

A Plea to Stop Fighting Over “Calvinism”

I am increasingly frustrated, discouraged, and saddened by the heated arguments, personal attacks, and divisions surrounding “Calvinism.” The exchanges between “Calvinists” and “non-Calvinists” seem to be intensifying, often playing out on social media in full view of a watching world. Sadly, this issue has even caused church splits, with each side claiming greater faithfulness to Scripture. In some cases, I’ve seen people on both sides question whether those who hold the opposing view are truly Christians.

I once recommended an R.C. Sproul book to a brother in Christ. His immediate response was, “Isn’t he a Calvinist?” It didn’t matter that perhaps only 15% of the book touched on the topic; the other 85% offered solid biblical teaching on other subjects.

My purpose in this short document is to plead with both sides to end the vitriolic back-and-forth—especially in public—and to embrace a better way of approaching all of Scripture without avoiding sections that seem to favor “the other side.” I have no expectation of transforming the broader Christian world or displacing either Calvin or Arminius. I’m simply seeking greater balance in my own teaching and writing—and hoping it may help even a few people in my circle of family, friends, churches, blog readers, and social media followers. If it brings peace or clarity to even a handful of believers, I will be deeply grateful.

Let me pose a potentially provocative question: Does much of this conflict stem from oversimplifying and over-summarizing systematic theology? Systematic theology is valuable—we naturally organize, categorize, and outline what we learn. But when “Calvinism” is reduced to the five-point acronym TULIP, it can give the impression that God’s ways are neatly packaged and fully comprehensible to the human mind in just a few lessons. They aren’t. God’s thoughts are higher than ours; His ways are not our ways. No acronym can confine or fully delineate the mind of God.

I’ve heard some “anti-Calvinists” claim the doctrine teaches that God arbitrarily chooses some people over others with no regard for human choice—something I’ve never heard any thoughtful Calvinist affirm. Likewise, I’ve heard “pro-Calvinists” accuse Arminians of denying God’s sovereignty or the effects of the Fall—charges I’ve rarely, if ever, seen actual Arminians make. Too often, each side highlights a handful of favorite verses while ignoring or caricaturing the rest.

A friend recently wrote, “I do not like ‘TULIP’—as if the mind of God can be defined, delineated, and confined.” He’s right. Who can know the mind of the Lord or become His counselor?

Here is my primary request as I close this introduction: Let’s stop using the label “Calvinism” altogether—whether to describe our own position or to characterize someone else’s. The term has become so loaded and pejorative that it often shuts down discussion before it begins. One tragic consequence is that pastors sometimes avoid passages that the “other side” emphasizes, fearing they’ll be labeled. As a result, their congregations miss parts of the whole counsel of God. This needs to change.

Let me suggest a better path forward—one I’m striving to follow in my own teaching. The Bible itself maintains a beautiful, Spirit-inspired balance. It does not present doctrine like a systematic theology textbook, with election isolated in one chapter, free will in another, and atonement in a third. My conviction is that we should preach and teach Scripture the way it is written. The Bible frequently places seemingly paradoxical truths side by side without always resolving them for us. When we rush to harmonize apparent contradictions using extra-biblical explanations or categories, we risk adding to God’s Word rather than letting it speak on its own terms.

Expository preaching—working steadily through entire books of the Bible—helps guard against this tendency. It compels us to proclaim every facet of God’s character and ways as they appear in the text, without skipping or over-systematizing, or for that matter, oversimplifying.

The Scriptures present all of the following truths together: whoever wills may come; God predestines; God loves the world; God sovereignly calls and elects. These realities coexist in God’s revelation, even when they strain our finite understanding. Rather than forcing premature resolution, we should teach what each passage actually says—without fear of the label—and allow the tensions to remain where Scripture leaves them.

With that in mind, let’s examine key biblical themes, beginning with...

