

DECLARATION OF FAITH of the Northwest Association of Slavic Baptist Churches

1. THE WORD OF GOD

We believe that the Bible, the canonical books of the Old (39 books) and the New (27 books) Testaments, is the inspired Word of God. It was written by men of God, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21; 2 Tim. 3:16). Inspiration is the writing down of God's revelation by men of God who were guided by the Holy Spirit. The Bible is the only inerrant and infallible source of truth and doctrine for the Christian faith (John 20:31; Rom. 10:17; 2 Tim. 3:16). It provides the only true guidance in matters of salvation, life and ministry (Josh. 1:7-8; 2 Pet. 1:19; Rom. 15:4; Heb. 4:12).

The Bible is the complete written revelation of God to men; its central theme is the Word of God incarnate - Jesus Christ (John 5:39; 2 Pet. 1:19; Heb. 1:1-2). Adding to, or subtracting from, the Word of God entails a strict punishment from God (Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Rev. 22:18-19).

2. GOD

We believe that there is only one living, true and eternal God (Isa. 45:22; Jer. 10:10; John 17:3) who created, in six literal days, the heavens and earth and all that fills them (Gen. 1:1-2; Ex. 31:17; Ps. 24:1; Isa. 45:12; Acts 17:24-29).

God is a Spirit, perfect in all his qualities (Matt. 5:48; John 4:24). He reveals himself as an infinite, incomprehensible, self-sufficient, and unchanging Lord (Ex. 3:14; Titus 1:2). He is holy, all-powerful, all-knowing and ever-present (Gen. 17:1, 28:16; Ps. 22:3, 94:11; 1 Pet. 1:16).

God is love. He is holy, righteous and just, and he desires salvation for all people (Deut. 32:4; Ps. 119:137; Isa. 6:3; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 John 4:16; 1 Tim. 2:4).

The Triune God

We believe that God is one in His nature and yet exists in three Persons: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Each Person of the Trinity possesses all divine attributes in equal measure (Isa. 48:16; Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:13).

God the Father

We believe that God the Father is the Eternal God, the Creator and the Ruler over all that exists, including all humanity (Eph. 4:6).

He is the caring and loving Father of all believers who are called to worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 1:13, 4:23; 1 Cor. 8:6). God the Father sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to provide salvation for us (John 3:16).

God the Son - Jesus Christ

We believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God Eternal (1 John 5:20; Titus 2:13), who has no beginning or end (Heb. 7:3). He is also the Creator of the Universe (Col. 1:16).

We believe God the Son existed with the Father from eternity past (Ps. 2:7; John 1:18). Before the creation of the world, God foreordained the Son to be a sacrifice for the propitiation of sin, and the redemption and salvation of the entire human race (1 Pet. 1:18-20, 2:24, 3:18; 1 John 2:2; Gal. 4:4).

God the Son became a man (1 Tim. 2:5; 1 Tim. 3:16), yet retained the fullness of his deity, being both fully God and fully man (Luke 1:35). He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin (Matt. 1:18). He was without sin (1 Pet. 2:22; 1 John 3:5).

Jesus Christ is the only Savior of the world, promised to us by God (Gen. 3:15; Luke 4:18-19; John 4:42; Acts 2:36, 4:12; Eph. 5:2). Christ redeemed us with His blood and became the only mediator between God and man (Col. 1:20; 1 Tim. 2:5-6; Titus 2:14; Heb. 7:24-25). By His death and resurrection, Christ defeated the devil and death (1 Cor. 15:54-57; Rev. 3:21, 5:5). He sets believers free of eternal punishment (Rom. 6:9; 2 Tim. 1:10; Heb. 2:14). Having arisen from the dead and ascended into heaven, Jesus Christ is Head of the Church (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 1:22-23, 5:23; Col. 1:18). Now in glory, He gives eternal life to those who believe in Him, and He intercedes for His children before the Father (John 6:47; 1 John 2:1; 1 Tim. 3:16). He will be the Judge of the Universe and its King forever and ever (John 5:22; Acts 17:31; Rev. 11:15).

