

The Family International Declaration of Faith

1. The Holy Scriptures

We believe the Holy Bible to be the inspired Word of God, given to us by God our Creator to be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psalm 119:105). We assert that the Scriptures are a sacred revelation, written by holy men of old who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, and that these writings are the divinely appointed standard and guide to our faith and practice. Holding fast to the truth that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16), we strive to study, memorize, and obey it, that we may grow in faith, wisdom, and spiritual strength through our knowledge of and adherence to its tenets. God's Word as revealed in the Bible is the basis and cornerstone of all our beliefs and practices. It is the core of our spiritual strength and nourishment. Its principles are the foundation of the instruction we give our children, and its truth is the basis of the witness we give to others.

• Matthew 24:35; Romans 15:4; John 8:31–32; 1 John 2:5; Romans 10:17; Psalm 119:99–100; Jeremiah 15:16; 2 Timothy 2:15; 3:15; 4:2; John 1:1,14 2

2. God and the Trinity

We believe in the one true, eternal God, who is the all-powerful, all-knowing, ever-present, invisible Spirit of love who created and rules the universe and everything in it. We believe in the unity of the Godhead, that there are three distinguishable but inseparable Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

• Isaiah 43:10–11; John 4:24; 1 Timothy 1:17; 1 John 4:8; 5:7

3. Creation

We believe the biblical account of Creation as outlined in the book of Genesis, that it is to be accepted literally and not allegorically or figuratively; that God, not chaos, created the heavens and the earth. We also believe that on the sixth day of Creation, God formed the first humans in His own image and after His own likeness. He formed Adam out of the dust of the ground and breathed into him the breath of life, then later that day made Eve from Adam's rib; thus they became living souls by divine creation and not by random evolution. We also believe that God's visible creation provides clear testimony of His invisible existence. As our Creator, God deserves thanksgiving, reverence, and obedience from us as His creations.

• Genesis 1:1; Romans 1:20; Psalm 33:6–9; Jeremiah 32:17

4. The Fall of Man

We believe that the first man and woman were created innocent by their Maker, but through the temptation of Satan they voluntarily transgressed and fell from their sinless and happy state. As a result all humankind are now sinners by nature, and are absolutely unable to attain righteousness without the saving power of Jesus Christ.

• Genesis chapter 3; Romans 5:12–21

5. Jesus Christ, the Son of God

We believe in the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, who was miraculously conceived by divine intervention and born of the Virgin Mary, and was sinless throughout His life. He made a full atonement for the sins of the world by His death—the substitutionary sacrifice of the just for the unjust. We affirm that Jesus Christ is the mediator between God and humankind, and that He gave Himself as the only ransom for sinners. We believe in His physical resurrection and His bodily ascension into Heaven, His perpetual intercession for His people, and His soon coming personal visible return to the world in power and great glory, to set up His kingdom on Earth and later to judge the living and the dead.

• 1 Timothy 3:16; Philippians 2:5–11; Hebrews 4:14–15; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24–25; Romans 1:3–4; Matthew 28:18; Acts 1:9–11

6. Salvation by Grace

We believe that all people by nature are sinners, but that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). We believe, therefore, that anyone who personally accepts God's pardon for sin through Jesus Christ will be forgiven of his or her sin, reconciled to God, and will be able to forever live in God's presence.

We believe that the salvation of humankind is wholly by grace (God's gift of love, mercy, and forgiveness), through Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who in infinite love for the lost, voluntarily accepted His Father's will and became the divinely provided sacrificial Lamb who alone can take away our sins (Ephesians 2:8–9; Titus 3:5). Salvation can only be acquired through Jesus Christ. "I am the way, the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).

