



## **Script of The Eden Podcast Episode 2. Genesis 2:18, “Equal Partners,” 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:**

Genesis 2:18, Created to be “Equal Partners”

Let’s get started.

### **Body:**

Have you noticed? There are some Bible verses that stand out. They seem to touch everyone and change everything. Genesis 3:16 is one of these verses. Genesis 2:18 is another.

Sadly, mistranslations and misinterpretations of Genesis 3:16 have led to misleading and even harmful teachings from what many mistakenly think is found in the first chapters of Genesis.

Later passages in the Bible might tell of a certain king here, or a certain shipwreck there. But the first chapters in Genesis, and especially Genesis 2-3, are packed full of meaning. They explain why our world is a mixture of good and evil. They even reveal the roots of the titanic spiritual battles we are experiencing.

Let me tell you the story of how my wife and I came to focus specifically on Genesis 3:16 and the passages related to it like 2:18. When we were preparing to teach in Africa, we were interviewed by African leaders who gave us this advice. “Don’t do your doctoral research on something *you* think might be interesting but may turn out to be of little help to us here. First, find out what the people of Africa need to know from the Bible. Do your research on that. Then, you’ll be a real help to us.”

Since we both would be serving as missionary professors in French-speaking Africa, we spent two years in France learning the language. Our first year, we attended advanced language school in Albertville, in the French Alps.

Our second year, we perfected our French by using it doing doctoral studies. Joy studied Old Testament. I studied Practical Theology. It was the first time the University of

Strasbourg School of Theology had a wife and husband duo with each studying in a doctoral program of theology at the same time.

Joy focused on Genesis 2-3, having been advised that such studies would be quite useful in Africa. She would be able to study the Beginning, the person of God, Man and Woman, Sin, Death and Curses. I studied the New Testament and Contextualization of Theology in Africa.

Then we headed for Africa. Sometime after the birth our daughter and moving to a nearby population center and settling in to our home, we were robbed! All the course notes I had taken down during class lectures and the notes from my research in the libraries in France were stolen. The thieves apparently thought my metal portable filing box was a strong box for valuables. When they saw only papers inside, they got rid of them and just kept the box!

What could I do next? I couldn't leave Africa to go back to Europe to retake my doctoral seminars. There had been a changeover in professors at the University. And each year different subjects were being offered at that level. We felt the loss deeply. All that work was gone!

For months we prayed, "God, is there any way to bring good out of this evil?" Was it somehow possible to pick up my studies and go on? Was there something else God wanted me to study? The answer came a year later when we moved deep into the rainforest to teach in a small theological institute.

**There, out our front door**, down the hill, under the dark green shade of towering avocado trees, past the end of the grass airstrip and then the whitewashed clinic, came the end of the mile-long dirt path. From that point you could only turn right or left down the main road, which was only a one-lane rutted track, crowded on both sides by thick rainforest.

To the right, you came to the first mud-walled, thatched-roof huts in a line of villages that belonged to people from the Mono tribe. To the left, you soon found a larger village. These people were from the Ngombe tribe. Their villages lined the mud road away to the west. In this juxtaposition of culture groups, in the lush hills of northwestern Congo, Joy and I took turns raising our toddler daughter and teaching courses to students who were preparing for pastoral work in village churches in the Congo.

**The initial coming** of Christianity to new culture groups anywhere in the world almost always results in a marked improvement in the status of women in those groups. To my surprise, I found that after 25 years of mission work and church planting, the status of women had *not* improved in the Mono and Ngombe villages that lined the Bosobolo Road. In fact, their lowly status in the two tribes remained remarkably as it had been before the arrival of the Gospel in their area. Why?

As a Practical Theologian, I began digging to find what had been taught, and what had *not* been taught by the first missionaries and African pastors. What had been done right? What had been misunderstood? What had been done wrong?

I interviewed older believers in their villages and took notes. I searched the school library, the archives and the shelves in the various offices. My searching paid off, as I found on a top shelf many dust-covered, yellowing booklets that had been used in Bible and Practical Christian Life training during the early years in the school.

I discovered that incorrect doctrine had been taught in the village churches. This was hindering the growth of the Christian women and men in their faith and their ministry. It was disrupting their home life as well!

Many of these incorrect teachings were based on misinterpretations of Genesis 2-3. Additional faulty teachings, based on these misinterpretations of Genesis warped the understanding of key New Testament passages as well. I realized that here was the Biblical research and writing God had for me to do.

As Joy and I each tackled tough passages, we noted faulty translations into modern languages from the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament in seven key passages. Working from the original languages, we began to peel away centuries of faulty interpretation and arrived at clear expressions of the passages we were studying.

We taught what we learned to the students and believers around us. It was a privilege to see their troubled expressions turn to ones of recognition and joy as the Bible studies progressed.

Since then we have continued to study and teach on the seven passages which build on the insights Joy discovered in Genesis 3:16. These are the seven passages: Genesis 2, Genesis 3, Ephesians 5:15-6:9, 1 Timothy 1:18-3:16, 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, 1 Corinthians 14:34-40 and 1 Peter 3:1-7.

## **Genesis 2**

**“In the beginning, God.”** In Genesis 1:1, on Day One of Creation, the name used for God in Hebrew (*Elohim*) ends with “-im.” That was like ending an English name with the letter “-s.” The “-im” ending usually meant “more than one.” But there was only one God “in the beginning.”

A careful look at the first chapter of Genesis shows that God Three-in-One was at work “in the beginning.” Verses 1-3 could be worded this way:

Verse 1: ... the Father Three-in-One created the heavens and the earth.

