

Questions for a Prospective Pastor*

It is not uncommon for a pastor to be opposed by the very people who at first enthusiastically promoted him. Why? Often it is because only surface communication took place between the potential pastor and the congregation before he assumed his position in the church. In our day it is possible for a pastor to be chosen for a church with almost no serious questions being asked, much less any doctrinal questions. This should never be the case. We suggest that churches seek the most complete dialogue possible about matters of doctrine, practice, and lifestyle. If the church fails to do so, the prospective pastor should call for it. This procedure protects both pastor and church.

Two other matters are of extreme importance. First, the potential pastor should supply a list of references. The church must carefully follow up these references and even ask those individuals to suggest others. Consideration should be given to the fact that sometimes a person is disliked for no fault of his own. (Even Christ was hated.) The breadth of inquiry through references assures you that the pastor has “a good reputation with those both inside and outside the church.” (1 Timothy 3:7) Your questioning of references should focus on the list of qualifications found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. These lists of qualifications were written primarily as a means of observing the lives of prospective leaders in the church, not as a list of questions to ask the candidate. Such observation is extremely important. Of course the ideal would be for your church to live with the man and observe his life over months and even years of time. Because this unfortunately is not the pattern of most churches, you will have to depend heavily on the observations of the references supplied. Superficial or overly subjective answers by the candidate himself could distort the true picture. The survey below will refer to the above mentioned passages, but their use will be more general; your use of them with the names references should be extensive. This does not infer that the passages mentioned are not of extreme importance for the candidate to use in questioning himself.

Related to the above is a second consideration: Much effort should be made to expose the prospective pastor to the church for as long a time as possible before a decision is reached. Exposure to a prospect is not a problem when choosing pastors from within the congregation, but it does pose a considerable difficulty for those bringing a new pastor in from outside. A quick weekend of meetings is often not enough for the people to be properly informed. Remember, this man will be there a long time, influencing your family and the community for Christ. We know that you are ready now to have your new pastor. But there is one thing worse than no pastor—the wrong pastor.

This final suggestion: After initial interviews, consider getting taped or written answers to these questions from the one who is the most serious prospect at the time. Ask him if he is interested enough to go to this further stage of inquiry and tell him that it will take a good deal of his valuable time. This in-depth questioning is for those men who show a high level of interest. Clarifying questions can then follow by phone and personal interview. A select group of these questions may be asked later in the larger church meetings to allow the pastor to speak about his beliefs and to receive further questions.

The following questions are not necessarily listed in order of their significance. Some of them may not be important to you. You may want to add others. There is no such thing as the perfect pastor; but attention to these matters along with lengthy times of prayer and even fasting should assure you of finding God's man for your church.

1. There are many who profess to know Christ who are mistaken. What evidences do you have that you have been given life by God?
2. What does it mean for a person to love God? In what ways do you see true biblical love toward God demonstrated in your life? Do you see true biblical love toward God in the lives of your wife and each of your children?
3. How does your wife feel about your commitment to pastoring?
4. Why do you believe God wants you in the pastorate?
5. Closely examine each of the Bible's qualifications for pastors and deacons (1 Tim. 3; Titus 1:5-9; Acts 6:1-6; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). Which are your strongest qualities? With which requirements do you have the most trouble? Why do you believe these areas of difficulty do not presently disqualify you from ministering? (Note the phrase "must be" in 1 Tim. 3:2.)
6. A pastor is charged by God to preach to the church and to shepherd the people in a more individual way. Which aspect of the ministry appeals to you the most? What are some specific ways you could be helped to develop your skills in either of these areas?
7. What are your methods for involving yourself in the lives of your people as their shepherd and overseer of their souls?
8. What activities characterize your evangelistic interest? What is your approach to personal evangelism? corporate evangelism?
9. What is your approach to counseling? How do you handle your counseling load?
10. What are your specific and regular practices regarding the spiritual disciplines (e.g., personal prayer, Bible study, meditation, stewardship, learning, etc.)?
11. How would you describe a successful pastor? How would you describe a successful church?
12. How is the pastor held accountable? What relationships in your life currently provide accountability for responsible attitudes and behavior, both personally and as pastor?
13. Who are your favorite Christian writers, commentators, theologians, etc.? Why? What books have you read in the past year?

