

Preface

The good news is that this book is another substantive step in the direction of understanding God's Word and wrestling with the implications of that understanding for local church ministry. Due to over two decades of our denomination's focus on the doctrine of inerrancy, coupled with all the related foundational beliefs that we hold dear, today we are debating matters like Calvinism instead of liberal ideas like whether or not Jesus actually rose from the dead. This is good.

I (Brad) enrolled in seminary in 1979 when theological compromise was far more pervasive than most grass roots Southern Baptists realized. Years later I developed several close friendships with people who were students in some of our more compromised institutions. I was appalled to hear what was claimed and argued and propagated as "truth" in the classrooms of those schools. If I had known then that today we would be debating *Calvinism*, I would have gotten on my knees and thanked God (as I do) that the nature of the debate would become so much healthier. My praise would not have been based on any personal zeal for Calvinism, but on the recognition that we would no longer be fighting over whether or not the Bible is trustworthy.

The bad news is that the current debate regarding Calvinism is not as healthy as it needs to be. There is a lot of misunderstanding related to many of the issues. There is a fair amount of misrepresentation on both sides of the debate. To make matters worse, the tone of the debate is often characterized by arrogance, intellectual elitism, snobbery, or simplistic flame throwing. Too often the number of "points" one claims to hold or not to hold is used as the test of orthodoxy or fellowship. Too often friendships are destroyed and peace in many of our churches is shattered by the way this debate is handled.

The reality is that the issues surrounding Calvinism are not going away. As Ed Stetzer will chronicle in his chapter, the number of leaders who embrace five-point Calvinism is growing. Therefore it is essential

that we handle this debate with integrity and with love. We must not drag our churches into the mud to fight about words (2 Tim 2:14).

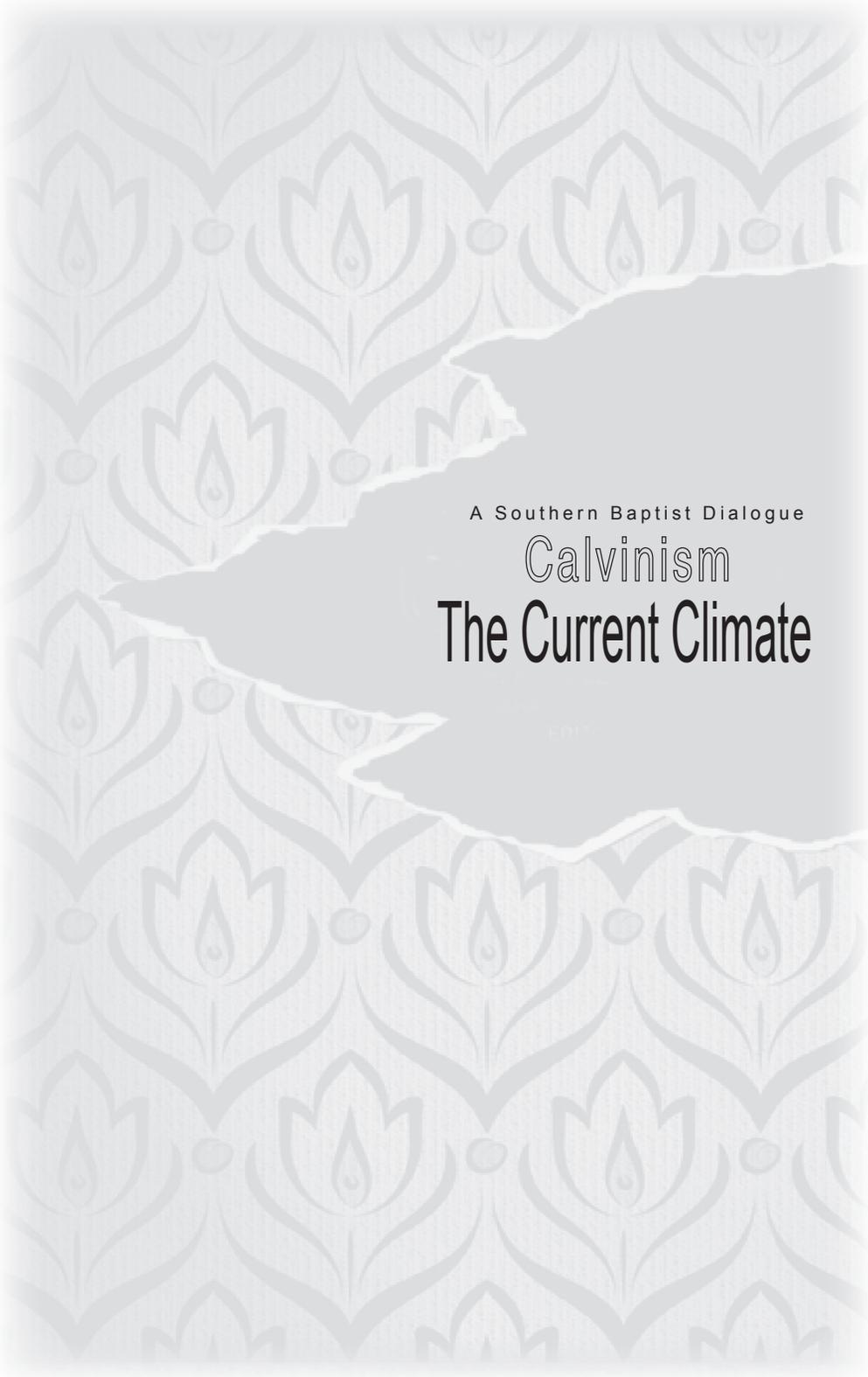
Early in 2007, with concern for the local church, Dr. Danny Akin, Dr. Tom Ascol, Dr. Thom Rainer, and I met to brainstorm how we could facilitate a healthy dialogue related to the issue of Calvinism. By the way, only one of us considers himself a five-point Calvinist, so this was never approached from the perspective of promoting Calvinism. Rather, we wanted to promote honest, God-honoring debate and analysis.

