

Vanguard Classical Academy
Commencement
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“See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception (pseudo-intellectual babble) according to the tradition and musings of mere men, following the elementary principles of this world, rather than following the truth – the teachings of Christ.” (Colossians 2:8, *Amplified*)

Welcome to the 2019 Commencement Exercises for Vanguard Classical Academy. Vanguard’s Mission Statement is:

“To Partner with parents in providing a Christian, Classical, College Preparatory Education; equipping student with the tools of learning and developing in them wisdom, knowledge and understanding.”

Tonight, we celebrate the graduations of Ms. Cameron Cattell and Ms. Emma Holly. They are the first class to graduate at Vanguard.

Value Is Not Determined by Size

In modern society, we typically judge human endeavors by size; big is better and success will be reflected in large numbers. However, that was not Jesus’ judgment. While it was not spoken in the context of ecclesiology, Mathew 18:20 has application to the nature of the church and to the significance and insignificance of people in the church.

Jesus said, “Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them.” A church Is not a building, or an organization; it is a living, spiritual organism inhabited by a living Lord. Imperatively, people are required for a church to exist. In fact, people are so important that a church cannot exist without them; it is also the case that people are so unimportant, that it only takes two or three to create “church.”

So, it is with an academy. Men judge the success of academic institutions by numbers and the larger the numbers, the greater the success, as judged by men and women. Cameron and Emma, the two of you being the only members of the 2019 graduating class of Vanguard, does not make Vanguard unimportance; but, you being the only two graduates speaks of the absolute value of the two of you, because, rather than being graduates of an academy; you ARE the academy.

Tonight, you are laying a foundation which will allow others to stand on your shoulders in reaching new heights of success in their lives. In coming years, the reunions of your class will be by numbers, small; but by heart, your reunions will be as big as your love, devotion, passion and achievements.

Setting The Standard

This evening, I want to set a standard for you which may be beyond your ability to meet, but, set it I shall. In September 1961, as a 17-year-old freshman (or Fish, as they say) at Texas A&M College (now a University), I was placed in a number of advanced, honors classes. One was English and it was in this class that I received my first graded report in college.

My performance was so significant that my grade required a parenthetical remark. We had been assigned the writing of an autobiographical essay, which at 17, I thought was beneath my dignity. My grade reflected just how little dignity I had; it an “F-,” with the following comment, “You may have trouble passing this course.”

While the assignment had not warranted my serious attention, this judgement of my performance commanded it. Oh, yes, I did well in the class.

I spent my first year at A&M in pre-veterinary medicine. I became a Christian that year and thinking I would go into the ministry, I transferred to a college very similar to Lamar. My personal and academic growth and development were equally promoted by both, as shall yours, whether at A&M or Lamar.

Who Will Be the Hero of your Life

Today you begin the process of taking complete control of your life’s images and of creating your life portrait. As Charles Dickens had David Copperfield say in the beginning of the novel of the same name: “Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life or whether that station will belong to anybody else, these pages must show.”

Today, you continue to write the story which shall be the novel of your life. How you write and the story your life tells will be largely your decision and your choice. In September, you will spend the first night, maybe of your life, out from under the direct influence of your parents. That night will be spent with your new family in your new home which will be a college dormitory. The good news is that you do not abandon your old family, but forever you will be changed.

The brothers and sisters, which you will join in college will forever be an intimate part of your heart and life. That is a good thing; but it requires our sharing you with strangers which is not easy but in honor of you, we will do it gracefully.

God bless you dear, precious ones. You are and shall forever be loved. Be well; be strong; be noble. Be your best! Your brothers and sisters, your parents, your cousins, your aunts, your uncles and your grandparents shall cherish you every day, until the day, we see you “coming,” – returning home briefly but knowing that inevitably in that “coming” there is the certainty of another “going.”

First You Must Forgive

What can you do to insure the success of this new, challenging and even daunting adventure in your life? You may be surprised at the answer.

We have all lived life with extreme swings between **condemning words**, and **confirming words**, which have often been spoken to all of us.

The tragedy of “condemning words” is that they have a way of becoming self-fulfilling in their prophecies, and they take on a life of their own when mixed with one’s own anxiety about the future. “Confirming words,” on the other hand, often are lost in the confusion which the swings between the two can bring.

Your parents lived in a complex set of circumstances, carrying the baggage (the weights) of their past, both before marriage and after. It is probable that they have now lived considerably longer as a married couple than as singles, therefore, like all of us, they can no longer simply “blame their childhood” for the weights that they carry. The “condemning words” with which you may have lived up to this point of your very young life can become weights to you, impeding your growth and progress.