I. Whosoever will

Based on the following passages, I believe we should teach that God loves the world and offers salvation to all as a gift and did not send His son to condemn it. God doesn’t want anyone to perish but wants them to come to repentance. Whoever wants to come is welcome and should come. Whoever calls on the Lord has God’s promise that he will be saved! We should explain the gospel of God’s substitutionary death on the cross and invite people to believe that gospel and trust Christ. We should let them know that if they believe in Him, they will be eternally saved. We should tell them: “If you’re hungry and thirsty for the life God gives, Come!” “Is there any greater Good News? Come!” People should be encouraged to come and should understand the consequences of rejecting God’s gracious offer. God does not want people to perish, and He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that whoever believes on him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

“For if by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.)” (Romans 5:17)

“Say to them: ‘As I live,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?’” (Ezekiel 33:11,)

“For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Timothy 2:3–4)

“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9)

Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved (Romans 10:13).

The Spirit and the Bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price (Revelation 22:17).

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls (Matt 11:28-29).

Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David (Isaiah 55:1-3).

II. Repentance and Believing

Based on the following scriptures, I believe we should teach that repentance and believing (trusting in, receiving) is the only requirement for salvation. A person must believe what God has said and trust Jesus Christ alone for salvation. He must believe the testimony God has given concerning His Son. God commands all people to repent and believe the Gospel. Tell them that if they do so, they have God's promise of forgiveness and eternal life. No works are required. Just belief. Whoever believes is born of God and won't abide in darkness. When Jesus was asked what work God requires, He replied, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent" John 6:29.

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life" (John 5:24)

And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. (John 6:35)

And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:40).

So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31).

"He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:18).

"He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36).

"To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins." (Acts 10:43)

"And by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:39).

"That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved". (Romans 10:9-10).

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

"I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness" (John 12:46).

"Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." (1 John 5:1)

“And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.” (1 John 3:23)

“And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” (Hebrews 11:6)

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel. (Mark 1:15)

“Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,” (Acts 17:30)

“He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His son” (1 John 5:10).

III. Jesus’s Death

From the following verses, I believe we should teach that Jesus was the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and that in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself and is not counting their trespasses against them. These things are true because God loved the world and gave His son not to condemn it but to save it. Every one of us has gone astray and gone our own way, yet God laid all our iniquities on Him.

None of this is contradictory to the fact that believing is means whereby a person enters into these promises of God. This in turn is consistent with the idea that people are responsible for what they willingly desire to do.

He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2).

“That is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:19).

“God so loved the world that whosoever believes in Him would not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

“All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6).

“For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world” (John 6:33, 51).

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45)

[Christ Jesus] who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. (1 Tim 2:6)

IV. The Fall

Based on the following passages we should teach that no one is good. No one seeks God. The human heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Every imagination of the thoughts of our hearts is only evil continually. All kinds of evil things flow from our hearts. We naturally are enslaved to sin and cannot direct our own steps or please God. Without Jesus we can’t do anything and can’t come to God unless granted and drawn by the Father. There is a natural hostility to God and His ways. All of this is evident from the time we’re born.

“The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” (Genesis 6:5, emphasis mine)

“Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.” (Ecclesiastes 7:20)

“As it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.’” (Romans 3:10–12)

“Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.” (Romans 3:19)

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So, they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.” (Romans 1:18–23 emphasis mine)

“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—(For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.” (Romans 5:12–14)

[In the above passage, Paul is saying that sin was not imputed to the people who lived before the law. In other words, their sin was not put on their record. Yet, they still died. The reason they died was that the sin and corruption of Adam was imputed to the entire human race. We all face the consequences of that one sin.]

“Remember that you were at that time [before you came to Christ] separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” (Ephesians 2:12)

“And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt, for all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.” (Genesis 6:12)

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” (Romans 3:23)

“For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.’” (Galatians 3:10 emphasis mine)

“The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth, speaking lies.” (Psalm 58:3)

“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” (Psalm 51:5)

“But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away.” (2 Corinthians 3:14)

“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 them because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Corinthians 2:14)

“But I know that you do not have the love of God within you.” (John 5:42)

“Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word.” (John 8:43)

“They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.” (Ephesians 4:18)

“For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,” (2 Timothy 3:2–4)

“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.” And he said, “Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.” (John 6:44, 65)

“Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.” (John 8:34)

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me [Jesus] you can do nothing.” (John 15:4–5)

“For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” (Romans 8:7–8)

“And he said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person. (Mark 7:20–23)

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9)

“O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.” (Jeremiah 10:23)

Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil. (Jeremiah 13:23)

