

4th Edition

# Questions and Answers for Pastor Search Committees of Non-Calvinist Congregations

[This document seeks to help SBC Laypeople understand the contemporary rise of Calvinism in the Southern Baptist Convention]

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## **Dear Pastor Search Committee Chairman and Member:**

This paper is written to help your committee avoid confusion over the issue of Calvinism as you search for a new pastor or staff member. Although there is a minority of Calvinists within the Southern Baptist Convention, the vast majority of our churches and people are not Calvinistic. There are two kinds of Calvinists in the Southern Baptist Convention. Some are Calvinists with a little “c” in that they have no agenda to “convert” others to Calvinism. Others are Calvinists with a capital “C” and possess an agenda to turn the Southern Baptist Convention toward Calvinism.

Calvinism shows up in varying shades, stages, and degrees. Many Calvinists are five-point Calvinists, adhering to the five historic tenets of Calvinism expressed in the TULIP acrostic (see below). Some Calvinists are “four-point” Calvinists in that they reject “limited atonement” and believe that Jesus died for the sins of all people.

My concern is the kind of Calvinist that has the crusader mentality of reforming our convention, one church at a time. While the study of reformed theology (Calvinism) is intriguing and exciting, especially to a young seminarian, it usually gets him into trouble at the local church level. Essentially, he is bringing aspects of a Presbyterian theology into a Baptist Church.

Today, we have Calvinists in our convention that rightly reject infant baptism and other parts of Presbyterianism, but yet have adopted the Five Points of Calvinism or some gradation of reformed theology. When they come into a church that is not Calvinistic, friction develops that often leads to church division and even to churches splitting over the issue.

Many of the capital “C” Calvinists in our convention find fault with the SBC. Some Calvinists have started their own networks (churches of like mind) while giving just enough Cooperative Program funds to the SBC to remain a voting member of the SBC each year at the annual convention in June.

Southern Baptists have never had a man (pastor, theologian, president, teacher, etc.) that we have looked to as our founder and expositor of truth. The Lutherans have Luther. The Presbyterians have Calvin. The Methodists have Wesley. The Church of Christ congregations have Campbell. Southern Baptists have always looked to Jesus. We usually ask: Does this doctrine agree with what Jesus taught and with God’s Word?

**Allow me to share a few things John Calvin taught; these writings are found in his most famous work, *The Institutes*.**

**(3:21:5)** “By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestined to life or death.”

**(3:21:7)** We say, then, that Scripture clearly proves this much, that God by his eternal and immutable counsel determined once for all those whom it was his pleasure one day to admit to salvation, and those whom, on the other hand, it was his pleasure to doom to destruction. We maintain that this counsel, as regards the elect, is founded on his free mercy, without respect to human worth, while those whom he dooms to destruction are excluded from access to life by just and blameless but at the same time, incomprehensible, judgment.”

It is clear from his writings that John Calvin taught there were a chosen few whom God predestinated to become His children. He taught that all others were created or predestined to go to hell (damnation).

Calvin believed that God decreed this before the foundation of the world. Some call this detestable teaching the doctrine of double predestination.

Calvin's teaching on the eternal "divine decree" is not found in the Bible. He devised this philosophical concept from the writings of Augustine. His logic knew that not all would be saved. Calvin logically constructed the idea that if God determines everything, then God must have willed or decreed this damnation of the lost from the foundation of the world. His teachings seek to support this premise.

Below you will read a brief summation of the five points of Calvinism. The five points of Calvinism were not written by Calvin; he died in 1564 and the five points of Calvinism [doctrines of grace] were published in 1619, by the Synod of Dort. The five points serve as a summation of the differences between Calvinism and Arminianism and not as a summation of Calvin's theological writings. Those that go beyond Calvin's theology could be called: Extreme Calvinists.

**The five historic tenets of Calvinism are represented by the acronym T-U-L-I-P.**

Very briefly they are:

**T = Total Depravity.** Sin has corrupted every part of man. He is a sinner by birth, by choice, and by practice. Many Calvinist actually teach Total Inability. They teach that man had/has no free will in the matter of salvation and that salvation was predetermined by a sovereign God who determines all things. In other words, man has no ability to respond to God in and of himself.