The result of this brainstorming was the decision to schedule a forum at the Ridgecrest Conference Center in the fall of 2007 to provide a healthy context for discussion and dialogue. Five reputable Calvinistic scholars were selected to represent various issues from the Reformed point of view and five reputable non-Calvinists were selected to represent alternate points of view. The chapters of this book began as addresses in the plenary sessions at Ridgecrest plus a chapter by Ed Stetzer which adds significant research related to the degree and magnitude of Calvinism within our denomination.

Our prayer and hope are that this book will advance our understanding of the issues surrounding Calvinism and will promote ongoing godly dialogue. The manner in which we handle this and other points of contention will significantly impact our churches. May God bless our efforts to understand His Word, to edify His church, and to share the gospel around the world.

I (Ray) can only add my gratitude to God that this book (and the conference where it originated) represents an unalterable commitment to the gospel. Every contributor is driven by zeal to bring to a lost world “the light of the knowledge of God’s glory in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6 HCSB). The authors are all driven above all by a passion to see the powerful, unadulterated gospel set free in the world, to have innumerable men and women finding life in Christ, and that His church in this generation might be the healthy, effective instrument in His hands to display His glory. It is in that commitment that we can all have one mind, one love, “sharing the same feelings, focusing on one goal” (Phil 2:2).

Brad Waggoner and E. Ray Clendenen, editors



A Southern Baptist Dialogue

Calvinism
The Current Climate

EDIT



Calvinism, Evangelism, and SBC Leadership

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THIS REPORT ANALYZES AND COMPARES data from two recent surveys—LifeWay’s 2006 Calvinism Study and the NAMB’s Center for Missional Research 2007 New Minister’s Study. Drawing from these two sources, we get a good view of the proportion of Calvinist pastors and/or church staff in SBC churches and how Calvinist doctrine influences several factors related to evangelism.

Although opinions abound about Calvinist doctrine, little empirical data is available that analyzes how a belief in irresistible grace and election influences evangelism in the local church. By comparing LifeWay’s 2006 Calvinism Study and the NAMB’s New Minister’s Study, my hope is that we can use specific data to answer the general question: Do churches with Calvinist leadership remain committed to evangelism?

Here is a summary of the findings of these two studies:

- Calvinism is a growing influence among Southern Baptist leaders with about 10 percent affirming the five points of Calvinism. However, when we look at recent SBC seminary graduates who now serve as church pastors, nearly 30 percent identify themselves as Calvinists.
- Congregations led by Calvinists tend to show a smaller attendance and typically baptize fewer people each year. The data doesn’t explain why these churches are smaller.
- Even though churches with Calvinist leadership baptize fewer people each year, their baptism *rate* is virtually identical to churches led by non-Calvinists. The baptism rate is the percentage of annual baptisms relative to the total average worship attendance, a statistic used to measure evangelistic vitality.
- Both Calvinistic and non-Calvinistic leaders believe local congregations should be involved in sponsoring missions and planting new churches. The two studies showed 95 percent of

