

INTRODUCTION

We have finished the first three chapters of Ephesians and now we are on the last three. I told you at the beginning the first three chapters deal with doctrine and the last three chapters with our duty. What do we do because of who we are? The first three deal with our position in Christ. We are seated with Christ. The last three chapters deal with our practice in Christ. What we should do. In the first three chapters, we are pictured as seated with Christ in the heavenlies. In these last three chapters we are pictured as walking in the spirit, going somewhere, doing something. Before you know what you do, you ought to know who you *are* and never claim to be someone you are not.

Maybe you heard about the single guy who was having trouble getting second dates. He read all the books he could and listened to tapes on how to interest women. He discovered in order to be interesting to women you have to find out what they are interested in and be that or do that. He went to a baseball game and happened to sit next to a beautiful single girl, so he thought there might be possibilities, so he said to her, “I see you enjoy baseball. What kind of men do you like?” She thought for a moment and said, “Actually, I like native American men, I like Jewish men, and I like just good ole boys. What’s your name?” He thought for a moment and said, “My name is Geronimo Goldstein, but my friends call me Bubba.”

You have to be careful you don’t claim to be who you really are not. But if you are a Christian, you will act in a certain way. Let’s read about “walking straight.”

Ephesians 4:1-3. “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

“Live a life” used there is the word *peripateo*, which literally means “to walk.” The Christian life is like a walk. Why does the Bible compare the Christian life to a walk? Because that’s something we can all relate to. If it said the Christian life is like a swim, there are some people who never swim but, unless you are crippled, everyone walks and you understand what it is to walk. The Christian life is a journey.

Do you remember when you taught your child to walk? If you’re a mom or a dad and you have had kids, you can relate to this. I remember when our first child, Jenni, was born, we brought her home from the hospital and, of course, she couldn’t walk immediately. She had to grow and she had to strengthen her muscles. First she started crawling, then she would pull herself up and stand, but I remember that fateful night when she took her first step. I suppose every parent remembers when their first child took that first step. I got down on my knees across the room and I said, “Come on, sweetheart. Walk to Daddy.” We all remember that beautiful sight of that child taking their first walk. They have that stiff-legged Frankenstein kind of walk as they toddle and maybe fall, but they get back up and try it again. Then, they learn how to walk better as their balance and their equilibrium improves. About two months after she took her first step, she was running everywhere and getting into everything. I wondered why in the world I ever wanted her to walk in the first place! There is a progression to walking. First, you crawl, then you stand then

you begin to walk. That’s a picture of the Christian life.

I. OUR PURPOSE

1. Walking involves a decision

As we talk about how to walk straight, notice three things. Number one, our purpose. What is our purpose as Christians? According to verse one, he says, “I want you to walk worthy.” Here’s our purpose: To walk the talk. I wouldn’t dare stand up in front of you and tell you my name is Geronimo Goldstein and people call me Bubba, because that’s not true. But, there are a lot of people who stand up and say, “I am a Christian. I am a born again Christian,” but their walk, their daily lifestyle, does not demonstrate it. It’s so easy to talk the talk. “Oh, yes. Praise God, I am a Christian.” But it is a totally different thing to live a lifestyle that demonstrates you are a Christian. Why does the Bible compare the Christian life to a walk? There are a couple of reasons at least. First, because walking involves an initial decision. Unless you are sleepwalking or you are hypnotized or something, you never walk unless you make a conscious decision. “I am going to take a step.” The journey of a million miles begins with the first step and the first step is the most critical step.

Let me show you in a picture what the Christian life is. All of us are going in the wrong direction because we are all sinners by nature and by choice Jesus said we are all on a broad highway leading to destruction but, if you are a Christian, there came a time in your life when, by a conscious act of your will, you turned and you started walking in the right direction. That was a conscious decision. That’s what becoming a Christian is and that first step is the most critical and the most important.

