief. Whether a person believes in Jesus ultimately depends on whether God enables a person to believe. Even though Jesus’s audience saw him do many signs, “they still did not believe in him” (12:37). This is similar to what Moses told Israel after they saw signs and great wonders: “To this day the LORD has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear” (Deut 29:4).

“So that” (John 12:38) indicates that the God-designed purpose that some Jews did not believe in Jesus is to fulfill Scripture—specifically, Isa 53:1 (John 12:38b) and Isa 6:10 (John 12:40). “For this reason [διὰ τοῦτο] they could not believe” (12:39 NIV).²⁰

The Isaiah 6:10 quotation in John 12:40 is startling. God has blinded the eyes and hardened the hearts of specific individuals for the explicit purpose that they not see and not understand so that they will not repent and experience God’s saving work. In his infinite wisdom, the just and merciful God judicially hardens some individuals and graciously saves others (cf. Rom 9:14–24). In Isa 6, God commissions Isaiah, who knows that his preaching will evoke and, in some sense, *cause* a negative

¹⁹ Cf. J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 598.

²⁰ Cf. Todd Scacewater, “The Predictive Nature of Typology in John 12:37–43,” *WTJ* 75 (2013): 129–43.

response; in that sense God hardens their hearts (see John 8:45). John's Gospel affirms both God's sovereignty (12:38–40) and human responsibility (12:37).

John 13:18

I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, "He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me." (John 13:18)

John has repeatedly warned about the treachery of someone within the ranks of the Twelve (6:70–71; 12:4; 13:2, 10–11). In 13:18–30, Jesus predicts that Judas will betray him.

There is a sense in which Jesus chose Judas, and a sense in which Jesus did not choose Judas. On the one hand, Jesus chose his twelve disciples in the sense that he selected all twelve to follow him (6:70). On the other hand, Jesus savingly chose (cf. 15:16, 19) eleven of the disciples and did not savingly choose Judas. The first sentence of 13:18 indicates that Jesus did not savingly choose all twelve of his disciples: "I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen." That is why the Father drew eleven of the disciples, but did not draw Judas (6:64–65, 70–71).²¹

This fulfills Scripture—a concept Jesus repeats in 17:12: "Not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, *that the Scripture might be fulfilled*." The Scripture passage Jesus quotes in John 13:18 is David speaking in Ps 41:9. Jesus fulfills that passage by repeating David's experience at a deeper, climactic level in the history of salvation.²²

John 15:16, 19

¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. ... ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. (John 15:16, 19)

²¹ Jesus's metaphor of the vine and branches in John 15 illustrates that Judas was only superficially connected to Jesus. Every unfruitful branch connected to the vine ("in me," 15:2) is removed, thrown away, dried up, gathered, cast into the fire, and burned (15:6). Unfruitful branches show that they are only superficially connected to the vine. As Jesus spoke those words to his eleven disciples, Judas was showing that he was only superficially connected to Jesus (13:1–2, 10–11). Judas betrayed Jesus. In contrast to Judas (13:10–11), the eleven disciples were fruitful and clean (15:3). Judas represents spurious believers who are only superficially connected to Jesus, and the eleven disciples represent genuine believers who are vitally connected to Jesus. See Andrew David Naselli, *No Quick Fix: Where Higher Life Theology Came From, What It Is, and Why It's Harmful* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2017), 69–76.

²² Because of passages like 2 Sam 7:12–16 and Ps 2, David became a type or model of his greater Son, the promised Messiah. This does not mean that everything that happened to David must find its echo in Jesus, but the NT understands many of the broad themes of his life that way (cf. Ps 16:8–11 in Acts 2:24–28; Ps 45:6–7 in Heb 1:8–9), especially those that focus on his suffering, weakness, betrayal by friends, and discouragement (e.g., Ps 22 in the passion narratives). On typology, see Jason S. DeRouchie, Oren R. Martin, and Andrew David Naselli, *40 Questions about Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2020), 81–88.

The opening line of Jesus speaking to his disciples puts it starkly: “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (15:16a). Believers enjoy privileges—such as being the friend of Jesus! (15:14–15)—not because they are wiser or better than others, but ultimately because Jesus selected them and set them apart.²³ Jesus chose specific individuals out of the world (15:19).

John 17:2, 6–9, 20, 24

² since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ... ⁶ I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷ Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. ⁸ For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹ I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. ... ²⁰ I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word ²⁴ Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. (John 17:2, 6–9, 20, 24)

In Jesus’s prayer, he repeatedly refers to a group of specific individuals whom the Father has given to him (17:2, 6, 9, 12, 24; cf. 6:37–39, 44). He prays only for present and future believers—not for the world.

