



## **Script of Season 2. Episode 5. Ephesians 5:25-32, Loving and Giving “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 5:25-32 – Loving and giving “as Christ!”

### **What a great time Jesus has in building up the church! Have you ever thought of that?**

Think about Hebrews 12:2 that talks about Jesus giving himself up for the church as he considered “the joy before Him.”

In the Garden of Eden, Adam rejoiced to be joined by Eve. The verse at the turning point of Ephesians 5 and 6, 5:32, points us to something *even greater than Eden*. It is the one-flesh or joint-body relationship of Christ and the church that Paul calls the Great Mystery.

This relationship with God in Christ was once unknown but Paul says it has been revealed in Christ Jesus. Jesus rejoices in his relationship with us! We are fulfilled in our relationship with him and with one another as we relate to one another filled with Christ’s Holy Spirit!

What do we do in that relationship? Ephesians 5:19a and 21 are the verses that tell us.

Ephesians 5:19a has a helpful parallel passage in Colossians 3:16. Both use *this* string of words: “psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.” The verse in Ephesians talks about “speaking.” The other one gives a bit more detail and talks about our “teaching and admonishing” one another, or our “teaching and correcting” one another.

Who is doing this teaching and correcting? Every believer filled with the Spirit. That includes you and me. That includes males and females, both older and younger ones, in the body of Christ. As another person in the body of Christ teaches or corrects you or me we submit ourselves to the teaching and correction we receive from them.

There’s the formula! There’s the plan! It is clearly spelled out in the way Paul put it together as a mirror parallelism in the Greek text of Ephesians 5:19a and 21.

Laying this foundation, especially in what is numbered as verse 21, Paul sets out a long chain of examples afterwards that show us how this works. He shows us how to practice this ourselves with one another.

In verses 22 to 24 Paul uses a mirror pattern that focuses on how Christ gave of himself as savior of his body which is the church. Then, starting with verse 25 Paul introduces a second “as Christ” behavior practiced by Christ that we are to practice ourselves. The first “as Christ” action was as Christ gave of himself for the church. The second “as Christ” action is how Christ loves the church. The church means you and me, every and all believers down through time and including today and the years to come.

This second “as Christ” action is introduced in verse 25. So let’s look there.

**But wait!** Let’s not jump into verse 25 too fast. We have to understand this verse in the way Paul wrote it for us. The very first words we come across are not the main idea in the verse. We must wait till the second part of verse 25 to see Paul’s main ideas. A preliminary, but subordinate, or secondary idea is found at the start of the verse.

One of the things young children love when they get into the family vehicle to go somewhere is to turn all the dials they can find *and* press all the buttons as well. Then, when the driver gets in and turns on the ignition they gleefully watch as the wipers swoosh across the windshield and the radio begins to blast. They find the mayhem thoroughly entertaining!

In looking at Ephesians 5:25 let’s not get distracted by the very first words of the verse. We will look at those in a moment. The *meaty* portion of the sentence is in *second* part of verse 25, or 25b. That must get our attention *first*. This is because this second part of verse 25, verse 25b, is like the second part of verse 23, or 23b. It is the second of the “**as He did**” sandwiches in Ephesians chapter 5!

What’s an “**as He did**” sandwich? There are three in a row used by Paul in his build up to revealing the Great Mystery in Ephesians 5:32.

No Greek scholar I’ve ever read calls these three verses “**as He did** sandwiches.” But I did my doctoral work in the field of Practical Theology. Practical Theology included missions, evangelism, homiletics, journalism, sociology, church planting and even youth ministry.

In my years working with teenagers on the staff of my local Youth for Christ chapter we had clubs in 40 junior and senior high schools. None of our students would have lit up with enthusiasm if I had talked with them about chiasms or mirror parallels. I got used to using – let’s call it - picturesque language. And the habit is still with me.

The meat is in the middle of a sandwich and the big idea is often found in the middle of the rainbow-like pattern called a chiasm. In Ephesians 5:22-24 Paul wrapped the parallel verses of 22 and 24 around the meaty middle of verse 23. In the *middle* is the big idea that “as Christ” gave himself as savior of the church so all believers should act as He did and give of themselves for one another.

Paul builds the next “**as He did**” sandwich putting in a double middle. His second sandwich

contains not just one slice of meat, but two slices made up of two different kinds of meat. In verse 25b, he picks up the meaty middle from verse 23b and he puts in a slice from what will be in his third “*as He did*” sandwich in verses 28-31. We can spot each meaty idea by looking for the Greek words which are usually translated “*as Christ*.”

Here are the two “*as Christ*” ideas in this doubly rich word pattern in 5:25b.

“just *as Christ* also *loved* the church and *gave Himself up* for her.”