The way you walk doesn’t earn your salvation. The way you walk is a demonstration you are a Christian. Who you are determines how you walk. Let me try to explain with a true story. In 1819 a little girl was born into a family in England. Her father was, Edward, Duke of Kent. They named her Victoria. She was to become Queen Victoria but, her parents decided they would not tell her she was to be Queen, because they were afraid it might spoil her. (I tend to agree with them) Can’t you see her at 4 years old playing with her friends? “If you don’t give me your toys, I’m going to have you beheaded when I become Queen.” So, in order to keep from spoiling her, they never told her. They wanted her to discover it naturally in the course of her school studies. It was not until she was 13 and studying the lineage to the throne of England that she read something and suddenly became aware when her uncle, William IV, died; she would be the Queen of the greatest empire on the planet at that time. That 13-year-old girl made an amazing statement which applies to the Christian. She said, “Because of who I am I determine that I will be good.” She didn’t say, “I’m going to have to act like royalty so I can become the Queen she was born to be Queen She said, “Because of the way I have been born, because of who I am, I determine that I will be good.”

You don’t have to be good to become a Christian, but because of who you are—a child of the King—then, you should walk a certain way because of your new birth. It involves a decision.

2. Walking involves a destination

The second thing walking also involves a destination. In about 25 minutes we are going to finish this service and each of us is going to get up and walk somewhere. You will have a destination in mind when you start walking. You will be walking to your car, wherever it may be parked. So always walking involves a destination. Seldom do you ever walk around in circles with no destination in mind. You are going from Point A to Point B. What is our destination as Christians? Is it heaven? Not really, because basically heaven is a fringe benefit for Christians. Right now while you are alive Jesus wants you to have life and have it more abundantly, and so our destination ought to be to be more like Jesus. Jesus is our destination and his character and his personality. That’s why in Romans Paul said, “God’s plan for your life is you may be conformed to the life of his son, Jesus.” So every step you make takes you toward your destination of becoming more like Jesus.

Isaiah 40:31 talks about walking. “But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” For many years I misunderstood that verse and wondered why Isaiah under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit started with soaring, then transitioned to running, and then walking. It was almost anti-climatic, a decrescendo, but I have come to believe it is totally the opposite. Sometimes it is easy to soar like an eagle. Have you ever arrived at a day in your life when the weather is nice, and you are feeling good? All your bills are paid, nobody seems to be angry at you. It’s easy to soar on those special days. In like manner, sometimes it is easy to get up and run—you have a sense of enthusiasm. But it is tougher to walk day after day after day, putting one foot in front of the other, being faithful. It takes more spiritual strength and courage to walk faithfully day after day. That’s why you need the strength of God. That’s our destination as we walk along having his strength.

Some of you are in a tough marriage right now. The thing you need from God right now is strength, not to fly or run, but strength to be faithful in marriage day after day, step after step. For some of you, your service for the Lord has become cold and lifeless. You used to soar and you used to run but now you get up and say, “Do I have to teach that Sunday School class again?” You need the strength of the Lord just to put one foot in front of the other foot and keep on being faithful. That’s when you really need the strength of the Lord. I read something this past week in a secular magazine I think applies. It said the definition of a successful person is “someone who performs the ordinary requirements of life with extraordinary faithfulness.”

II. OUR PARTNERSHIP

Let’s learn something else about this walk. Number two, our partnership, because you are not walking this walk alone and neither am I. We walk with each other. If you’ll look at verse 2 this is how you ought to walk. It says, “Be completely humble and gentle, patient, bearing with one another in love. Now, we are walking together in this walk. You and I are partners. We are not competing against each other.

Maybe you heard about the two guys who were going bear hunting together. That is pretty biblical because it says “bearing with one another there...” They are going bear hunting together and they come up upon this big, mean, grizzly bear and they empty their guns at this bear it

doesn't have any effect they throw their guns at this bear and they turn and begin to run as fast as they can. Grizzlies can run a lot faster than a man, so here they are with this bear breathing down their necks running beside each other for their lives. One of these old boys begins to kick off his heavy hunting boots as he is running along to get barefooted to run faster. His friend running beside him notices what he is doing and he says, “Man what are you doing that for?! You know you can't outrun that bear!” The guy says, “I don't have to outrun that bear, I just have to outrun you.”

A lot of people in life think that's what life is, a race against the person beside you. Absolutely not! It is a partnership in which we ought to stick together. We're partners together in this walk. That means I may need to adjust my speed a bit sometimes and it may mean you need to adjust your speed a little bit.

