



Script of Season 2. Episode 4. Ephesians 5:21-24, Christians Submitting “as Christ!” 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.

I’m Bruce C. E. Fleming, founder of the Tru316 Project and a former Academic Dean and Professor of Practical Theology.

The focus of this episode is:

Ephesians 5:21-24 Christians Submitting “as Christ!”

Where’s my phone? It was right here! Have you ever heard that? When you hear that you drop everything and search till for that phone because it is important to moving forward.

That’s what happened to me when I learned enough Greek to read verse 22 of Ephesians chapter 5. Only my question was, **Where’s my verb?** Because I couldn’t find the verb, the action word, in verse 22.

Everyone knows a good English sentence has a subject and a verb and maybe an object. A good sentence is about *someone* or something who *is* or *does* something to or for *someone*.

The *subject* is the someone.

The *verb* is the action that someone is doing.

And the *object* is who or what is affected by the action.

But in the Greek sentence in Ephesians 5:22 I could find no action word. It just read, “wives to your husbands in the Lord.”

Since the passage from 5:15 to 6:9 is about Christ and the church, and about being filled with the Holy Spirit I knew who was the subject and who was the object in this sentence. Paul was speaking about Christian wives and Christian husbands. But, doing what? There was no verb!

Then I learned that in biblical Greek when a sentence is lacking a verb it is not really a problem. Standard procedure was to look back and to find the verb that had been used previously and fill that in to the sentence that was missing one.

Oh! Was that all? I could do that. And so I went to plug into verse 22 the verb from verse 21.

But that was a big deal! Do you know what verb plugs into the sentence in Ephesians 5:22? It is the brand new re-defined verb that Paul really worked over in verse 21. That verb?

Yes!

The New Verb. Let's review what that verb is in verse 21, this because people look to Ephesians 5:22 as a very key verse telling wives how to treat their husbands! And if you look at your Bible it likely won't be obvious that verse 22 is pulling down the previous verb from verse 21. But it is!

It gets a bit more complicated when one goes to pull down the verb in verse 21 because *it* is linked to the action at the start of verse 19, or 19a. Both actions in 19a and 21 go together and are linked in a chiasmic, mirror-parallel pattern. What are the linked actions?

verse 19a. Teaching and correcting *one another*

verse 21. Submitting to *one another*

The New Verb in verse 22. So, the action and the people involved in the incomplete sentence of verse 22 – “wives ... to your husbands” can be filled in with the paired actions of the believers in verses 19a and 21. Thus Paul's meaning in verse 22 is

Wives and husbands be submitting to the teaching and correction
you are receiving from one another in Christ

-ing verbs can be read as having an exclamation point after each of them so I can read verse 22 this way too: “Wives and husbands submit to the teaching and correction you are giving to one another in Christ.”

Verses 22 to 24 are formed by Paul not in a 1, 2, 3 linear pattern of ideas but as a mirror parallel or chiasmic pattern. It follows an A B B prime A prime pattern. That means that the two parts in the middle in verse 23 are linked together, and that verses 22 and 24 are linked and mirror one another. Since verse 24 is a mirror of verse 22 we can look at it to find out about the last couple of words in verse 22. “to the Lord.” Why does Paul add these words?

In verse 24 Paul writes in Greek “as the church submits to Christ even so wives to their husbands in everything.” Because we know what it means for Christians to submit to *Christ* in everything we know the limits and the extent of what it means for Christian wives to be mutually submitting themselves to their husbands as they and their husbands are teaching and correcting one another in their Christian walk.

These verses are *not* about how a household is to be organized, hierarchically or not. ***This is how two believers who are joined together in marriage are the ultimate example of how Christians can be mutually building up one another in their Christian walk.***

So verse 22 means:

Christian couples be submitting yourselves to the speaking, the teaching and correction,
you are getting from one another as to your life in Christ.

Could *this* possibly be the meaning of verses 22 and 24? If one understands that these

verses are building up to the high point of the passage in verses 31 and 32, of course it is. All of these verses, from 5:22 through to 6:9, are giving us details about how to practice verse 32, in which Paul says, I am speaking about Christ and his joint-body, that great one-flesh relationship Christ has with the church!

