



Script of Season 2, Episode 2. Ephesians 5:15-21 – Spirit-filled Walking, by Bruce C. E. Fleming

Intro:

Welcome to **The Eden Podcast** where we think again about the Bible on women and men and we start with a correct understanding of what happened in the Garden of Eden back in the beginning.

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The focus of this episode is:

Ephesians 5:15-21. Think Again about Spirit-filled Walking!

Let's get started.

"Why are you telling me this?" Picture a growing child full of curiosity and impatient to get an answer to a question. The adult has started to answer. But not in a way the child wants. The adult started by filling in information the child needs to know first.

"But that's not an answer!" the child objects. "Well, it is the start of your answer," counsels the adult. "If I gave you the final part of your answer without the beginning part you might end up doing the wrong thing!"

Many people hope to get an answer right away when they rush to certain verses in Ephesians 5. But in doing so, they can miss the start of their answer. As a result they can end up taking their wrong "answer" out of context. Sadly, many end up doing the wrong thing with their incorrect answer.

In Ephesians 5:15-6:9 Paul covers some breathtaking theological ground. He goes to great lengths to write out these ideas so they will be hard to misunderstand. But, he does so in the Greek language. When these words are translated into English, for example, the linkages between the words and sentences become unclear. Things get doubly complicated when Paul uses linkages and patterns from Hebrew literature in his writing in Greek. He was an Old Testament scholar and it shows. The more you know Hebrew the less his letters read like Greek literature and more like Hebrew!

Remember the child's question? "Why are you telling me this?" Well, there is a longer answer we need to hear and understand before we rush off and get some important things in Ephesians all wrong.

Things like: "How should wives and husbands get along at home?" and "How should believers get along with one another in church?" These are questions worth good answers. Paul gives great answers to both of these questions in the passage of Ephesians 5:15-6:9

but most people have missed them because of the way the passage has been translated and interpreted up to now.

How do we know the passage starts at 5:15 and goes all the way down to 6:9? Whoever said all these verse go together as one unit? Paul told us.

Paul did not put in the chapter breaks and verse numbers you find in your Bible. Those were added hundreds and hundreds of years later by people who wanted to find their place in the Bible. Many of these chapter breaks are helpful to the reader. But some of them badly interrupt the thought that is being developed. They break the train of thought before the passage is finished. For example, in the passage of 5:15 to 6:9 the insertion of a chapter break, right after the key point of the passage is an unfortunate one.

When I set out to study important verses in Ephesians 5 I looked for the way Paul himself wrote out his entire letter. There is an obvious break between the first half of the letter and the second half, between chapters 1-3 and 4-6. So I looked to chapters four on since chapter 5 as located in this half of the letter.

How did Paul write the second half of Ephesians? I made the happy discovery that he wrote it out in six passages. Each passage starts with two Greek words: “therefore” and “walk.” The fifth of these *therefore walk* passages begins and ends at 5:15 and 6:9. If I wanted to understand my verses I needed to study them in their context starting with the *therefore walk* introduction in 5:15 and going all the way down to the next *therefore walk* introduction in 6:10.

Watch out for any study of Ephesians 5 and 6 that does not recognize the beginning and end of this passage! Because if they miss the complete passage they very easily can misinterpret the meaning of the verses within it.

In 5:15, Paul introduces the passage with these important words, “Therefore walk very carefully.” Knowing where to start, I read through this long 26 verse passage and discovered Paul used a pattern of fours to organize his thoughts.

Picture a tall building that is built of distinctive sections. Starting at the ground floor is a wide section. The first three floors all look the same. The fourth floor is just as wide and looks quite similar. The next part of the building is almost as wide and it too has three floors that all look the same. And the fourth of these floors is quite similar to them. The third major section of the building is the obvious one. It goes on and on. But if you look closely you see that the pattern of fours is built into it. The pattern built into the building’s architecture is noticeable and pleasing. Inside the building there are other patterns. And they make sense to the people inside the building itself.

In Paul’s pattern of fours in the passage that runs from 5:15 to 6:9, he first gives us three ground floors that build up to the thought presented in the fourth floor. Each section of the passage after that picks up the theme of the preceding fourth floor and incorporates it into the next section of fours.