Verse 2: ... the Spirit Three-in-One hovered over the waters.

Verse 3: ... the Word Three-in-One said, “Let there be light....”

This fits the description of what happened on Day Six of Creation:

Verse 26: ... God Three-in-One said, Let us make humans, male and female, in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule ...

Verse 28: ... God Three-in-One blessed the man and woman and said to them, Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.

Thus, according to Genesis 1, on Day Six of Creation:

- Both the man and the woman were made in God’s image (1:27).
- Both the woman and the man were given the creation mandate to multiply and fill the earth (1:27).
- Both were made as rulers. (1:28)
- And, all was very good (1:31).

What is summarized in Genesis 1 is told with details in Genesis 2:4-25. Genesis 2 describes what happens on Day Six of Creation when God specially creates each of our first parents and they begin life with the Lord God in the Garden of Eden.

The Lord God forms the man from the dust of the ground. After God breathes into him the breath of life, the man meets God (2:7). Then the Lord God plants a Garden in Eden and places the man in it (2:8-15).

The fruit from all the trees can be enjoyed, but the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is not to be eaten. The penalty for eating from the forbidden Tree is death (16-17).

Then, Genesis 2 tells of the creation of the woman. The Lord God makes an assessment, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a partner equal to him" (2:18).

What was not good? Five times the word "good" is used up to this point in Creation. What is "not good?" A look at the end of Day Five provides the insight we need.

At that point God blesses the recently made birds of the air and creatures of the water with these words, "Be fruitful and multiply..." (1:22). A similar blessing is coming for the man and woman at the end of Day Six (1:28). But at this point on Day Six the man is alone. He can not be blessed to reproduce as it takes a male and a female to do so.

He is aware that he is a *male* human. He has named the animals. When he named the lions, for example he likely observed there were male and female lions with their physical differences. The same would have been true for other animals. Where is the *female* human? Creation is obviously incomplete.

Readers of Genesis 2 have the delightful experience of listening to God talking within the Trinity, so to speak. Here's a playful yet respectful way to sum up what we read next.

"On Day Five we blessed the birds and the fish to be fruitful and multiply. We can't do the Day Six blessing yet because we don't have the last piece of the puzzle yet. All is not good, yet. That is the state of affairs so far. Let us finish this *and* give the man insight into what we're doing. Yes. That'll be great. We're starting to fellowship with the first of all of them already. When we're done all will be very good!" (2:18; 1:31).

How did the Lord God make the woman? There are different descriptive verbs used when each person is made. God "forms" the man from the ground (2:7). God "builds" the woman from the already existing material taken from the man (2:22).

**Created to be equal partners.** In Genesis 2, when God creates the woman, she is described in relation to the man. In two Hebrew words packed full of meaning, *'ezer kenegdo*, God describes how the two are designed to go together. They are made for each other, just hours apart. Once together, they are to be a resourceful and satisfied pair, at home together in Eden.

Modern language versions of the Bible translate these two Hebrew words in confusing and contradictory ways. But there really is no cause for confusion. The two words in Genesis 2:18 are not that hard to translate.

An *'ezer kenegdo* is someone who is equal, a counterpart, one who works together with another as they help each other through sharing their strengths.

As for the Hebrew word *'ezer*:

- The majority of times it is used in the Bible, it is used to describe *God*. In Deuteronomy 33:7, God is the *'ezer* of Judah. The NIV translates this as: "Oh, be his *help* against his foes." God is the *'ezer* who *helps* with superior strength.
- The Bible also uses *'ezer* to describe one king who *helps* another as allies in battle. The word *'ezer* refers to someone who helps by sharing his strength with another (as Pharaoh in Isaiah 30:1-5).

As for the word *kenegdo*:

- This word creates a picture of two people facing each other.
- It can be translated as "vis-à-vis," "conspicuously facing," "corresponding to" or "equal to."

Further studies in the Hebrew use of the word *kenegdo* outside of the Bible by Michael Rosenzweig<sup>1</sup> show that those who were in that kind of relationship were partners. He translates *'ezer kenegdo* as "equal partners." It takes two to be partners. Both the man and the woman are equal partners with each other. Both are involved in an equal partnership.

Many couples don't live together this way. And we wonder why our lives don't work out as well as the relationship Adam and Eve had when they first started out in Eden.

The woman is *'ezer kenegdo* to the man. Thus, she is a corresponding ally or a partner equal with the man.

Sadly, *this* is not what had been taught along the Bosobolo Road in Congo for so many years. And it showed. Women were on a level little higher than domesticated animals! There seemed to be little restraint to the practice of polygamy. We began teaching what the Bible really says, that wives and husbands were created by God to be equal partners, and trusted God to work in the lives of the couples in those local churches.

Even correcting the errors in Genesis chapter 2 would turn out not to be enough. Keeping women in a low and unequal status in the home, in their cultural practices and in the church was perpetuated by incorrect teaching on the content and meaning of Genesis 3:16. They needed the true meaning of 3:16.

### **Close:**

I invite you to visit our website at [Tru316.com](http://Tru316.com) for links to books and our YouTube Channel with more than a dozen in-depth Workshops on the 7 key Bible passages on women and men from Eden on.

You can also receive a free study guide on this episode for use in small groups and more. You can find it in the blog posts on [Tru316.com](http://Tru316.com) or write me at [Bruce@Tru316.com](mailto:Bruce@Tru316.com). And thanks for listening to The Eden Podcast!

<sup>1</sup>Michael L. Rosenzweig, "A Helper Equal to Him," *Judaism* 35/3 (1986): 277-80.