

Statement of Faith

The statement of faith is divided into two sections. This is to distinguish between doctrinal positions which we would expect each member to agree with (in the first section), and those that represent the church's position on issues which evangelicals have differed over (in the second section). While we very much hope that all members do agree with the second section it is not a condition of membership; so, for example, someone who does not believe in believers' baptism is not barred from membership. The only people who have to subscribe personally to this section are elders and deacons because of their position as leaders of the church. While members do not have to agree with the second section they do have to acknowledge that this is the agreed basis of teaching in the church.

SECTION ONE

1. God

There is one God, who exists eternally in three distinct but equal persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God is unchangeable in his holiness, justice, wisdom and love. He is the almighty Creator, Saviour and Judge who sustains and governs all things according to his sovereign will for his own glory.

Genesis 1-2; Exodus 15:1-18; Isaiah 45:5-18; Psalm 90:2; Psalm 96:10-13; Daniel 4:34-35; John 16:7-15; Titus 3:4-7; James 1:17.

2. The Bible

God has revealed himself in the Bible, which consists of the Old and New Testaments alone. Every word was inspired by God through human authors, so that the Bible as originally given is in its entirety the Word of God, without error and fully reliable in fact and doctrine. The Bible alone speaks with final authority and is always sufficient for all matters of belief and practice.¹

Psalm 19:7-11; 1 Corinthians 2:6-16; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; Hebrews 1:1-2; 2 Peter 1:19-21.

3. The Human Race

All men and women, being created in the image of God, have inherent and equal dignity and worth. Their greatest purpose is to obey, worship and love God. As a result of the fall of our first parents, every aspect of human nature has been corrupted and all men and women are without spiritual life, guilty sinners and hostile to God. Every person is therefore under the just condemnation of God and needs to be born again, forgiven and reconciled to God in order to know and please him.

Genesis 1:26-27; 3:1-24; Psalm 8:3-8; Matthew 22:34-40; John 3:1-8; Romans 1:18-32; 5:12-19; 2 Corinthians 5:16-19; Ephesians 2:1-3.

4. The Lord Jesus Christ

The Lord Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of a virgin, and lived a sinless life in obedience to the Father. He taught with authority and all his words are true. On the cross he died in the place of sinners, bearing God's punishment for their sin, redeeming them by his blood. He rose from the dead and in his resurrection body ascended into heaven where he is exalted as Lord of all. He intercedes for his people in the presence of the Father.

Matthew 1:18-25; John 1:1-18; 7:16-18; Acts 2:22-36; Colossians 1:15-22; Hebrews 2:14-18; 7:23-28; 10:11-14.

¹ When we say that the Bible is 'without error and fully reliable' this is not to deny the constraints of the everyday language used – this will include: reasonable approximations (for example with regard to numbers), free quotations of a persons speech, and hyperbole, metaphors and fictional stories (e.g. parables) that are not to be interpreted literally.

When we say that the Bible is 'always sufficient' we mean it gives us as much information as we *need* to have to be able to know God and live for him; there is nothing missing in the Bible such that we *must* find more information elsewhere. However useful insights may be gained from other sources such as secular psychology or education, which nevertheless should be subject to the teaching of the Bible.

5. Salvation

Salvation is entirely a work of God's grace and cannot be earned or deserved. It has been accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ and is offered to all in the gospel. God in his love forgives sinners whom he calls, granting them repentance and faith. All who believe in Christ are justified by faith alone, adopted into the family of God and receive eternal life.

John 1:12-13; 5:24-26; 6:35-51; Romans 3:21-26; Galatians 2:15-16; Ephesians 2:4-9; 2 Timothy 1:9-10; Titus 3:4-7.

6. The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit has been sent from heaven to glorify Christ and to apply his work of salvation. He convicts sinners, imparts spiritual life and gives a true understanding of the Scriptures. He indwells all believers, brings assurance of salvation and produces increasing likeness to Christ. He builds up the Church and empowers its members for worship, service and mission.

John 3:1-8; 16:5-16; Romans 8:1-17; 1 Corinthians 2:6-16; 3:17-18; 12:1-31; Galatians 5:16-26.

7. The Church

The universal Church is the body of which Christ is the head and to which all who are saved belong. It is made visible in local churches, which are congregations of believers who are committed to each other for the worship of God, the preaching of the Word, the administering of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, for pastoral care and discipline, and for evangelism. The unity of the body of Christ is expressed within and between churches by mutual love, care and encouragement. True fellowship between churches exists only where they are faithful to the gospel.

