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## WORTHY OF RESPECT

Baccalaureate Sermon  
Western Kentucky State College  
May 29, 1960

Irvin E. Linger  
President, Transylvania College

These final days before your graduation from Western Kentucky State College are quite properly a time for recollection, reflection and resolution.

Four years or more ago you graduated from high school. Neither before nor since were you more confident in your knowledge or more secure in your ability to cope successfully with life.

When you began your college studies you were startled, you may recall, by the discovery of the painful limitations of your knowledge and the hazardous state of your intellectual competence. The years of your college experience taught you the fitness of humility and the necessity of disciplined purpose in your quest for knowledge and skill.

Now, as you conclude your collegiate experience, you are wiser - greater in knowledge and intellectual resourcefulness and more mature in social understanding. You have gained a more profound sense of the mysteries about and within which deny human grasp or control. You understand more fully the intricacy and complexity of both the natural and the human realm. You know more than you knew before. You know less than you need to know to deal with life adequately. Consequently, you recognize the necessity of continued intellectual, technical, social and spiritual growth.

It did not require the recent events in Paris to remind you that your life will be lived amidst tensions in an age of unending crisis. It is axiomatic that many of the certainties you seek and the securities for which you strive will elude you. Yet there is no turning back. It is the mark of an educated and mature person to confront life with courage and determination and to challenge it with thoughtfulness, with dreams and with faith.

Draw confidence from your years of preparation. Be humble in the face of the years which await you. Set your course with firm and noble purpose. Do not minimize the importance of the contribution you can make or the responsibility which is yours by virtue of the educational advantages which have been yours.

## I

It is not my intention this evening to dwell upon the years you have already lived. My concern - and yours - is that far greater span of years which awaits you when you leave Western Kentucky State College diploma in hand.

I doubt that you face the future, despite its uncertainties, with a spirit of resignation. Few of you believe that the future is pre-determined and that passive submission to whatever may transpire is a virtue. Furthermore, I doubt that any of you are indifferent to the future or dubious as to your responsibility for it. On the other hand, I doubt that you are so imbued with self-assurance as to believe that the coming days and the troubled world are waiting breathlessly for you to take over. You are certainly more competent than when you entered this institution but none of you has all the answers the age so desperately seeks.

While the tomorrows will not enslave you against your will neither will they permit you unrestricted freedom. Circumstances will certainly limit your opportunities and personal inadequacies will restrain you. However, you dare not fail to recognize that the years will surely yield to disciplined desire, reasonable faith and resolute purpose.

## II

What will give you the power to direct your life in the face of discouragement and against forces which may seem intent upon overwhelming you? The answer is clear: the validity of your goals and the intensity of your desire to achieve them!

Goals differ and the difference is important. Some generate greater power than others. Some have wider repercussions than others. In the coming years only significant objectives will suffice. Lesser goals will cost you your life and give nothing in return.

We may rate our goals on a scale which ranges from personal gratification, on one hand, to social significance on the other. We may evaluate our goals in terms of immediate reward and ultimate value. It is needful to understand what our goals are, what the central or ultimate objective is, and what their realization will mean for self and society.

What goals will give direction and drive to your life? They are already evident but their final formulation awaits your decision. Will your goal be the accumulation of personal wealth? Will it be the acquisition

of political, social or economic power? Will it be the satisfaction of physical yearnings for comfort, convenience and security? In other words, will your goals be physical, material, selfish? If they are, rest assured that your education will assist you in their attainment.

Perhaps, beyond the goals of self service and fulfillment, you cherish goals of a more humanitarian or altruistic nature. You may have achieved sufficient maturity to realize that the enrichment of the common life holds the greatest measure of reward for personal living. You may have acquired sufficient wisdom to keep individual goals in proper relationship to universal objectives. If you have, your education will aid you in seeking the attainment you desire.

However, beyond the generally accepted goals which commend themselves to you, there is one goal which properly takes its place above all others. It is to this goal that I would direct your attention this evening.

If you are to seek happiness and the true satisfaction of personal and social fulfillment in the coming years, strive to be worthy of respect.

I am not saying, strive to be respectable. Nor am I saying, strive to be popular. I am saying, strive to be worthy of respect - so to live that, whether men honor you or not, you will be worthy of honor.

### III

When that ancient teacher and missionary, Paul, wrote to his young friend, Timothy, he advised, "For yourself, concentrate on winning God's approval, on being a workman with nothing to be ashamed of."

This is what I mean by being worthy of respect. Concentrate on winning God's approval - commendation in light of ultimate ~~v~~virtue and wisdom. Seek to be a workman with nothing to be ashamed of. In so doing, you will prove yourself worthy of honor.