We are saved by believing in Jesus Christ and personally receiving Him into our hearts and lives, thus becoming spiritually regenerated or "born again." "As many as received Him [Jesus], to them gave He the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12). "Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

Once saved, the believer is saved forever. We believe it is the privilege of all who are born again through faith in Jesus Christ to be fully assured of their salvation from the very day that they receive Him as their Savior. Just as the believer is saved by grace, he or she is sustained by grace: "Who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation" (1 Peter 1:5). "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:28).³

• Romans 3:23; 6:23; 3:10; 1 John 1:8; Acts 4:12; 1 John 5:12

7. The Holy Spirit

We believe that the Holy Spirit came forth from the Father to teach, instruct, inspire, and empower believers for their God-given mission. A believer receives a measure of the Holy Spirit when he accepts Jesus, but he can be filled to overflowing if he asks and desires to give himself more fully to the Lord. "Be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18).

We also believe the Holy Spirit is the personification of the feminine and maternal element of the Trinity of God and as such is the picture of a mother, the comforter, who loves, nurtures, comforts, and consoles the born-again child of God.

- Genesis 1:26–27; Proverbs 8:1,22–32; John 3:5–8; 14:15–18,26; 15:26; 16:7–11; Acts 1:8

8. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

We believe that the baptism or complete filling of the Holy Spirit is a baptism of love, "for God is love" (1 John 4:8), and that it may be freely obtained by all believers who simply ask God for it, and that it is often given after the scriptural "laying on of hands" of other believers. The primary purpose of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is to empower the believer to witness the Gospel of Jesus Christ to others. "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me" (Acts 1:8).

Other ministrations of the Holy Spirit are to guide the believer into all truth, to comfort the believer, to bring all things that Jesus has said to the believer's remembrance, to assist the believer in prayer, and to help him understand God's Word.

- Luke 11:9–13; Acts 8:15–17, 1:8; Luke 4:18; Galatians 5:22–23; John 14:16,26; Romans 8:26–27

9. The Gifts of the Spirit

We believe it is the privilege of the Spirit-baptized believer to enjoy the benefits of the spiritual gifts outlined in 1 Corinthians chapter 12. It is our belief that God gives different gifts to different people, according to their specific ministry and His particular plan for them. "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all" (1 Corinthians 12:4–5,7). All of these gifts that are bestowed by the heavenly Father upon His children are to be used and freely exercised in the congregation by both male and female members, so that the body of believers may be strengthened, encouraged, and edified by them.

- Joel 2:28–29; Acts 2:17–18; Matthew 7:11

10. The Fruits of the Spirit

We believe that Christians who are filled with the Holy Ghost should manifest the fruits of the Spirit as detailed in Scripture: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance (Galatians 5:22–23 KJV).

- Ephesians 5:9; James 3:17–18; Matthew 7:16–20

11. The Gift of Prophecy

We believe prophecy is an important gift given to God's children through the Holy Spirit and that prophecy should be an active part of our daily lives and ministry. As we acknowledge the Lord and ask Him to guide our paths, leaning not to our own understanding (Proverbs 3:5–6), we believe He speaks to us personally with instruction, guidance, and encouragement. "He who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men" (1 Corinthians 14:3).

The gift of prophecy is available to all followers of Christ, as is any other gift of the Spirit, which God has promised to pour out in great measure. It was foreseen in the Bible that prophecy would occupy a more important role in the Last Days⁴, the era we believe we are living in now. "And it shall come to pass in the Last Days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" (Acts 2:17).

12. Angels

We believe that God created an innumerable company of spiritual beings known as angels (literally, "messengers"). Angels are powerful immortal beings whom the Lord has assigned to watch over humankind, especially to protect and to minister to God's people. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14). Although angels are usually invisible, they can materialize and appear in human form and even walk amongst us without our being aware of it, which is why God's Word tells us, "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels" (Hebrews 13:2).

- Psalm 34:7; 91:11–12; 2 Kings 6:15–18; Genesis 19:1–2; Judges 6:11–22; 13:2–21

13. Departed Saints

We believe that in addition to angelic ministering spirits, God also uses the spirits of departed saints to minister to and deliver messages to His people. Scriptural evidence of this is found in the account of the spirits of the departed prophets, Moses and Elijah, appearing and conferring with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration; and Saint John's account in the book of Revelation of his conversation with a heavenly messenger sent by God to reveal to him mysteries of the future: "And when I heard and saw these things, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then he said to me, 'See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God'" (Revelation 22:8–9).

