

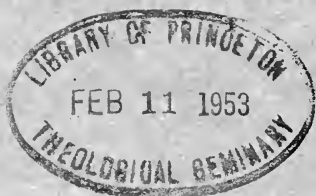
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# **A SERMON**

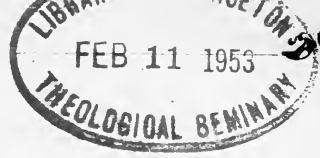
BY THE

**REV. W. P. SHROM.**



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A  
SERMON

DELIVERED

BEFORE THE STUDENTS

OF

Lebanon Valley College,

ANNVILLE, PA.,

BY

REV. W. P. SHROM, A. M.,

SABBATH, JUNE 2, 1872.

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"I am the way, the truth & the life" John 1:14-6  
Christ our way to the Father

1. New way,
2. a plain way,
3. a holy way,

The Truth,

1. In opposition to all figures & shadows,
2. " " error & falsehoods,
3. " " dishonesty & deceit,

The Life,

1. The Source & Giver of natural life
2. " " spiritual life
3. " " eternal life.

TEXT.—Acquaint now thyself with Him, and be at peace; thereby good shall come unto thee.  
—JOB XXII: 21.

Every man should have an acquaintance with God. There is no sphere of life in which, as active agents, men are not better qualified for their duties when controlled by the Holy Spirit. There is no employment that is not exalted and dignified when those engaged in it are men possessing the Spirit of Christ — Both to the worker and the work much is added when Christ is added, for He is all—and should be all in all.

But while this is universally true, there are special reasons why every student should have an acquaintance with God,—why he should have frequent, free communication with Him,—living in an intimate relation to Him,—reasons I mean, in addition to those having direct reference to eternal interests, and which apply equally to every man, and which are infinite in importance.

1. A student's mind is in process of development. His intellectual powers are expanded and strengthened by continued exercise. It is possible for this development of intellectual faculties to take place without effecting in any way the moral faculties. A man may become a good mathematician and this in no way tend to make him consciencious. He may be skillful in tracing Greek and Hebrew roots but not able to break off a bad habit. He may with ease traverse the varied lines of history; be at home in science and philosophy, theorize upon systems of religion with as much skill as a doctor of divinity, yet not have called out one emotion that developed his moral nature.

An education is imperfect in so far as it fails to effect the whole man — in whom there are at least three interests to be attended to,—viz: the moral, the intellectual and the physical. Neither of these can be neglected without positive loss—a loss not only in the parts neglected but a loss to what is attended to. The mind develops best when each of the other interests receives due attention, and *only* then.

In a course of study there is development in the student whatever exists in his nature, provided it be properly exercised. When a child loves its parent tenderly and truly, that affection becomes deeper, purer and stronger as the

child, under careful instruction, ripens into manhood. The tendency of education is to elevate and strengthen the whole man,—all his finer sensibilities and attributes. Here is found one of the false suppositions of the ignorant, in thinking that graduation from college, implies that the student has learned the required number of facts, and is, in consequence set free with the attendant honors. It is looked upon as a taking in, or pouring in process, — as if there had been introduced into the mind proportionate amounts of Latin, Greek, Mathematics, Natural Science, Philosophy, &c, and that the sum of all these constitutes the student's education. This is far from the truth. It is not to gather facts that you are here as students; It is not to learn; It is to develop, to discipline, to *e-duce*,—to lead out the powers that are in the growing man. In this leading out process all that is within you, that is exercised and attended to, is lead out,—that is, it is developed and brought under better discipline.

Now in order that there may be moral principles developed, they must not only exist in the intellectual conceptions, but must be brought into actual exercise as moral principles. There is a wide difference between having a high intellectual nature of a moral quality and possessing it in reality as a moral quality. A man may have an intellectual acquaintance with God, — may intellectually possess very commendable apprehensions of God's love, but this will never develop love for God in his own heart. To accomplish this he must actively, and in reality love Him. The only way to grow benevolent is by the actual exercise of giving, the only way to cultivate conscience is by living conscientiously, in all things.

But before any of these moral qualities can be successfully and truly developed, it is necessary that you acquaint yourself with God, — that you be at peace with Him. By nature we are enemies to God, and must be reconciled to Him, we are foreigners and strangers to His commonwealth and must renew our allegiance and our acquaintance. This we can do through Jesus Christ our Mediator.

If we are reconciled to God and his love is implanted in the heart,—if the chief desire of the heart be to love Him, to know Him, and to glorify Him more and more in our lives, then as the mind passes out into new fields of thought, it is to find new reasons for loving Him. As we go deeper into the book of nature it is only to find His name more legibly written on every page. The speechless flower elegantly teaches us of His wisdom, and His love. If science lead us into the earth, behold He is there! for in His mighty power hath He made it.—The rocks whisper to us of His eternity. Or if in our inquiries we are led out into space, where in thought we keep step with the motion and music of the spheres, and watch them with wonder, in their pathless

courses, we hear a voice from their midst calling aloud to us, "*The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech and night unto night showeth knowledge.*" Full of adoration, yet humbled by our conception of His immensity we shout back in answer, "*When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained, what is man that Thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that Thou visitest him.*"

I say then, young gentlemen, that with the love of God burning within your hearts, — filling you with a desire to know more and more of Him, you will mount up on philosophy, science and art, as with wings. Each of these bringing you into a more perfect knowledge of Him whose you are and for whose glory you live. Every new conquest of thought, every new science will impress convictions of the Divine Attributes deeper and deeper upon your hearts, or reveal to you some new phase of God's character. You may say with the prophet of old, "From the top of the rocks I see Him, and from the hills I behold him."