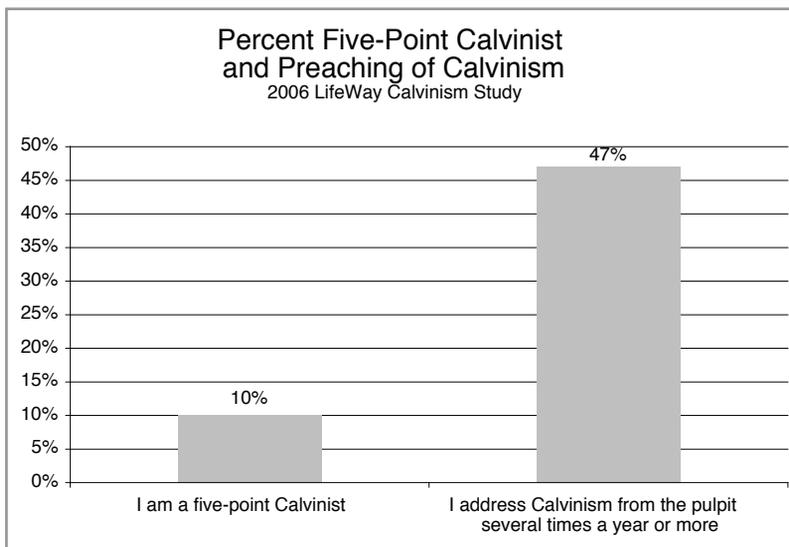
both leadership types affirmed the necessity of missions and church planting.

- Recent graduates who are Calvinistic report that they conduct personal evangelism at a slightly higher rate than their non-Calvinistic peers.

The protocols related to these studies are provided at the end of this chapter; however, some specific findings are reported in the following graphic illustrations.

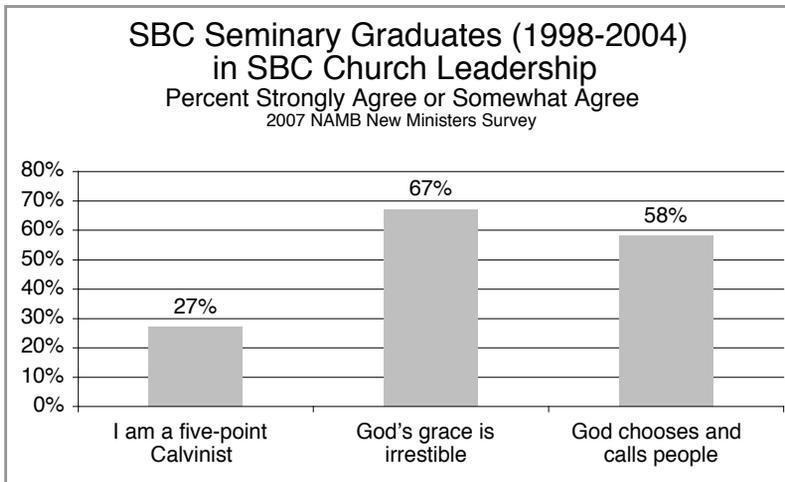
Preaching about Calvinism

Starting with the 2006 LifeWay Calvinism Study, about 10 percent of SBC pastors say they are five-point Calvinists whereas nearly half of SBC pastors (47%) address the issue of Calvinism from the pulpit several times a year or more.



These results reveal that pastoral leaders who identify themselves as Calvinists are the minority. Even though nearly half of SBC pastors surveyed say they preach on issues related to Calvinism, this is not terribly surprising considering the issue is present in some form whenever the salvation message is explained or presented. All in all, however, Calvinism is not widespread throughout the Southern Baptist Convention.

The 2007 NAMB New Minister’s Study indicates a fairly substantial increase in those who agree they are five-point Calvinists compared to those in the LifeWay study who say they are Calvinists. In fact, 27 percent of seminary graduates serving currently in SBC church leadership roles strongly or somewhat agree with the statement, “I am a five-point Calvinist.” However, it is difficult to make a direct comparison between the two studies since the 2007 NAMB New Minister’s Study includes any seminary graduate between 1998 and 2004 who is serving at any level of church staff leadership. The LifeWay Calvinism study only looked at SBC senior or lead pastors.



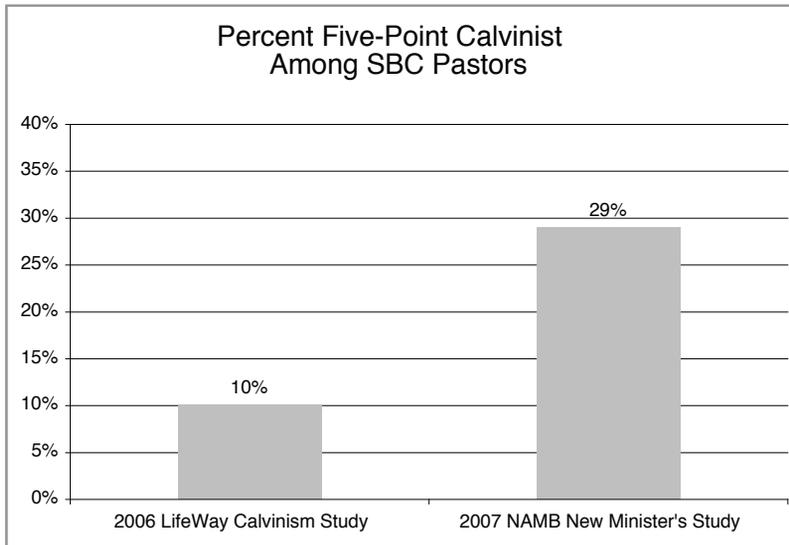
Among the recent seminary graduates serving in SBC church leadership, a majority of them agree specifically with two tenets often associated with Calvinism:

- God’s grace is irresistible (67%).
- God chooses and calls people (58%).