- Luke 9:28–33; Revelation 19:10; Hebrews 12:1,22–24

14. Satan and His Demons

We believe that one of God's mightiest archangels, "Lucifer, son of the morning" (Isaiah 14:12), sinned and fell through his pride, jealousy of God, and ambition. He then became Satan [the Devil], the infernal foe of all righteousness. About a third of the angels followed

him in his rebellion against God, and thus became demons, evil spirits, which are presently active as his agents and associates in his malignant and God-defying activities. Satan's evil spirits now influence many people, and are largely responsible for the rampant crime, violence, wickedness, and disease presently flooding the world. We hold Satan to be the open and avowed enemy of God and humankind, who, as a usurper, now rules as the unholy "god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4 KJV). He will be defeated at the apocalyptic Battle of Armageddon after the Second Coming of Christ (Revelation 20:1–3).

- Isaiah 14:12–15; 1 Peter 5:8; Revelation 12:7–9; Ezekiel 28:11–19

15. Spiritual Warfare

We believe that we are engaged in a relentless spiritual warfare; that as we strive to obey God's commands and preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all whom we can, "to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18), our adversary the Devil does all that he possibly can to try to thwart our efforts. "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). Soldiers in the Lord's army must therefore "put on the whole armor of God" (Ephesians 6:11), and learn to skillfully wield the powerful spiritual weapons that God has entrusted us with, particularly the "sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God" (Ephesians 6:17) and the "keys of the kingdom" (Matthew 16:19). We are confident of victory, because God's Word has promised us that "He [Jesus] who is in you is greater than he [the Devil] who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

16. Prayer

We believe that prayer is the vital communication between every child of God and his or her heavenly Father. Far from merely being a religious ritual or spiritual exercise, prayer is the means by which we enjoy personal communion with the Lord. By prayer, we declare our love for God, our dependence on Him, our submission to Him, and our desire to cooperate with Him in the fulfillment of His purpose. All those in our fellowships are encouraged to take time daily for personal private prayer, as well as to join the other members of their community in united prayer. In His Word, God promises to hear prayer and bless those who diligently seek Him, thus "men ought always to pray" (Luke 18:1).

- Jeremiah 33:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Hebrews 11:6; James 5:16; 1 Samuel 12:23; 1 Chronicles 16:11; Ephesians 6:18

17. Divine Healing

We believe that healing diseased and afflicted bodies was a major part of Jesus' ministry while on Earth, and that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). He still desires to restore health to the afflicted that come to Him in faith. Through Christ's suffering on the cross, God has made provision not only for the salvation of the souls of all humankind, but also for the healing of physical infirmities, for "by His stripes [the wounds He received when He was beaten] we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). Divine healing is a privilege available to all who believe.

We consider God's power to heal a great blessing for those who exercise the faith to partake of it. We do not condemn or hinder those who seek medical help for their illnesses. Our prescribed scriptural outlook, as to whether to rely on prayer alone or medical help in addition to prayer, is "according to your faith it will be done to you" (Matthew 9:29 NIV).

- Matthew 4:23–24; 10:1; Mark 16:17–18; 1 Peter 2:24; Matthew 8:16–17; Psalm 103:3

18. The Lord's Supper—Communion

We believe that the Lord's Supper, called "communion," was instituted by Christ as a means for us to commemorate His death on the cross for our sins, and that partaking of its elements (the bread and wine) is a profession of the believer's faith. Communion is a simple ceremony whereby a group of believers partake of bread, which is broken, representing how Jesus' body was broken for the healing of our bodies; and wine, which represents how Christ's blood was shed for the remission of our sins. Scripture enjoins the believer to periodically (usually weekly) partake of the Lord's Supper with other believers until His return; therefore it is the privilege of all who know and believe in Him to commemorate His sacrifice on Calvary "till He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26).