Acts 2:42-47; Ephesians 2:19-22; 4:1-6; 5:25-33; Philippians 2:1-11; Colossians 1:18

8. Baptism and the Lord's Supper

Baptism and the Lord's Supper have been given to the churches by Christ as visible signs of the gospel. Baptism is a symbol of union with Christ and entry into his Church but does not impart spiritual life. The Lord's Supper is a commemoration of Christ's sacrifice offered once for all and involves no change in the bread and wine. All its blessings are received by faith.

Matthew 28:19; Luke 22:14-23; Romans 6:3-10; 1 Corinthians 11:23-32

9. The Future

The Lord Jesus Christ will return in glory. He will raise the dead and judge the world in righteousness. The wicked will be sent to eternal punishment and the righteous will be welcomed into a life of eternal joy in fellowship with God. God will make all things new and will be glorified forever.

Matthew 24:1-44; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 20:11-21:4; 22:1-5

SECTION TWO

We wish to maintain both a broadly reformed position and a baptistic position in our teaching and practice. Therefore in addition to those doctrines already contained in the preceding section elders and deacons must also subscribe to the following.

10. Reformed Doctrines of Grace

- A. That God chooses some people to be saved, not on account of any foreseen merit or faith in them, but only because of his sovereign good pleasure (John 6:37-44; Romans 8:28-30; Ephesians 1:3-14); and that this sovereign choice is compatible with the offer of the gospel to all people and that it does not negate anyone's responsibility to believe (John 5:36-47; Acts 2:38-41; Romans 10:5-15).
- B. That God calls people, through the proclamation of the gospel, and works in them by his Spirit, so that they respond in faith (Romans 8:30; 2 Corinthians 4:4-6; Ephesians 2:4-10; James 1:18); and that this call and work are compatible with a person's voluntary response to the gospel (John 6:44-45; Acts 13:48; 16:14).

- C. That all those who are truly born again will be kept by God's power and will persevere as Christians until the end of their lives (John 6:39-40, 10:28-29; Romans 8:30).

11. The Doctrine of Believers Baptism

- A. The baptism of believers into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in obedience to our Lord's command (Matthew 28:19), and that such baptism should only be given to those who have consciously repented and trusted in the Lord Jesus as their Saviour.

Constitution

This section contains our rules for government of the church; they are our agreed way of working together and making decisions. Therefore while we hope every member thinks they are a good way of working, personally agreeing with them is not a condition of membership. However all members have to agree to abide by them.

1. Name

The name of the church is “Rock Baptist Church”.

2. Membership

Note: for all references to voting, see section 7.3 for the arrangement of church votes.

2.1 Application and conditions of membership

Admission to church membership is open to all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, whose lives bear evidence of their Christian profession, who wish to express their commitment to the church in accepting the responsibilities of membership and who are in agreement with the church’s statement of faith. All members must have fulfilled the New Testament requirement to be baptised. As a church we believe that the New Testament teaching is that baptism should follow conscious faith as a believer. However we recognise the diversity of interpretation among evangelicals in this matter and respect the right of others to hold a different view from this position, and so welcome all baptised Christians into membership.

Applications for membership should be submitted to the elders who will assess and decide on the applicant’s suitability for membership. The church will be notified both of applications for membership and when people are received into membership.

2.2 Responsibilities of membership

Members of the church are responsible for:

- regularly attending and supporting the meetings of the church,
- actively participating in the life of the church,
- supporting the work of the church in prayer,
- using in love the gifts God has given them for the good of the church,
- recognising our mutual responsibility to care for each other and build each other up,
- contributing towards the church’s financial support in Christian stewardship,
- respecting the leadership of the church,
- bearing witness to the good news of the gospel as they are able,
- committing themselves to a moral lifestyle in accordance with Christian teaching.

2.3 Discipline of members

If a member’s beliefs, conduct or commitment to the church wilfully deviates from clear biblical teaching, the elders will take steps to encourage their repentance and restoration, in accordance with biblical principles. If all efforts to resolve such matters are unsuccessful, then the elders will recommend to the church that the person’s membership be suspended or terminated. This recommendation will be carried by a two-thirds majority voting at a church meeting.

The following references are to guide our thinking and practice in this matter: Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5:1-5; 9-13; Galatians 6:1; 1 Timothy 5:20; Titus 3:10-11.

2.4 Associate membership

Associate membership is allowed for those who are resident in the Cambridge area only briefly or for only part of each year. Associate membership allows the continuation of membership at another church elsewhere. Associate membership does not carry voting rights or eligibility for either eldership or diaconate.

2.5 Lapsing of membership

Members who move from the Cambridge area, for reasons other than being commissioned by the church, will normally be expected to transfer their membership to a new church as soon as is reasonably possible. The elders may recommend to the church the termination of the membership of those who have left the Cambridge area for a period greater than one year and have not resigned their membership.