Quoting the explanation of Total Depravity from a Calvinist blog called the Calvinist Corner, the author says, "The Calvinist asks the question, 'In light of the scriptures that declare man's true nature as being utterly lost and incapable, how is it possible for anyone to choose or desire God?' The answer is, 'He cannot. Therefore God must predestine.'"

The strong Calvinist sees man as incapable of responding to God and if he could it would thwart God's will and deny God the glory he is due.

James Montgomery Boice and Philip G. Ryken in their book entitled: The Doctrines of Grace share their point of view [p.30], "In our unregenerate state, we do not have free will so far as "believing on" or "receiving" Jesus Christ as Savior is concerned. In fact, such is our slavery to sin that we cannot understand our need of Christ until God first gives us spiritual understanding. Even faith must come as a gift, because prior to the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit our depravity renders us impotent to cooperate with God's saving grace."

The Bible teaches the sovereignty of Almighty God and the responsibility of man to repent, believe, turn, trust ... yet the extreme Calvinist focuses too much on the sovereignty of God, while the extreme Arminian focuses too much on the responsibility (free will) of man. Correct doctrine requires a healthy understanding of their great truths.

**U = Unconditional Election.** God, before the foundation of the world, by divine decree, chose certain persons unconditionally, according to his own desire and mercy. He choose them not according to their merit, nor according to his knowledge of how each would respond to him, but rather, according to his own mysterious divine plan. Some Calvinists believe that God "looked over" those not chosen, while others believe in a double predestination, that is, God predetermines those who go to both heaven and hell.

**L= Limited Atonement.** Christ died for the sins of the elect only; those God unconditionally chose to save. Christ did not die for the sins of the non-elect and they are not savable because Christ did not die for their sins.

Boice and Ryken share in their book on [p.31] ...“What Reformed people want to say about these words is that the atonement had a specific object in view, namely, the salvation of those whom the Father had given the Son before the foundation of the world, and that it was effective in saving those persons. Thus it would be better to call this doctrine definite atonement, or particular redemption.”

Theologians David L. Allen and Norman Geisler both contend that John Calvin did not believe in Limited Atonement [particular redemption] but held a form of Universal Redemption [Christ died for all]. Dr. Allen’s research indicates that Limited Atonement became a doctrinal position of Calvinists among the second and third generations of the reformers, but not held by Luther and Calvin or many of the early reformers.<sup>1</sup>

**I =Irresistible Grace.** God draws the Elect to regeneration by issuing an inward call only to the elect and inevitably draws them to faith in Christ. The unregenerate person cannot respond in and of himself through repentance and faith. The elect are drawn irresistibly to salvation.

**P= Perseverance of the Saints.** Calvinists believe that all the elect will persevere in their faith by not falling from grace and they will be in heaven for all eternity. Many Southern Baptists would agree with this doctrine, especially if we are talking about the security of the Believer!

**Calvinism in a nutshell** ... could be described as God the Father choosing a people (a certain number of persons before creation), Jesus the Son of God died for them (them alone, the elect- not the whole world), and 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 (drawing or dragging them) to obey the gospel. This entire process of (predestination, election, regeneration, salvation) is the work of God determining who will be the recipients of his salvation or ensuring salvation for those he chose before the foundation of the world.

**The rest of this paper is aimed at guarding your church from the type of Calvinist who comes with an agenda.** Their agenda is to reform your church and they know if this is to be successful, they must walk a tight rope with words and not fully reveal their theological beliefs and certain new changes that will happen if they are called to the church as pastor or staff member.

They understand that the vast majority of SBC Churches are not Calvinistic in doctrine. This is the crux of the matter. Some Calvinists choose to be deceptive by carefully crafting their answers and statements. They know if they are openly honest about their theology the conversation about employment will be over in most Southern Baptist Churches.