A cautionary note at this point: Church leaders who are not Calvinists in the formal sense could still believe in either of these statements.

Clearly Calvinism appears on the rise among recent seminary graduates compared to SBC pastors as a whole, particularly when the NAMB study is compared to the 2006 LifeWay Calvinism Study. In order to obtain a better comparison between the two studies, it is helpful to limit the 2007 NAMB New Minister’s Study to only those who are senior or

lead pastors of SBC churches. This better aligns with the LifeWay study of pastors. By doing this, the combined studies reveal a 19 percentage point difference between recent seminary graduates who say they are five-point Calvinists against SBC pastors as a whole.



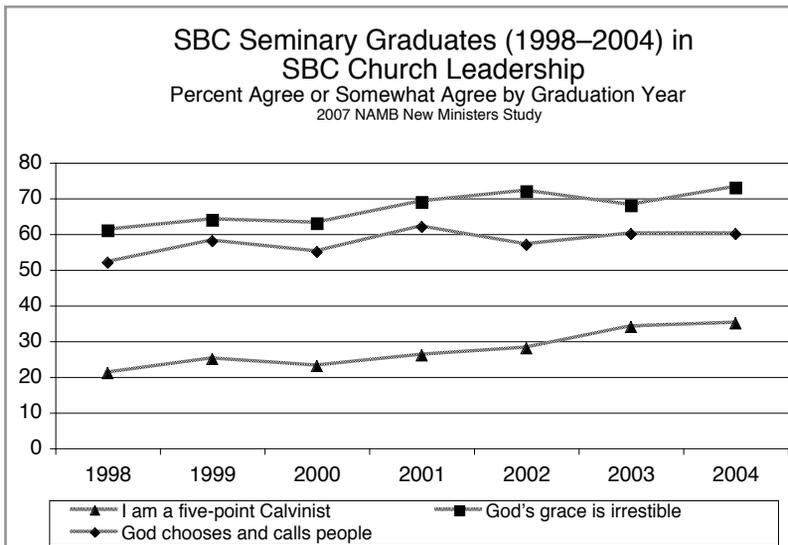
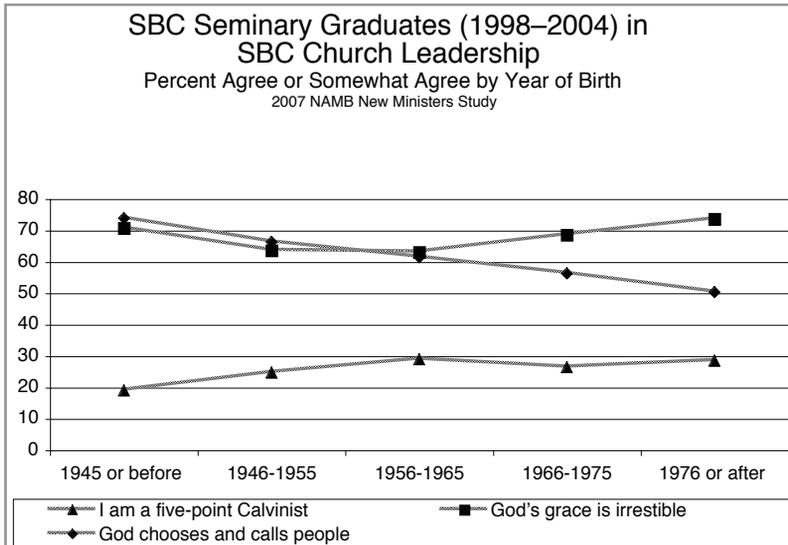
These results confirm that Calvinism is on the rise among recent seminary graduates of SBC seminaries; however, it is still far from a majority of recent graduates now serving as pastors.

Is the Rise of Calvinism a Generational Effect?

If more SBC church leaders identify themselves as Calvinists, is this because younger leaders are more likely to embrace the tenets of Calvinism, or is it because Calvinism is now emphasized more in seminary education than it was in the past?