We all need to heed the admonition of Hebrews 12:1-3, which states:

“...let us strip off and throw aside every encumbrance – unnecessary weight – ...and let us run with patient endurance and steady and active persistence the appointed course of the race that is set before us...” (*Amplified Bible*)

You have both lived in homes which demand a very high standard – a standard, which is held up to you as the ideal -- but which is not often achieved by those who hold it up. And, that very standard, which is right, and your families’ failure to achieve it, which is human, can be used of our enemy to destroy you.

Your parents do not want that, and we will not have that.

What you as the child need to understand – which will help you deal with the words which you have heard – is that parents often think that “condemning words” have a “magical power” to prevent from coming to pass what is spoken in those words. What we as the parents need to understand is that the opposite is often the case – “condemning words” often release the powers of the air to fulfill the very fears given life by those “condemning words.”

What then, as young high school graduates, standing on the threshold of your life, are you to do? What are the weights – the impediments (one translation of Hebrews 12:1 says “protuberances,” as something which “sticks out and bumps into things as you go along the way, impeding your progress.”) – which you must “lay aside” in order to make the transition from the child who is dependent to adult who is independent?

First, you must forgive! The greatest step which you can make toward independence – healthy independence from your parents where you become totally and personally dependent upon the

Lord Jesus Christ – is to forgive your mother and father for the errors and mistakes which they made – indeed for the sins which were committed against you.

Now, do not hear me speaking “condemning words” against your parents. They have done many, many things right, which has contributed, with the grace of God to bringing you to the point of being the person you are. Yet, as we all go through this very painful transition, our fears, hopes, regrets and desires can turn this time into a toxic time which can poison all of the good which has gone on before.

So, your first step to success is to actively, intentionally and sincerely forgive your parents for any offense or wound you may carry. In so doing, you free yourself and your parents from the bondage of unfulfilled expectations and you free yourself for a successful future.

The Irony of the Stories of your Life

The power of forgiveness does not, however, tell the whole story of your life to this point. As you grow and learn, you may discover that some of the experiences which you judged as painful or negative will become “touch points of intimacy.”

When I was twelve my brother and I heard the audible voice of God. Our family had only one gun and it was a 410 shotgun. It was a simple weapon. You broke it open, inserted a shell, closed it, cocked the hammer and pulled the trigger. It was very simple and very safe.

Occasionally, we would get a box of shells and we would “go bird hunting.” Unfortunately, no one told us about “range” and so we never hit anything because we were shooting too far away. One day, my brother and I were out in the field with the shotgun. We were in a vigorous discussion about whose turn it was to shoot. You can see when you have one gun, that would shoot one time, and there were two boys, that it would be difficult to know whose turn it was.

On this occasion, I knew it was my turn to shoot because I had the gun and my brother, who was older, couldn’t catch me. As we ran down the pasture, we heard the audible voice of God.

When I looked up, God looked a great deal like my Daddy, and he was walking rapidly toward the two of us. Instantly, I knew what he was going to say, “Is that gun loaded?” I knew the answer and it was the wrong answer. At that point in my life, I was not totally committed to the telling of the truth, but I knew that a prevarication would do no good because he wasn’t stupid.

If I told him that the gun was not loaded, he would simply take the gun, break it open, catch the unspent shell and then “beat me” for lying as well as running with a loaded gun.

At this point, we had two options. Walk toward my daddy and meet our fate sooner or wait for him to reach us. We chose the latter. When he was close, he said the magic words, “Is that gun loaded?” and I said, “Yes, sir.”

We had horses but no saddles but for Christmas we had gotten new bridles. He said, “Go to the barn and cut a rein off of each of your bridles.” Being the negotiator, I asked if we could cut one

rein off of only one bridle. I heard the voice of God again but this time, it was in silence. No negotiation; just obey.

My brother was older, so my father administered justice to him first. As I watched the event unfold, I thought, "I did this; I'm going to take it like a man." When my turn came and my father applied the first stripe, I did move or cry out. As he proceeded and I stood there, not rebelliously, I thought but courageously, he was encouraged. Needless to say, because of my lack of response, my father was encouraged to be more vigorous. Finally, he concluded the lesson.

While I had been silent during the event, I went behind the barn and cried for an hour. Do you think I learned a lesson? Absolutely! I learn it so well that I had joined the arm and a sergeant had told me to run with a loaded gun, I would have said, "I can unload this gun and outrun all of these men but with a loaded gun I cannot run."

At the time, there was nothing pleasant about this experience. For the sixty-three years since it happened, it has been one of my most cherished memories and I have told it often. It has become one of those "touch points" of intimacy which once was unpleasant, but it added positively to the story of my life.

