

# THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

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Editor ~ Wade Stanley

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## The Perfect Bride of Christ!

Jay Graham

*Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me. For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ (2 Corinthians 11:1-2).*

In **Revelation 12**, we have a picture of two women, and we can more easily see these two women in **12:13-17**. I believe the first woman is "Jehovah's wife" of the Old Testament, Israel. The Lord referred to Israel a number of times as His wife, such as in **Jeremiah 31:32**,

*... not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD.*

It is with this thought in mind that He described Israel's going after other gods as "adultery" several times. The woman pictured in **Revelation 12:13** is OT Israel as it says, "the woman who gave birth to the male Child" (the male child represents Christ). This vision sees Satan persecuting the woman, OT Israel.

The vision then goes to the second woman and her offspring as described in **12:17**,

*And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.*

This second woman refers to the Lord's church (I think) and His Christians as they are persecuted and continue to be in our present time. Satan surely continues to attack the Lord's people, and he will until the end of the world when Jesus returns. This second woman is described as the "bride of Christ" a number of times in the New Testament in various ways, including Jesus' words and several of the writers of the NT Scriptures, such as the apostle Paul as noted in the beginning of this article.

In the Lord's eyes, the bride (the church) is in the perfect condition to be His betrothed. Because we live and see in the flesh, we see our own lives and our brothers and sisters with all our flaws and warts. The Lord sees us as His perfect wife to be.

We can see this perfection in several places, as pictured in **Revelation chapters 19, 20, and 21**.

However, if we consider it closely, we can see perfection in the body today here on earth. The church is the perfect spiritual organization to do exactly what it was ordained and planned to do, even "before the foundation of the world," as noted in **Ephesians 1:4**. It provides glory to the Lord, its Creator, and its Savior. The church provides a perfect dwelling place for the household of God, as taught in **Ephesians 2:19-22**. Its foundation is perfect, not only in its chief cornerstone (Jesus) as its savior and provider but also in the form of the writings of the apostles and prophets in which we find the church's only doctrines and teachings.

Through this perfect foundation, the Lord's people can be aided by every spiritual blessing "in the heavenly places" (**Ephesians 1:3**). We can appreciate this perfection in the assemblies of the body and what we do while in these assemblies. The Lord ordained singing, teaching, praying, remembering, and giving to be done among the brothers and sisters when they meet in His name. I am convinced these activities are the perfect way for us to gain these blessings. For this reason, among others, we do only these things approved by the Lord.

The problem comes when men and women think they need other things to help us serve the Lord, such as religious holidays and foreign things (activities and devotions not found in this foundation) that the New Testament does not authorize in their writings. If something does not come from the Lord, it only glorifies those who invented it, and, in reality, it tells the Lord His ways are not enough. However, the Scriptures clearly say the Lord has given us "all things that pertain to life and godliness," as noted in **2 Peter 1:2-4**. He gives us all things!

The Lord created the church to accomplish His perfect will. This includes all things pertaining to it -- including its assemblies and edifying practices -- to give His people everything they need to glorify and walk with Him and ultimately be saved for eternity. It is indeed the perfect organization to accomplish its ends!

When men and women attempt to introduce new things to the faith -- such as organizations and practices -- or even to exclude the things the Lord has authorized, the congregations and individuals who make them up are no longer the Lord's

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possession. We can see this clearly in five of the seven letters to the churches in **Revelation 2-3**.

What a beautiful "pearl of great price" we have found! What a glorious path to the Lord and His righteousness we can follow! What a magnificent bride we can be part of!

I know these modern times may seem dark to some. But the bride of Christ will continue to follow the path our Lord has chosen. Will you come along?

*And the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely (Revelation 22:17).*

~ 7715 Quarterhorse Cir, Flagstaff, AZ 86004  
jayhgraham@live.com

## Is Baptism Just a Symbol?

Wade Stanley

I believe baptism is for the remission of sins, that one is born into the kingdom of God through baptism in Jesus's name, and that baptism is necessary in order to be saved. When I teach about baptism, what I sometimes hear in response is, "Baptism is important, but it's only a symbol. We are baptized because we are saved and not saved because we are baptized." But is baptism JUST a symbol?