God the Holy Spirit

We believe that the Holy Spirit is God and possesses all the divine attributes (Ps. 139:7; Rom. 15:19; 1 Cor. 2:10). The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead and has mind, will and emotions (Acts 5:3-4, 15:28; Eph. 4:30; Heb. 10:29). The Scripture warns us about sins against the Holy Spirit (Isa. 63:10; Mark 3:29; Acts 5:3,9; 7:51; Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19).

The Holy Spirit inspired men, who were chosen by God, to write the Bible, and He gives the illumination for its understanding (John 14:26; 2 Pet. 1:21).

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was sent to testify about Christ, to glorify Him and to establish the Church (John 15:26, 16:7,14; Acts 1:8). The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgment, and He urges people to repent (John 16:8; Heb. 3:7-8).

At the moment of conversion, the Holy Spirit indwells, regenerates and seals a person (John 3:3-6; Acts 5:32; 1 Cor. 6:19). In the same moment, Jesus Christ baptizes (immerses) the regenerate Christian into the Body of Christ, which is the Church (John 1:33; 1 Cor. 12:13).

The Holy Spirit lives in regenerated people (Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 3:16), equipping them with power from above (Acts 1:8; 1 Cor. 2:4), filling them (Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; Eph. 5:18), teaching, encouraging and counseling them (John 14:26, 16:13; 1 Cor. 2:12-13), convicting them (John

16:8-9), and producing fruit in their lives (Gal. 5:22-23; Eph. 5:9).

The Holy Spirit gives gifts to believers. Gifts are special abilities which are given by God to men for service in, and the building up of, the church (1 Pet. 4:10; 1 Cor. 12:7-11, 28).

The gifts of wonders, signs, prophecy, healings, other tongues and the interpretation of tongues were actively used in the apostolic period for the founding of the church. God gives His gifts in accordance with His will, but the Scriptures warn us that in the last times the Devil will try to counterfeit the gifts of the Holy Spirit in order to deceive believers (Matt. 24:24; Mark 13:22-23; 2 Pet. 1:19; 1 Cor. 13:9-10; 2 Cor. 12:12; Eph. 2:20; Heb. 2:2-4; Rev. 16:14).

3. SPIRITUAL WORLD

We believe that God created angels (Col. 1:16), to serve Him (Ps. 103:20; Heb. 1:7) and those who will inherit salvation (Heb. 1:14). Angels are spiritual beings who are superior to humans in their might and power (2 Pet. 2:11). They differ among themselves in rank and authority (Col. 1:16; 1 Thess. 4:16). Although angels are mightier than men, God's Word forbids worshiping them (Col. 2:18; Rev. 22:8-9).

The most excellent angel did not remain in the truth and fell into sin (Ezek. 28:16; 1 John 3:8). He became the enemy of God and of humankind (John 8:44) and was named the Devil and Satan. A number of angels followed him; they did not preserve their dignity, and they fell. For this reason, God has prepared for them judgement and punishment in the lake of fire (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6; 1 Cor. 6:3; Rev. 20:10).

Satan and the fallen angels are leading a spiritual war against God and the church, tempting believers and slandering them before God, spreading false teaching (Matt. 4:1; Rev. 12:10) and bringing suffering to humans (Matt. 12:22; Mark 5:9, 9:22).

4. MAN

We believe that man is the utmost of all earthly creatures, created in God's image and likeness (Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1; Isa. 45:12). God created man for His glory as an eternal, perfect being, without sin, and with the right of moral choice (Gen. 2:16-17; Josh. 24:15; Isa. 43:7; Jer. 21:8; Dan. 12:2-3; Matt. 25:46). God blessed man and put him in charge of creation (Gen. 1:28; Ps. 8:6).