V. The New Birth is Necessary

From passages like the following, I think we should teach that in order to see the kingdom of God we must be born again. I would relate this to the previous point that we are naturally evil and desire to walk in our own ways. As Jesus told Nicodemus, the new birth is a spiritual birth by the moving of the Spirit of God in ways which, similar to the wind, can’t be explained or predicted. The new birth is from an incorruptible seed, the Word of God. A person who has been born again is a new creature with new motivations and goals. And it fulfills God’s promise under the new covenant to provide us with a new heart, new spirit, new motivations and the promise of God that He would cause us to walk in His ways. And from John 1;12-13 we learn that it is not a physical birth, nor is it of the will of man, but of God. It is the conviction of the Holy Spirit and the creating power of God to command light to shine out of darkness that produces this new birth.

“Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” 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?” Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.” Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?” Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?” (John 3:3–10)

“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a **new heart** and put **a new spirit** within you; I will **take the heart of stone out** of your flesh and **give you a heart of flesh**. I will **put My Spirit** within you and **cause you to walk in My statutes**, and **you will keep My judgments and do them**.” (Ezekiel 36:25–27, Emphasis mine)

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” (John 1:12–13 Emphasis mine)

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,” (1 Peter 1:3)

“...having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever,” (1 Peter 1:23)

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:17–18)

“But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus’ sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 4:3–6)

“And when He [The Holy Spirit] has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:” (John 16:8)

VI. God Calls

From the following passages we learn and should teach that God is calling out a people for Himself. God calls out of an everlasting love and His calling is irrevocable. He is calling us out of darkness into His marvelous light. He calls us by the gospel into the fellowship of His Son. Apparently not all are called because not many are called from the wise or among those of noble birth. He calls those whom He foreknew and predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. Those He calls He also justifies and glorifies. All of this fits in and is totally consistent with all that has already been discussed in the previous sections, namely that God loves the world and does not want any to perish. Add that to the Bible’s clear teaching that everyone is invited and whoever wills to do so may come and will not be rejected or cast out.

“Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, “ ‘After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of

David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things” (Acts 15:14–17)

“For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.” (1 Corinthians 1:26)

“For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God will call. (Acts 2:39, Emphasis mine)

“The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: “Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, with lovingkindness I have drawn you.” (Jeremiah 31:3)

“For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.” (Romans 11:29)

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.” (Romans 8:28–30, emphasis mine)

“For many are called, but few are chosen.” (Matthew 22:14).

“Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.” (2 Timothy 1:9, emphasis mine).

“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” (1 Peter 2:9 emphasis mine).

“But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.” (1 Peter 5:10)

“But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood.” (Galatians 1:15-16 Emphasis mine).

“But we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:23–24)

“Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ;” (Romans 1:5–6)

“...that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?” (Romans 9:23–24)

“God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” (1 Corinthians 1:9)

“But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches.” (1 Corinthians 7:17)

But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2Thessalonians 2:13-14 Emphasis mine). Consider the calling of Abraham, Samuel, Gideon, Paul, and many others. Study these situations to gain an understanding of how God's call works.

VII. Human Will

What should we learn and teach from passages like the following? First, there is no partiality with God. God challenges us to choose between following Him or following some other god or goal. People choose to do evil. Many are not willing to come to Christ for life, but God begs us to choose life. We also learn that it is God who works in us both the willing and the doing, and those who are born again are not born of the will of man, but of God. God holds us responsible for our decisions and asks us to choose wisely. There are eternal consequences for not using our will to choose wisely.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! (Matt 23:37)

And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. (Josh 24:15)

“tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God.” (Romans 2:9–11)

“Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD,” (Proverbs 1:29)

It is God who works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure. (Philippians 2:13 emphasis mine).

[Speaking of salvation and mercy, Paul writes] *So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. (Romans 9:16)*

[Speaking of the new birth, John writes] *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right (authority) to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:12-13).*

But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life. (John 5:40)

“I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live;” (Deuteronomy 30:19)

Knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts. (2 Peter 3:3)

There would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. (Jude 1:18)

VIII. Foreknowledge

What should we learn and teach from passages such as the following? God declares the end from the beginning and tells us that it His counsel that will stand. He knows what would have happened if certain conditions had been met. He tells us that our election was according to the foreknowledge of God. God's foreknowledge carries with it the concept of certainty: Jesus was handed over according to the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God. It is clear that what happened to Jesus was determined ahead of time and yet was the

result of the decisions of multiple people who were working according to their own sinful motives and individual will and were guilty and were held accountable for those decisions. How that all works, we do not know.