John 20:30–31

³⁰ Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; ³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30–31)

This passage encapsulates the theological message of John’s Gospel: *Jesus the Messiah and Son of God gives eternal life to everyone who believes in him*. This Gospel emphasizes *believing* in Jesus.²⁴ The verb *believe* occurs an astounding 98 times! No wonder that some people refer to this book as “the Gospel of belief.”²⁵ Most of the passages that mention *believing* emphasize human responsibility. Here are eight examples:

- 3:15–16, 18: “that whoever *believes* in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever *believes* in him should not perish but have eternal life. ... Whoever *believes* in him is not

²³ Cf. Charles Simeon, *John XIII to Acts*, Horæ Homileticæ, 14 (London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1833), 75–78.

²⁴ Faith is part of conversion. To state it as an equation, *conversion* = *repentance* + *faith*. On repentance in John, see John MacArthur, *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 81–82; David A. Croteau, “Repentance Found? The Concept of Repentance in the Fourth Gospel,” *TMSJ* 24 (2013): 97–123.

²⁵ E.g., Merrill C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief: An Analytic Study of the Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976).

condemned, but whoever *does not believe* is condemned already, because *he has not believed* in the name of the only Son of God.”

- 3:36: “Whoever *believes* in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”
- 5:24: “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and *believes* him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”
- 5:38–40: “and you do not have his word abiding in you, for *you do not believe* the one whom he has sent. You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet *you refuse to come to me* that you may have life.”
- 6:35: “I am the bread of life; whoever *comes* to me shall not hunger, and whoever *believes* in me shall never thirst.”
- 8:24: “I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you *believe* that I am he you will die in your sins.”
- 12:46: “I have come into the world as light, so that whoever *believes* in me may not remain in darkness.”
- 20:29: “Have you *believed* because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have *believed*.”

How Does the Gospel According to John Contribute to a Systematic Theology of How Election, Regeneration, and Faith Relate to Each Other?

The above passages help us answer three questions:

1. Is election based on our faith that God foresees?
2. Does faith logically precede regeneration?
3. Is God’s sovereignty regarding election and regeneration contingent on our faith?

Unconditional Election Logically and Chronologically Precedes Faith: Faith Is Not the Basis of Election

Grant Osborne, an Arminian exegete, explains, “Arminian theology accepts the doctrine of predestination but asserts that it occurs on the basis of foreknowledge (Rom 8:29; 1 Pet 1:2)—that is, God knew beforehand who would respond to the Spirit’s convicting power via faith-decision, and he chose them.”²⁶ But the Gospel According to John never says that our faith is the basis of election. Such a view is based on a presupposition that the text does not state. To the contrary, the text repeatedly emphasizes that election is God’s sovereign choice.

²⁶ Grant R. Osborne, “The Gospel of John,” in *The Gospel of John and 1–3 John*, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2007), 97. See also H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology*, 3 vols. (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1940), 2:334–78.

- People come to Jesus because the Father previously gave them to the Son (6:39, 65; 10:29; 17:6, 9, 24; 18:9). Robert Peterson rightly infers from the logic of John 6, “Election precedes faith and results in faith. For this reason, it is incorrect to maintain that election is based on God’s foreseeing people’s faith.”²⁷ Bruce Ware rightly infers from the logic of John 17, “The unconditional election of the Father, then, accounts for the subsequent faith and salvation of those to whom the Son grants eternal life.”²⁸
- A human does not have the ability to come to Jesus on his or her own initiative (6:44, 63–65). The decisive cause of one’s coming to Jesus is the Father’s drawing him or her (6:44). Carson argues, “The combination of [John 6] v. 37a and v. 44 prove that this ‘drawing’ activity of the Father cannot be reduced to what theologians sometimes call ‘prevenient grace’ dispensed to every individual, for this ‘drawing’ is selective, or else the negative note in v. 44 is meaningless.”²⁹
- The fundamental reason a human does not believe in Jesus is that he or she is “not of God” (8:47).
- The Father has given specific individuals to Jesus as his sheep. The rest are not his sheep. Every human is either among Jesus’s sheep or not. The fundamental reason a human does not believe is that he or she is not one of Jesus’s sheep: “You do not believe because you are not among my sheep” (10:26). When a human first believes in Jesus, he or she does not experience a transformational status change from *not a sheep* to *a sheep*. To the contrary, a human believes in Jesus *because* he or she is already a sheep—that is, someone whom the Father previously gave to the Son.
- The fundamental reason a human does not believe in Jesus is that God has blinded and hardened his or her eyes and heart. Whether a person believes in Jesus ultimately depends on whether God enables a person to believe (12:37–40).
- One cannot say, “I knew a good deal when I saw one because I am smarter than the average guy. That’s why God chose me.” To the contrary, Jesus says, “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (15:16a).³⁰ That humbling logic is similar to 1 John 4:19: “We love because he first loved us.” As Leon Morris observes while explaining John 6:37, “People do not come to Christ because it seems a good idea to them. It never does seem a good idea to sinful people.”³¹