Here are Paul's fourth floor ideas, so to speak, that are built into the passage:

Verse 18 – Be being filled with the Spirit

Verse 21 – Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ

Verses 31-32 – Christ and the church go beyond Eden and make up one joint-body

The first section of the passage is made up of verses 15-18. The outstanding idea of this first section, found in verse 18b, is that we are to be continually being filled with the Spirit.

The second section is made up of verses 19-21. This section takes the key idea from verse 18b and tells us *how* to be being filled with the Spirit. The outstanding idea of the second section comes in verse 21. It tells us that we are to be submitting ourselves one to another in the fear of Christ.

The third section is made up of verses 5:22 all the way down to 6:9. It takes the key idea of the previous section in verse 21 and tells us *how* to go about submitting ourselves one to another in Christ. The outstanding idea of the third section is the revelation of the great mystery, that was previously hidden, that Christ and the church are united in one body. This is found in 5:31-32.

This third very long section of fours also has two 3-part patterns built on either side of the outstanding idea. They run from 5:22 to 5:30 and from 5:33 to 6:9.

The Great Mystery God reveals in this long section is that Christ and the church make up one joint-body. This joint-body has two parts, a head part and a torso part. The main idea of this word picture is the unity of these two parts. The joint-body, which functions as one unit, is called the Body of Christ.

But who knew this passage in Ephesians 5:15-6:9 was built this way? Have you ever heard this? Have you ever had this explained to you? I never had when I started out to study it.

When we fail to discern the structure Paul built into this passage we can easily cut it up any way we want to. We can even make it sound like a passage on something we dream up, something Paul didn't say or even something that contradicts what Paul really did say! This has happened with this passage. In it some people have missed completely the one big idea. Others have brought into the passage ideas that rightly have no place in it at all. Observing people completely contort the meaning of Ephesians 5:15-6:9 is no fun at all! I discovered people taking verses from this passage doing with them things that have nothing to do with their meaning in the context of the passage.

For example, Ephesians 5:22 from the Greek says, "You Christian wives submitting mutually to your Christian husbands" and then the passage goes on to focus on how Christ is Savior of the Body. But many, many people pluck verse 22 from its literary context and improperly make it say something like this: Hey! All you women out there, make sure you subject yourselves to your husbands. But that's *not* what the passage is saying at all!

Another example is found in Ephesians 6:4. This verse says in the Greek, “You parents, don’t you exasperate your children...” But many, many people pluck 6:4 out of its literary context and make it say something like this: “You Dads out there, be sure to rule over your children because you’re the head of the house, ...” Again, that’s *not* what the passage is saying at all!

These two verses really are just subpoints revolving around the main teaching about how united are the members of the church with Christ who is joined with them in one spiritual body. That idea is found in Ephesians 5:31-32. Verse 5:22 is meant to shed light on this spiritual unity, just as is verse 6:4. But when they are taken out of context no one can see that.

So what is the structure of the context in which all these verses are found? If we can answer this we can then dive deep into the meaning of each verse and the words in them.

Here are the three main ideas of the passage as laid out by Paul in his pattern of fours. They build up to the very big idea in the third point.

Verse 18 – Be being filled with the Spirit

Verse 21 – Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of Christ

Verses 31-32 – Christ and the church go beyond Eden and make up one joint-body

Section one of the passage: Ephesians 5:15-18. In Ephesians 5:15-18, Paul introduces the subject of “careful walking” by contrasting three things to be done, with three things not to be done. The fourth contrasting actions are different from the first three pairs. The last action was not something to do but something to let the Spirit do! And this last one is the big idea.

1. Don’t be unwise walkers! / Be wise walkers! (5:15b)
2. Don’t be thoughtless! / Make the most of your time! (5:16)
3. Don’t be foolish! / Understand the will of the Lord! (5:17)
4. Don’t be controlled by wine! / Be being filled with the Spirit! (5:18)

The first three contrasting pairs are commands. We put exclamation points in print after imperatives like these because they are strong words.

Paul says, Don’t do these three things! Do these other three things! That is what we find in verses 15 to 17. Even in verse 18, the first part of the next contrasting pair starts out the same way. Don’t do this either! Don’t be controlled by wine!

But here Paul changes the pattern. *This* imperative is not something to do. It isn’t even something to not do. It is something to let be done in you, by the Holy Spirit. And this is to be a continuing process. Paul says, Be being filled with the Spirit!