By looking at the generational peers of SBC seminary graduates,

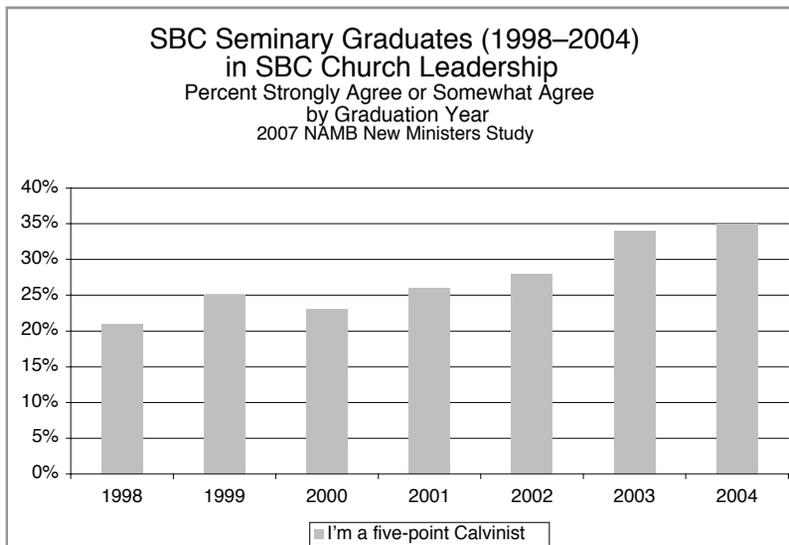
- We can see that younger leaders identify themselves as five-point Calvinists slightly more than older leaders. When we compare leaders born from 1945 through 1975 with leaders born in or after 1976, we can see the increase toward Calvinism is between 20 and 30 percent.



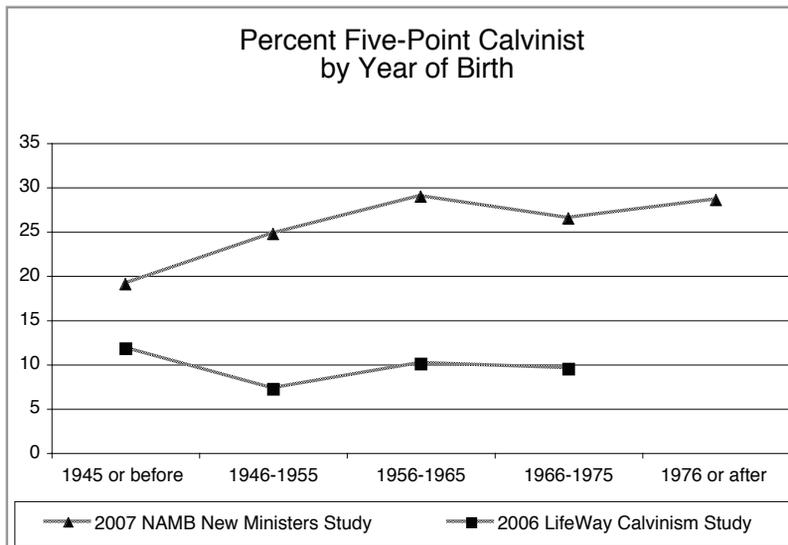
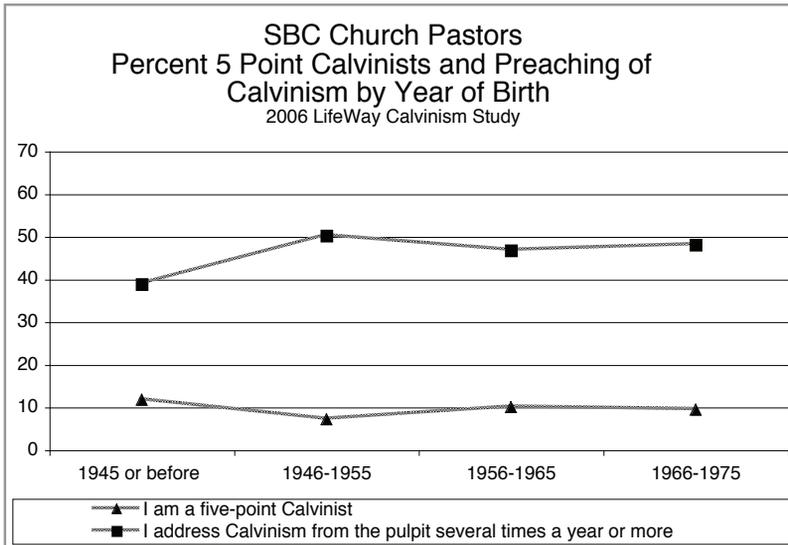
- At the same time, there is a steady decline of those who believe God chooses and calls people (as defined by election within Calvinistic doctrine). The NAMB study gives a further mixed message by revealing, among leaders born between 1946 and 1965, a dip in those who agree God’s grace is irresistible.

It is difficult to determine if an age effect is at work here. It does appear that younger cohorts are more likely to be five-point Calvinists, but the belief in central tenets of Calvinist doctrine fluctuate substantially for all birth peers. If a trend for younger leaders to embrace Calvinism does exist, a further breakdown by graduation year will provide some clues about this trend, whether it is increasing, decreasing, or remaining stable.

There does seem to be an increase in the proportion of seminary graduates who agree with Calvinist doctrine, up from 21 percent in 1998 to about 34 percent in 2004. This same seven-year period indicates an increase in those who believe in irresistible grace and election. The bar chart below is enough to emphasize this rise in five-point Calvinists.