The nature of election is unconditional—that is, what we do is not a precondition of election. The basis of election is what God chooses to do—not our faith that he foresees.³²

²⁷ Robert A. Peterson, *Election and Free Will: God’s Gracious Choice and Our Responsibility*, Explorations in Biblical Theology (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 61.

²⁸ Bruce A. Ware, “Divine Election to Salvation: Unconditional, Individual, and Infralapsarian,” in *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*, ed. Chad Owen Brand (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2006), 7.

²⁹ Carson, *John*, 293.

³⁰ Cf. D. A. Carson, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus: An Exposition of John 14–17* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1980), 107.

³¹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 2nd ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 325.

³² Cf. Robert W. Yarbrough, “Divine Election in the Gospel of John,” in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 47–62.

Monergistic Regeneration Logically Precedes and Enables Faith:
Faith Is Not the Basis of Regeneration

Regeneration is an act of God. Those who believe in Jesus “were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:13). Only God’s Spirit can produce spiritual life (3:3–8; 6:63). When God causes a human to be born again (cf. 1 Pet 1:3), he changes that person’s nature so that he or she willingly comes to Christ; the Father effectually persuades or “draws” each person he has given to the Son (John 6:39–40, 44, 65). “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all” (6:63).

What the Gospel According to John teaches about regeneration affirms *monergism* (i.e., God alone causes a human to be born again), not *synergism* (i.e., being born again is a joint effort between God and a human).³³ The physical corpse of Lazarus illustrates the spiritual state of a human prior to God’s causing him or her to be born again. Lazarus’s corpse was lying lifeless in a tomb until the moment Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out” (11:43). Jesus alone raised Lazarus (which illustrates monergism), and then Lazarus responded after Jesus enabled him to do so. The raising of Lazarus was not a joint effort between Jesus and Lazarus (which would illustrate synergism). The raising of Lazarus was entirely one-sided. Similarly, the effectual call and regeneration are monergistic. (The effectual call is the means of regeneration.³⁴)

If regeneration is monergistic, then it follows that from God’s perspective (logically or *theologically*) regeneration precedes and enables faith.³⁵ Mark Snoeberger captures the logic of John 1:13 in a syllogism (Figure 1).

³³ An Arminian theologian calls this “a main issue between Calvinism and Arminianism”: “It is the historic issue of monergism and synergism. The latter, with its full meaning of conditionality in forgiveness and salvation, is ever the unyielding and unwavering position of Arminianism.” John Miley, *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1893), 2:122–23.

³⁴ Cf. Jonathan Hoglund, *Called by Triune Grace: Divine Rhetoric and the Effectual Call*, Studies in Christian Doctrine and Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 6, 124–25.

³⁵ A minority Calvinist view sees the logical order as illumination, then faith, then regeneration. In other words, this view affirms that a life-giving work of the Spirit logically precedes faith but labels that work illumination instead of regeneration. The best case for this view that I am aware of is this three-part series: R. Bruce Compton, “The *Ordo Salutis* and Monergism: The Case for Faith Preceding Regeneration, Part 1,” *BSac* 175 (2018): 34–49; R. Bruce Compton, “The *Ordo Salutis* and Monergism: The Case for Faith Preceding Regeneration, Part 2,” *BSac* 175 (2018): 159–73; R. Bruce Compton, “The *Ordo Salutis* and Monergism: The Case for Faith Preceding Regeneration, Part 3,” *BSac* 175 (2018): 284–303. I do not find this view exegetically or theologically persuasive. For example, in Compton’s discussion on John 1:12–13, he argues, “Nothing inherent in the expressions [in 1:13] themselves highlights the inability of the human will in regeneration. They are simply compounded to emphasize the contrast between human procreation and being born of God.” Compton, “The *Ordo Salutis* and Monergism: Part 2,” 163. That manner of arguing seems to misread the point of the text and is as persuasive to me as Arminians who argue that John 10:28–29 still allows for a believer to reject his or her salvation and apostatize since Jesus does not specify that it is impossible for a believer to remove himself or herself from Jesus’s hand or the Father’s hand.