“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.” (1 Peter 1:2)

“Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure.’” (Isaiah 46:10)

“Him, [Jesus], being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death.” (Acts 2:23)

“Known to God from eternity are all His works.” (Acts 15:18)

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.” (Romans 8:28–30, emphasis mine)

And then there’s this example of contingent foreknowledge. God knows what will happen if...

Then David said, “O LORD God of Israel, Your servant has certainly heard that Saul seeks to come to Keilah to destroy the city for my sake. Will the men of Keilah deliver me into his hand? Will Saul come down, as Your servant has heard? O LORD God of Israel, I pray, tell Your servant.”

And the LORD said, “He will come down.”

Then David said, “Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul?”

And the LORD said, “They will deliver you.”

So, David and his men, about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah and went wherever they could go. Then it was told Saul that David had escaped from Keilah; so he halted the expedition. (1 Samuel 23:10-13)

IX. God’s Sovereignty

From passages such as the following we should learn and teach that God is sovereign over everything. God’s plans and counsel are what stands. Over and over in these passages you read that God is somehow sovereign even over the wicked decisions of people, and yet the Bible teaches that those decisions were the personal acts of the people involved and were held accountable for them. These are things our minds can’t comprehend. We need to believe them by faith. God has specific intentions for His Word as it goes out and everything He intends will be accomplished.

“In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will,” (Ephesians 1:11)

“The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD.” (Proverbs 16:33)

“The counsel of the LORD stands forever, The plans of His heart to all generations.” (Psalm 33:11)

“A man’s heart plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps.” (Proverbs 16:9)

“A man’s steps are of the LORD; How then can a man understand his own way?” (Proverbs 20:24)

“The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, Like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.” (Proverbs 21:1)

“The LORD of hosts has sworn, saying, “Surely, as I have thought, so it shall come to pass, And as I have purposed, so it shall stand.” (Isaiah 14:24)

“And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings,” (Acts 17:26)

“If a trumpet is blown in a city, will not the people be afraid? If there is calamity in a city, will not the LORD have done it?” (Amos 3:6)

“The LORD has made all for Himself, Yes, even the wicked for the day of doom.” (Proverbs 16:4)

Joseph to his brothers: *“So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.” (Genesis 45:8)*

“But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.” (Genesis 50:20)

“Who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways.” (Acts 14:16)

And God said to him in a dream, *“Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart. For I also withheld you from sinning against Me; therefore, I did not let you touch her.” (Genesis 20:6)*

“Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,’ Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man who executes My counsel, from a far country. Indeed, I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it.” (Isaiah 46:10–11)

“For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that He might utterly destroy them, and that they might receive no mercy, but that He might destroy them, as the LORD had commanded Moses.” (Joshua 11:20)

“God sent a spirit of ill will between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech,” (Judges 9:23)

“So the king did not listen to the people; for the turn of events was from the LORD, that He might fulfill His word, which the LORD had spoken by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat.” (1 Kings 12:15)

“He increased His people greatly and made them stronger than their enemies. He turned their heart to hate His people, To deal craftily with His servants.” (Psalm 105:24–25)

“Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death;” (Acts 2:23)

“The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.” (Matthew 26:24)

“For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.” (Acts 4:27–28)

“So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11).

X. Predestination

From passages such as these I believe we should teach that predestination is the act of God whereby he determines a specific goal for a person such as adoption into God’s family, being conformed to the image of Christ, and having an inheritance as Christians. I don’t know of a passage that speaks of predestination with respect to salvation. God predestined Jesus to be executed on a Roman cross at a specific time in history. Even though God predestined the event, those involved in the trial and execution were each responsible for their own specific role in the incident. They did what they did because they wanted to for whatever reason, and yet in doing so, they accomplished the plan and will of God for Jesus’s death on the cross in that particular year.