If we add the 2006 LifeWay Calvinism Study to the trend analysis, the proportion of Calvinist solo or senior pastors is consistent through those born in 1975. Because a random sample was used, the small proportion of pastors under age 32 does not allow for accurate comparison



to older ages. Between 7 and 11 percent of pastors claim to be five-point Calvinists across these older age groups. The proportion of pastors addressing the subject of Calvinism from the pulpit does increase by generational peers over time.

Calvinist pastors are still very much in the minority despite the upward trend among seminary graduates, and at the current growth rates it will take some time before Calvinist-led churches approach an equal or majority status within the Southern Baptist Convention.

Seminaries Most Likely to Produce Calvinist Pastors

The NAMB and LifeWay studies also reveal a transition is taking place among Southern Baptist seminaries with a new order for which institutions are more likely to produce Calvinist leaders. The NAMB study indicates that since 1998 Southern Seminary produced the largest relative proportion of Calvinist pastors with Midwestern in the second position. The LifeWay study, one year older than NAMB's, indicates Golden Gate as the seminary producing, on a relative scale, the most Calvinist leaders with Southeastern in the second slot.¹ However, in some cases, the samples are too small to draw definitive conclusions. Therefore, we have only listed the order, not the amount, by seminary.

2007 NAMB NEW MINISTERS 2006 LIFEWAY CALVINISM

Southern	Golden Gate
Midwestern	Southeastern
Golden Gate	New Orleans
Southwestern	Southwestern
New Orleans	Midwestern
Southeastern	Southern

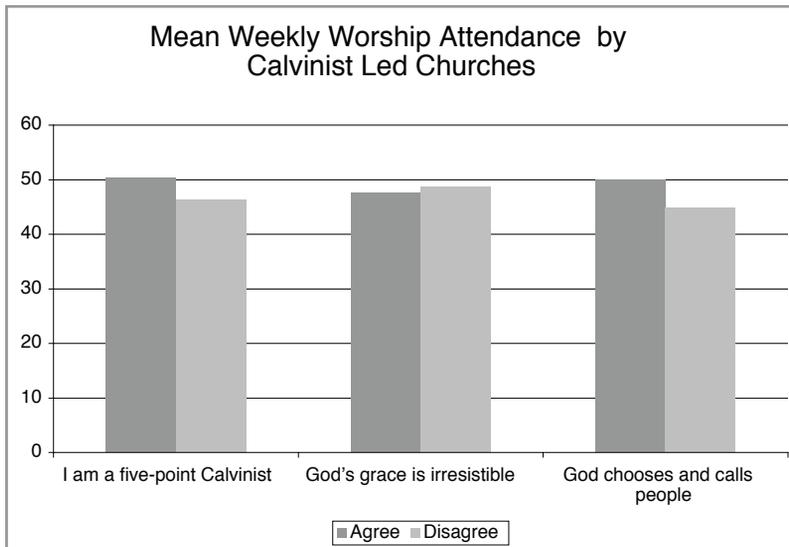
The LifeWay study indicates less difference in the seminary rankings among all pastors included in the study. The greater difference is revealed when looking at recent seminary graduates. In other words, more recent graduates from certain schools (particularly and in order, Southern, Midwestern, and Golden Gate) were more Calvinistic than the

¹ Note that the NAMB study represents recent seminary graduates and is therefore representative of the current state of Calvinist-producing leadership by seminary. But the Lifeway study represents all SBC seminary-trained pastors and so reflects seminary training in the past several decades as a whole.

other schools and more Calvinistic than the sample of all graduates in the LifeWay study.

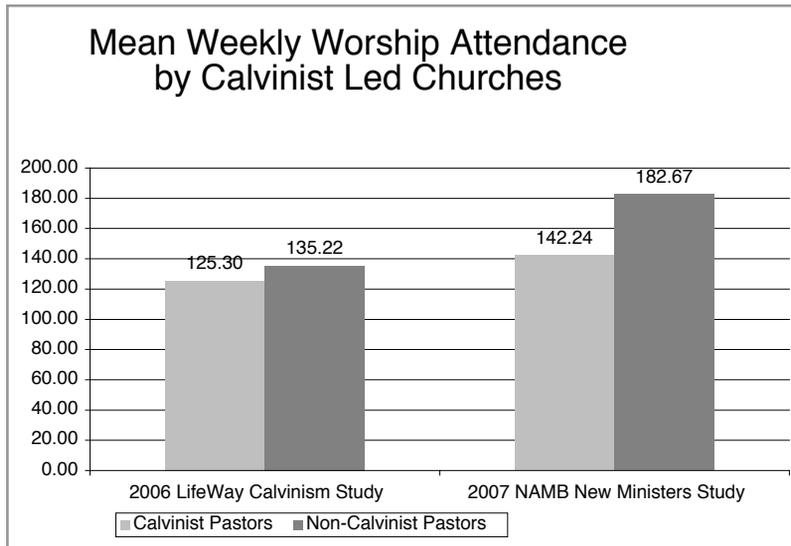
Does Calvinistic Leadership Lead to Less Evangelism?