- Matthew 26:26–28; John 6:51; 1 Corinthians 11:23–30

19. The Fellowship of Believers

We believe that great spiritual benefit can be derived from fellowship with other like-minded believers. Therefore, members of our communities not only take time for private prayer, Scripture reading, and personal devotions, but also for united prayer, united readings of God's Word, as well as united devotions, fellowship meetings, and group activities on a daily basis. Scripture exhorts us not to abandon "the assembling of ourselves together" (Hebrews 10:25). Thus, we endeavor to follow the example of the Early Church, whose members "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42).

- Acts 2:46; 1 John 1:3,7a

20. The Church

We believe that the Church is the collective body of believers. The Church is referred to as "the body of Christ" as well as "the bride of Christ." Thus, it is not merely an ecclesiastical institution or organization—and certainly not a religious edifice or place of worship. "The Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands" (Acts 7:48). "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house" (1 Peter 2:5 KJV). "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). We believe the Church is the spiritual entity composed of all born-again persons, regardless of their affiliation with Christian organizations or denominations.

- Ephesians 1:22–23; 2:19–22; 1 Corinthians 12:12–14

21. The Great Commission

We believe the Great Commission that Jesus has given to His Church is to evangelize the world: "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15). We believe this should be the primary purpose in life on Earth of the born-again believer—to make Christ's love known to the world and to seek to win others into God's heavenly kingdom. Whether or not the believer has received a formal ordination into the Gospel ministry from a denomination or institution is irrelevant. We believe all Christians are ordained by God to preach His Gospel and win others to Christ, thereby bearing everlasting fruit for His kingdom. "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit" (John 15:16).

• Matthew 28:19–20; Acts 1:8; 2 Timothy 4:2; 1 Peter 3:15; Proverbs 14:25; Acts 26:18; 1 Corinthians 9:16

22. Consecration

We believe that the Christian's life should be consecrated to the Lord, that is, to "present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1), so that He may work through us and in us "both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13).

Because our bodies belong to the Lord and are the temples in which the Holy Spirit dwells, we do not believe in abusing them with illicit drugs, tobacco, or harmful substances. "Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16). "You were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:20).

23. Our Separation from the World

We believe that the Christian is called by God to "be not conformed to this world, but [to] be transformed by the renewing of [his] mind" (Romans 12:2). We adhere to the scriptural admonition to "love not the world or the things in the world" (1 John 2:15). We understand this to mean that the believer should not only avoid the un-Christian pursuits and practices of secular society, but that we should avoid conformity to worldly attitudes and unscriptural ways of thinking.

However, while we believe that Scripture bids God's people to "come out from among [unbelievers] and be separate" (2 Corinthians 6:17), we do not feel that this separation of the believers should impede us from reaching out to the unevangelized in any strata of society and following the footsteps of Him who came to this world "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

24. Discipleship

We believe that it is a high privilege for a believer to respond to Christ's challenge to follow Him as a full-time disciple.⁵ We also believe that Jesus' call to such full-time service remains essentially unchanged from His invitation to the fishermen on the shores of Galilee long ago: "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19).

It is our conviction from Scripture that the ideal of such discipleship entails a commitment to devote one's life to winning others to Christ, and to teaching and training others to follow Jesus as His disciples. "Go therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19–20). "By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit [others won to Christ]; so will you be My disciples" (John 15:8).

Full discipleship also entails a renouncement and forsaking of the pursuit of material wealth, as well as worldly and materialistic ambitions and endeavors. "No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please Him who enlisted him as a soldier" (2 Timothy 2:4). Christ plainly set forth the rigorous terms of the high standard of discipleship when He said, "So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:33).

• Matthew 6:19–34; Mark 10:21; Hebrews 11:13; Luke 16:13

25. Cooperative Communal Living

We believe the New Testament's account of the lifestyle of the Early Church offers us not only a historical narrative, but an exemplary pattern and model, which God intended succeeding generations of believers to follow. The Early Church's unselfish, cooperative lifestyle, in which "all who believed were together, and had all things in common" (Acts 2:44), not only proved to be exceptionally beneficial for the fledgling movement in terms of practical and economic concerns, but even more importantly, the close fellowship and spiritual unity fostered by this lifestyle provided the early disciples with needed support, fellowship, encouragement, and a spiritual haven. It was an example to nonbelievers that Jesus' followers could live together in harmony and cooperation—further proof of the love that they professed. Likewise, we today have found both the practical and spiritual benefits of cooperative communal living to be extremely advantageous in helping us achieve our goal of reaching all whom we can with the Gospel of Christ.