14. Describe an instance when you made attempts to reform the church in some significant area. What were the results? What did it cost you personally?
15. Describe your leadership style. What have been some weaknesses? Strengths?
16. When you have met with opposition, has it been mostly related to your style of leadership, your personality, your beliefs, or something else?
17. According to your observations, what doctrines need special emphasis in our day?
18. What is true biblical repentance?
19. What is true biblical faith?
20. Explain justification by faith. What is the difference between the Catholic view of justification and the biblical view?
21. Please explain your view of sanctification. What are the various means God uses to sanctify the believer?
22. Can a person have Christ as his Savior without submitting to Him as Lord? Explain.
23. What is your position on the inerrancy of Scripture?
24. Explain the biblical term "baptism of the Spirit." When does this baptism occur?
25. What are your views on baptism by water?
26. How does the Bible relate the sovereignty of God to salvation?
27. What does the Bible teach about the extent of man's depravity?
28. What does Christ's atonement accomplish?
29. What does the Bible teach about the perseverance and preservation of believers?
30. What is the proper use of the Old Testament law?
31. How do you articulate your present view of end-time or eschatological issues?
32. Do you believe that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin? What is the significance of your belief?
33. What is your interpretation of the biblical teaching on Hell?
34. Do you believe that the events described in Genesis 1-11 are factual or symbolic?

35. What does the Bible teach concerning spiritual gifts? Please delineate your views about prophecy and speaking in tongues.
36. What is your view of divorce and remarriage? How strictly will you follow this view in practice?
37. What is your view of the phrase, "The bishop [pastor] then must be...the husband of one wife"
(1 Tim. 3:2)?
38. What are your requirements for performing a marriage ceremony?
39. Please explain your views on church discipline. Relate any personal experience.
40. How would you handle a case of scandal or immorality by a church member?
41. What is your view on abortion?
42. Many children who appear to be converted at an early age show no evidence of knowing Christ later. How do you handle children when they come to you for counsel concerning conversion? What is your advice to parents?
43. What is a useful plan for receiving new members into the church? What are prerequisites?
44. What are your views on styles of church music?
45. Who should direct the worship of the church? Why? Which methods of leading corporate worship are appropriate? Which are inappropriate?
46. What does the Bible teach is the purpose of the church's weekly gathering?
47. What are your views regarding raising money for various projects within the church? Should the church solicit those outside the church?
48. What are your convictions about the local church and debt?
49. What does the bible teach about women in pastoral ministry?
50. What does the Bible teach about how churches should make decisions?
51. How should a pastor and his church relate to other churches locally and (if denominational) to the larger body? Do you feel comfortable cooperating with other denominations? Do you draw any lines?
52. What are the biblical responsibilities of elders? Are there any distinctions between elders, pastors, and overseers? If applicable, what distinctions exist between staff and non-staff pastors?
53. What are the biblical responsibilities of deacons? How are deacons and elders to relate?

54. What emphasis do you give to the leadership of fathers with their families, especially in terms of family worship? Do you personally engage in family worship with your wife and children?
55. What is your missionary vision for the church? How are you currently demonstrating missionary interest and involvement?
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A man does not have to have full and immediate answers to every question to be a good and faithful minister. With some of these questions it may be acceptable for him to say, "I don't know," or, "I don't have my position completely developed on that yet."

However, beware of a pastor who seems to avoid giving clear answers. Certainly with some questions he may find it necessary to define terms and qualify his response. Proceed carefully if he avoids making his position as plain as possible.

Other questions, if applicable, might deal with such issues as the church growth movement, home schooling, the Masons, the New Age movement, racial views, political activity of the church, relationships with other ministries or movements, etc. Questions regarding other important doctrinal issues should be asked as needed (e.g., regarding the deity of Christ, the acceptance of the Trinity, etc.) Both a search committee and the church should satisfy themselves concerning any issues they wish to discuss.

*Some or all of these questions may also be appropriate for ordination councils, securing church staff, qualifying missionaries, Christian school faculty interviews, and evaluating suitability of candidates for Christian ministries.

Written by Jim Elliff and Don Whitney

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