Elsewhere in his letters to Timothy, Paul describes those who are unworthy of respect. Such men, he writes, are "utterly self-centered, greedy for money, full of big words . . . proud and contemptuous, without any regard for what their parents taught them." They are "utterly lacking in gratitude, purity and normal human affections." They are "men of unscrupulous speech" with "no control of themselves." They are "passionate and unprincipled, treacherous, self-willed and

conceited, loving all the time what gives them pleasure instead of loving God."

This age needs more men and women who are worthy of respect - honorable in the sight of God.

## IV

Although you must even now bear the responsibilities of adulthood, you are young. Long years lie ahead. As you seek to merit the respect of man and God, you will witness to growing maturity.

Paul told Timothy, "Don't let people look down on you because you are young, see that they look up to you because you are an example to them in your speech and behavior, in your love and faith and sincerity." These words from the fourth chapter of First Timothy constitute the text of my brief remarks this evening.

If you speak and act like a beatnik or a self-centered and irresponsible youth, men will look down on you and accord you little respect. And you will deserve no honor. However, if, as Paul wrote, you "turn your back on the turbulent desires of youth and give your positive attention to goodness, faith, love and peace in company with all who approach God in sincerity," you will merit the respect of your fellows and honor in the sight of God.

## V

To be worthy of respect, be an example in your speech and behavior. That is, in what you say and do, deserve honor.

Paul was not referring to the grammatical correctness of your speech - important though this is. He was referring to the spirit in which you speak, to what you refrain from saying as well as to what you give utterance. I am reminded of a meeting between Stalin and Churchill, reported by Robert Sherwood in his book, ROOSEVELT AND HOPKINS, when, during a breakdown in the translation of a remark Churchill had made, Stalin chuckled, "I do not understand your words, but I like your spirit." Who will forget Socrates' statement to a young friend who sought guidance in the art of speaking, "I must teach you two things. The one how to hold your tongue, and the other how to speak." By the signess or the littleness of your speech, men will grant or withhold respect.

Behavior, too, is a key to respect. Goethe once declared that "behavior is a mirror in which every one displays his image." The

quality of your actions will reveal themselves in time. What your actions defend or proclaim will determine the respect or disrespect in which you are held.

I need not further elaborate the relation of speech and behavior to honor. However, attention needs to be called to their importance even though their decisive nature is obvious. If you are worthy of respect, let your speech and behavior defend your claim.

Paul underscored, in his words to Timothy, the essential qualities which must reveal themselves in speech and behavior when he urged his young friend to be an example in love and faith and sincerity.

"The ultimate aim," he insisted, "is to produce the love which springs from a pure heart, a good conscience and a genuine faith." The supreme triad of virtue, as Paul described it in the letter to the Christians of Corinth, is faith, hope and love - with love the greatest. When a man is motivated by love of that which is true, good, beautiful and charitable, when love for one's fellows is a by-product of a genuine love of God, when man places before self the highest values the human spirit can perceive, he is worthy of the respect of God and the honor of men.

The quality of faith, too, earns respect. Without sincere faith in self, in man, in God, and in the processes of freedom, life is empty. "God has not given us the spirit of fear," Paul wrote, but a spirit of faith. This age calls for faith in the human enterprise, in the dependable values of the spirit, in the certainty of the vindication of righteousness, in the unfailing strength and grace of God. It is in what a man places his faith that provides the ultimate clue to his merit as a person.

Sincerity is the third quality Paul suggests. Certainly insincerity rarely merits respect. Honesty and fairness are fundamental virtues. Unless a man has integrity (an inner wholeness and unity of purpose), unless he is ruled by righteous purpose, unless he will stand firm in the right as God enables him to discern the right, he deserves neither respect nor honor. The desperate lives of dishonest men offer to the thoughtful person sufficient warning, and the glorious lives of sincere and honest men and women provide a stirring challenge.

So love, faith and sincerity - expressing themselves in speech and behavior - hold the promise of honor among men and the approval of God. In such respect is the glory of life.

## VI

As you approach the hour of graduation from Western Kentucky State

College and contemplate your goals in life, reveal the measure of your learning and understanding. With your greater knowledge and experience, with your determination to achieve success and happiness in the coming years, keep clear before you the finest goal of all - honor in the sight of God and, if possible, in the opinions of men.

Be an example to your fellows, even as Paul advised Timothy, "in your speech and behavior, in your love and faith and sincerity." In being worthy of respect, you will honor your college, your generation and your God.

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Galations 5:1, 13-23, 25-25  
6:7-9