The Reformers in the SBC have worked very hard in their strategy. They want to reform our convention – one church at a time, one local association at a time, and one state convention at a time. This strategy is being employed and in some places it is working. The leaders of this movement are brilliant, focused, excellent communicators, and winsome in generating networks of young men and women who are passionate about their new theology.

Blessings, Ron F. Hale

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<sup>1</sup> David L. Allen, *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, Broadman and Holman Academic, 2010, p. 77

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

**Statement to Potential Pastor (s):** 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 the five points of Calvinism? Did your studies change your theology in any way? Would you call yourself a Calvinist?
2. How would you describe your overall theology concerning the doctrine of salvation? (He could say: Arminian, Calvinist, 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 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**; 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.)
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 men 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: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

### Theological Differences between Traditional Southern Baptists and Extreme Calvinists

**Major Concern:** Extreme Calvinists deny that Jesus Christ died for all people and some deny that God desires all men to be saved!

**Concerning the Sovereignty of God and Predestination** -- Traditional Southern Baptists and Calvinists agree that God is sovereign. Traditional Baptists hold to a belief that God exercises His sovereignty in which those created in His image have the God-given gift and capacity to make real spiritual and moral choices. Man has this freedom because God initially gave it to him; therefore, God takes the initiative in all His acts, even in salvation.

Traditional Baptists believe our sovereign God has chosen to provide for forgiveness and salvation through Jesus Christ and it is for all who will accept His offer of grace through repentance and faith. Extreme Calvinists believe that God has decided in advance to save particular people and to damn the non-elect. In other words, extreme Calvinists believe that only those God predestines to be saved will be saved.

Some extreme Calvinists translate John 3:16 as, "For God so loved the **elect**, that he gave His only begotten Son..."

Traditional Baptists believe Election is God's initiative in salvation and God has an eternal plan for mankind. God has always sought the sinner. He sent Jesus to make salvation possible and through various spiritual agencies (the Word of God, preaching, the work of the Holy Spirit, the work of the Church, the gifts of the Spirit.), He calls (draws) men to salvation.

**Concerning God's Knowledge** – Traditional Baptists believe in an all knowing God, but they are not determinists because they do not believe God has planned everything that happens. Through His eternal foreknowledge, He knows what is going to happen, but He doesn't override man's free will.

**Concerning Freedom** – Traditional Baptists believe in a creator God that made man in His image and they are free moral agents. The consistent Biblical appeal for man to repent, believe, and receive presumes the fact that man must make a choice. Paul said, "Knowing therefore the fear of the Lord, we persuade men" (II Cor. 5:11). If man were not free to make moral decisions, then why would Paul seek to persuade? Paul said concerning Israel, "Brethren, my heart's desire and my supplication to God is for them, that they may be saved" (Rom. 10:1). Why would Paul submit himself to continual travel, danger, and suffering, if their destiny was already fixed before the foundation of the world?

**Concerning Sin** – Traditional Baptists believe we are made in God's image and all have sinned and fall short of God's glory. Mankind is totally depraved due to sin; every area of our life has been corrupted by sin.

Extreme Calvinists believe in man's total inability to see, hear, and respond to the truth. They believe that a person has to be regenerated (born again) before they can even believe. They believe a spiritually dead man can't hear or see or respond to God.

Traditional Baptists believe while we were dead in our sins, we are still able to hear, understand, and respond to the gospel by repenting of our sins and trusting Jesus as Lord and Savior. Traditional Baptists believe saving faith comes by hearing God's Word as the Holy Spirit brings conviction of sin and convincing the lost person of their need for receiving God's gift of salvation through Jesus Christ.

**Concerning Grace** – Traditional Baptists believe in a Holy God that freely offers His grace and salvation to all people as they hear the good news and through the work of the Holy Spirit they either accept God's offer or reject it. Extreme Calvinists believe that an irresistible grace brings salvation only to the elect. Traditional Baptists believe God's Word teaches that God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34) and salvation is a gift that Jesus purchased and freely offers this gift to all who will receive it.

Traditional Baptists believe in a God that is love and this motivates His desire for the maximum number of souls to be saved (II Pet. 3:9).