• Mark 10:29–30; Acts 2:44–45; 4:34–35; Psalm 133:1

26. Marriage and Children

We believe that God created and ordained the marriage union of man and woman and that marriage is the ideal relationship for the parenting of children and the forming of stable families.

We also believe that children are a wonderful gift of God with which He blesses and entrusts us, for "children are a heritage from the Lord; and the fruit of the womb is a reward" (Psalm 127:3). Therefore, it is our conviction that the physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual needs of children should be amply and competently met. We consider the care of the little ones God has given us to be a very important responsibility and a fundamental component of our daily lives and service to God, for which reason all members of our communities are encouraged to do their utmost to ensure that their children are reared in as healthy, loving, safe, and godly an environment as is possible.

Saint John expressed the desire of every genuine Christian parent for their children: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3 John 4). For this reason we strive to impart to our children a deep appreciation, respect, and love for God and His Word, and the sacred principles contained in it, bringing them up "in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

• Psalm 127:3–5; 2 Timothy 3:15; Proverbs 22:6; Deuteronomy 6:6–7; Psalm 34:11; 1 Samuel 1:28

27. The Sanctity of Life

We believe that human life is sacred, and that it is the right of each person to be treated as an individual created in the image of God. It is our belief that as Christians our duty is to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:31) by sharing the news of God's love and salvation for humanity, regardless of race, gender, color, creed, nationality, religious affiliation, or social status. We are exhorted to love and respect others without partiality (1 Timothy 5:21). We oppose acts of prejudice and violence.

We are diametrically opposed to abortion. Scripture makes it clear that God esteems the unborn as a person with an identity, not merely as a mass of fetal tissue. The Lord said to the prophet Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5). Modern fetology makes a strong case that human life begins at conception, which means that the developing child deserves all the protection and safeguards that any of us enjoy.

We believe that neither suicide nor euthanasia is sanctioned as an acceptable act in the eyes of God. We maintain that life is a valued gift from God, and as the sole giver of life, God is likewise the only appropriate taker of life.

• Genesis 1:27; 2:7; Psalm 139:14–16; Jeremiah 2:34–35; Acts 7:19

28. Civil Government and Religious Liberty

We believe that we are "strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Hebrews 11:13). Nevertheless, we also accept the Scripture's teaching that civil government is of divine appointment, for the interest and order of human society. "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake" (1 Peter 2:13). "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the powers that exist are appointed by God" (Romans 13:1).

The only exception to this would be in matters of faith, where obedience to a law of man would mean disobedience to the law of God. Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords, and in such cases where the laws or ordinances would violate our faith or duty to witness our faith to others, our position is the same as the apostles': "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

• Romans 12:18; 13:1–7; 1 Peter 2:17; Matthew 22:21; Proverbs 8:15–16; Revelation 19:16

29. Jesus' Law of Love

We believe that Jesus' Law of Love as explained in Matthew 22:35–40 should govern every aspect of a Christian's life. An expert in the law tested Jesus with this question: "'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?' Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." He expressed it again in His famous "golden rule": "In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12 NIV).

We therefore believe that if a person's actions are motivated by unselfish, sacrificial love—the love of God for our fellow man—and are not intentionally hurtful to others, such actions are in accordance with Scripture and are thus lawful in the eyes of God. "The fruit of the Spirit is love. Against such there is no law" (Galatians 5:22–23).

It is also our belief that the Law of Love comprises the ultimate fulfillment and completion of biblical law, including the Ten Commandments, as by nature it fulfills the spirit of all the Mosaic law. Saint Paul affirmed this when he said: "All the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Galatians 5:14). We therefore believe that through the Lord's salvation and His Law of Love, Christians are released from the hundreds of rules under the Mosaic laws in the Old Testament and are no longer required to observe them. They are however, held to a higher law, Christ's Law of Love, which should guide all our interactions with others.

