QUESTIONS FOR NON-CALVINIST SBC PASTOR SEARCH COMMITTEES

If your congregation is historically non-Calvinist in doctrine -- this document is designed to help your committee find a new pastor or staff member in changing times.
Questions for Non-Calvinist SBC Pastor Search Committees

CONNECT 316 – GOD LOVES EVERY PERSON!

Statement of Purpose: This document is designed to help non-Calvinist SBC Pastor Search Committees interview and call a non-Calvinist pastor or staff member to serve their congregation. It is not designed to identify Calvinistic pastors or staff members currently serving in Southern Baptist congregations. With the growth of new Calvinism within the SBC, this paper serves as a tool to meet a need that many non-Calvinist congregations have requested.

Dear SBC Pastor Search Committee Member:

Most non-Calvinist Pastor Search Committee members have not studied reformed theology or Calvinism. Therefore, they are sometimes not theologically astute enough to ask potential candidates hard questions; nor are they always perceptive enough to detect any deception or double-talk on the part of the candidate.

Most of the time the Pastor Search Committee member will say to the candidate, “We do not want a Calvinist as a pastor, so tell us, are you a Calvinist? Some Calvinists have been trained to ask, “Tell me, what do you mean by a … Calvinist?” Then the committee member makes a very general response. The candidate says, “If that is a Calvinist, then no, I’m not a Calvinist.” The committee then assumes the candidate is not a Calvinist and returns to other kinds of questions.

What is Calvinism?

The following statement seeks to reduce Calvinistic beliefs down to what may be called: Calvinism in a nutshell:

Calvinism could be described as God the Father unconditionally choosing some individuals (the elect) for salvation; He did this in eternity, before creation and apart from foreseen faith.

Jesus the Son of God died for them only, the elect. He did not die for the non-elect or all sinners -- for His electing love (sovereign grace) is focused only on His chosen ones. Some Calvinists believe Jesus died for the sins of all people. These Calvinists reject “Limited Atonement,” the “L” in the T.U.L.I.P acrostic (more on this later).

The elect receive the secret or effectual call to salvation. God in eternity chose to “pass over” the non-elect, called also “reprobates.”

God the Holy Spirit works to make Christ’s death effective by bringing the elect (only those chosen before creation) to Christ, thereby, causing them to obey the gospel.
He first regenerates the hearts of the elect in order for them to believe the gospel, as they are given the gift of faith. In Calvinistic doctrine, they usually see regeneration preceding faith logically and/or chronologically.

Sinners are seen as being dead as a corpse (totally incapable of responding to God), therefore, God is seen as having to bring about the new birth (regeneration) in order for the person to then believe. This entire process of (predestination, election, regeneration, salvation) is the work of God sovereignly determining who will be the recipients of his salvation and ensuring salvation for those he chose before the foundation of the world.

Most non-Calvinists believe that Jesus died (shed his blood) for the sins of all mankind (the world) and any sinner can be saved as the Holy Spirit brings conviction of sins and the sinner trusts (believes) in Jesus as Lord and Savior. Traditional Baptists believe that God genuinely desires all people be saved and has made a bona fide offer of salvation to any and all who will accept Him through repentance and faith.

I hope you can see the difference in basic beliefs concerning salvation.

Another way Calvinists teach their belief system is by means of an acrostic: T.U.L.I.P.

Here is a very simple lesson on the meaning of each letter of the “TULIP” found in The Moody Handbook of Theology by Dr. Paul Enns (p.508).

**Total Depravity** – As a result of Adam’s fall, the entire human race is affected; all humanity is dead in trespasses and sin. Man is unable to save himself. (I would add that most Calvinists see this as total inability; man, is dead as a corpse).

**Unconditional Election** – Because man is dead in sin, he is unable to initiate response to God; therefore, in eternity past, God elected certain people to salvation. Election and predestination are unconditional; they are not based on man’s response.

**Limited Atonement** – Because God determined that certain ones should be saved as a result of God’s unconditional election, He determined that Christ should die for the elect. All whom God has elected and Christ died for will be saved.

**Irresistible Grace** – Those whom God elected and Christ died for, God draws to Himself through irresistible grace. God makes man willing to come to Him. When God calls, man responds.

**Perseverance of the Saints** – The precise ones God has elected and drawn to Himself through the Holy Spirit will persevere in faith. None whom God has elected will be lost; they are eternally secure.

**The Pastoral Candidate Dialogue**

Once the committee has narrowed the field of candidates to a very small number of top candidates, the committee will need to talk or communicate with each candidate in a two-step process. The first step gives Calvinist pastors the option of dropping out of your search process.
**Step one: Screening**

This step seeks to let the candidate know right up front that your church is seriously searching for a non-Calvinist pastor.