Many people assume that Calvinist pastors, because of their belief in God’s election, are less likely to share their faith regularly than non-Calvinist leaders. Yet this idea is not supported by the data in these studies. The number of Calvinist leaders who share their faith weekly is similar to the amount of non-Calvinist leaders who engage in weekly evangelism. This percentage remained consistent even when Calvinist leaders agreed with statements, such as:



- I am a five point Calvinist.
- God’s grace is irresistible.
- God chooses and calls people.

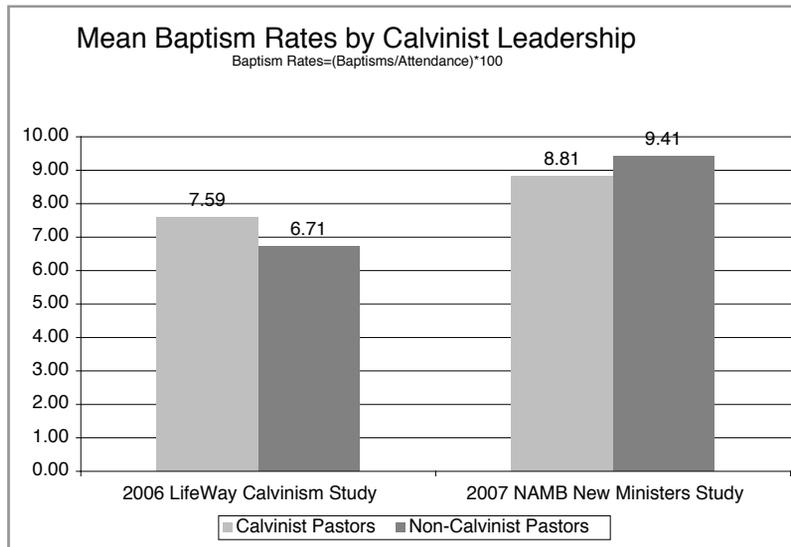
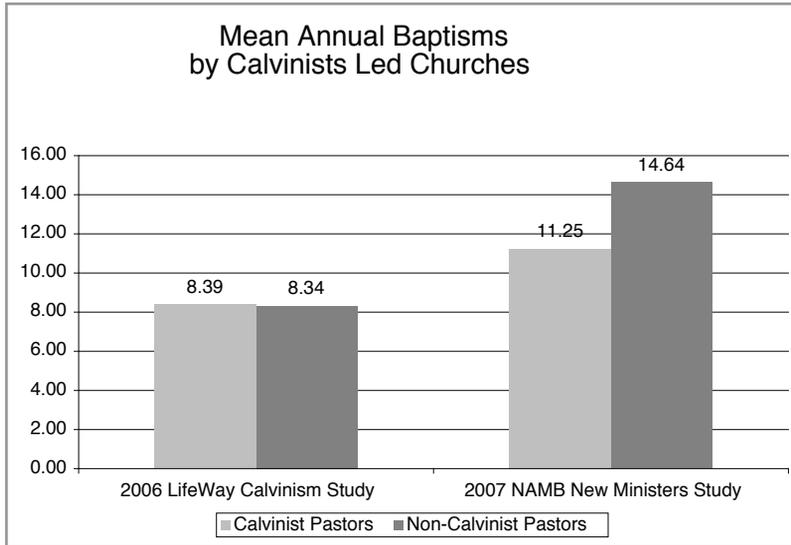
As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the mean weekly attendance is substantially higher among churches led by non-Calvinist pastors: 28 percent higher in the NAMB study and 8 percent higher in LifeWay’s study. In general, Calvinist pastors lead smaller churches.



On a side note, congregational size between the two studies reveals a recognizable difference. The LifeWay study demonstrates a much lower mean worship attendance than the NAMB study. The LifeWay attendance figures are based on the Annual Church Profile (ACP), while NAMB’s attendance figures are self-reported by the respondents. The LifeWay sample represents all SBC churches whereas the NAMB study includes only churches employing recent SBC seminary students. The smallest SBC churches who could not afford a full-time staff member would be less represented in the NAMB study.

Number of Baptisms

Baptisms tend to give a better indication of a congregation’s commitment to evangelism; the number of yearly baptisms reveals whether a church is actually reaching the lost instead of just moving believers around. In the NAMB study, congregations led by non-Calvinist leaders baptized 30 percent more than Calvinist led congregations. This is similar to the higher worship attendance figures for the same group. On the other hand, the LifeWay study indicates Calvinist congregations baptize essentially the same number of people as non-Calvinist-led congregations.