Here it is again,

“just *as Christ* *loved* the church and *gave Himself up* for her”

The idea of Christ’s giving of himself for the church points us back to verse 23b. The idea of loving the church points us down to verse 29b-30.

My wife, Dr. Joy Fleming, often shared her research *findings of* the day with me as she studied. A benefit to me was that I became familiar with the passage she was researching. That was Genesis chapters 2 and 3. In those two chapters which are written in a mirror parallel, chiasmic pattern, she discovered the importance of two linked sections in 2:7-9 and 3:15-17. These sections each had two ideas in a middle section. One that pointed back to the previous sentence and one that pointed down to the following one. She called this the linchpin construction.

**The linchpin.** Have you noticed? Paul uses a linchpin construction from Genesis 2-3 right here in Ephesians 5. It is centered in verse 25b.

This linchpin pattern used in the passage on the Garden of Eden would have been *well* understood by Paul. The very way the words are put together conveys meaning along with the individual words themselves.

Did those who were not lifelong students of the Bible recognize these patterns that Paul uses in his writing? Maybe not. I think this may be one of the reasons **Peter** famously said in 2 Peter 3:16 that Paul’s writing was sometimes hard to understand. Perhaps Peter didn’t follow the fine details of Paul’s syntax that parroted the Hebrew.

But, these words presented in these patterns *sounded good*. They were presented in catchy ways that helped the hearers hang on to the ideas he was presenting.

In using our modern languages which are different from the one’s Paul was using, and in reading in our modern translations we can end up puzzled like Peter sometimes was. That’s why I’m so excited to look at these sandwiches with you. As we pay attention, we all can find the meat of his message. It is found every time he writes “as Christ.” And we can escape the confusion and the bad ideas that have been attributed to these verses!

Since previously we’ve looked at the idea of “as Christ *gave* himself for the church” we can prepare to focus on the idea of “as Christ *loved* the church.” Paul develops this idea for us

first in verses 26-27 and then again in 28-31.

Now, we can look at the beginning of verse 25. In verse 25*a*, Paul uses an imperative verb, (with an exclamation point) “Husbands, *love* your wives!” This is not the only imperative verb in the passage. The passage began in 5:15 with a string of imperative verbs. But here, in passing, Paul takes the occasion to stress to husbands the depth with which they must *love* their wives.

They must love their wives with God’s own pure *agape* love. Paul does not use the Greek word *eros* for erotic love, or *philos* for brotherly love. This is *agape*, God’s pure, sacrificial love that only believers filled with the Spirit can practice.

The details presented in this second “as he did” sandwich now tell us about Christ’s love. They come after the first five words, in 25*b* as Paul writes,

“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for it.”

And then in verses 26 and 27, Paul gives us three Greek *hina* clauses (*hina* means “in-order-that”). These three clauses focus on the impact of Jesus’ self-sacrificing *love* on the church.

This is always true of *selfless* submission. It focuses on the one being served, not on the one doing the serving.

Here are the three ways Christ’s loving care makes the church better in 26 and 27:

“In order that”

1. he might sanctify it, cleansing it ... (26)
2. he might present ... the church glorious (27*a*)
3. it might be holy and unblemished (27*b*)

A three-fold repetition is a Hebrew way of showing emphasis. By using three *hina* clauses, Paul emphasizes the complete and full result *Christ’s love has* on the church. (Paul also uses a three-fold repetition in regards to husbands in this part of the passage. Three times, he tells husbands to love their wives in an *agape* self-sacrificing way, in verses 25*a*, 28, and 31.

Christ *demonstrated* his *agape* love for the church when he “gave himself” for it. To behave *like Christ* does not mean to “lord it over” or “be king over.” His *agape* love was shown in seeking the best for the church.

**“Marriage” or “Christ”?** Those who think that *marriage*, not Christ, is the main topic of these verses have difficulty dealing with verse 27. That verse makes good sense as a description of Christ’s example. But how can one apply this verse to marriage?

Here’s the verse:

that he might present to himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.

Husbands are not told to enter the skin care business to deal with their wives' literal spots, wrinkles and to turn them into glorious beauties. But Christ, himself the perfect and spotless sacrifice, did give himself for the church in order to make the church a perfect offering fit for a king!

The example of Christ's love for the church, not of a husband's love for his wife, is described in verses 25b-27. Christ's love is another lesson on "how to submit" in the Christian way described back in verses 19a and 21.

**The third "as he did" sandwich.** In Ephesians 5:28-31, Paul organizes his thoughts into another chiasm. Here too, as in the first chiasm of verses 22 to 24, Paul's readers would have been in a hurry to get to the center of this chiasm to see the best part.

The center of this chiasm is found in verses 29b and 30. Here Paul uses a different type of parallelism. It is the familiar two-line parallelism that is so often found in The Book of Proverbs.

