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Milo Rediger

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As a Little Child (chapel talk)

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1. To become new students
2. Announce passing of J.3.
3. Sing American

Chapell
1-24-68

Simplicity

AS A LITTLE CHILD

Matthew 18:2-4. "And He called a little child to Him and put him in the midst of them, And said, Truly, I say to you, unless you repent (change, turn about) and become like little children (trusting, lowly, loving, forgiving) you can never enter the kingdom of heaven at all. Whoever will humble himself therefore, and becomes (trusting, lowly, loving, forgiving) as this little child, is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

Jesus did not say to become childish; He said we are to become like little children. This implies a simple faith; note again the amplification - trusting, lowly, loving, forgiving. We are inclined to complicate and thereby confuse the elements of many things, including religion, as we grow up. For example, this often shows in the language of the sophisticated. Recently we were appealed to, on this platform, to believe in and trust God and His word because of its simplicity, but the communication included numerous repetitions of "simplistic." I asked later, "Why say simplistic when to say simple would be simpler?" The answer was, "We get into these intellectual habits."

I have reasons for talking about this simplicity today, the opening day of a new term. First, because of Christian higher education, the Taylor program.

Our society and the world have become very complex and complicated. The social issues of our time, the actual events going on in our world, the description of much of our life in America, do not square very well with the values and the ideals

inherent in the kingdom of God and with which many of us have been confronted in our homes and churches and, hopefully, even in our schools.

Knowledge has exploded hopelessly until mastery of a subject matter field is hardly any longer possible. Nor is the old pattern of life, getting an education, a good job, a nice home, and settling down to a peaceful life of prosperity and happiness any longer very likely. Our personal problems and our social problems are difficult and confusing, all the government help programs notwithstanding. I suppose you've heard about President Johnson's walk down the road from the L.B.J. ranch and he came by a rickety, run-down place where an old man was sitting on a rickety front porch, rocking in a rickety old chair. --- the farm program, the beautification program, the poverty program, the medicare program. No response. Proverbs 26:17 - "He who, passing by, stops to meddle with strife that is not his business is like one who takes a dog by the ears." Anyway, even though it would be an oversimplification to assume that we can point to a verse of the Bible as a solution or answer to every problem, it is nevertheless obvious that the non-Christian attempts to explain and control life are not very successful.

No plan or program which ignores and omits faith and the revelation of Jesus Christ can ever be adequate. And here is the significant difference between the Christian and the secular college or university. Within the overwhelming mass of knowledge and through the maze of issues and events runs the influence and enlightenment, the redeeming refinement of faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to His standard of values.

The massive multi-university with all of its libraries and research programs cannot furnish the guidance toward answers and solutions which the people and the climate of a Christian college make available to the students. Even chapel services and programs should contribute to this distinction between Christian and other kinds of educational institutions. This is the meaning for higher education of the simplicity of the Christian faith, the organizing and clarifying effect that submission and obedience to Jesus Christ have upon our relation to the world in our time.

My second reason for this emphasis is something about you -- you are already past the chronological age of this simple faith. It is spontaneous at a very early age, say before ten or twelve. Many of us know this from our own experience of what, variable though ~~it~~ it is among individuals, has been called the age of accountability, the point at which we became painfully aware of the difference between right and wrong behavior. Beyond this point in experience, it becomes necessary for us to give conscious attention to the matter of faith^{to} acceptance and development, in accordance with certain principles and laws. This is not a contradiction of St. Paul's Corinthian principle that it is by grace that we are saved, through our faith. Many go on to argue that it is the faith which is "not of ourselves; it is a gift of God." A more careful reading, however, reveals that the "gift of God" reference here is not so much to our faith as it is to His salvation. Ephesians 2:7, 8. "He did this that He might clearly demonstrate through the ages to come the immeasurable (limitless, surpassing) riches of His free grace (His unmerited favor) in kindness and goodness of heart toward

us in Christ Jesus. For it is by free grace (God's unmerited favor) that you are saved (delivered from judgment and made partakers of Christ's salvation) through (your) faith. And this (salvation) is not of yourselves - of your own doing, it came not through your own striving - but it is the gift of God." It is our faith, and this is what, as college students, you must be concerned about and give conscious attention to, now that you have passed the age of accountability.

Some good examples of the earlier spontaneous simple faith come from a recent publication by Simon and Schuster, titled Children's Letters to God, a collection of prayers actually written by children. It is something of a combination of the serious and the hilarious. The authors claim that "children under ten write much the best prayer letters." Note these examples. I take the responsibility for suggesting what it is that each prayer demonstrates, but the prayers are actual quotations from the children's letters.

Here is one showing complete confidence. "Dear God: I wished on a star two times and nothing happened. Now what?" *signed* Anna.

Candor - "Dear God, if you made the rule for kids to take out garbage, please change it." *signed* Maurice.

All-inclusiveness - "Dear God: Would you make it so there would not be any more wars? And so everyone could vote? Also everybody should have a lot of fun." *signed* Nancy.

Desperation - "Dear God: Do you let your children stay up for Bonanza? I have to know." *signed* Linda.

Theological inquiry - (excellent for the Calvinisticly inclined child) - "Dear God: Charles my cat got run over. And if you made it happen you have to tell me why." signed Harvey.

If you read Time magazine regularly, you've read some of these examples. The Children's Letters to God book was mentioned in the same issue in which the religion section presented the flower people and the naivete of other children.

Here is one more example, and notice the sophisticated simplicity: "Dear God, I read your book and I like it. I would like to write a book some day with the same kind of stories. Where do you get your ideas? Best wishes." Signed, Mark. Well, it's wonderful to contemplate this beautiful and innocent world of simplicity. But, students, it's behind you. You've arrived in the hard, cold world of right and wrong. It's a world in which standards are essential, and where personal worth and growth are related to principles and laws that form the framework of those standards. No, we are not free to decide whether or not ethics is important, Whether God is alive or dead, whether or not obedience is necessary. We must decide if we will believe in God, if we will be good or bad, if we will contribute to or detract from the true, the good and the beautiful.

My third reason for talking about simplicity is that this same childlikeness, to which we have looked back, becomes the goal and standard of our maturity. Hear it again - trusting, lowly, loving, forgiving. Note how little trouble there could be in a world in which all of the grown people were strong in faith, humble in spirit, loving in

human relationships and forgiving in personal interactions. To the measure in which we do not rebuild and re-establish this childlikeness as adults, we fail in our individual and corporate lives. This is the meaning of the Wise Man's appeal to "remember your Creator now in the days of your youth, before the evil days come - - - before the wheel is broken at the cistern." There is a sense in which the whole of life is like a wheel, and it will come round full circle. This is not a threat; it is a principle of guidance which challenges us to choose and reconstruct by conscious volition the elements which were native in us as we were made in the image of God.

It is hard because of our depravity and our bent to sin. The environment of our world is such as to make it so easy not to achieve this. But how desirable and how worthwhile it is to do it. Can you think of anything uglier and less desirable than the cynical, bigoted, hateful, vindictive person, the opposite of the childlikeness set forth in the text?

To win this battle of life takes our whole will, and we need God, His Son, His Word and His Spirit.

The application of this in higher education is the Christian college or university. Together, students and faculty, in our striving toward these goals, we can make Taylor this through another term. The term is not very long; it's only February through May. Let's start right from the beginning.