Figure 1. *The Logic of John 1:13*³⁶

A: No act of the human will can inaugurate regeneration.
B: Faith is an act of human will.
∴ C: Faith cannot inaugurate regeneration.

From our perspective, however, regeneration and faith seem to be chronologically simultaneous. In other words, we do not discern a time gap between the moment that (1) God instantaneously imparts spiritual life to a spiritually dead human and (2) a human first believes in Jesus. Though we perceive that we experience regeneration and faith simultaneously, that does not mean that regeneration and faith must be simultaneous from God’s perspective. There is a logical order in which one enables and causes the other—see Figure 2.

Figure 2. *Analogies for How Regeneration Enables and Causes Faith*

Regeneration: God regenerates a human.	Faith: A human believes in Jesus.
Turn on a water faucet.	Water runs out of the faucet. ³⁷
Flip a toggle switch in a dark room.	Light fills the room (cf. 2 Cor 4:6; 1 Pet 2:9).
Jesus commands, “Lazarus, come out” (John 11:43b).	“The man who had died came out” (John 11:44a).
A mother gives birth to an infant.	The infant breathes. ³⁸

All of the analogies in Figure 2 illustrate that regeneration is both passive and instantaneous. The actions are *passive* in that the first action happens to another item; the item does not perform the first action—that is, water does not turn on the faucet; light does not flip the toggle switch; Lazarus does command his corpse to come out of the tomb; and an infant does not decide to be conceived and born.³⁹ Regeneration is what God does to us; it is not something we do. The actions are *instantaneous* in that they appear to occur simultaneously. There is not a noticeable time-delay between flipping a toggle switch and light filling a room.⁴⁰

³⁶ This figure is from Mark A. Snoeberger, “The Logical Priority of Regeneration to Saving Faith in a Theological *Ordo Salutis*,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 7 (2002): 80.

³⁷ Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 107.

³⁸ Cf. Piper, *Finally Alive*, 7:354n1: “We will not make any significant distinction between the imagery of conception and the imagery of birth. Even pre-scientific, first-century people knew that children were alive and kicking before birth. But the biblical writers did not press the details of gestation in discussing the new birth. In general, when they (and we) speak of the new birth, we are speaking more broadly of new life coming into being whether one thinks of the point of conception or the point of birth.”

³⁹ Cf. John Piper: “Faith is our act, but it is possible because of God’s act. Repentance and faith are our work. But we will not repent and believe unless God does his work to overcome our hard and rebellious hearts. This divine work is called *regeneration*. Our work is called *conversion*. Conversion does indeed include an act of will by which we renounce sin and submit ourselves to the authority of Christ and put our hope and trust in him. We are responsible to do this and will be condemned if we don’t. But just as clearly, the Bible teaches that, owing to our hard heart and willful blindness and spiritual insensitivity, we cannot do this.” John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, in *The Collected Works of John Piper*, ed. David Mathis and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 2:67.

⁴⁰ Contra some Reformed theologians who assert that there may be a time gap between when God regenerates an infant and when conversion (i.e., initial repentance and faith) occurs. Peter van Mastricht

But some of the analogies in Figure 2 are imperfect because they do not exactly parallel how regeneration and faith relate. For example, a water faucet and toggle switch are impersonal items, not personal agents. The most helpful aspect of the analogies is how they illustrate that one action enables and causes another. The first action is logically prior to the second action. Thus, I agree with how Matthew Barrett defines regeneration:

Regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit to unite the elect sinner to Christ by breathing new life into that dead and depraved sinner so as to raise him from spiritual death to spiritual life, removing his heart of stone and giving him a heart of flesh, so that he is washed, born from above and now able to repent and trust in Christ as a new creation. Moreover, regeneration is the act of God alone and therefore it is monergistic in nature, accomplished by the sovereign act of the Spirit apart from and unconditioned upon man's will to believe. In short, man's faith does not cause regeneration but regeneration causes man's faith.⁴¹

When God regenerates a human, he creates a believer.⁴² We may still have questions about exactly why and how regeneration works the way it does. Ultimately, analyzing regeneration is like analyzing the wind. The wind evidences itself only by what it affects (John 3:8).