“Having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.” (Ephesians 1:5)

“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.” (Romans 8:29-30)

“In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will” (Ephesians 1:11)

He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world but was manifest in these last times for you. (1 Peter 1:20)

XI. Election

From passages such as these we should teach that there is an elect people of God. The Father has “a people” and He has given them to His Son, and both Father and Son will hold them so that no one plucks them out of their hands. These people are chosen, known, and loved by God from before the foundation of the world. Since this is an election of grace, we know that there is no partiality and no merit in the individual for God to prefer one over another. Since everyone has been condemned, there are no innocent people overlooked. This election is according to the foreknowledge of God, in the setting-apart of the Holy Spirit, for obedience and the sprinkling of the blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:1-2). Both Jeremiah and Paul are said to have been known and set apart by God before they were born. Jesus manifests his word and prays especially for those God has given Him, and they will never perish. Since this seems to be the most controversial aspect of all of the ongoing debate, it needs to be pointed out that all of the preceding points in this document are also true. The acceptance of what the Bible says about election and the elect does not change the fact that anyone who believes on Christ will be saved and whoever wants to follow Christ can do so if they want to.

“All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.”
(John 6:37)

“I have manifested Your name to the men whom you have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. (John 17:5-6)

“Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled” (John 17:12).

“I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word” (John 17:9,20).

“I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand (John 10:14, 27-29).

“And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd. But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep” (John 10:16,26 emphasis mine).

“The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt. (Acts 13:17)

“Blessed is the man You choose, And cause to approach You, That he may dwell in Your courts. We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Your house, Of Your holy temple.” (Psalm 65:4)

“Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace’ (Romans 11:5).

“But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Thessalonians 2:13–14)

“Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.” (Acts 13:48)

“Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering;” (Colossians 3:12)

“Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God’s elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness,” (Titus 1:1)

“... knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God.” (1 Thessalonians 1:4)

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.” (1 Peter 1:1–2)

“... just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,” (Ephesians 1:4)

“Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine.” (Romans 16:13)

“What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded.”
(Romans 11:7)

“Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble;” (2 Peter 1:10)

“She who is in Babylon, elect together with you, greets you; and so does Mark my son.” (1 Peter 5:13)

“For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.” (Matthew 24:24)

“And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” (Matthew 24:31)

“(for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls),” (Romans 9:11)

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations. (Jeremiah 1:5)

Paul’s testimony in Galatians: *“But when it pleased God,(on the road to Damascus) who separated me from my mother’s womb (many years earlier) and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me (on the road), that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood,”* (Galatians 1:15–16, Emphasis Mine)

You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.” (John 15:16).

XII. God’s involvement in salvation

From passages such as the following, I believe we should teach that salvation is of the Lord. God draws, grants them to come, opens their hearts, opens eyes, commands light to shine in the darkness of our hearts, convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgment, and reveals Christ to people. God loves, draws, quickens, opens eyes and hearts, calls, convicts, and reveals Christ to people.

“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.”
(John 6:44)

“And He said, “Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.” (John 6:65)

“Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.” (Acts 16:14)

“Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight.” (Luke 24:31)

“For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 4:6)

“And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:” (John 16:8)

“All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.” (Matthew 11:27, emphasis mine.)

“But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood,” (Galatians 1:15–16, emphasis added).

XIII. We need to remind ourselves that there is no partiality with God.

“For there is no partiality with God.” (Romans 2:11)

“For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe.” (Deuteronomy 10:17)

“And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.” (Ephesians 6:9)

“But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.” (Colossians 3:25)

Every one of the passages in each section supports the teaching and preaching of the truths contained in those passages. We should avoid advocating for one portion of scripture over and against another so as to make the other passages false. When we can’t figure out how to make seemingly contradictory passages mesh with each other, we should let the tension lie there in the same way the Bible does. God doesn’t explain everything to us. Let’s be content with that and stop the infighting. Let’s just rejoice and bask in the truth that God loved the world enough to send Jesus to save all who will believe.

*I am putting “Calvinism” in quotes because it is a label that is used to separate Christians and to summarize the broad teaching attributed to one man into a five-letter acronym. I am going to try to limit my use of the term in this document.