3. Practice of baptism and the Lord's supper

3.1 Baptism

We practise only the baptism of Christian believers in obedience to the command of Jesus Christ (Matt 28:19-20). We believe this is best expressed by immersion in water but recognise the validity of other modes of administration. Application for baptism must be made to the elders who will ascertain the genuineness of a candidate's profession of faith in Christ. Baptism will normally be performed by an elder or any other person approved by the eldership.

3.2 Lord's supper

We will regularly observe the Lord's supper together in obedience to his command (Luke 22:14-20; 1 Cor 11:23-26). All those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord, who are in good standing with this or another Christian church, will be welcome to participate. The Lord's supper will normally be administered by an elder or any other person approved by the eldership.

4. Elders

4.1 Responsibilities and qualifications

Elders are under-shepherds of the Lord Jesus who is head of the church and so they are responsible for leading the church, the teaching of the church and pastoral oversight of all areas of church life. They are to care for and lead the church with a loving servant attitude (1 Peter 5:1-4). In particular elders are responsible for:

- ensuring that the church is well taught in the Bible, through public teaching, teaching in the small groups within the church, and personal mentoring where appropriate,
- praying regularly, individually and together, for the whole church family and life of the church,
- building relationships with the church family so that, as far as is possible, every member is known and cared for by at least one elder,
- maintaining warm and close communication with the deacons, supporting and encouraging each deacon in his or her work,
- supporting and caring for every ministry of the church and especially its leaders,
- modelling unity to the church family by working well together,
- promoting closeness of fellowship within the church so that each member can contribute to and receive from the life of the church,
- encouraging the use of the gifts of each member for the good of the whole church family,
- setting an example in godly living, both personally and in family life, that others can follow.

Each elder must fulfil the New Testament qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) which we believe to include limitation of the role of elder to men. In addition elders must consent to the doctrinal statements which represent the teaching of the church with regard to the reformed doctrines of grace and believers' baptism (statements 10 & 11 in the statement of faith).

4.2 Selection and appointment

As part of their responsibility to encourage the use of the gifts of all members, the eldership is expected to work actively to identify suitable candidates for the role of elder. Members of the congregation are encouraged to assist in this task by suggesting potential candidates. Candidates are formally nominated to the church by the eldership and their appointment will be confirmed by a two-thirds majority of members voting at a church meeting, after time for consultation with the membership and prayer.

4.3 Pastors

Pastors are employed by the church as staff elders. Their responsibilities are the same as for the lay elders but in addition they may be given particular responsibility for certain areas such as the teaching of the church or aspects of leadership. In appointing a pastor the same procedure is followed as for a lay elder. However in the case of an external candidate the membership must be allowed adequate opportunity to assess the suitability of the candidate before a vote is taken. Any pastor ceases to hold the office of elder when he leaves the employment of the church unless he is re-elected as a lay elder.

4.4 Period of service

Lay elders will serve for an initial period of 3 years, after which they will be eligible for re-election. Upon re-election they will be appointed for periods of 5 years and will be eligible for re-election every 5 years up to the age of 70, after which they shall continue in office only by a resolution of the church for periods of up to 2 years at a time. Pastors will be appointed without any set term of office unless otherwise agreed. Pastors will retire at the age of 65 and shall continue beyond that age only by a resolution of the church for periods of up to 2 years at a time.

4.5 Removal from office

If any elder is suspected of heresy, gross incompetence or immoral conduct, or otherwise be suspected of being unsuitable for their office, the elders will investigate such matters. If it becomes necessary to terminate the office of any elder a recommendation will be put to the church, and this recommendation will be carried by a two-thirds majority of those members voting.

5. Deacons

5.1 Responsibilities and qualifications

Deacons are officially designated servants of the church and so are responsible for working with the elders in running the church by taking delegated responsibility for important areas of church life. These will include tasks of administration, finance, maintenance and care of the physical needs of the congregation but are not limited to purely practical areas. They do so in line with the broad policy established by the elders. They are to conduct all their ministry in a godly and loving manner that serves the congregation. In particular deacons are responsible for:

- ensuring that all the practical and financial needs of the church family are met,
- organising appropriate care for any member of the church family who is in need,
- guiding the church in responsible Christian stewardship both as individuals and as a congregation,
- liaising with the elders in their areas of ministry,
- praying regularly for the elders and other members of the congregation,
- modelling unity to the church family by working well together,
- setting an example in godly living, both personally and in family life, that others can follow.

Each deacon must fulfil the New Testament qualifications (1 Timothy 3:8-13), which we believe to allow both men and women to serve as deacons. In addition deacons must consent to the doctrinal statements which represent the teaching of the church with regard to the reformed doctrines of grace and believers' baptism (statements 10 & 11 in the statement of faith).