**Free Choice and the Responsibility of Man** – Extreme Calvinists believe that God's irresistible grace works on the unwilling to make them willing. If this were true, then what about man's responsibility?

Not having free choice denies mankind's responsibility before a holy God. There is no responsibility without the ability to respond.

Traditional Baptists believe that each person is accountable to God for their thoughts, attitudes, and actions; we are responsible to our Creator.

Last, not believing in man's free will makes God responsible for those who go to hell. If God only chooses some and if His son died for only a few and His Holy Spirit doesn't work on anyone else to bring them to a point of conviction and conversion, then you have to say that God only wants some to go to heaven. Therefore, God is responsible for sending people to hell. Traditional Baptists believe we either receive or reject God's offer. Those who reject the light and love they are shown ... choose damnation for themselves. The ground is level at the foot of the cross!

### **Reformed Red Flags in the SBC**

This section deals more with "behavior" than believing. Things to look for:

- Lack of passion in the use of public invitations and altar calls for the lost to repent and receive Jesus as Lord and Savior, or no gospel invitation is extended.
- Lack of salvation sermons or evangelistic preaching.
- Use of the ESV Study Bible. The ESV is a good translation; the Study Bible has many notes that promote reformed theology.
- Lack of participation with other churches in evangelistic campaigns in their city, county, or region.
- Adding other belief statements or confessions to what their church believes, such as: 1<sup>st</sup> London Baptist Confession (1644), 2<sup>nd</sup> London Baptist Confession (1689), New Hampshire Confession, and Abstract of Principles.
- Moving the SBC church away from Single pastor leaders and toward Elder leadership or rule.
- Focused on creating the "true" church.
- Strict Church discipline is used to grow the church down to the "true" church. Most SBC congregations can use a dose of church discipline; however, what is the true motive? Is it to help the straying Christian or to legalistically bring about the "true" church?
- Sometimes a member of the Founders Movement and/or listed as a "Founders Friendly" church on their website.
- Look for the men they quote in their sermons. Do they mainly quote Calvinists such as John Piper, R.C. Sproul, James R. White, C. J. Mahaney, Mark Driscoll, John MacArthur, and Wayne Grudem, etc. ?
- They will call other Calvinists to join them on their church staff as they attempt to reform the church. Sometimes it may be the Youth Pastor employing a strategy of reforming the church and without the blessing and understanding of the Pastor.



- They will methodically employ a strategy of “converting” members to the so called “Doctrines of Grace” or “Reformed Doctrine.” As the circle enlarges, the movement grows bolder within the fellowship.
- Tendency toward a highly logical systematic theology where all the questions about life and God have answers and fit neatly and nicely in a theological box. Look for words and terms that are new to Southern Baptists: The Five Solas, catechisms, Doctrines of Grace, reformed doctrine, the study of Puritans and their writings, etc.
- They love to write and blog about their reformed theology and can form a theological swarm on the internet “blogging” against anyone who speaks or writes against their reformed theology.
- Tendency to use their pastoral authority against any member that questions their reformed theology or their direction.
- Tendency to be evasive about their theology during the pastor search process. They will say things like: “I believe and preach the historic doctrines of Southern Baptists just like many of the great Baptist preachers of the past.” Many laymen will be satisfied in hearing the statement, “I believe and preach the Bible.” Without more intense questioning, the committee will not be fulfilling the sacred duty their church entrusted to them.

## Closing Statement

Ernest C. Reisinger and D. Matthew Allen wrote a book entitled: **A Quiet Revolution**. Their book outlines their beginning strategy of reforming the SBC one church at a time. Under their “Instructions for Local Church Reformation,” the writers give the following advice to pastors with an agenda of reforming a local SBC congregation:

**“In the pulpit, don’t use theological language that is not found in the Bible. Avoid terms such as Calvinism, reformed, doctrines of grace, particular redemption, etc. Most people will not know what you are talking about. Many that do will become inflamed against you. Teach your people the biblical truth of these doctrines without providing distracting labels for them.”**

The writer of “Questions and Answers to Pastor Search Committees of non-Calvinist Congregations,” believes that every Southern Baptist Church has the right to call any man they feel led to call as their Pastor. If they wish to call a strong Calvinist Pastor, that is their business and no one should intrude into this sacred course of action. However, many Southern Baptists are not aware that several camps of Calvinists have a desire to “Calvinize” our Convention, and they are not equipped with the theological understandings and tools to ask discerning and probing questions.