Baptism Rates

An even better measurement of a congregation's commitment to evangelism is the baptism *rate*, which looks at how many baptisms occur every year for each 100 in average worship attendance.

Using these measures, the LifeWay and NAMB studies provide conflicting results. In the LifeWay study Calvinist-led churches appear to have a higher baptism rate than non-Calvinist led churches. The NAMB study indicates just the reverse. The difference between Calvinists and non-Calvinists within these surveys is small, always less than 1 percent. From this we can conclude that Calvinist-led and non-Calvinist-led churches evidence similar rates through their annual baptisms.

Implications

Data such as this can be used and misused. Already, after the conference where this data was presented, many were quoting (and misquoting) its conclusions. Important information here should be addressed, and that calls for more research. More study is needed on *why* Calvinistic churches are smaller and baptize fewer, yet they still have similar baptism rates.

Failing to Engage Lostness

Regardless of who has better numbers, both Calvinist-led and non-Calvinist-led congregations in the SBC are failing to reach lost people in North America. Theological discussions, such as the ones about Calvinism, are important, but my fear is that many churches love their traditions or love theological debates more than they love the lost. Should we be compelled to debate or compelled to be on mission? Our mission is to tell the lost about Jesus Christ; God calls us to act as agents of reconciliation between God and man. Our goal is not to win a theological debate; rather, it is to keep our eyes on the prize for which we were called heavenward—the high calling of Christ.

Summary

Research cited reveals several important items regarding Calvinism among SBC church leaders:

- Churches with Calvinist leaders are still a small minority in the Southern Baptist Convention.

- Even though Calvinism is on the rise among recent seminary graduates, it will take years to approach any equality with non-Calvinist-led congregations.
- Calvinist-led churches are generally smaller in worship attendance and annual baptisms than non-Calvinist led churches.
- Annual baptism rates indicate little difference between Calvinist-led and non-Calvinist-led churches.

2006 LifeWay Study Protocols

The data reported in this chapter is part of an ongoing project by LifeWay Research toward understanding the theological and evangelistic implications of Calvinism on SBC congregations. Using a random sample of Southern Baptist churches, LifeWay Research conducted telephone interviews with 413 senior or lead pastors during August 2006 regarding their opinions and attitudes surrounding Calvinism. This sample provides for a margin of error of +4.8 percent at the 95 percent confidence interval.

Key questions asked during the interview included:

- Do you consider yourself a five-point Calvinist? (yes, no, don't know)
- How frequently do you address Calvinism from the pulpit? (Would you say you address it more than once a month, once a month, less than once a month but several times a year, or once a year or less?)
- Respondents were also asked if they had attended seminary and, if so, what seminary they had attended.
- They were also asked for their age. This enabled us to calculate their year of birth and conduct trend analysis.

Critical to the results reported in this chapter is the capacity to link Annual Church Profile data (including baptisms, worship attendance, etc.) to the church of each pastor surveyed. This enabled patterns of SBC churches to be understood in the context of Calvinist pastors versus non-Calvinist pastors.

2007 NAMB New Minister's Study Protocols

In late 2006, all 1998–2004 masters-level seminary graduates from Golden Gate, New Orleans, Midwestern, Southeastern, Southwestern, and the Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary were invited to complete an online survey regarding their experiences in seminary and their

current opinions and beliefs. Southern Seminary declined to participate, thus a limited subset of Southern graduates was available for the study. Although more than 2,000 seminary graduates completed the survey, 1,234 respondents indicated that they were serving currently as pastors or staff members at an SBC church. Within this group, 527 serve as senior or solo pastor of a congregation. Whenever comparisons are made between the NAMB and LifeWay surveys, this later “pastor only” group represents the NAMB data.

The number of respondents by seminary are: Golden Gate (N=270), New Orleans (N=287), Midwestern (N=148), Southeastern (N=403), Southwestern (N=978), Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary (N=11), Southern Seminary (N=52).

Several key questions germane to this report on Calvinism were asked during the interview. Each of the questions asked for the respondent’s level of agreement: strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree, and don’t know.

Some of these statements included:

- I am a five-point Calvinist.
- God is the true evangelist; and when He calls someone to Himself, His grace is irresistible.
- People do not choose to become Christians; God chooses and calls people who then respond to Him.
- I give a verbal presentation of the gospel (outside of church) at least once a week.

Responses for this report were collapsed into two categories: (1) agreement, which includes those stating strongly agree and somewhat agree, and (2) disagreement, which includes strongly disagree and somewhat disagree.

Respondents were also asked their age, seminary of graduation, and year of graduation. As in the LifeWay survey, this enables trend analysis of the direction for Calvinism over time.

Additionally, respondents were asked about their annual number of baptisms in the last reporting period and their average weekend worship attendance. Although these data may be softer than Annual Church Profile numbers, these responses will still enable us to understand the relationship of Calvinist-led churches on these important variables.