This step can be done through a letter or by asking the questions in a phone conversation. Here is a suggested letter or dialogue:

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Dear Pastoral Candidate,

Thank you for your recent letter and resume to our church.

You are aware that Dr. Frank Page of our SBC Executive Committee appointed a group to study the theological “tension” in our convention. They brought back a report entitled: **Truth, Trust, and Testimony in a Time of Tension** (A Statement from the Calvinism Advisory Committee).

This following statement was within the report:

> In order to prevent the rising incidence of theological conflict in the churches, we should expect all candidates for ministry positions in the local church to be fully candid and forthcoming about all matters of faith and doctrine, even as we call upon pulpit and staff search committees to be fully candid and forthcoming about their congregation and its expectations.

We wish to be very clear that we are a non-Calvinist SBC church and are seeking to call a non-Calvinist pastor. You could help us greatly by answering the following questions.

**Questions**

1. If a pastor search committee member asks you about your theology are you prepared to be completely open and without nuanced answers that might confuse us as laypeople?

2. If you became the top candidate of our pastor search committee of our traditionally non-Calvinist church would you sign a statement that you are “not” a Calvinist – could you sign such a statement?

3. Have you ever been forced terminated from a Church over any moral or theological issue?

Please know that your answers will be held in the confidence of our pastor search committee.
Step Two: The Interview Questions

Purpose: To discern Calvinist beliefs in potential pastors, interim pastors, or staff members during the interview.

Statement to Potential Pastor: Our church could be described as a traditional Southern Baptist Church in our doctrine and structure. We believe the Bible is the Word of God and hold that the Baptist Faith and Message represents our basic historic Baptist beliefs. We are not a Church that adheres to Calvinist or Reformed Theology. We ordain deacons, not elders. We do not want to call a pastor that preaches and teaches the five points of Calvinism. So, after some study in that belief system, we have several questions:

1. Have you studied reformed theology or Calvinism? Did your studies change your theology? If so, how?

2. How would you describe your overall theology concerning the doctrine of salvation? (He could say: Arminian, Calvinist [or one-point Calvinist or two-point Calvinist, etc.], Biblicist, Evangelical, Baptist, Historic Southern Baptist, Traditional Southern Baptist, etc.)

3. Who are some of the theologians, pastors, professors, or authors that have shaped your theology?

4. Would you believe more in the total depravity of man (that sin has corrupted every part of man but a person can hear and respond to the gospel) or in the total inability of man (that people are dead in sin and cannot respond to the gospel until they have been regenerated)? The extreme Calvinist believes that regeneration precedes faith (logically if not chronologically). Traditional Baptists believe that the sinner repents and believes in order to be regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

5. Do you believe that God in His sovereignty determined from the beginning who will be saved and who will be damned? (Deals with Unconditional Election)

6. How does your theology fit together the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man?

7. Has God made man a free moral agent with a free will to respond to God in faith or reject God in unbelief?

8. Do you believe that a person can hear the gospel, and become convicted of their sin by the Holy Spirit and, by their own free will, repent and receive Jesus as Savior? (John 3:17)

9. Are all people savable due to Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection?

10. What is your approach to public invitations and altar calls?

11. Do you believe that Jesus died for only the elect, or do you believe Jesus bore the sins of all people? (I Tim. 4:10; I Tim 2:4-6; II Peter 3:9; I John 2:2)
12. Do you believe that a person can receive or reject Christ, or do you believe in an irresistible grace?

13. Can you share with us a recent witnessing encounter where you personally shared the gospel with a lost person, they heard the gospel, and they repented and received Jesus as their Savior?

14. If called by this church to be our pastor, what are some evangelistic programs or events that you would seek to utilize to win the lost in our community?

Closing question (optional) – Would you sign a personal belief statement (if called as our Pastor) stating that you do not currently hold to a Calvinist theology? Would you also agree that if you ever adopt such theology while serving as our pastor, you would make your new views known to the staff and deacons? Would you agree that in such a case you would make every effort to transition to a new place of service that is compatible with your new beliefs?

Belief Statement and Pastor’s Pledge

I, ____________________________, state that my theological beliefs and practices are in accord with __________________________ Baptist Church. I wish to state that I do not hold to a reformed or Calvinist doctrine and the Pastor Search Committee has questioned me comprehensively in this area of concern.

With integrity of heart, I have heard the statements of the Pastor Search Committee and can say with certainty that if my theology ever changes to a Calvinist doctrine, I will share with the Staff and Deacons my new beliefs and work with them in transitioning me and my family to a new place of ministry that is more in line with my new theological stance.

Signed by Pastor: ____________________________

Date: __________/________/________

Signed by Chair of Pastor Search committee:

____________________________________

Date: __________/________/________

Signed by Chairman of Deacons:

____________________________________

Date: __________/________/________

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