30. Theological Perspective on Sexuality

We believe that God created human sexuality, and we consider it a natural emotional and physical need. As evidenced by Genesis 1:28, sexual relationships between men and women were designed, ordained, and commanded by God. Long before Adam and Eve sinned, God told them, "Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth." Later in verse 31 of the same chapter it says that God "saw everything that He had made"—which clearly included the first man and woman as well as their bodies and sexuality—"and behold, it was very good."

Thus, it is our belief that heterosexual relations, when practiced as God ordained, designed, and intended—between consenting adults of legal age—is a pure and natural wonder of God's creation, and permissible according to Scripture. Members of the Family, if they choose, may privately and with discretion, according to Family Charter 6 guidelines, interact sexually with other adults within the Family, as long as all parties concerned are in agreement and no one is offended by it.

31. The Bride of Christ

We believe it is evident throughout the Bible that the relationship between God and His people and Christ and His Church is akin to that of a bridegroom to his bride. The Scripture tells us, "For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is His name" (Isaiah 54:5). "You may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead [Jesus], that we should bear fruit to God" (Romans 7:4).

The marital metaphor is frequently used to describe the intimate spiritual unity between Christ and His people, and the fervency of the loving union of heart, mind, and spirit that accompanies this relationship. The book of Revelation describes the reunion of Christ with His Church in Heaven as His marriage: "Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper" (Revelation 19:9). It is our understanding of the Scriptures that the followers of Christ are His bride, called to love and serve Him with the fervor of a wife. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for her" (Ephesians 5:25). He has promised to betroth us to Him forever (Hosea 2:19–20).

32. The Time of the End

We believe that we are now living in the time period known in Scripture as the "Last Days" or the "Time of the End," which is the era immediately preceding the return of Jesus Christ. His second coming will fulfill the Scripture: "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever" (Revelation 11:15).

Following is a brief analysis of our understanding of biblical prophecy, as a result of prayerful study of the Scriptures. Some of the specifics may not fall into place exactly as we view them at present, but as the time approaches we expect to have a better understanding of them.

a. Signs of the Times: Many biblical prophecies and signs of the times that specifically predict world conditions prior to Christ's second coming have been fulfilled within this generation, confirming that we are indeed living in the "Last Days." "As the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matthew 24:37), for "evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Timothy 3:13).

• Matthew 16:3; 24:all; 2 Timothy 3:1–7

b. The Antichrist: Seven years before Jesus' return, a powerful world leader known in Scripture as the "beast," "man of sin," "son of perdition," and "Antichrist" will rise to power, gaining sufficient influence to "confirm a covenant [peace treaty]" (Daniel 9:27), which will probably include a religious/political agreement on Jerusalem, resolving an important world issue that concerns the Israelis and Palestinians, and concerning the world's Christians, Jews, and Muslims. The ratification of this covenant will in all likelihood result in the internationalization of the city and the restoration of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem.

• 1 John 2:18; 2 Thessalonians 2:1–4, 9; Revelation 13:4,7

c. Great Tribulation: Three and a half years after the peace initiative is confirmed, the Satan-possessed Antichrist will break the covenant, abolish Jewish temple worship, declare that he alone is God, and demand all the world's veneration and worship. A mandatory universal credit system will be instituted during this time, permitting no one to legally buy or sell essential goods, except those who bear this demagogue's mark, name, or number (called the "mark of the beast") in their right hand or forehead. The progression of these events will plunge the entire world into an unprecedented time of social chaos and religious persecution known in the Bible as the "Great Tribulation" (Matthew 24:21).

Despite all the demonic fury that the oppressive anti-Christ regime will muster against them, countless Christians will survive the beast's onslaughts, boldly preaching the Gospel of salvation until the Lord's return. A vast number of adherents of other religions will also rebel against this One World regime. It is our firmly held belief that born-again Christians will remain on Earth during the time of the Great Tribulation.