Cindy and I love to walk. One of our favorite things to do in the afternoon is go on a walk. We may walk 30 minutes, 45 minutes or even an hour, but we do more than just walk. We like to walk and talk. We have one major problem: When she walks at a certain pace, she thinks that's a good pace and I think it's way too slow. It doesn't get my heartbeat up to my target aerobic level. So what do I do? If you ever see us walking around in south Tyler, you will see my wife walking in a straight line and me zigzagging all the way around her. I'm accommodating her speed so we can stay close enough to talk together. That's a great parable about how we are all in this together and we need to do whatever it takes to walk together.

1. Humility that produces gentleness

How can you be a good walking partner with other Christians? Paul gives four qualities in verse 2. Two of them are attitudes and two of them are subsequent actions. First, he says there must be humility that produces gentleness. In verse 2 he says, “be humble and gentle.” Humility is the attitude; gentleness is the action. Humility is not thinking lowly of yourself. Humility is not thinking of yourself at all. Never claim to be humble, because the moment you claim to be humble, you become proud of the fact you are humble and you are no longer humble. Humility is something other people recognize in you. But the opposite of being humble is being proud and arrogant and always wanting to talk about yourself. Someone said, “A bore is someone who only talks about themselves. A gossip is someone who only talks about others. A genius is someone who only talks about you.” We all know that is true!

I'm told in South America there is a bird called the MeMe bird because the bird only has one song. “Meme meme meme meme.” Those birds are indigenous to South America but I've seen a few of them flying around East Texas, haven't you? People who only want to talk about themselves they are the center of their universe the big “I.” That's not humility—that's pride. The apostle, Paul, is a great example of humility. He usually claimed to be the slave of the Lord, Jesus Christ. On one occasion he uses a word even lower than slave. In the Roman ships there were galley slaves whose job was to pull these long oars to propel the ship, like in “Ben Hur.” There were different levels. The top row of galley slaves were closer to the sunshine and fresh air, the second row of galley slaves were in the middle, but the bottom row galley slaves were down in the bottom of that stinking, dark boat pulling away at those oars. It was the hardest work.

You’ve probably heard about the galley master who went to the galley slaves one day and said, “Boys, I have good news and bad news for you. It’s the captain’s birthday. The good news is you get double rations today!” Everybody cheered. He said, “The bad news is the captain wants to go water-skiing this afternoon.” Can you imagine how terrible it must have been to sit down in the bottom of a ship and row hour after hour after hour? That’s the word the apostle, Paul, used to describe himself. “I am an under rower, a third row galley slave.” What humility he had in his life. But humility can only be demonstrated if you have gentleness in your life, because Paul says, “be completely humble and gentle.” The word *gentle* literally is the word *meek* and meekness is not weakness—it is strength under control. You can’t really say, “I am humble because that’s something only someone else can say about you, but you can look at your own life and ask yourself, “Do I display meekness gentleness toward other people?” What is meekness?” In the Bible they used *meek* as a verb, using it to describe a proud stallion that had been broken. We use that word in Texas when you take a wild horse and you transform it to where that horse will follow the directions of the rider. You say that horse has been *broken*. It’s the same word Paul uses here for gentleness, meekness. Are you the kind of person who can be directed, who can be taught do you have a teachable spirit? Are you open to being directed? There are some people who are not. They think they are always right on everything and say, “You can’t teach me a thing. My mind is already made up.” It’s really funny to stand up here Sunday after Sunday and you can see some people out in the congregation who sit there with their arms crossed and hang a “Do Not Disturb” sign around their necks. They are saying, “You can’t teach me a thing. I know everything there is. I’m right and my mind is made up.” That is exactly the opposite of what Paul is talking about here. You can take the reins of a horse that has been broken and direct him, or pull them back and the horse will stop. How easily directed are you today? Do you have that kind of teachable attitude?

2. Patience expressed in love

The second couplet of qualities he gives in verse 2 are patience expressed in love. As you are walking along in partnership, you ought to display patience and it ought to be demonstrated by love. Are you an impatient person? Do you have a sense of being patient with those around you? Do you know what it means to be a patient walker? It means you don’t run ahead of someone else. You are willing to slow down on their behalf—you accommodate them. That’s what patience is all about. It’s actually the good old word “long-suffering.” Long-suffering is not sitting through a boring sermon. It means you are slow to respond with retaliation. That’s an attribute of God. 2 Peter, 3:9, says, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness.” I can ask a question and I guarantee the answer from everybody is “Yes.” Aren’t you glad God is patient with us? Aren’t you glad God is patient and long-suffering with us?