Let me call your attention to another insight to these verses from reading it in Greek. We are dealing with only a single long sentence in Ephesians 5:18-24. Break this sentence up and place it into apparently unrelated paragraphs in your English translation and you miss Paul's meaning and God's message to us.

We can get as far away from the true meaning of these words as did the person who took God's words out of context and said the Bible says "There is no God." Does it? Those words are there but they need to be read in their context because the context in Psalm 14:1 reads, "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God.'" It is equally foolish to ignore how the parts of this one long Greek sentence go together from verse 18 all the way down through to the end of verse 24.

The "as He did" sandwich. Teachers of children and even adults *who* are struggling to explain an idea often revert to using analogies or word pictures. Analogies work this way: this thing I'm trying to explain to you is like another thing you already understand. It happens in media too. "Life is like a box of chocolates." "Destroy the ring and its power over us!"

So here's another word picture. In Ephesians 5:22-31 we encounter a number of what I'll call "sandwiches." With a slice of bread on each side and something in the middle you get a sandwich. Two slices of bread do not a sandwich make. It takes the good stuff in the middle to make a good sandwich!

In these verses Paul serves up three "**as He did**" sandwiches. In verse 23 we come to the middle of the first "**as He did**" sandwich. On either side of verse 23 are the slices of bread that talk about Christian husbands and wives teaching and submitting to one another.

What's in the middle of this sandwich? It is the B, B prime, portions of the chiasm of verses 22-24. All this patterning and sandwich making is hard to translate from the original Greek text into different languages because each language may prefer different word patterns. We need to respect and follow the word patterns we find in Ephesians. Plus, as in much of the Greek New Testament, *we have writings* that build on the preferred patterns of the *Hebrew Old Testament*.

With all this in mind, what is at the center of the meaty sandwich in verse 23. The words "**as Christ.**" Just as the Spirit of Christ enables us to walk carefully (5:15) being filled with the Spirit (5:18) even so "as Christ" acted so can we (5:23). This "as Christ" sandwich teaches us how to act in our Christian walk.

How did Christ act in relation to the Church? Verse 23 ends with the words "himself *savior* of the body." How was Christ savior of the body? He *gave* of himself for the body. He *gave*

himself up to the cross that he might save us, that he might pay the price for our sins. Everyone who believes in him and is born again becomes a member of Christ's body the church. *This* is the meat of the "**as He did**" sandwich in verse 23.

Let's go back and track the main points in the developing flow of thought in Paul's passage up to this point in Ephesians 5.

Verse 15 – Walk very carefully

Verse 18 – How can we walk carefully? By being filled with the Spirit

Verse 21 – What do we do? We submit ourselves to one another.

Verse 23 – Who is our supreme example in this?

Christ is! We do "as Christ."

This is the highway lane Paul is leading us down in his development of his teaching on the unity of Christ and the Church (verse 32). But this is NOT what I'm hearing today from those who are supposed to be teaching this passage. And this foundation is NOT what people are recommending we practice in our lives as followers of Christ.

Instead people are telling us to "submit to those who are leaders in a vertical relationship over us." *They* claim to be our leaders themselves. *They* claim that there are vertical leadership positions in the church. *They* claim there are vertical leadership positions in among spouses at home. And *they* claim that these verses teach these things when they say *no* such thing.

Do they want to persevere in promoting their vertical leadership ideas? Then they must find them supported in some other passage *if* they can. Clearly, such ideas are *not* taught in *these* verses.

I think I understand where people have gotten in the wrong lane in their teaching and practice. Not only have they missed the traffic pattern of thought Paul uses in Ephesians 5, but they have carried into their studies a bias that has polluted their thinking from back in the Garden of Eden.

Satan, the liar and murderer from the beginning, has been in conflict with the woman and her promised Offspring since Genesis 3. And people have been presenting a *mistranslation* of Genesis 3:16 to us as if God had cursed the woman in some way, one or *more* times in the Garden. These mistruths present Eve as the Temptress who needs to be mistrusted and ruled over. These sorry ideas are found in patriarchal and complementarian systems, but actually are *not* advanced in the Bible as something to follow.