A year or two later, I got mad at my father and stormed out of the back-screen door from the kitchen. I jumped off the porch and turned to look up. My father had come to the door. He saw in my eyes what I was thinking; he said, "Do you want to?" He meant, "Do you want to take me on?" In a moment of lucidity and unusual wisdom, I said, "No, sir." He responded, "Good, you will live to eat supper."

Do you think that the threat of my life by my father was pleasant? No, but through the years, I have remembered that moment with amusement and love. And, I have often told that story.

My father was famous for saying, "I can't keep you from it," speaking of some forbidden act, "but, I can sure make you wish you hadn't done it." Throughout their young lives, my children would say, "Tell us what Pawpaw Bill used to tell you."

While forgiveness of your parents for real or imagined transgressions is imperative to your success in life; don't ever forget that your judgement of events will change as you grow older. Some things which were very unpleasant will become "touch points" of intimacy. They will be remembered fondly and will be told to you children again and again.

Surviving College with a Vibrant Faith

Freed by forgiveness and by the transformation of memories from the negative burden of life's events and as a student with a heart for God, you are free to face one of the greatest barriers to the preservation of a vibrant faith; that is, the obtaining of your education without losing your passion for Christ. It is in the transition from dependence upon your parents to independence, that you face the greatest danger. The question is: "How can you get an education which qualifies you for participation in today's complex society and at the same time maintain intimacy with Christ?"

In college there will be many pressures -- academic, social, financial -- to compromise God's standards. There will be many efforts on the part of the world to "squeeze you into its mold." There will be many pressures to broaden God's horizons, to obscure them, and to include in one's life that which God has excluded. To succeed, you must be committed to separate living, to sounding together only with Christ, and to avoiding being squeezed by the world.

How can you resist and conquer these pressures? How can you maintain your passion for Christ in the face of these pressures?

There are three imperatives which will enable a young person to complete college with a consistent and courageous faith. They are the imperatives of making the commitment to God of sexual innocence; spiritual intimacy and social involvement.

Sexual Innocence

First, make a vow to God to keep yourself morally pure and sexually innocent. God intends for His people to be holy: "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." (Hebrews 12:14)

The reason is that Holiness is the only thing which emulates God Himself: "Be ye followers (imitators) of God as dear children." (Ephesians 5:1) One translator uses the word "pantomime" for the word "follower." The implication is that we are to reflect the character of God by our conduct, conversation and character.

Sexual Innocence Involves Your Effect Upon Others

In Matthew 5:27-28, Jesus said:

"Ye have heard it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."

Immediately, in Matthew 5:29-30, He adds the admonition:

"And if thy right eye offends thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: ...and if thy hand offend thee, cut it off."

Why the eye and the hand? Because men are sexually motivated by the what they see; and, women are sexually motivated by touch. Young ladies, you are not to dress or behave in such a way as to entice a young man to sin with his eyes. Young men, you are not to touch a young woman in such a way as to cause her to sin.

Spiritual Intimacy

Secondly, make a vow to God to spend time with Him every day of your life in meditating upon His Word and in communion with Him through prayer. Eternal life is knowing God and Jesus Christ. (See John 17:3) The Bible states:

“And you, Solomon my son, know the God of your father -- have personal knowledge of Him, be acquainted with and understand Him; appreciate heed and cherish Him -- and serve Him with a blameless heart and a willing mind for the Lord searches all hearts and minds, and understands all the wanderings of the thoughts. If you seek Him --inquiring for and of Him and requiring Him as your first and vital necessity -- you will find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever!” (I Chronicles 28:9)

“That you may really come to know -- practically, through experience for yourselves -- the love of Christ, which far surpasses mere knowledge (without experience); that you may be filled through all your being unto all the fulness of God -- that is may have the richest measure of the divine Presence and become a body wholly filled and flooded with God Himself.” (Ephesians 3:19)

Apart from this commitment to spend time with God everyday of your life, I hold no confidence that your faith will make a difference in your own life, let alone the lives of others. This means having a Quiet Time every day of your life.

What is a Quiet Time? It is a time of intimacy with God, of personally knowing God. It is a time of mediation upon the Word of God and of communing with God in the Word. It is the highest calling to which you were called at salvation. In fact, it is an activity of salvation, for it is the activity of knowing God which is eternal life . (John 17:3)

Social Involvement

Thirdly, make a commitment to have no emotionally dependent relationships with anyone who is not growing in Christ. In my own life, I spent seven years recovering from the spiritual devastation resulting from the establishment of an intimate friendship -- an emotionally dependent relationship -- with a man who was not a Christian. It began with my desiring to witness to him. It ended with my not going to church and not practicing my faith for seven years.