About a hundred years ago before television and motion pictures, people went to great halls where they would hear orators speak. It was the age of oratory. One of the most popular orators in the 19th century America was an infidel named Robert Ingersoll. He was an atheist, a very strong humanist. He went around preaching the gospel of humanism. One of his favorite speeches was, “Why I am an atheist,” or “Why I am an agnostic.” One evening he spoke to a packed house in an auditorium in Boston, Massachusetts, and did an unusual thing. Halfway

through his speech on “Why I am an Atheist” he said, “I am going to demonstrate once and for all there is no God!” He looked up to the ceiling and said, “If there is a God, I invite him to strike me dead in the next 5 minutes! Come on...if there is a God prove it!” Women screamed, people gasped, some people fled for the exits, certain God would strike lightning down on that building. Robert Ingersoll continued to speak, but every thirty seconds he stopped and said, “God you only have three and a half minutes left! Strike me dead if there is a God!” He did that repeatedly and at the end of the five minute period he said, “See I told you there is no God! I rest my case!” Well, word got around to Dr. A. J. Gordon, pastor of the largest church in Boston, about what Robert Ingersoll had done and said. (and I love his reply) Dr. A. J. Gordon said, “Does Robert Ingersoll believe he can exhaust God’s long-suffering in only five minutes?” You can’t exhaust God’s patience in five minutes, in five years, in five decades, in five centuries, in five millennia God is long-suffering, that’s why we should be patient with one another. We all ought to carry around a button on us reading, “Please be patient with me God isn’t finished with me yet!”

How can you tell if you are a patient person? Look what Paul says in verse 2, “bearing with one another in love.” There will be love in your life toward other people. As we walk along holding hands with one another we ought to love each other. Love is best expressed in kindness. That’s why in 1 Corinthians 13:4, when Paul begins to describe love he says, “Love is patient, love is kind.” Kindness is being nice to one another.

A little girl knelt beside her bedside one night and prayed, “Dear God, make all the bad people good and make all the good people nice.” There is a whole covey of people out there who are mean as snakes. They have never committed adultery. They have never cheated on their income tax but they act like they have been pickled in vinegar. They are downright mean. The Bible says, “Love is expressed in kindness.” What kind of walking partner are you? We are in this thing together so let’s be humble and gentle and patient with one another, and let’s show love to each other.

III. OUR PEACE

1. God creates unity

The final thing is in verse 3 and speaks about our peace. “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” Here’s the truth this speaks about the unity of the Spirit. The psalmist says this, “How good and how pleasant it is for the brethren to dwell together in unity.” Let’s learn some things about unity. Number one God creates unity. God is the author of all unity. He is the author of unity in a marriage, a family, a community, a church, a nation. God is the one who creates unity. Sometimes people say, “We need to create more unity in our church.” or “We need to create more unity in our community.” We cannot create unity any more than we can create earth out of darkness. That is a divine act only God can do.

Sometimes people misunderstand what true unity really is. Unity is not “unison.” A while ago this great choir sang to us, but they did not sing in unison, they sing in parts and that’s what made it pretty. Unity does not mean we always say exactly the same thing exactly the same way. There is beautiful diversity in the body. Unity is not “uniformity.” Some people think unity is where everybody dresses exactly alike wears their hair exactly alike uses exactly the same

catchword in languages. You can go in some churches and that’s basically what you see. They think that’s unity. That’s not unity. That’s “uniformity.”

True unity is where there is a spirit of love, “Hey the short hairs can come here, the long hairs can come here, the no hairs can come here.” “Whosoever will may come: The blue collars, the white collars, the no-collars may come.” That’s what unity is—diversity. Unity and diversity are not “uniformity” and they are not “unification.” There are some groups around the world who are trying to get all the churches together into one big body sometimes that’s called, “The World Council of Churches.” That’ll never work. It’s like trying to take a bunch of corpses in a cemetery and manufacture a resurrection. That doesn’t happen. That’s “unification.” That’s man’s effort to “unite.” Only God can create unity. I heard someone say, “You can take two tomcats and tie their tails together and hang them over a clothesline and you have unification—but you certainly don’t have unity. Only God can create unity and he loves unity.