In **Romans 6:1-4**, Paul asks

*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*

Paul's teaching on baptism in **Romans 6** is, in part, a response to one of the criticisms of his teaching. From Paul's teaching, some people seem to conclude: if God gives more grace in response to sin, then we should sin more to increase God's grace. Or, to put it another way, "Sin is bad, but if I sin, God just gives more grace, so it's okay."

Paul vehemently denies this insinuation based on what we have experienced in Jesus Christ: "*How shall we who died to sin*

*live any longer in it?"* In Jesus Christ, we experience a spiritual death: we die to sin. Our motivation to resist temptation and avoid sin lies in the reality that we are now spiritually dead to sin.

This death to sin occurs when we are baptized into Christ Jesus: "*Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?" (Romans 6:3)*. Paul asserts we are baptized INTO His death: prior to baptism, we are not "in" the death of Jesus. When we are baptized, we are baptized "into His death." So when do we die to sin? When we are baptized INTO Jesus which includes His death.

The baptism taught by Paul contains all three of the core gospel elements. We are "*buried with (Jesus) through baptism,*" we are "*baptized into His death,*" and we are "*raised...to walk in newness of life.*" Just like the central element of the gospel, baptism is a death, burial, and resurrection.

And remember, this entire line of reasoning stems from the question, "*How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?"* Paul says I should no longer live in sin because I was baptized INTO His death. So I ask: Is Paul treating baptism as "just a symbol?" Now some people might be thinking, "Well, he does call it a symbol in verse 5." Yes, he does, so let's take a look at verses 5-7.

*"For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin" (Romans 6:5-7).*

Notice the word "likeness" in verse 7. The Greek word means "figure, image, likeness, representation." Paul says baptism is a figure, a likeness, a representation of the crucifixion and resurrection. Is baptism a symbol? Yes. But is it JUST a symbol?

Although baptism symbolizes the core of the gospel, we should not conclude it is only symbolic: notice the use of the word "with."

- **Verse 4:** in baptism, we are "*buried...with (Jesus).*"

- **Verse 6:** in baptism, our old man is "*crucified with (Jesus).*"

- **Verse 8:** in baptism, we have "*died with Christ.*"

- **Verse 8:** because we have died with him in baptism, we expect to "*live with Him*" upon our resurrection from the dead.

## Blessed Are the Dead

The use of the word “with” implies a participatory event, not an abstract, symbolic ritual. Paul depicts baptism as more than a symbol of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection; he depicts baptism as our participation in those consequential events.

Taking this a step further, notice where Paul situates baptism: he places baptism between our “old man” and “walk (ing) in newness of life.” He equates our “old man” with “the body of sin” in **verse 6**. Our “old man” is who we were before baptism. Our “old man” enters the waters of baptism in order to be crucified with Jesus and thereby freed from sin. What emerges from the water is a “new man” who “walk(s) in the newness of life.” So baptism is placed between the “old man” and the “new man.”

In addition, Paul describes the “old man” as a slave to sin. Our crucifixion with Jesus in baptism does away with “the body of sin...that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin.” Once again Paul situates baptism in a crucial spot: he places it between slavery to sin and freedom from sin.

As I consider what is taught by **Romans 6:1-7**, here are a few key conclusions I draw from the text.

- Before baptism, I am outside of Christ -- I am baptized INTO His death, burial, and resurrection.
- In baptism, I am united WITH the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus -- I participate WITH Him and because Jesus died to sin, I die to sin in baptism.
- God situates baptism between death and life, between our old person and our new person, between slavery and freedom.

I enter baptism as a sinner, I emerge from baptism a saint, sanctified by the blood of Jesus Christ, raised to walk in the newness of life.

~ 18078 State Highway 149, Unionville, MO 63565  
wadestanley@gmail.com

## Glory to God!

It was a happy occasion for the church in **Eldon, MO** when **Brandon Roark** was baptized for the remission of his sins on April 15.

The **Chapel Glen Church of Christ, Indianapolis, IN** welcomed **Melody Luppino** as a member of the congregation on April 27.

