

Frequently Asked Questions on Confessional Subscription

What exactly is being proposed?

The elders are proposing an amendment to our church constitution that would require the elders to affirm the London Baptist Confession of Faith. The proposed amendment is as follows:

Add the following paragraph to “Section 6.02 Elders”:

Convictions. The elders will affirm the system of doctrine expressed in the London Baptist Confession of 1689 (LBC). This ensures broad alignment for the teaching of the church’s elders beyond what is necessary to be affirmed by its members. It also ensures the elders’ doctrinal unity with the body of Christ more broadly and historically. Any candidate for eldership will be called on by the elders to review the LBC and express his convictions in relation to it. The elders will then make a determination as to whether the candidate’s convictions are consistent with the system of doctrine in the LBC. The elders will review the LBC biennially and each elder will state any change of his convictions since the last review. Any change will be reviewed by the elders to assess whether it is within the acceptable bounds of the system of doctrine in the LBC.

What is the process for considering and deciding on this?

1. August 24: Presentation at church members meeting
2. September 7 through November 9: weekly Sunday class for explanation and discussion
3. November 23: congregational vote of affirmation

What resources do you recommend we consult as we consider this decision?

Any elder would be eager to discuss this with you personally. In addition to personal discussion and these FAQs, we recommend the following resources:

1. Sunday Class, “The Need for Creeds” - this will be the best context to better understand what is being proposed and ask any questions you may have.
2. The London Baptist Confession - available online [here](#)¹ or in print [here](#)².
3. Books - *The Need for Creeds Today: Confessional Faith in a Faithless Age* by J.V. Fesko, which is available in the church bookstore, and *The Creedal Imperative* by Carl Trueman, now out of print but available in ebook format online.
4. Rooted class recordings - Robin’s lectures through the Westminster Confession of Faith, which closely aligns with the LBC, are available on the church website [here](#).³

Why are we doing this?

There are many good reasons to subscribe to an historic confession of faith. We can summarize our main motivations as three “C’s”: clarity, consistency, and continuity.

1. *Clarity* - Every Bible teacher has convictions about what the Bible teaches that informs their ministry. Plainly stating what those convictions are and how they relate to the convictions of the Christian church at-large brings clarity to the teacher, the other elders, and the church.
2. *Consistency* - The eldership is made up of many individuals who come and go over time. Having a unified doctrinal touchstone for the church’s elders ensures alignment across the church’s ministries and down through the generations that is less susceptible to the fluctuations of any particular leader.
3. *Continuity* - utilizing a doctrinal standard that is shared with other churches around the world and through centuries demonstrates our doctrinal continuity with the church broadly and historically.

¹ <https://www.the1689confession.com>

² <https://banneroftruth.org/us/store/theology/the-baptist-confession-of-faith>

³ <https://covlife.churchcenter.com/channels/13479/series/31251>

Why are we doing this now?

There is not a currently pressing issue driving this proposal. However, we believe affirming an historic confession of faith is not only helpful, but urgently needed for our church's future health and our effectiveness. Our age is marked by a lack of rootedness. The world is rapidly changing. As the Christian church seeks to reach the world, it can be tempted to jettison its convictions in an attempt to make its message more palatable. On the contrary, we believe the message of the gospel is compelling not when it mimics the world, but when it stands distinct from it. Our distinctiveness should not be the result of novelty but of faithfulness. Our methods will inevitably change, but our convictions must remain consistent with "the faith once for all delivered to the saints." (Jude v. 3)

Don't we already have this in our Statement of Faith? How is this different?

Our Statement of Faith is a baseline expression of our doctrinal beliefs that all members can affirm. It is necessarily brief. The London Baptist Confession of Faith aligns with our Statement of Faith, but differs in two notable ways.

First, it is more *extensive*. The LBC touches on many areas of doctrine that are important for consistency of the church's teaching ministry, but not necessary for church membership. One example is the mode of baptism. It is not necessary for church members to agree that new believers should ordinarily be baptized by immersion, rather than pouring or sprinkling as in other church traditions, in order to be church members. But it would be very difficult for pastors to work together administering baptism if they have opposing convictions on the mode by which it should be administered. Having a more expansive confession of faith helps ensure broad alignment for the church's pastors beyond what is necessary for its members.

Second, it is more *ecumenical*.⁴ Our church's Statement of Faith originated from within our own congregation in recent decades. The LBC originated outside of any one church hundreds of years before our own. By affirming it, we demonstrate our convictional unity with a broader, historical Christian tradition.

⁴ I.e. represents many different churches. Not a reference to the Ecumenical Movement.

What are the differences between the LBC and the Westminster Confession?

The LBC was written to adhere as closely as possible to the language of the Westminster Confession (WCF) while reflecting the distinctives of churches that did not adhere to its positions on baptism and church governance. The term “baptist” most broadly describes churches that practice believer’s baptism and are independent of external church authorities. As a “baptist” confession, the LBC reflects those distinctives while retaining much of the language of the WCF.

What authority does the LBC carry and how does it compare with that of Scripture?

The LBC is not ultimately authoritative; only Scripture is. The LBC, like other historic confessions, is a thematic summary of what the Bible teaches on key doctrines formed by consensus from the careful study of Scripture, but it is not the same as the Bible itself. Classical orthodox Protestantism coined the phrases “*norming norm*” to refer to Scripture, and “*normed norm*” to refer to creeds and confessions derived from Scripture. As the *norming norm*, the Bible is the standard by which all other theological statements are to be judged. Thus, the LBC itself states, in article 1.10, “*The supreme judge for deciding all religious controversies and for evaluating all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, human teachings, and individual interpretations, and in whose judgment we are to rest, is nothing but the Holy Scripture delivered by the Spirit. In this Scripture our faith finds its final word.*”

Why just elders and not the whole church?