The *true* eleven words God gave to the woman in the Garden of Eden as researched by Dr. Joy Fleming, my wife, are covered in the episodes of Season 1 of **The Eden Podcast** and have been put into our book entitled **The Book of Eden**. What *really* was said in 3:16 and what *really* happened in Eden can be quite eye opening and refreshing.

Here are five things from Genesis 1-3 on what happened in the beginning that have become clear.

1. God created the man and woman as *equal partners*.
2. God told *both* to rule over all the other creatures and creation.
3. *Both* were attacked by Satan but *each* reacted *differently*.
4. God *affirmed* Eve's confession and appointed her Satan's combatant *and* gave her a promise.
5. God cursed *neither* human. The woman wasn't cursed in any way in the original Hebrew text. But translations wrongly *make it look* like God *did so* in one or more ways.

So, back to the "**as He did**" sandwich in Ephesians 5:23. What about the first half of the verse? It contains a word picture that is linked with the "as Christ" part of the second half of the verse. So it is linked with giving of oneself in a very special way in a very special relationship.

Here is how most people read it in English: "as a husband is head of his wife." Hold on! This is a word picture. It is not literally true. At the marriage ceremony, no one dares to picture real transplant surgery being performed in some fantastic way. No one really thinks in any way that a man somehow clones his own head and places it on the neck of his wife's body. No husband is literally the head of his wife. So what possibly is the meaning of this saying?

Let me ask you this. What do you picture when someone says I'm walking on air? I'm sitting on a cloud? I'm as *jumpy* as a cat? Your mind reaches for the meaning behind the image.

Ants in Africa. I was thinking about this head-body imagery one day as I was standing under a towering avocado tree in the Congo in Africa. A line of ants was steadily crossing in front of the door to our little house. There they went. All in a row. One by one. And then I saw it! The head-body word picture became clear!

Each little ant had a three-part joint body made up of a head, a thorax and an abdomen. No one part was the body of the ant. They went together. The parts worked together joined as a unit. And so does the human body. We name the parts a bit differently and basically we have two parts joined together. What is awkward is that sometimes we describe them separately as the head attached to the body. At other times we use just the word body to refer to the whole two-part unit.

I went back earlier in the Book of Ephesians to see if I could find some indicators of what Paul was thinking before he got to Ephesians 5:23 and referred to a husband as the head of a wife. And I came across Ephesians 3:3-6!

In 3:3-6, Paul explains that each believer is **joined** together with every other believer. Three times he adds *soon* which is how I pronounce the Greek prefix which stands for "**joint-**". And in the second of these instances Paul actually uses the word picture of a "**joint-body**."

In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight ... that the Gentiles should be joint-heirs (along with Israel) and a **joint-body** and joint-sharers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel. (Eph. 3:4, 6)

In Ephesians 4, Paul further develops the picture of a **joint-body**. Jesus himself is joined with all believers in a joint body:

But speaking the truth in love, we may *grow into* him in all respects who is the head, Christ, of whom **all the body being brought together** by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Eph. 4:15-16)

What Paul is picturing for us in the middle of the **“as He did”** sandwich of Ephesians 5:22-24 is the remarkable unity of Christ and the church. He prefigures it by anticipating what he is going to write about the Great Mystery in 5:32 talking about the one-flesh unity of the very first husband and wife in the Garden of Eden.

As a husband and wife are intimately joined together in one body, so to speak in the first part of verse 23, even so Christ and the church are joined together and this is where Christ’s example for us stands out – he gave himself up on the cross for the church. He is savior of the body.

All word pictures and analogies break down if you try to take the imagery too far. Just as a husband and wife aren’t really one flesh, so we can’t really become the savior of another. Only Christ did that. But the *way* Christ gave of himself for the good of his body is what Paul wants us to do. *This* is the meaty meaningful portion of verses 22-24. We are to be submitting ourselves one to another, building up one another, in the church, and certainly as married believers in our marital relationships, as Christ gave himself for us!

This one long sentence from verse 18 through to 24 sets the table for Paul’s next revelation of the wonder and the joy of Christ’s exemplary acts for us when he gets to verse 25. For he will tie in verses 22-24 and link them again with Christ’s example spelled out in verse 25b.

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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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