God's Absolute Sovereignty Regarding Election and Regeneration Is Compatible with Human Responsibility Regarding Faith

Jesus explains, "You do not believe because you are not among my sheep" (10:26). On the one hand, being a sheep depends solely on God's sovereign choice. On the other hand, you are responsible to believe, so you are culpable if you do not believe.

Jesus demands, "You must be born again" (3:7). On the one hand, being born again is solely a work of God. On the other hand, you are responsible to be born again, so you are culpable if you are not born again.

On the one hand, God's sovereignty regarding election and regeneration is absolute; it is not contingent on our faith. On the other hand, humans are morally responsible to believe in Jesus; we are culpable if we do not believe in Jesus.⁴³

Both of those sentences are true at the same time without contradicting each other. God is absolutely sovereign to choose to save individuals and regenerate them, and humans are morally responsible and thus culpable without being puppets or robots. What John's Gospel teaches about election, regeneration, and faith fits with

refers to "seminal faith, which belongs through regeneration even to infants"—that is, "God works faith, first, in regeneration, whereby he confers the seed of faith, that by it we may be able to believe at the proper time, once all things needed are supplied." Peter van Mastricht, *Faith in the Triune God*, vol. 2 in *Theoretical and Practical Theology*, ed. Joel R. Beeke, trans. Todd M. Rester (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2019), 7, 14.

⁴¹ Matthew Barrett, *Salvation by Grace: The Case for Effectual Calling and Regeneration* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 127.

⁴² Cf. Sproul: "God intervenes in the hearts of the elect and changes the disposition of their soul. He creates faith in faithless hearts." R. C. Sproul, *Everyone's a Theologian: An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2014), 228.

⁴³ See Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*, 163–98.

the position that modern philosophy calls *compatibilism*. That is, God's sovereignty and human responsibility are compatible; they can exist together without conflicting. They do not break the law of noncontradiction.⁴⁴

The many passages in John's Gospel that emphasize human responsibility⁴⁵ do not cancel out or contradict the passages that emphasize God's sovereignty. Both are true. If we sense a problem, then the problem is not with the God-breathed text but with our finite and fallen minds. Some concepts are too difficult for us to fully understand. There is a tension for us—a mystery.⁴⁶ Carson observes how this is the case, for example, regarding Judas (and Caiaphas in 11:49–52):

Divine ultimacy even behind evil actions is presupposed. But divine ultimacy operates in some mysterious way so that human responsibility is in no way mitigated, while the divine being is in no way tarnished. In particular, Judas is responsible even when Satan is using him; but over both stands the sovereignty of God.⁴⁷

The Gospel According to John presents this tension without a hint that it is philosophically perplexing. MacArthur rightly asserts,

A full understanding of exactly how those two realities, human responsibility and divine sovereignty, work together lies beyond human comprehension; but there is no difficulty with them in the infinite mind of God. Significantly, the Bible does not attempt to harmonize them, nor does it apologize for the logical tension between them.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Here is how Carson put it: "Divine sovereignty in salvation is a major theme in the Fourth Gospel. Moreover, the form of it in these verses [i.e., 6:38–40], that there exists a group of people who have been given by the Father to the Son, and that this group will inevitably come to the Son and be preserved by him, not only recurs in this chapter (v. 65) and perhaps in 10:29, but is strikingly central to the Lord's prayer in ch. 17 (vv. 1, 6, 9, 24; cf. Carson, pp. 186ff.). John is not embarrassed by this theme, because unlike many contemporary philosophers and theologians, he does not think that human responsibility is thereby mitigated. Thus, he can speak with equal ease of those who look to the Son and believe in him: this they must do, if they are to enjoy eternal life. But this responsibility to exercise faith does not, for the Evangelist, make God contingent. In short, John is quite happy with the position that modern philosophy calls 'compatibilism.'" Carson, *John*, 291. Cf. Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters: The Word, the Christ, the Son of God*, Biblical Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 458–64.

⁴⁵ See the sampling of passages under the "John 20:30–31" heading above.

⁴⁶ Sproul helpfully distinguishes three terms: (1) "The logical law of contradiction says that a thing cannot be what it is and not be what it is at the same time and in the same relationship." (2) "A paradox is an apparent contradiction that upon closer scrutiny can be resolved." (3) A mystery is "that which is true but which we do not understand." Sproul continues, "No one understands a contradiction because contradictions are intrinsically unintelligible. ... Mysteries are capable of being understood. The New Testament reveals to us things that were concealed and not understood in Old Testament times. There are things that once were mysterious to us that are now understood. This does not mean that everything that is presently a mystery to us will one day be made clear, but that many current mysteries will be unraveled for us. ... Christianity has plenty of room for mysteries. It has no room for contradictions." R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1986), 43–47.