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⁵ This answer is an excerpt from the question above regarding the church’s Statement of Faith

Do I have to affirm the LBC to be a member?

No. Our Statement of Faith is and will continue to be the convictional foundation for membership at Covenant Life. For more on this, see the question above regarding the Statement of Faith.

Will this change the church fundamentally?

Adoption of the LBC will not change the doctrinal beliefs of CLC. It will articulate the system of doctrine that we already hold to. In that way, it will function much like the Statement of Faith, but at a more detailed level for the church's teachers. The elders will use the LBC as a frame of reference to ensure that our doctrine remains aligned to scriptural norms over successive years and generations of leadership. Thus, the LBC will not only not change us; it will help us to not change or deviate from the norms of Scripture.

Does this mean we are becoming baptists?

We already are! In the broadest sense, a “baptist” church is one that practices believers baptism, not infant baptism, and is independent in governance, not under the authority of a presbytery or other assembly outside the local church. Those distinctives have marked our church for many years. Affirming a baptist confession of faith is therefore very natural for our church. It does not mean we are a part of any baptist denomination. We are not. There are a number of other churches that share our doctrinal distinctives and even our history who also affirm the London Baptist Confession, most notably [Trinity Fellowship Churches](https://trinityfellowshipchurches.com/confession-of-faith/).⁶

Will adopting the confession quench diversity of thought among the elders?

We value and enjoy diversity of perspective among the elders. We believe that a confession simply establishes convictional guardrails within which a diversity of perspective on secondary matters or specific application can thrive.

⁶ <https://trinityfellowshipchurches.com/confession-of-faith/>

What should I do if I think some teaching I hear is inconsistent with the LBC?

Any time a listener has a concern about the doctrinal fidelity of a teaching in their church, they should first go directly to that teacher. The CLC elders welcome questions like this and take it as a wonderful sign that members are listening with discernment and care. If that interaction does not alleviate the concerns, the member should discuss it with one of the other elders, who may then bring it to the entire board of elders for consideration.

What happens if an elder disagrees with an article in the LBC?

Elders must agree on the essential articles of the LBC in a similar form that Christians agree on the essentials of the faith (e.g. salvation by grace alone). In secondary and tertiary doctrinal articles, elders may differ to varying degrees. In some cases, he may state that he has not fully established his thinking on that issue and defer to the confession in the absence of more established convictions, similar to legislators abstaining. In other cases he may agree with the doctrine, but have a minor issue with it, such as the specific wording used or the proof text cited. On rarer occasions, on secondary matters, he may actually hold an exception. In Protestant confessional churches, this commonly arises related to confessional statements regarding Sabbath observance or the order of creation. Having a confessional standard that an elder must openly state his convictions in relation to clarifies where he stands and enables the other elders to evaluate his theological fitness for ministry.⁷

Which other churches affirm the London Baptist Confession?

The LBC was designed to follow as closely as possible the Westminster Confession of Faith (Presbyterian) and Savoy Declaration (Congregationalist). The intention was to show that though these churches had different convictions about the candidates for baptism, they held closely to the doctrines and practices of other Protestant churches. Many baptist churches today affirm a modified version of the LBC such as the *Philadelphia Baptist Confession*, or the *New Hampshire Confession*. The Southern Baptist Convention uses articles of faith that are deliberately patterned off of the LBC. The Presbyterian Church of America, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and the Association of Reformed Presbyterians subscribe to the *Westminster Confession*.

⁷ This article is a helpful brief overview on the details of confessional subscription:
<https://reformedbaptistblog.com/2018/01/18/confessional-subscription-its-terms-and-types/>

Covenant Life has identified with this broad reformed tradition for many years. However, our history is different from those above denominations. Our church was birthed out of a remarkable work of God in the 1970s. Growing out of a spontaneous and counter-cultural revival meant that we did not initially exist within an established church tradition. Churches with a similar history and affiliation also now subscribe to the London Baptist Confession, including Trinity Fellowship Churches.

Do we still believe in the gifts of the Spirit for the church today?

Yes! Our statement of faith includes a section on the empowerment of the Spirit. *“The gifts of the Holy Spirit are available today for the building up of the Church and the advancement of Christ’s mission. We are to earnestly desire and employ them, in accordance with God’s word (1 Corinthians 12:31; 14:1-5; 12, 26, 40).”* The first article of the LBC on Scripture has led to questions about whether it is compatible with a “continuationist” view of the spiritual gifts. It includes the phrase, *“... which makes the Holy Scriptures to be most necessary, those former ways of God’s revealing His will unto His people being now completed.”* Some have misunderstood this to mean that the LBC is explicitly ruling out the ongoing activity of the gifts of the Spirit. However, this sentence expresses a conviction that it is necessary for God to reveal Himself to us through the special revelation of the 66 books of the Bible. Along with all Christian churches, we believe that God is no longer giving authoritative Scripture. There is nothing strictly necessary for knowing God and salvation that He has not already revealed. This does not mean that the Holy Spirit has ceased working or is unnecessary for salvation. Quite the opposite! The Holy Spirit applies the work of redemption in us. He gives us new life, opens our hearts to understand God’s word, convicts, encourages, and empowers us. In fact, many writers of the Westminster and London Baptist Confessions believed that God continues to work through means such as dreams, angels, and prophecy. They believed those ‘supernatural’ means are of a lower level of authority than the Bible and must be judged by it, as Covenant Life does.