

A Guide for Determining a Pastoral Candidate's Level of Commitment to Calvinism

Ronnie W Rogers

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The selection of a pastor may very well be the most important single decision that a church makes. This questionnaire is designed to assist churches who seek to avoid calling a pastor who either is a Calvinist or has strong leanings in that direction, which is often referred to as Calvinistic. Determining whether a person is Calvinistic can be a difficult task for a pastoral search committee. The lack of certainty of a candidate's belief by the committee can result in non-Calvinist churches extending a call to a Calvinist candidate, which results in harm to the body of Christ. Avoiding such harm can be avoided by asking the right questions.

Although a certain level of precision is required in formulating such questions in order to avoid mistakes, unnecessary technical language has been omitted. The yes answers to the first six questions and the no answers to the last three questions reflect the general teachings of Calvinism. It is not uncommon to find those who embrace Calvinism to be inconsistent in their answers. This may be due to a lack of sufficient understanding of what a commitment to Calvinism includes or because of a lack of forthrightness in expressing his beliefs in the interview process.

I offer the following guidelines for using the questionnaire. First, the committee needs to ask, and repeat if necessary, the question *precisely* as written. This will facilitate keeping the conversation focused on the question being asked, which will enable the committee to better understand the candidate's position; otherwise, the committee may find itself discussing topics not included in the question. Second, each question is written so as to be easily answered by a simple **yes** or **no**. In order to avoid a response that may fail to answer adequately the *specific* question, follow-up comments should be delayed until after the committee has obtained a clear **yes** or **no** answer. Third, the "Meaning" listed under each question is to assist the committee in better understanding the nature of the question. Fourth, a non-Calvinist can readily answer **no** to the first six questions and **yes** to the last three. Therefore, the degree of understanding and preference for Calvinism is best indicated by the number of times the candidate fails to answer as the questionnaire indicates a non-Calvinist would answer.

1. Do you believe in unconditional election?

Meaning that while all people have the responsibility to respond to the Gospel, only those whom God has sovereignly and unconditionally elected to salvation can or will believe unto salvation and the same will not say no.

- a. Calvinists say **Yes**.
- b. Non-Calvinists say **No**.

2. Do you believe that regeneration¹ is monergistic?²

Meaning that until a lost person is regenerated he is totally passive with regard to exercising faith.

- a. Calvinists say **Yes**.
- b. Non-Calvinists say **No**.

¹ Usually understood to mean born again

² This means that God *alone* brings about regeneration in the elect without *any cooperation* or activity by man; consequently, being born again is not contingent upon man exercising faith.

3. Do you believe that regeneration precedes faith?³
*Meaning that faith results **from** regeneration rather than **preceding** regeneration.*
 - a. Calvinists say **Yes**.
 - b. Non-Calvinists say **No**.
4. Do you believe that only the unconditionally elect will experience regeneration?
Meaning that God selectively and exclusively applies regeneration to only the unconditionally elect.
 - a. Calvinists say **Yes**.
 - b. Non-Calvinists say **No**.
5. Do you believe there is an internal efficacious⁴ call of God that is extended only to the elect?
Meaning that this is the essential and irresistible call given by God to the elect that inevitably results in salvation, and this same call is withheld by God from the non-elect.
 - a. Calvinists say **Yes**.
 - b. Non-Calvinists say **No**.
6. Do you believe that conditioning regeneration or salvation upon a person's faith in Christ is equivalent to adding human works, merit, or virtue to salvation?⁵
Meaning that Calvinism's belief in unconditional election gives God all the glory (credit), and non-Calvinist's belief that salvation is conditioned upon faith gives man some of the glory (credit) for his salvation.
 - a. Calvinists say **Yes**.
 - b. Non-Calvinists say **No**.
7. Do you believe that both God's saving desire and His decretal will *agree* that His salvation plan provides everything necessary for every single person to *actually* be saved by faith?⁶
*Meaning God's decrees and His saving desire **equally prove** that everyone and anyone who hears the gospel can truly be saved by faith.*
 - a. Calvinists say **No**.
 - b. Non-Calvinists say **Yes**.
8. Do you believe that anyone and everyone who hears the gospel is, by the grace of God, able to freely respond by faith unto salvation or to freely reject the gospel, and whichever choice the person makes, he was equally able to have made the other choice?
*Meaning that God graciously provides in order to make both options **accessible** to every person.*
 - a. Calvinists say **No**.
 - b. Non-Calvinists say **Yes**.
9. Do you believe that Christ's death atoned for the sins of every person in the world *in the same way* so that anyone and everyone can believe and be saved?⁷
*Meaning that Christ's death **actually** paid for every sin thereby removing the obstacle of a person's sin so that every person has the same opportunity to believe the gospel and be saved.*
 - a. Calvinists say **No**.
 - b. Non-Calvinists say **Yes**.

³ Not all Calvinists ascribe to this, but most in SBC life do; all non-Calvinists reject it.

⁴ "Efficacious" means that it is absolutely successful in securing salvation for those who receive it—the unconditionally elect. Oftentimes this is used interchangeably or cooperatively with the belief in "irresistible grace."

⁵ Some Calvinists may not say yes, but this is a common statement of Calvinists against non-Calvinists

⁶ Sometimes Calvinists say they believe God has a universal desire to save everyone, while simultaneously believing that God's decrees override that desire and keep Him from fulfilling that desire. This question is designed to help avoid such an inconsistent and confusing answer.

⁷ A non-Calvinist and a four-point Calvinist can say yes, but a five-point Calvinist will say no.