⁴⁷ Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*, 132.

⁴⁸ John MacArthur, *John 1–11*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 2006), 442.

Conclusion

After inductively examining what key passages in the Gospel According to John say about election, regeneration, and faith, I deductively synthesized how the Gospel According to John contributes to a systematic theology of how election, regeneration, and faith relate to each other:

1. Unconditional election logically and chronologically precedes faith. Faith is not the basis of election.
2. Monergistic regeneration logically precedes and enables faith. Faith is not the basis of regeneration.
3. God's absolute sovereignty regarding election and regeneration is compatible with human responsibility regarding faith.

I conclude with (1) an observation, (2) a warning, and (3) an exhortation.

Concluding Observation. While some Christians profess to disagree that God sovereignly saves specific individuals in this way, it is noteworthy that Christians seem to universally affirm God's sovereignty in salvation in (1) how they thank God for their own conversion and (2) how they ask God to save specific unbelievers. J. I. Packer highlights this at the beginning of his masterful little book *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*:

[I am not] going to spend time proving to you the particular truth that *God is sovereign in salvation*. For that, too, you believe already. Two facts show this. In the first place, you give God thanks for your conversion. Now why do you do that? Because you know in your heart that God was entirely responsible for it. You did not save yourself; He saved you. Your thanksgiving is itself an acknowledgment that your conversion was not your own work, but His work. ...

As you look back, you take to yourself the blame for your past blindness and indifference and obstinacy and evasiveness in face of the gospel message; but you do not pat yourself on the back for having been at length mastered by the insistent Christ. You would never dream of dividing the credit for your salvation between God and yourself. You have never for one moment supposed that the decisive contribution to your salvation was yours and not God's. ...

There is a second way in which you acknowledge that God is sovereign in salvation. You pray for the conversion of others. In what terms, now, do you intercede for them? Do you limit yourself to asking that God will bring them to a point where they can save themselves, independently of Him? I do not think you do. I think that what you do is pray in categorical terms that God will, quite simply and decisively, save them: that He will open the eyes of their understanding, soften their hard hearts, renew their natures, and move their wills to receive the Saviour. You ask God to work in them everything necessary for their salvation. You would not dream of making it a point in your prayer that you are not asking God actually to bring them to faith, because you recognize that that is something He cannot do. Nothing of the sort! When you pray for unconverted people, you do so on the assumption that it is in God's power to bring them to faith. You entreat Him to do that very thing, and your confidence

in asking rests upon the certainty that He is able to do what you ask. And so indeed He is: this conviction, which animates your intercessions, is God's own truth, written on your heart by the Holy Spirit.⁴⁹

Concluding Warning. Some Christians (including me) love the above truths about God's sovereignty in election, regeneration, and faith. We should love any truth that God reveals, so in no way do I want to be a wet blanket over embers of praise. But since in some circles "Calvinists" have a poor reputation, here is a friendly warning. Greg Dutcher wisely cautions us about eight ways we might wrongly respond to such glorious truths about God's sovereignty:

1. By loving Calvinism as an end in itself
2. By becoming a theologian instead of a disciple
3. By loving God's sovereignty more than God himself
4. By losing an urgency in evangelism
5. By learning only from other Calvinists
6. By tidying up the Bible's "loose ends"
7. By being an arrogant know-it-all
8. By scoffing at the hang-ups others have with Calvinism⁵⁰

Concluding Exhortation. In his sermons D. A. Carson often recounts a story about someone asking George Whitefield, "Why do you go around preaching, 'You must be born again' all the time? You go someplace, and all you say is, 'You must be born again.' Why do you keep emphasizing that?" Whitefield answered, "Because you *must* be born again!"

We might feel a tension between God's sovereignty (i.e., God causes a human to be born again) and human responsibility (i.e., a human is morally responsible to be born again). Jesus does not attempt to resolve the tension: "You must be born again" (John 3:7b).

When Jesus says to Nicodemus, "You must be born again" (3:7), the word "You" is plural. What Jesus demands here applies to all humans, not just Nicodemus. It applies to *you* (singular): *You* must be born again.

⁴⁹ J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1961), 12–15.

⁵⁰ Greg Dutcher, *Killing Calvinism: How to Destroy a Perfectly Good Theology from the Inside* (Adelphi, MD: Cruciform, 2012).