**Lawrence Edward “Larry” Ballenger, Jr.**, 91, of Kearney, MO, passed away January 25. Larry was born March 12, 1930, in Kansas City, MO, the eldest of two children of **Lawrence Edward Sr. and Oral Virginia (Heckenliable) Ballenger**. Along with his parents, Larry was preceded in death by his sister, **Barbara Mouchague**. Larry graduated from Paseo High School and served 13 years in the National Guard. He was united in marriage to **Charlene Carol Boyer** on May 5, 1953. In his early career, Larry worked seven years as an Officer for the Kansas City Police Department and later operated a Texaco Service Station with his father. For 30 years, Larry worked for the US Postal Service, retiring as an Operations Manager at the KCI Post Office. Larry was a member of the **Church of Christ in Independence**. Survivors include his wife of 68 years, Charlene; children, **Randol (Pattie) Ballenger, Douglas Ballenger** and **Janet Squire**; and two grandsons.

**Barbara Landes**, 73, of Lee's Summit, MO, went to be with Jesus on April 18. She was born **Barbara Ann Waterworth** in Kansas City, MO, on February 6, 1949, to **Charles and Lois Waterworth**. She was the eldest of 4 children. She married **David Landes** on August 22, 1969. Barbara put on the Lord in baptism at the age of 13 and was a member of the church of Christ all her life, most recently of the **church on Smart Road, Greenwood, MO**. Barbara’s mother, Lois, and her sister, **Paula**, preceded her in death. She is survived by her husband, David, of the home, daughter **Carrie Brigham**, also of the home, son **Rob (Maggie) Landes** of Killeen, TX; father Charles Waterworth, Nixa MO, sister **Leslie Waterworth**, Springfield MO and brother **Bryan (Connie) Waterworth** of Clever, MO. In addition, she leaves seven grandchildren.

Barbara wants you to know the following things about her:

- She loved her family unconditionally
- She prayed for her family daily, especially for her grandchildren to find the need to live for Jesus
- She and David had a strong and loving marriage for almost 53 years and she credits the examples set for them by their parents and others in the church for how to have a successful marriage

BUT

- She was a flawed person
- She committed many sins throughout her life

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- She didn't do things she knew she should do and she did things she knew she shouldn't

But here's the great news:

- She was a Christian from an early age
- She believed completely in the saving power of Jesus' blood
- She believed that she had a home awaiting her in heaven and so when she was diagnosed with ALS, it wasn't devastating to her
- And she believed that God is Good. All. The. Time.

She wants you to know that you can be blessed, have peace of mind and find salvation by trusting in Jesus, obeying his word, living the way he wants you to and digging deep in his word.

**Deral John Miller**, known as John to his family and friends, 75, of Carrollton, MO, passed away on Tuesday, April 19. John was born in Carrollton on August 30, 1946, to **Jesse David** and **Opal Frances (Stanley) Miller**. He graduated from Carrollton High School in 1964, and while in school, was an active FFA member. On January 4, 1967, he enlisted in the Army National Guard, and served until December 2, 1971, when he was honorably discharged. On July 16, 1967, John married **Betty Jean Atherton** at the **Carrollton Church of Christ**. During his working career, he held several jobs including: Banner Cookie Factory, McClure Motors, and a farm hand for Cliff Cowherd. After thirty-eight years of dedicated farming, he retired from this position. John was a quiet, private person, who enjoyed working on cars, and tinkering on lawnmowers, motorcycles, tractors, and especially his pride and joy El Caminos. He was a faithful member of the **Carrollton Church of Christ**. John enjoyed singing and serving God through his commitment as the church song leader. John is survived by his wife Jeanie of the home; his daughter, **Janette (Frank) Raasch** of Norborne, MO, and his son, **Eric (Carolee) Miller** of Carrollton; one brother, **Jesse David (Wanda) Miller** of Bogard, MO; three grandchildren, as well as nieces, nephews, aunts, uncles, and cousins.

## Special Meetings



Scan the QR code with your camera app to visit our website to RSVP and view a full schedule of classes, services, and activities.

The brethren in **Excelsior Springs, MO** look forward to hosting the **Summer Meeting July 24-29**. Using your phone or tablet camera, please scan the QR code to the left to RSVP and to see a full schedule of events.

### 2022 Meetings

June 11-12.....Vandalia, IA  
 July 4-8.....Midwest Bible Campout, Eminence, MO  
 July 24-29.....Summer Meeting, Excelsior Springs, MO  
 September 3-4.....Pleasant Hill, IA  
 Sept 30-Oct 2.....North MO Fall Campout, Unionville, MO  
 October 15-16.....Nixa, MO

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**Wade Stanley, 18078 State Highway 149, Unionville, MO 63565 wadestanley@gmail.com**

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