This is a famous verse. Many people have commented on it. But most people have filled these words with meanings from their own imaginations! They haven't asked Paul from the context what *he* means by "Be being filled with the Spirit!" What does this kind of filling look like? What do we end up doing as a result?

He tells us right away. Because he is working in a pattern of fours. He takes the fourth point in each section of the passage and defines and describes it in the next four parts in the following section of the passage. If we want to know how to be being filled with the Spirit we need only look at the following section of fours. And he tells us plainly.

How much creative agony expended on verse 18 could have been spared us if we had only looked to what Paul tells us next? How much energy could have been properly invested in the activities Paul directs our attention to next?

What's that? Do you want to skip right away to the last of the four points in the next section to look at the really important one? You catch on fast. Sure we can. It is found in verse 21.

But be careful! You can't fully understand verse 21 apart from another verse in this section to which it is linked. So let's look at that one first. It is in the first part of what came to be numbered as verse 19.

And here is the overview of Section 2. It doesn't use the pattern of four contrasting sets of actions as Section 1 did. Don't do that! Do this!

The pattern used inside Section 2 from, verse 19-21, is that of a chiasm. We've seen chiasms before on The Eden Podcast in our study of Genesis chapters 2 and 3. Chiasms are built something like rainbows. What you find on one end looks similar to what is on the other end. And there are more or less parallel parts in between.

So here in verses 19-21 we have four parts. We have the end parts that can be called A and A prime. And in between we have two middle lines we can call B and B prime. B and B prime direct our Spirit-filled activity toward God. A and A prime activity is directed toward one-another.

So if we want to see what verse 21 means we need to recognize that it is the A prime part and it completes or corresponds to part A at the start of verse 19. When verse 21 says Be submitting yourselves one to another it is linked in the context to what is going on at the start of verse 19.

The activity in verse 19a seems rather bland at first. "Speaking to one another." When I first started studying this verse I got frustrated. What does "speaking" mean? So I looked it up. It is a general verb and simply means speaking. I wanted a better word, something I could more precisely put into practice. But speaking simply means speaking. Since I couldn't get very far looking up the word itself, and knowing it was tied in with verse 21 and was therefore very important I looked elsewhere in Paul's writings to see if he defined this activity better somewhere else. And he did. In a very wonderful way!

The fuller definition of “speaking” as used in Ephesians 5:19 can be found in comparing a verse in a parallel letter he wrote at the same time to the Colossians.

The Letters to the Ephesians and Colossians first were to be read each in their own church and then were to be exchanged to be read in the other church. Those who read Ephesians would also get the letter to the Colossians to read and vice versa. Doing it in this way, Paul could save energy, because what he skipped over quickly in one letter could be gone into in more depth in the other letter. And that is how we come understand the beginning of verse 19.

The parallel passage in Colossians tells us what he means when he says in Ephesians 5:19a “speaking to one another.” In Colossians 3:16, he replaces the single verb of Ephesians, “speaking” with two verbs. Ephesians 5:19a is thus enriched by Colossians 3:16:

speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs ...
Ephesians 5:19a

... **teaching and admonishing one another** with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs ...
Colossians 3:16

The “speaking” simply stated as such in Ephesians 5 involves two practical actions, “teaching and admonishing.” All believers filled with the Spirit are to teach one another the truths found in the psalms, in hymns and spiritual songs. Every believer is to inform for the first time, or remind an additional time every other believer in the Body of Christ. On the other hand, and where necessary, believers are to admonish, or correct, one another.

This is the first way believers are to experience the Spirit filled life. Believers of all ages are to teach and correct one another.

Is this understanding of the meaning of 5:18b contrary to what many people say it is? Yes. Teaching that being Spirit filled is all about speaking in tongues or all about seeking to heal the sick and so on, is *not* what Paul tells us here using his four-point pattern. And there are other ideas that people mistakenly inject here and there in this long passage. We will go into them in the coming episodes of The Eden Podcast.

As always, whether it is in Genesis 3:16, or here learning from Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19 we need to seek the true meaning of the Bible.

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There is also a study guide on this episode for use in personal study or in small groups and more. You can find it in the blog posts on Tru316.com or write me at Bruce@Tru316.com. And thanks for joining me on **The Eden Podcast!**

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