Psalm 101 states:

“...I will not know a wicked person. Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off: him that hath an high look and a proud heart will not I suffer. Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me. He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight. I will early destroy all the wicked of the land; that I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of the Lord.” (vs. 4b-8)

You must not live like, act like, think like the world, or you will become like the world. In the 1960's a mission organization sent seven men and women to Los Angeles to live among the hippies. They were to act like, look like, live like hippies, in order to witness to them. The result: they were never heard from again; they became hippies and were absorbed into that culture.

But, what about believers and non-believers and/or Christians who are not growing in the Lord? You must reach out to non-believers. You must be kind to them and attempt to meet their needs as you are their neighbor. But you must not include them in the circle of your intimate friends. You must invite non-believers to be a part of the assembly of Christians for Bible study, worship and preaching. You must not invite them into your hearts. You must be sensitive to the emotional needs of non-believers and allow God to meet those needs through you without allowing yourself to look to them to meet your needs.

There is a delicate balance here. You must not be exclusive in your relationships; yet, neither must you allow yourself to be influenced by those who are not committed to Jesus Christ, regardless of whether they profess to be Christians or not.

Three Dangers to the College Student

There are three great dangers to you as a Christian college student, even after you have made these commitments.

Seduction's Influence: Do Not Be Seduced

The world's way is seduction; God's way is submission. When you, as a college student, begin to include in your life that which contradicts the Word of God, you will soon begin to justify it by distancing yourself from the Word of God.

This is the first step toward your abandoning a vibrant faith in the Lord. This is the seduction of the world. It began in the Garden of Eden with the question, "Hath God said?"; and, it continues today in the classroom with, "Do you really believe the Bible is the Word of God?"

The battle for your mind as a Christian-college student will be the battle over your confidence in the nature of the Word of God. Once your confidence in the Word of God is undercut, the compromising of your passion for the Lord is a short way behind the loss of that confidence, and the compromise of choosing wrong friends and activities will closely follow.

Shavings' Impurities: Do Not Shave The Word!

When confidence in the Word of God begins to wane, you begin to "shave off the Word." The concept, "diminish not from (the Word of God)", is common to Deuteronomy and Jeremiah. Jeremiah 26:2 states:

“Thus saith the Lord: Stand in the court of the Lord’s house, and speak unto all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the Lord’s house, all the words that I command thee to speak unto them; diminish not a word.”

God’s Word is of such importance that nothing, absolutely nothing, must be removed from it. But, once you begin to be embarrassed by the Word of God and once you allow things into your life which contradict the Word of God, the next step is “shaving off the Word, diminishing from the Word” to excuse your compromise.

The word translated “diminish” means “to scrape off, to shave, remove, withhold”. The same word is found in Deuteronomy 4:2 and 13:1. To “shave off” the edge of God’s Word is to attempt to allow yourself to “slip around the sharp edges” of the “two-edged sword” which is the Word of God.

Strange gods’ Idolatry: Avoid Strange Gods

The final result of seduction and shaving will be your acceptance of strange gods. These “strange gods” may be the god Nebo, the god of education, worshiped by the Babylonians; or the Phoenician god, Ashtoreth, the god of sexual impurity or others. But they are not the God of your fathers.

It is one of the anomalies of this world that those who hold false beliefs seldom change them; while the children of God often abandon Him. Once the seduction of the world has begun and once intimacy with God has been sacrificed, the worship of strange gods will enter the life of the believer. This will not be manifested by your bowing down before an altar with a plastic god on it. It will be manifested by your relinquishing of a passion for a personal intimacy with God and by your focusing of your life on other matters.

It is in your priorities that you declare your loyalties. When God ceases to be first in your life, He ceases to be God in your life.

Conclusion

These commitments are made simply by praying:

“Father in Heaven, I vow to You that I will keep myself sexually innocent with all, spiritually intimate with You and socially involved with all men, but emotionally dependent only upon those who are walking with Jesus. In the Name of Jesus Christ. Amen.”

God bless you as you live in this world and yet are not of this world. God bless you while you honor God by the holiness in your life, by the pursuit of God in your life and by your sharing of your faith with others, both by the way in which you live and by the words which you speak.

Final Thought

“Furthermore, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge, and he pondered and search out and arranged many proverbs. The Preacher sought to find delightful words, even to write correctly words of truth.

“The words of the wise are like prodding goads, and these collected. Sayings are firmly fix in the mind like well-driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd. But beyond this my son, about going further then the words given by one Shepherd, be warned the writing of many gooks is endless so do not believe everything you read, and excessive study and devotion to books is wearing to the body.

“When all has been heard, the end of the matter is: fear god, worship him with wee-filled reverence, knowing that he is almighty God and keep his commandments, for this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, every hidden secret thing, whether it is good or evil.” (Ecclesiastes 12:9-14