



Script of Season 2. Episode 1. Ephesians 5:15-6:9 – Beyond Eden. Something better! 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 5:15-6:9. Beyond Eden is something better!

This Episode is the first in our series on Ephesians 5:15-6:9. We begin with this overview and we look at common traps that lead to misinterpretation of important passages in Ephesians. Then, in the coming Episodes we'll go more in depth.

Let's get started.



If you picture life back in the beginning in the Garden of Eden as something wonderful did you know there is something for you right now that is even better! Sound interesting? Of course it does!

Just how great *was* life in the Garden of Eden? To begin with everything was “**good**”! That was the divine assessment of things as recorded in Genesis 1. Day by Day as God created more and more it was “good.”

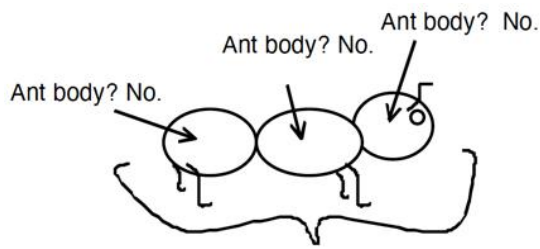
It's hard to beat “good.” But God improved on it. God made things “very good!” On Day 6, God made the man. God also made the Garden of Eden. And God put him in it. Then God made woman. In Eden, each one, the man and the woman, first knew God. Then God brought them together in the very first marriage ever.

For many young people today *key phrases* stand out in their thinking. They dream of “a marriage made in heaven.” Of the two of them “being made for each other.” And of walking into their future “together with God.”

Is that what happened in Eden? Oh yes! Theirs was “a marriage made in heaven.” Or a marriage made in Eden certainly. They could tell they were “made for each other.” They really were! Were they “walking together with God” in that beautiful Garden of Eden. Yes! How could anything be better than that?

Beyond Eden. And yet, in the Book of Ephesians we learn that there was something *even better* to come. It went beyond Eden to deeper and better relationships both vertically and horizontally.

Trap #1. Misunderstood imagery. Now let's look at trap number one that leads to misinterpretation of Ephesians: incorrectly understanding the head-body metaphor.



ONE CONJOINT ANT BODY? YES!

In Genesis 2 we're told that in marriage a man and a woman join together in a one-flesh, joint-body unity. While we were living and working in the rain forest of Africa, I got a picture of one-flesh, joint-body unity from looking down at the ants that were marching across the corner of our front step. Each one was made up of three parts joined together: a head on one end, a thorax in the middle where the legs were attached, and an abdomen. Humans have a joint body as well, only with a two-part joint-body. The head plus the trunk or torso, where the arms and legs are attached, make up our two-part joint-body.

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In Ephesians chapter 3 in the Bible Paul refers to a "joint-body." Later, he uses the imagery from Genesis chapter 2 of a "one-flesh" unity.

In Ephesians 3:4-6 the Apostle Paul uses the word "joint" three times. He explains that each believer is **joined together** with every other believer. Each of these three times he takes a different word and adds the Greek prefix, *sun-*, which stands for "**joint-**". With the second one he uses the word picture from Eden, that of a "**joint-body**." He writes:

In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight ... that the non-Jews should be **joint**-heirs and a **joint-body** and **joint**-sharers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel.

That's found in chapter 3 of Ephesians. In chapter 4 Paul develops this idea further.

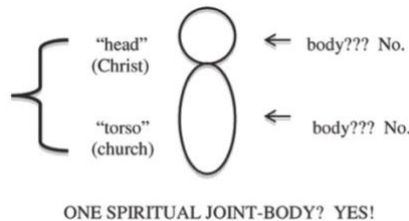
Paul writes of Jesus and believers together in a joint-body relationship in the one body of Christ. Then in chapter 5 he sums it all up saying Jesus and believers are together in a one-flesh joint-body relationship that surpasses the relationships of Eden.

Believers are those who are born again, made alive in the Spirit. Together, they are united with Jesus in a one-flesh relationship!

Paul doesn't describe all believers as a spiritual body. Together they form *only one part* of a joint-body. Together by themselves they form no more than a headless torso. Not a pretty picture. To get the complete picture of a spiritual body we need to picture the head as well, which is Jesus Christ. Have you ever pictured the church this way? Or has your picture actually been headless? Can you picture the complete spiritual joint-body made up of its

two indispensable parts? This *image* of a joint-body is one very important key to help us understand Paul's message in Ephesians 5-6.

In Ephesians 5:15-6:9 Paul takes us to the heart of how the members of the Body function together in spiritual unity. Here we revisit the joint-body metaphor. Christ and the church together form one body.



Here the English language fails us. In English we can say the word “body” and refer only to everything below one’s head. A head goes on top of a “body” pictured this way. But we can also say, “Look at the body lying over there!” In this case we refer to every part of the body lying over there, the head included.