## For Additional Studies and Consultation

- For serious study on this subject, I would like to suggest a new book from SBC Theologians entitled: **Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism**. The book is edited by Drs. David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke and is printed by Broadman and Holman Academic (B&H) in Nashville, Tennessee.
- In the above mentioned book, please read pages 102-103 entitled: **Problems When Non-Calvinist Churches Interview a Calvinist Potential Pastor or Staff Member**, by Dr. David L. Allen. Dr. Allen is the Dean of the School of Theology at Southwestern Theological Baptist Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.
- Geisler, Norman L., "Chosen But Free: A Balanced View of Divine Election." Bloomington, Minn.: Bethany House Publishing, 2001.
- The writer of this paper recommends that you contact the Director of Missions of your local Baptist Association or someone at your State Baptist Convention for Pastor Search Committee training. During the training, ask them about the issues discussed in this document and how the contemporary rise of Calvinism has impacted the Southern Baptist Churches in your association or state convention. They can also connect you to laymen in SBC congregations that have learned the hard way. In other words, they now realize they were not equipped with the crucial questions and understandings to deal with a man that had a secret agenda of reforming their church.

### Additional questions based on the books referenced above:

- **Some Baptists believe that the Bible teaches that saving faith is a special gift of God only to a select few, what are your convictions concerning this issue?** Dr. Norman Geisler says, "Nowhere does the Bible teach that saving faith is a special gift of God only to a select few. On page 196-197 [Second Edition] he gives various scriptures how sinners can exercise saving faith unto the Lord.
- **John 1:29 says, "The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'" Does the word *world* here mean "the church" or "the elect" or all fallen human beings (sinners)?** On page 201 (Second Edition) Dr. Geisler shares that Christ died for all sinners [all fallen human beings and not for a select few].
- **Theologian R.C. Sproul asks the question: "For whom was the atonement designed" How would you respond to that question?** On page 213 (Second Edition) Dr. Geisler responds to the false dilemma that Dr. Sproul set up by saying, "In response to the question and the dilemma it is only necessary to point out that premise (1) is a false dilemma. There is a third alternative: (1a) Christ's atonement was intended to provide salvation for all as well as to procure salvation to all who believe. As non-Calvinists, we believe that God really and truly wants all persons to be saved. Many Calvinist believe that while Jesus' death was sufficient for all, it was efficient only for the elect. In other words, the non-elect are not savable because Jesus did not die for their sins.
- **Can the saving grace of God be irresistibly imposed on someone's will?** On page 130 in the book *Whosoever Will*, Dr. Steve Lemke shares several reasons why the doctrine of **irresistible grace** does not conform to the teachings of our Baptist Faith and Message 2000.
- **Our church has a history of our pastor(s) extending a gospel invitation at the conclusion of his sermon, share with us your beliefs and practices concerning the public invitation?** Chapter nine in the book *Whosoever Will* relates to this issue. Dr. R. Alan Streett does an excellent job in writing about the history and scriptural basis for extending public invitations for sinners to repent and believe.

Southern Baptists believe that God made us free moral agents with the ability to repent and believe through the work of the Holy Spirit. Many Calvinist say this is not possible! Calvinist James White has said, "God can and does as He pleases in all matters, including with man and his eternal destiny. God has the only say in what he does with man. Conversely, man has no say in what God does with him."

In other words, many Calvinists believe that God has determined or decreed the path and plight of every man and man is unable to respond to Him – even in faith. This is why many Calvinists believe that the sinner must be saved (regenerated) in order to believe.

Dear reader of this document, your testimony is that you believed the good news of the gospel in order to be saved. This is what the Bible teaches and this is the witness of the Spirit of God to your heart. Go with God and His Word and not a man-made system of belief!