5.2 Selection and appointment

As part of their responsibility to encourage the use of the gifts of all members, the eldership is expected to work actively to identify suitable candidates for the role of deacon, and will do so in close collaboration with the diaconate. Members of the congregation are encouraged to assist in this task by suggesting potential candidates. Candidates are formally nominated to the church by the eldership and

diaconate and their appointment will be confirmed by a two-thirds majority of members voting at a church meeting, after time for consultation with the membership and prayer.

5.3 Period of service

Deacons will serve for an initial period of 3 years, after which they will be eligible for re-election. Upon re-election they will be appointed for periods of 5 years and will be eligible for re-election every 5 years up to the age of 70, after which they shall continue in office only by a resolution of the church for periods of up to 2 years at a time. If any staff member of the church holds the office of deacon as part of their employment, such as may be the case with a church administrator, they will cease to hold that office when they leave the employment of the church unless they are re-elected as a lay deacon.

5.4 Removal from office

As for elders in section 4.5.

6. Other staff positions

6.1 Pastoral staff positions

The elders, in conjunction with the deacons, may recommend a pastoral staff position other than that of pastor to assist in the work of church. They shall be individually responsible to the elders and deacons although responsibility may be delegated as appropriate. Appointment of such staff positions shall be in the same manner as for pastors. Conditions regarding removal from office are as for elders in section 4.5.

6.2 Non-pastoral staff positions

The elders, in conjunction with the deacons, may recommend a non-pastoral staff position to assist in the work of church e.g. a secretary. The terms of office and period of service of such positions will be decided on a case by case basis.

7. Official meetings of the church

7.1 Regularity and notification of meetings

The church will meet at least quarterly to discuss the business of the church, including an Annual General Meeting, at which it is the duty of the elders and deacons to present accounts for the previous financial year for approval by the membership. The elders will give at least 10 days notification of any meeting and the business it contains including details of any resolution to be voted on at the meeting; this notification must include no fewer than two Sundays.

7.2 Content of meetings

The elders and deacons are responsible for the agenda and content of church meetings although all church members are entitled and encouraged to suggest items for discussion.

7.3 Voting at meetings

It is important that all decisions taken by the church are taken responsibly, in a way which is loving, and God-honouring, and endeavours to build up the body of Christ and to encourage fellow members. In particular, nothing should be said or done which would cause unnecessary hurt or embarrassment to any member, and that no candidate for an office or staff position should fail to be elected for unidentifiable reasons. These are the aims of the following rules for the conduct of voting at church meetings.

- A. Voting shall take place only at a formally constituted church meeting, for which at least 10 days notice has been given in writing (which must include at least two Sundays).
- B. Voting shall normally be by show of hands, unless a request for secret ballot has been made and agreed under rule (F) below.
- C. For all matters of church business, a simple majority of those voting will be required, except for the following: election of elders, deacons, pastoral staff members, long term missionaries, changes to the constitution, removal of an elder, deacon or pastoral staff member from office and suspension or

termination of membership. In these cases a two-thirds majority of those voting is required. In the case of changes to the constitution there is also a quorum requirement that at least 50% of the membership must cast a vote (including abstentions).

- D. Abstentions: members are free to abstain on any vote, but abstentions do not count in the calculation of percentages (except in the case of calculating the quorum requirement in 7.3 C).
- E. Proxy votes for those unable to attend the meeting may be registered in advance in writing, which may include letter, fax or e-mail.
- F. A secret ballot may be requested for any vote, provided that it is proposed by at least five church members with a reasoned explanation and one week's notice given. Requests should be given to an elder or a deacon.
- G. Any church member who wishes to vote against the election of an officer or staff member, should discuss this with an elder at least one week before the proposed vote. Where there is to be a secret ballot as in rule F above, this rule is nevertheless deemed to apply. Any member who wishes to speak against a candidate for office or a staff member should discuss their concerns with an elder before the matter is discussed at a church meeting.

8. Affiliations

8.1 Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC)

The church is affiliated to the FIEC for the purpose of expressing our unity with other evangelical churches, and benefiting from the service the FIEC provides.

8.2 Other affiliations

Other affiliations may be considered at the discretion of the elders and ratified at a church members' meeting. However no affiliations will be permitted with organisations which do not have an evangelical doctrinal basis.

9. Amendments to the constitution

The statement of faith and church constitution may be amended by a vote of the membership. A two-thirds majority is required for such a change. There is also a quorum requirement that at least 50% of the membership must cast a vote.

The elders should periodically review the church constitution, including consultation with the membership, to ensure that the running of the church is most helpful to its aims and in accordance with Biblical teaching.