I’d like us to hang on to that inclusive picture of a complete joint-body as we look at Ephesians chapter 5. In it we have both Christ, the head, together with the church making up one fully functioning and complete joint-body.

Trap #2. Misunderstanding the structure of Ephesians. Many fall into the trap of grouping the wrong verses together in Ephesians. In doing so they end up taking verses out of context and infusing their own ideas into what Paul was trying to say. These mistakes have gotten into our modern translations. And from them into our doctrines and practices in our churches. This is serious! If those who produce our translations get it wrong it is almost impossible for readers of our modern English versions to get it right.

So how did Paul put his passages together in Ephesians 4-6? In my doctoral research I uncovered he used a surprisingly clear six-part pattern in the second half of Ephesians that I hadn’t seen before. This pattern is very important to our understanding of the “beyond Eden” verses in chapters 5 and 6.

Paul organized what we now call chapters 4-6 as a series of six sections or passages. He repeatedly introduced each passage with two Greek words, “therefore” and “walk.” To introduce the sixth passage he modified the pattern a bit and replaced the word “walk” with “stand.”

Six Sections. Here are the sections that stand out. They begin with “therefore” and “walk”:

- Eph. 4:1-16 *Therefore walk* worthy
- Eph. 4:17-32 *Therefore walk* not in futility
- Eph. 5:1-6 *Therefore walk* in love
- Eph. 5:7-14 *Therefore walk* as children of light
- Eph. 5:15-6:9 ***Therefore walk very carefully***
- Eph. 6:10-20 *Therefore stand* against the devil

To understand any verse in the second half of what is called Ephesians 5 we need to start in verse 15 and go all the way over to verse 9 in chapter 6! How many people have seen these verses as the limits of the pericope of the passage *and* does it make any difference? It sure

does! First of all, when we start with verse 15 we can see the pattern of 4's that Paul uses as his hermeneutical key. Ah! But we will go into that more, later on.

Do we learn anything else by studying the structure of Ephesians? Yes! We learn that the key verse to the 5:15-6:9 passage is found in verse 32! And this is where Paul refers to the Great Mystery!

The Great Mystery. In Ephesians 5:15-6:9, Paul wrote about something previously hidden but now revealed. He called this a *great* mystery. What was it? What made it great?

It was something so new that there were no words available to Paul that could fully describe it! To explain this Great Mystery, Paul took old words earlier in this passage and gave them new meanings. At the same time, he used additional **word patterns** in such a way that they reinforced the new **word meanings**.

All this made the Great Mystery stand out in his letter to the Ephesians. Let's picture the following imaginary scene:

At Ephesus Paul's letter to the Ephesians was unrolled. It was more than two thousand words long. More than three fourths of the way down the scroll, **thirty words stood out in red**. Everyone noticed them. Everyone focused on them. Obviously, they were of great importance. These words were the ones that would be the most important to learn and to apply!

Well. That's an imaginary scene. And it didn't happen this way. But, when Paul wrote "this is a **great** mystery" it was as if he had turned **red** the thirty words in Ephesians 5:31-32.

In verse 31, Paul quoted the important verse of Genesis 2:24. That verse revealed the special one-flesh relationship the first husband and wife shared from Day 6 of Creation in the Garden of Eden. In Genesis 2:25, the man and woman in their one-flesh relationship in Eden were not ashamed in one another's presence nor in the presence of God. They were united in a joint-body relationship as they walked together with God.

In Ephesians 5:32, Paul explained that believers were joined together in an even greater relationship. Believers were joined together a one-flesh kind of unity! Together, they were joined with Christ in one spiritual joint-body, in a one-flesh unity:

**"... the two shall become one flesh.' This is a Great Mystery;
I am speaking about Christ and believers together."**

What was the Great Mystery that should impact all our thinking and acting as Christians? The Great Mystery was the revelation of the surprising unity we have together *in* Christ and *with* Christ!

Have you ever thought of Ephesians 5:32 as a key verse? I doubt it. Have you ever seen a Bible laid out with headings that pointed out the importance of the Great Mystery in verse 32? I never have.

Instead editors of modern language versions and even commentators focus on the verses *ahead* of verse 32. Many make the erroneous claim that this passage is about marriage. They say “This is the longest passage on marriage in the New Testament.” But it is not primarily about marriage. It is about the Body of Christ.

We should have seen this all along. What does Paul write in verses 31 and 32?

For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother
and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become **one flesh**.
This mystery is great;
and **I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.**”

Paul’s focus is on the one-flesh, joint-body unity of Christ and the church. *This* is how life in Christ goes beyond life in Eden.

By (1) *avoiding these interpretation traps*, and (2) *focusing on the key ideas* in Ephesians 5:15-6:9, we can proceed to unlock the riches of Paul’s passage in Ephesians 5-6. We come to see the wonderful news that **we participate in the great relationship of the Body of Christ, the relationship that goes beyond even that experienced by the first couple with God back in the beginning in the Garden of Eden.**

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