2. Satan hates unity

Why don’t we always have unity? Number two, Satan hates unity! And he attacks it. In your marriage, God united you—it wasn’t the ceremony, it wasn’t the vows, it wasn’t even the marriage license. What God has joined together do not let anyone tear apart. The devil wants to drive a wedge between husbands and wives. He wants to do his best to drive a wedge between you and your children, parents. The devil will come into a church, and tries to drive a wedge between brothers and sisters in Christ. He’ll try to drive a wedge between groups of people and races of people and destroy the unity of a nation.

As I watched the television broadcast of that terrible tragedy in Oklahoma City this week, I confess I was wrong for the first couple of days, because I was convinced some Arab terrorist came in, sneaked across our borders and destroyed our security. I thought maybe Moammar Khadafi or Saddam Hussein was behind that action. Of course, as you are reading now, what they are calling “home-grown terrorists” are responsible. We are beginning to see our nation is more divided than we ever feared. Some terrorists from the Middle East would have threatened our security, but some “home-grown terrorists” that threatens our unity. Both are scary. There is a lesson here. A terrorist is someone who slips in and tries to be nameless, faceless but he tries to hurt indiscriminately. There are people who do that in churches. That’s what they do. They may be unknowingly or unwittingly the tool of the devil, but the devil hates unity and he attacks unity. Why do you think the Bible says, “The devil is like a roaring lion?” When a lion stalks a herd of antelope, his strategy is to separate the weakest animal from the herd. When he gets the weakest animal from the group, he kills it and devours it. The devil does the same thing. He tries to isolate people from the group and get them aside and he tries to hurt them. He did that from the very beginning. There were only two people then Adam and Eve but did you notice he waited until Eve was all alone and he had her separated from Adam, and that’s when he tempted her. That is his strategy to divide and conquer. Satan wants to do to your marriage to your family to your church he wants to do to this nation. God loves unity God hates disunity. In Proverbs 6, God lists seven things he hates. One of them is “a man who sows discord among the brethren.” God hates that; it’s the tool of the devil.

3. We should maintain unity

The final thing we see here is we should maintain unity. That is our responsibility, to maintain the unity! That’s what he says in verse 3, “make every effort to maintain the unity which is the bond of peace.” How can you maintain the unity of this church? How can you maintain unity of your marriage and family? Look back up to point number two. If you will commit yourself this day to be humble and gentle to be kind and patient and loving. There would be a revival of love and kindness that would touch this world. What’s going to win this world to Jesus? What is going to win East Texas to Jesus is not the preaching of David Dykes, it’s not the great music Mike and his choir have, it’s not the great ministries this church provides. What will really reach this East Texas area for Jesus Christ? When they see the LOVE of this church and other churches and the body of Christ united.

How are you walking today? Are you walking straight? Is there progress in your walk? Are you farther along today than you were one week ago? Is there growth in your walk? The secret is to walk with God. The Bible says we can literally walk with God. I love that passage in Genesis 5, where it lists all these guys with long last names. It says so-and-so lived so many years and he died. It reads like a Hebrew telephone directory. Suddenly, in 5:21, you come to this guy named Enoch. “Enoch walked with God, and he was not for God took him.” (v. 24) We believe Enoch did not die. He had such a close relationship with God, such close fellowship, there came a time in his life when God said, “Enoch you don’t have to go through a graveyard; just come on with me.” I like the way the little girl in Sunday School described it after the teacher told the story. She said, “Oh, I know what happened Enoch and God were such good friends they were walking and talking, and walking and talking, and they just kept on walking and talking and finally they stopped. God said, “Enoch, I believe we are closer to my house than we are to your house. Why don’t you just come on home with me?”

So, why don’t you commit yourself to having that kind of close walk with God? If you walk that close to God, you won’t have any trouble walking with your hands touching the hands of other believers walking in harmony walking in unity walking in love!

OUTLINE

I. OUR PURPOSE

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III. OUR PEACE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes