

Pilgrim's Progress Sermon 1

Gospel Shoes for Progressing Pilgrims

Ephesians 6:15

A. INTRODUCTION.

1. A personal testimony and *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

- a. Illustration. When aged 5 in Melbourne, Australia, my older sister would regularly take me home from school. However, one day she took me to an after-school meeting at the local Baptist church for a never-to-be-forgotten colored slide presentation of John Bunyan's famous allegory, *The Pilgrim's Progress*.
- b. Illustration. Subsequently at home, I was also taught that *The Pilgrim's Progress* was the second best book in all the world, that is after the English Bible. Others were similarly taught that the allegory was the poor and illiterate man's Bible.
- c. *Since those early days, The Pilgrim's Progress* has increasingly captivated my attention. And so it has also captivated the interest of many others over the past 320+ years since its first edition was published in 1678.

(1) In the broad field of English literature consider:

- (a) Poets Samuel Coleridge and William Cowper.
- (b) William Thackeray, his novel *Vanity Fair*.
- (c) Louisa M. Alcott's *Little Women*.
- (d) Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*.
- (e) Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Celestial Railroad*.

(2) But more specifically in Christian ministry consider:

- (a) John Owen, confidant and encourager.
- (b) George Whitefield, perhaps second only to Scripture.
- (c) John Newton, “so insightful, so full of matter.”
- (d) C. H. Spurgeon, read it over 100 times.
- (e) J. Gresham Machen, “that most gentle and theological book.”

2. Primary emphases in *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

- a. Christian life involves essential truth.
 - (1) The only biblical gospel of justification by faith alone.
 - (2) The only biblical sanctification through perseverance.
 - (3) The only biblical refuge of local church fellowship.
 - (4) The only biblical hope of being with Christ in heaven.
- b. Christian life is a journey.
 - (1) It has been well said that, “The journey is the truest metaphor of human life.
 - (2) Bunyan believed this and may well have based *The Pilgrim's Progress* on the journeying of Abraham (Heb. 11:8-13, especially vs. 8-10, cf. I Chron 29:15, “sojourner;” Ps. 1:1; 23:4; 39:12).
 - (3) In *The Heavenly Footman* based on I Corinthians 9:24, “Run that you may obtain,” Bunyan writes: “There is many a dirty step, many a high hill, much work to do, a wicked heart, world, devil, to overcome; I say, there are many steps to be taken by those that intend to be saved, by running or walking, in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham. Out of Egypt thou must go through the Red Sea; thou must run a long and

tedious journey, through the vast howling wilderness, before thou come to the land of promise.”¹

c. Christian life is a struggle.

- (1) Contrary to popular opinion, it is not “let go and let God.” That is having claimed your justification by faith, you must also claim your sanctification by faith. No!
- (2) In J. C. Ryle’s classic volume *Holiness*, he comments, “It would be easy to show that this doctrine [of let go and let God] is utterly subversive of the whole teaching of such tried and approved books as *Pilgrim’s Progress*, and that if we receive it we cannot do better than put Bunyan’s old book in the fire! If Christian in *Pilgrim’s Progress* simply yielded himself to God, and never fought, or struggled, or wrestled, I have read the famous allegory in vain.”²
- (3) So Paul describes this struggle in Ephesians 6:12, but he qualifies it as a spiritual rather than a material conflict.
- (4) And what is to be the Christian’s response here? “Take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day” (Eph. 6:13).
- (5) And where is this armor to be found? Bunyan describes the location in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* as the Palace Beautiful, that is that spiritual oasis called a local church!

3. So for the rest of our study, let us focus on just one of these weapons that Christian in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* was equipped with.
 - a. It concentrates upon one of Bunyan’s essential truths.
 - b. It addresses how we travel in this journey of life.
 - c. It arms us with perhaps our most fundamental weapon.

¹ John Bunyan, *Works*, III, p. 382.

² J. C. Ryle, *Holiness*, pp. xvi-xvii.

- d. It is the necessity of, “having our feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace” (Eph. 6:15). It concerns the vital necessity of the Christian wearing his “gospel shoes.”

B. GOSPEL SHOES FOR PROGRESSING PILGRIMS – EPHESIANS 6:15

1. Two important questions.

a. What is the military footwear that Paul uses to illustrate here?

- (1) He probably has in mind the heavy duty sandals with long leg straps of a Roman soldier that were sadden with nails to provide good traction in all conditions.
- (2) Here was one of the reasons for the military success of Julius Ceasar as a general. His troops could cover long distances in a short time and so surprise the enemy.
- (3) Application. As Paul writes, captive in Rome, he may have often noticed this footwear and mused: “Would it not be better if these shoes could transport the gospel far and wide, and not cruel, despotic warfare?” Or he have have wondered: Would not I travel better with such footwear?”

b. What then is the spiritual footwear that Paul describes here?

- (1) It is specially made “gospel shoes;” they are long lasting and give such a firm footing. The Christian has this good news that a sinner may yet be at peace with God, and not His enemy.
 - (a) The Christian does not merely stand upon the gospel so-to-speak, like the wearing of a pair of wedding shoes. Instead the gospel is his every-day footwear.
 - (b) The Christian soldier has so experienced the peace of God through a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ that it effects his every step. This is the grace of the gospel “in which we stand” (Rom. 5:1-2), since God has “made peace through the blood of His [the Son’s] cross” (Col. 1:20).

- (2) We might paraphrase this verse thus: “Have that surefootedness of character that comes by means of wearing long-lasting, stabilizing gospel shoes,” v. 15.
2. But specifically, why is this Christian soldier to make this part of his weaponry available for everyday use? Why are these shoes so necessary? What will they best accomplish?
- a. For mobility? Some would immediately respond, “Why these gospel shoes allow the gospel to be taken to every corner of the earth. Here is the evangelistic task of every Christian soldier.”
- b. For stability? Now we would agree that the Christian soldier’s mission is to proclaim the gospel according to Romans 10:15, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!” But this is not the thought of Paul here.
- (1) In Romans 10:15 the gospel is for the unbeliever.
- (2) In Ephesians 6:15 the gospel is for the believer so that, “having done everything, [he may] stand firm,” v. 13, cf. vs. 11, 14; I Cor. 15:1.
- (3) In other words, Paul here in v. 15 is speaking about the sanctifying effect of the gospel. Do you know about this?
3. One of the greatest deviations today in evangelical Christianity has been the loss of the centrality of the gospel for daily, practical, ongoing Christian living.
- a. The gospel has erroneously been understood as basic, initiatory, the means of entering heaven’s gate, a sort of entrance ticket.
- (1) The gospel is a simple formula for getting a person saved.
- (2) The gospel is a transaction for the production of converts.
- (3) And the implication is that once a person is saved, the gospel is pushed into the background; it does not sanctify.

- b. But how fatally wrong is this idea, and how it belittles the centrality and ongoing glory of the Cross. Consider eight reasons why the Cross is *presently* important for the believer.
- (1) John 13:34. Love amongst Christian brethren is to be based upon Christ's dying love for those brethren.
 - (2) Romans 1:15, and the whole Epistle, indicate that the believer must have the gospel preached to him for his growth.
 - (3) Galatians 2:20. Christ's redemption is the basis upon which the life which I *now* live is lived.
 - (4) Galatians 6:14; cf. 5:12. Even Paul had only one ground of continuous boasting as a believer, and that was Christ crucified.
 - (5) Ephesians 4:31-5:2. Life in a local church, that is harmonious life, is to be regulated by Jesus Christ's gracious atonement.
 - (6) Revelation 5:12. Even in heaven the elders sing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, . . . to receive blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever."
 - (7) The Lord's Supper is the only repeatable ordinance. Why? Because the believer is frequently to remember Christ's saving sacrifice. It is a gospel remembrance feast!
 - (8) In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, when Christian is being questioned at the Palace Beautiful, he is asked what means help him overcome his trials. He replies that meditation on the cross and his embroidered coat, encountered at the Place of Deliverance, provide relief.
4. And here in Ephesians 6:15 the emphasis is exactly the same. As frequently as I wear gospel shoes, so just as frequently the gospel of peace with God is to be my constant stay and foundation. Even Israel in the wilderness had shoes that did not wear out (Deut. 29:50). So it may be truly said that, "the Christian dies with his shoes on."

C. CONCLUSION.

1. Are you wearing gospel shoes? Are you so rooted and grounded in the gospel that it establishes your steps, controls your walk, and makes you sure footed when the way is rough?
 - a. If you are, then this is because the gospel has caused you to be at peace with God, to be assured of your sonship.
 - b. You know what it is to have the gospel as encouragement in the midst of walking, running, combat. You *must* be marching.
2. For Paul, the gospel constrains his every step while on pilgrimage (I Cor. 9:16; II Cor. 5:14). And when he marches, every step he takes is grounded upon gospel shoe-leather (Rom. 5:1-2).
3. Irish hymn writer William Kelly well describes the perennial significance of the cross:

The Cross—it takes our guilt away;
It holds the fainting spirit up;
It cheers with hope the gloomy day,
And sweetens every bitter cup.
4. If you are a genuine Christian pilgrim, then you will be thoroughly engrossed in your journeying, your marching, your progressing toward heaven.
5. And if you are not really a Christian pilgrim, you need a change of footwear.
6. Not only do you die with these gospel shoes on, but also you can only enter heaven wearing gospel footwear. Anything else is unacceptable.