It is therefore the duty of every Christian to prepare both spiritually and physically for this cataclysmic time, because Jesus clearly tells us that He will come after the Great Tribulation to gather His people to Him in the Rapture—not before. He personally specified: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sign of the Son of Man will appear in Heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of Heaven with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:29–30).

• Matthew 24:15–31; Luke 21:25–28; Daniel 11:31–35; 7:21,25; Revelation 11:3–6; 13:7; 12:11; Daniel 9:27; 2 Thessalonians 2:4

d. The Second Coming of Christ: The three-and-a-half-year period of Great Tribulation will climax in the return of Jesus Christ to the Earth. All of the born-again believers will then be supernaturally delivered from their cruel persecutors by means of the Rapture, the miraculous event when their mortal bodies will be gloriously changed and made like Jesus' own immortal resurrection body, as they rise to meet the Lord in the air.

At this time, the deceased saved believers, whose spirits have been with the Lord in Heaven, will be reunited with their new glorified bodies, which will be resurrected from their graves.

• 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17; Matthew 24:29–30; Revelation 1:7; 1 Corinthians 15:51–52; Philippians 3:20–21

e. The Marriage Supper, the Wrath of God, and the Battle of Armageddon: Following their rapture and resurrection, the saved will partake of the glorious "Marriage Supper of the Lamb" in Heaven, and appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive rewards for service rendered on Earth. At the same time, God's angels of judgment will pour out His plagues and wrath upon the Antichrist and his followers, in an episode referred to as the Wrath of God. It culminates in the Battle of Armageddon, when Jesus and the hosts of Heaven return to Earth to utterly defeat and destroy the Satanic Antichrist and his evil hordes and deliver those they oppressed.

• Revelation 7:9,13–17; chapter 19; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Daniel 12:2–3; Revelation 14:9–10; 16:1–21

f. Christ's Millennial Reign: Jesus Christ and His victorious heavenly forces will then occupy and assume absolute control of the entire world, ruling and reigning over those who live through the plagues of God's wrath and Armageddon. As Jesus and His forces establish the kingdom of God on Earth, justice, equity, and true righteousness will at last prevail. Satan will be imprisoned in the bottomless pit, the world's cruel and senseless wars will cease, and Earth will be restored to its original paradisiacal state. This period will last for 1000 years; thus it is known as "the Millennium."

• Daniel 2:44; Revelation 20:1–4,6; 5:10; Isaiah 2:2–4; 11:6–9; Psalm 46:9; Jeremiah 31:34

g. The Battle of Gog and Magog, and The New Heavens and the New Earth: At the end of the Millennium, Satan will be released from his prison for "a little while" (Revelation 20:3,7), and will deceive those among the ones who lived through God's wrath and Armageddon and their descendents who have refused to willingly submit to the lordship of Christ and His reign of righteousness. These unregenerate rebels will again follow Satan, uniting in a futile insurrection that will culminate in the cataclysmic Battle of Gog and Magog, in which God sends a supernatural flood of fire upon them. So vehement will be this conflagration that the entire surface of the Earth will be melted, the seas will be vaporized, and the atmospheric heavens will vanish (2 Peter 3:10). God will then re-create on the purged surface of the planet a beautiful new Earth, with fresh new unpolluted surface and atmospheric heavens.

• Revelation 20:7–9; 2 Peter 3:10–13; Isaiah 40:4

h. The White Throne Judgment: The unsaved dead of all ages will then be raised to appear before God at the awesome "great white throne judgment." "Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things

which were written in the books. And anyone not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:11–12,15).

i. New Jerusalem: God's marvelous Heavenly City, New Jerusalem, will then descend like a stupendous jewel from above to crown the paradisiacal New Earth. The huge 1500-mile high pyramidal Heavenly City—"the mountain of the Lord's house" (Hebrews 12:22; Isaiah 2:2; Micah 4:1) with a 1500-mile square base—is the glorious eternal heavenly home for all of God's saved children, the hope of all ages, where at last, "the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:3–4).

- Revelation chapters 21 and 22