In Proverbs, quite often the idea in one line is repeated in a second line. The second line typically adds depth to the first line. In this case Paul writes parallel lines about a person's love for his own body.

This kind of love is a natural and dependable kind of love. Paul begins verse 29b with the Greek words "... just *as Christ*." Here at the center of the chiasm, Paul points to Christ, the supreme example.

In a startling theological declaration he draws a parallel between the care one provides for the *body* with *Christ's* love for the church. In doing so, Paul leaves no room for doubt about the *steadfast* love Christ has for the church.

In verse 30, Paul puts into words the rest of the startling truth, "because *we* are members of his body." No Christian who understands this *unity* with Christ can ever again harbor an inferiority complex after realizing the amazing position gained by a believer in Christ!

Christ would no sooner cease to love and care for any member of the church than a person would cease to love and care for any part of his or her own body! Also, this natural sort of care, elevated to the *level* of agape love, is for believers to practice on their own level, to-one-another.

In case someone doubted whether such close-knittedness could ever be lived out on the human level, Paul repeats the first idea in his chiasm. The best example humans have of such intimate care is in marriage.

**Marriage defined.** Paul returns to the Garden of Eden to define the unity of marriage. To those who knew their Bible well, this reference to Genesis 2:24 brought to mind three levels of commitment.

First, the marriage commitment surpasses all family ties – the man “leaves his father and his mother.” Similarly, the believer “leaves” family and all the ties of society and transfers primary allegiance to Christ.

Second, the unity of marriage is one of the heart and mind. This unity was indicated by the second verb in Genesis 2:24, “to unite.” This same verb was used to describe Ruth in the Old Testament who was united to her mother-in-law Naomi. Ruth made a ringing confession of their unity: “Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God” (Ruth 1:16).

As in marriage, the Christian is knit together with other believers. The Spirit in each Christian testifies to the Spirit in every other believer that all are *one* in Christ (Romans 8:15-17).

Third, *as* a husband and wife *become* one joint-body, as one flesh and heart, *so* new believers in Christ are united with all other believers who are in the joint-body of Christ.

The rainbow-type pattern of verses 28-31 is a three point one as follows: A B A prime. Part A is found in verse 28. Part A prime is in verse 31.

Part B is a bit chopped up by where the verse numbers were added in. Part B is found in 29a which is linked with the unit of 29b and 30.

Verses 28 and 31, A and A prime, are parallel as they talk about husbands and wives. And verses 29a and 29b with 30, or B and B prime, talk about caring for one’s own body as Christ cares for the church which figuratively is his body.

### **Ephesians 5:28-31: a mirror passage on “as Christ” loves his body**

**(A)**           <sup>28</sup>so ought Christian husbands to love (*agape*)  
                  their own Christian wives  
                  the one who loves **himself**, loves **his wife**

**(B)** <sup>29a</sup>no man hates **his flesh**/but cares for it  
<sup>29b</sup>just **as Christ** the church <sup>30</sup>we are members of **his body**

**(A')**           <sup>31</sup>for this reason  
                  a man shall leave his father and mother  
                  and will be united (cleave) to his wife  
                  and the two will become **one flesh**

To sum up, the *unity* of believers in one body with Christ, is illustrated in the three sections of Ephesians 5:22-31. The two main ideas which are grouped together in the center of the linchpin in verse 25b are “As Christ *loved*” and “as Christ *gave* of himself.”

*We* are to *love* and *give* of ourselves one to another. This is how we can be walking in the Spirit, *submitting reciprocally* one-to-another.

In verse 32, Paul confirms this in an “all of the above” statement. What was once a mystery, formerly unknown, has been clarified by verses 22-31. In verse 32 Paul writes, “This is a *great* mystery, that is now revealed. It has to do with *Christ and the church*.”

Although many claim that the last half of Ephesians 5 is *not* about the church but is *all* about *marriage*, the clear summary statement of verse 32 should *redirect* them onto the right track. *It is* about the church. Ephesians 5:21-32 is *all about* believers caring for one another, *submitting reciprocally*, in the church of Christ.

But wait! There’s more! Paul balances out verses 22-31 on the one side of verse 32 with all of the material in 5:33 to 6:9 on the other side of 5:32. Because of the chapter break after verse 33 we usually don’t see that Paul has put together one very large chiasmic parallel pattern with three sections on each side of verse 32.

On the one side of this giant rainbow pattern going up to verse 32 are the three “as Christ” examples. On the other side going down after verse 32 is a three-part pattern from life in the family at the time of Paul.

Next we will look at what he sums up in verse 5:33 about mutually submitting spouses. Then we will study what he says about Christian parents and children in Ephesians chapter 6 verses 1 to 4. Finally we will discover what he really is saying in verses 5 to 9 about Christian slaves and masters.

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