God endowed man with a mind, emotions, free will and moral responsibility before Him (Gen. 2:16-17; Deut. 30:19; Josh. 24:15; Eccles. 11:9; Rom. 2:14-15). Man is comprised of spirit, soul and body (2 Cor. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 4:12).

The gift of human life can only be given and taken away by the Lord Himself, from the moment of conception to the moment of the natural death of an individual (Ps. 139:14-16; Jer. 1:5).

God created man as male and female, and gave no one the right to change His plan regarding human gender (Gen. 1:27, 2:22). The human body is intended to be the temple of the Holy Spirit, thus people should not treat their bodies with neglect, abuse, knowingly harm, or mutilate them (1 Cor. 6:19; 1 Thess. 5:23). Every human being, no matter their race, has the fullness of dignity and deserves respect and Christian love (Acts 17:26-27).

5. SIN

We believe that sin is any disobedience to God's laws or standards, whether deliberate or unintentional. Sin is displayed in the fallen nature of every individual through thoughts, feelings, desires, words and actions (Gen. 6:5; Ps. 19:12-14; Matt. 12:34-37; James 1:14-15; 1 John 3:4; Eph. 2:3).

Being tempted by the devil, man has sinned, and has fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). All humans are sinners by means of the nature inherited from Adam as well as because of their own sins and transgressions (Ps. 14:1-3; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 3:10-12, 23, 5:12, 5:15-19; Eph. 2:1:5). Man's mind and conscience have been defiled, and he has become a slave of sin (Jer. 13:23; Rom. 6:17-18), and therefore he needs redemption (Eph. 2:1-3; Titus 1:15). Sin has separated man from God (Isa. 59:2), and man has become the object of God's wrath (Ps. 90:7-9; Rom. 1:18; Eph. 2:3). Man receives punishment for sin in the form of spiritual and physical death (Gen. 2:16-17; 5:5; Rom. 6:23; 1 Cor. 15:21-22), and ultimately, eternal death (2 Thess. 1:8-9).

The fall of man brought a curse upon all of creation (Rom. 8:22; Gen. 3:18).

6. SALVATION

We believe that God, in love, offers mankind salvation through repentance and faith in the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This salvation frees man from the bondage of sin and death, restores the relationship between God and man and results in eternal life for all who believe (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8; Col. 1:13-14; Titus 3:4-7). God desires the salvation of all people, but each person is responsible either to accept or reject God's grace (Isa. 43:11; 2 Cor. 7:1; Eph. 2:8-9; 1 Tim. 2:4; Titus 2:11).

God foreknew those who would respond to His call to salvation. He chose those individuals in Christ Jesus and predestined them to be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:28-29; Eph. 1:4-5).

Redemption

Redemption, liberation from the bondage and penalty of sin, is offered through the blood of Jesus Christ, which was shed on the cross to satisfy the demands of God's justice (Matt. 20:28; 1 Pet. 1:18; Rom. 3:24-25). Jesus Christ died for all, and now salvation by grace is

available to all people through faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 28:28; 2 Pet. 3:9; Rom. 3:24; Titus 2:11; Heb. 2:9).

Justification

Justification is the act of God by which the righteousness of Christ is imputed to the believer (Rom. 8:33). Man is freed from the punishment of sin and its guilt and is reconciled to God (Rom. 3:24). Justification is a gift given by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ and is not dependent on human works and merits (Rom. 3:28, 4:5, 5:1, 5:18; Gal. 2:16).

Adoption

Adoption is God's acceptance of regenerated people into His family (John 1:12-13; 1 John 3:1-2; Rom. 8:15-16; Gal. 3:26; Eph. 1:5, 2:19). Adoption gives believers the right to call upon God as their Heavenly Father and makes them God's heirs (1 Pet. 1:4; Rom. 8:17; Gal. 4:4-7; Eph. 1:11; Titus 3:7).

Faith

Faith, which is necessary for salvation, comes from hearing the Word of God (Acts 4:4; Rom. 10:17; Heb. 11:6). The faith which saves a man is a faith which responds to God's offer of salvation by unconditionally accepting the message of the Gospel and trusting Christ as the only Savior and Lord (Eph. 2:8-9; Heb. 11:1).

The confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is a confirmation of true faith (Matt. 10:32-33; Luke 12:8-9; John 20:28; Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:9-10; 2 Cor. 4:13). Works of faith also bear testimony to true faith (James 2:26; Gal. 5:6; Heb. 11).

Believers are called to grow in faith, and the knowledge of the Lord, through listening to and studying the Word of God, praying and living godly lives (Eph. 4:13; 2 Thess. 1:3).

Repentance

Repentance occurs when people realize their fallen condition, experience sorrow over their sin and agree with God through confession (Psalm 38:18). Repentance is the result of God's grace acting within the individual by means of God's Word, which leads him or her to conversion (Ezra 10:10-11; Prov. 28:13; Luke 15:17-21; Acts 2:37-38, 26:20; 2 Cor. 7:10; Titus 2:11-12).

Conversion

Conversion is evidenced when one turns away from a sinful way of life and turns toward a life of obedience to God (Acts 3:19).

The result of accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and the subsequent conversion, is forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:42-43; 1 John 1:9; Col. 1:13-14) and a new birth from God's Word and Holy Spirit (John 1:12-13, 3:5-6; James 1:18).

Regeneration

Regeneration (birth from above, or spiritual (new) birth) is a supernatural act of the Holy Spirit in the life of all who exercise faith. Through regeneration, God quickens a man's spirit and gives him a new nature (John 1:12-13, 3:3-6; James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:4-6; Titus 3:5).

People become children of God through spiritual birth, and their bodies become temples of the Holy Spirit (John 1:12; 2 Pet. 1:4; 1 Cor. 6:19; Heb. 2:14).

These are signs of the new birth:

- changing of one's way of life (Rom. 6:16-17; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:22-24; 5:8);
- rejection of wickedness and worldly lusts; hatred towards all evil (James 1:21; 2 Pet. 1:4; 1 John 5:4; Titus 2:12);
- carrying out of God's will in one's life (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 6:6);
- loving the Lord and the church (John 13:34; 1 John 3:14; 4:7-8, 5:1);
- desiring to fellowship with God through Bible study and prayer (Acts 9:11, 17:11; 1 Pet. 2:2);
- aspiring to become like Christ (1 Cor. 4:16; 2 Cor. 3:18; Gal. 4:19);
- desiring to witness to others about salvation (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 5:19).

Baptism of the Holy Spirit

Baptism of the Holy Spirit immerses regenerated person into the Body of Christ, the Church, and unites them with Christ. Christ, by the Holy Spirit, baptizes each believer at the moment of regeneration (Luke 3:16; Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27-28). Every born-again believer is baptized by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13).

Sanctification

During the process of sanctification, one becomes more like Jesus Christ, separates increasingly from sin and consecrates more to the new and holy life and service to God (1 Pet. 1:2,14-16; Rom. 6:22; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:4). Sanctification occurs as God acts and man responds (John 17:17; 1 Thess. 5:23).

Initial sanctification separates the believer from the sinful world and changes his position before God. Accomplished by God at the moment of conversion, initial sanctification liberates the believer from the bondage of sin and identifies him with Christ and the saints (1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 2:19; Titus 2:14; Heb. 10:10).

Progressive sanctification liberates a born-again individual from the power of sin and transforms him into the image of Christ. This transformation, leading to spiritual growth, is done by God the Father with the help of the Holy Spirit, God's Word, and the individual's participation, throughout his entire earthly life (John 17:17-19; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 1:9-11; 1 Thess. 4:3-8; Rev. 22:11).

Final sanctification fully liberates the regenerated individual from the presence of sin and results in Christ-likeness in eternity (1 John 3:2). Final sanctification occurs at the rapture of the church and our meeting with the Lord (1 Thess. 4:16-17, 5:23; Rom. 8:22-23).

Assurance of Salvation

We believe that the believer, kept by God, has the assurance of salvation and God's election on the basis of continuation in the faith (John 10:27-29; 1 John 5:13; Rom. 8:38-39; Heb. 10:38-39; Rev. 3:5). Assurance of salvation is based on God's promises and the testimony of the Holy Spirit (1 John 5:11-12; Rom. 8:16).

We believe that a born-again individual, exercising his free will, can fall away from salvation by abiding in willful sin, denying Christ or falling into heresy. In this case, a believer can be deprived of God's grace and will perish (Ezek. 18:24-32; 2 Pet. 3:17; Rom. 11:20-22; Gal. 5:4; 1 Tim. 1:19; 2 Tim. 2:12; Heb. 2:1, 12:15).

Christian Life

The Christian is called to fulfill Christ's two preeminent commands: to love the Lord and to love one's neighbor (Matt. 22:37-40; John 13:34-35; 1 Cor. 13).

In order to grow in Christ and abide in the way of salvation, each born-again individual is called to pray, to study and follow God's Word, to witness to others about Jesus Christ, to have fellowship with believers, and to participate in the life of the church through spiritual gifts and financial means (Luke 18:1; Acts 1:8, 17:11; 1 Pet. 4:10; 1 John 1:6-7; 2 Cor. 9:7; 1 Tim. 2:1-4).

7. CHURCH

We believe that the Church is the gathering of born-again believers who were redeemed by Christ and connected to His Body through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. These believers are found both on earth and in heaven (Matt. 16:18; Heb. 12:23). The Creator and Head of the Church is Jesus Christ (Matt. 16:18; Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 12:27; Col. 1:24).

The Universal Church is composed of born-again people from all nations and generations. From the Day of Pentecost, to the moment of the Rapture of the Church, all who have believed, and will believe, are united by one Lord, one faith and one baptism (Acts 2; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:11-13; 4:4-6; 1 Thess. 4:13-18).

The local church is the assembly of believers who live in one location and are connected by the same confession of faith, are united for service to God and each other, and who gather for the preaching of the Gospel (Matt. 18:17; Acts 2:42-47, 14:23; Eph. 4:11-16; Phil. 2:1-2). The local church is an integral part of the Universal Church; therefore each Christian must be a member of the local church, attend services regularly and participate in its ministry (Acts 2:41-42; 1 John 1:7; Eph. 10:25). The church's most authoritative body is the membership meeting.

Ordinances

Ordinances are those ministries which are commanded in the Scripture to be performed by

ordained ministers. The ordinances are special events in the lives of believers and the church. Water baptism and communion are the New Testament ordinances which are required for all born-again believers (Matt. 28:19; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:14-15; Acts 16:4, 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:28-32; Titus 1:5).

Other ordinances include ordination of ministers, prayer over the baptized, marriage, prayer over children, prayer over the sick with anointing oil and dedication of church buildings.

During ordinances, a minister offers prayer with laying on of hands, seeking God's blessing upon the one for whom they are praying for (Num. 27:19-23; Acts 14:23).

Christ instituted and commanded **water baptism** for all believers. It is established for those who have experienced conversion and became believers, to testify that they have entered into a covenant with the Lord. Baptism expresses obedience to the Lord, the pledge of a good conscience before God and a testimony of faith to others. Baptism is a sign of a believer's death to sin and his resurrection to new life in Christ (1 Pet. 3:21; Rom. 6:3-5; Gal. 3:27).

Baptism is administered for those who have received instruction in the faith and have reached the age of accountability. Baptism is a one-time, full immersion into water, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19).

Baptism makes one a member of the local church (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 2:41-42, 8:36-38; James 2:14,20). In order to maintain one's spiritual life and fellowship with Christ and the church, a regular participation in the Lord's Supper is required (1 Cor. 10:16-17).

Lord's Supper (Communion) - Jesus Christ enacted communion to proclaim and remember His suffering and death on the cross and to attest to His coming for the church (Matt. 26:26-28; 1 Cor. 11:23-26). The Lord's Supper, taken with living faith, signifies of our union with Christ and with each other, and reflects the reality that we share in the Blood and Body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16-17). The bread and the wine represent the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, but do not become them literally (1 Cor. 11:23-26).

Only born-again, baptized believers can take part in communion. They should be at peace with the Lord, the church and their neighbors, and should have a high regard for the body of Christ (1 Cor. 11:27-29).

Church Ministers

We believe that the church should have order and government in accordance with the Scriptures (1 Cor. 14:33,34). For this purpose, the Lord calls and installs ministers through the election and calling of the church (Acts 6:2-7, 15:22; Eph. 4:11-12).

When a minister is installed for the office of the presbyter (same as pastor or bishop) and deacon, ordination is performed by laying on of hands. Only men who fulfill the qualifications in the Scriptures can occupy these offices (Acts 6:1-6, 14:23; 1 Tim. 3:2-12; Titus 1:5-9).

The church, and the pastors who lay hands on the candidate, recognize that he is worthy to receive the office of a minister of the New Testament church and is endowed with rights, responsibilities and authority thereof (Rom. 15:15-16; 2 Tim. 1:6).

Pastor's responsibilities include teaching God's Word, performing ordinances, shepherding the flock (soul care), and leading the church (Acts 20:28,35; 1 Pet. 5:1-4; 2 Tim. 2:15; Titus 1:9).

Deacons are called to help pastors in their ministry; their main responsibilities are the financial and material aspects of church activity and acts of benevolence (Acts 6:1-4). Deacons (by pastor's assignment) have the right to perform any ordinances, except ordaining ministers and prayer over the sick with anointing of oil (James 5:14; Titus 1:5).

Church ministers may be supported financially by the church (Matt. 10:10; 1 Cor. 9:14; Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:17-18).

Church Discipline

Church members should walk in obedience and faithfulness to the Lord by keeping themselves from sin (1 Kings 15:22-23; Rev. 2:10), living in peace and mutual love with each other (2 Thess. 1:3), and keeping the unity of the church according to the teaching of Jesus Christ (Rom. 15:5-6; Phil. 1:27; 2:2).

To preserve purity and order in the church (1 Cor. 5:6-7; 2 Thess. 3:6) the following measures of church discipline exist: admonition (1 Tim. 1:5; Tit. 2:15), reproof (Matt. 18:15-18), rebuke (2 Thes. 3:14) and excommunication (1 Cor. 5:12-13).

Excommunication from the local church can be applied in the following cases: one falls away from faith in God (1 Cor. 16:22), strays into heresy (Titus 3:10) or commits and abides in sin (Matt. 18:15-18; 1 Cor. 5:11-13; 2 Thess. 3:6). The church receives the excommunicated back after they repent, leave their sin and show fruits of repentance (2 Cor. 2:6-8).

8. SUNDAY

We believe that the Lord set apart one day in the week for worship and rest from daily work (Gen. 2:1-3; Lev. 23:24-32).

Sunday is a special day during which the New Testament church gathers for common worship and study of Scripture, for these reasons:

- Jesus Christ rose from the dead on Sunday (Matt. 28:1-6; Mark 16:9);
- the first and second appearances of the risen Christ to His disciples took place during this day of the week (John 20:19-26);
- the Holy Spirit was given on this day (Acts 2:1);
- the first church held the Lord's Supper and regular worship services on this day (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2);

- John the Apostle was in the Spirit on this day and received Revelation from the Lord (Rev. 1:10).

The commandment about the Sabbath day, which was given to Old Testament Israel, was part of the Mosaic Law and was fulfilled by the life, death and resurrection of Christ. Christ gives His rest to every believer at conversion (Matt. 11:28, 12:8; Col. 2:16-17; Heb. 4:10). The New Testament does not require literal obedience to this commandment (Rom. 14:5-6).

9. MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

We believe that marriage was instituted by God (Gen. 2:18-24). It is a union between one man and one woman, and was established for fellowship, mutual help and support, and for the perpetuation of the human race (Gen. 1:28; 1 Cor. 7:1-5). A believer should only marry another believer, a member of the church, and one with whom he or she is spiritually united (1 Cor. 7:39; 2 Cor. 6:14-17). God commanded those who marry not to divorce (Matt. 19:6-9), and to be faithful to each other till death (Rom. 7:2).

God established the family to be the first, and most foundational, institution of society. Families consist of people who are connected with each other by marriage, by blood or by adoption. The husband and wife have equal dignity before God, since both were created in His image and likeness, but their roles and functions are different (Gen. 1:27; 1 Cor. 11:11).

The husband is the head of the family, and the wife is his helper; this reflects the relationship of Christ and the church (Gen. 2:18; 1 Cor. 11:3,8-9; Eph. 5:22-33).

Children are a gift and inheritance from the Lord (Ps. 127:3-5, 128:3-6). They are to honor their parents and be obedient to them (Eph. 6:1-3; Col. 3:20).

Parents bear responsibility for the spiritual upbringing of children by teaching and through personal example (Deut. 6:5-9; Ps. 78:3-7; Eph. 6:4).

10. CHURCH AND STATE

We believe that governmental authority is established by God (Rom. 13:1-7). Thus, in civil matters (unless otherwise commanded by Scripture), believers should obey the authorities, pray for rulers and officers, and be exemplary citizens (Jer. 29:7; Matt. 22:21; Acts 5:29; 1 Tim. 2:1-3). The church is separated from the state, since its head is Jesus Christ Himself. Any interference of the state into the affairs of the church is unacceptable, just as the participation of the individual church or denomination in political activity is unacceptable.

In accordance with the teaching of Jesus Christ, believers can choose not to swear an oath or use weapons against other people (Matt. 5:34-37,39; 44-45).

11. SECOND COMING OF CHRIST AND LAST DAYS

We believe in the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 1:11), and these consequential events of the last days:

The Rapture of the Church, at which time the church will meet the Lord in the clouds (1 John 3:2; Phil. 2:16, 3:20-21, 1 Thess. 5:23). At the rapture, those who are dead in Christ will be raised up, and those who are alive will be changed (1 Cor. 15:52-57; 1 Thess. 4:16-17).

After the Rapture, those who are saved will stand before the **judgement seat of Christ** to receive their rewards (1 Pet. 5:4; 1 Cor. 3:14, 9:24-25; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 4:7-8).

The Great Tribulation, will be a period of the Antichrist's rule and a time when God's judgements will be poured out on unrepentant humanity (Matt. 24:29-31; Luke 21:25-29; Rev. 12:12, 13:4-8).

The Coming of Jesus Christ in power and glory to the earth will be a visible, open coming of the Lord. (Matt. 24:27; 25:31; 26:64; 1 Thess. 1:10; Rev. 1:7). It will occur before the Millennium, which will be preceded by the rule of the Antichrist (Rev. 20:1-6).

The Millennium is a time when Christ reigns visibly on earth for one thousand years, according to the promises given to Israel (Isa. 11:6-9, 65:17-25; Dan. 7:13-14,27; Rev. 20:1-6)

Great White Throne Judgment is the final righteous judgment of God over all people whose names are not recorded in the Book of Life (Rev. 20:11-15).

After that, **eternity** will come. The righteous will enter into eternal bliss, while the unrighteous will be thrown into the lake of fire where they will be eternally tormented (Matt. 25:46; John 5:29; Rev. 20:11-15, 21:7-8).

The Scriptures call all believers to be ready for the Second Coming of Christ by looking forward to it with desire and anticipation (Luke 21:34-36; 2 Pet. 3:12-14; Heb. 9:28; Rev. 22:20-21).

"Come, Lord Jesus! ... Amen" (Rev. 22:20).