2. I now add that it is important that this acquaintance with God be made at the *beginning* of a course of study. In this there is no time to be lost.

(1) The development of christian character is a matter of growth. The earlier it is introduced into life, the more carefully it is cultivated, the more rapidly will it approximate a state of maturity. Your college life is decidedly a period of development, — a time of growth and discipline. If the first principles of christianity are early introduced into the heart, they share in the general growth. There will be a mutual acting and reacting between the mental and moral natures, each bettering the condition and hastening the growth of the other. To possess a true moral character implies a cultivation of patient humility and endurance; a freedom from selfishness, envy and jealousy, a living far above and apart from the common tricks and schisms, and thrusts of narrow minded worldly men. It implies a cultivated self-control and self-respect, without which a man is but a child of chance — a slave to passion. To attain these is not the work of a day, but the labor of a lifetime. For such a character you should seek with as much anxiety and patient endurance as the miser seeks his fortune, and value it as highly as the miser does his gold.

(2.) It is *dangerous* to advance far into a course of study without an acquaintance with God, because one tendency of study is to lead a student to expect demonstration, before he accepts any proposition as true. He demands proof for every statement. This is not, in itself, unreasonable, nor improper, but the danger lies in his demanding a kind and degree of proof, which from the nature of the case cannot be furnished. Some become extremely mathematical in their way of thinking, and consequently reject everything that cannot be brought to their

minds under the form of a mathematical proposition, carefully stated and clearly proved. The tendency with such a mind would be to reject the doctrine of the Trinity, or to set aside the Person of Christ. Other minds deal with visible facts, and cannot be satisfied fully until they have seen or handled. Others do not stop with facts but persistently push beyond these into the reason of every phenomenon, rejecting every proposition that cannot be logically stated and understood. While Christianity is abundantly established by satisfactory evidence, it does not force itself upon individual peculiarities, and because of its origin and nature, it cannot be brought wholly within the limits of finite comprehension. Every man in course of study is in danger of developing in such a direction as at least to give him much trouble, anxiety and doubt, in accepting Christianity, or perhaps be the occasion of rejecting it altogether. There is a world of truth and meaning in the remark of a German Philosopher, who said, "The most important subject, and the first problem of philosophy, is the restoration in man of the lost image of God." Intellectual development is safe only after a man is "born again," after his immortal nature has been made anew, and he has been adopted into the family of God.

(3.) A student's life is one of doubt. There is no period of life, either earlier or later, in which a man is so liable to be misguided, because of an unsettled state of mind, or when every truth appears so deeply veiled in doubt. It is a period of examination, of investigation, of formation. The mind is continually taking on new shapes; it is moulding and re-moulding

The student learns in every department of his course the uncertainty of things, and is convinced of his own inability to discover absolute truths. The subjects investigated are new; of necessity they are passed over rapidly and are not always well understood. There is not time for thoughts to mature. All this sort of exercise has some sort of tendency to create an unsettled state, and to cultivate doubt, in the growing mind,—I say *growing*, because like things might not thus effect a mind once mature. I know of nothing that will counter-balance these tendencies so well as Christianity. This introduces into the heart something that is absolutely certain and that in the greatest doubt will bring relief. When truly realized the heart is fortified by it. Logic can not shake off the effects and deep convictions of the Holy Spirit. Without some anchorage to the soul there is great danger of these doubts ripening into skepticism and infidelity. When a man becomes an infidel he is only a wrecked hope—a miserable creature. He drifts through life as aimlessly and uselessly as the bubble floats upon the tide,—or as the vessel without a pilot drifts upon the ocean, driven hither and thither by the winds. It is dreadful for any one to become doubtful on matters of religion, but it is more intensely so for a young



man or woman of cultivated mind. My own observation in this matter has been, that very few young men who pass through college without becoming christians, ever become such afterwards, and especially has this been true when there were tendencies toward infidelity. But if the heart be first united to God, the effect of study greatly strengthens the chord by which it is bound. Day by day, as the student nears the end of his collegiate journey, he may realize more and more that this anchorage is both sure and steadfast.

3. You need an acquaintance with God *to sustain* you while in college, for college life is not without its temptations, trials and discouragements. Of these I can name only a few. There are two sources of temptation that are perhaps more demoralizing to a student's success than any other, viz: *idleness* and *love of pleasure*. It is not here implied that every moment must find a book in hand, nor that there is no pleasure to be found in a course of study. But it is implied and expected that no time will be wasted unnecessarily, and that pleasure seeking will be at most only a secondary matter, and that this be found somewhere within the limits of those things which cultivate and refine, thus fitting the growing man for future usefulness.

To be a christian is to be conscientious in all things, and to be conscientious is to possess a strong stimulus to duty. It may be that not every one who is a christian realizes this—that is, not every one realizes that he can study better, recite better, economize better time when these duties are made a matter of conscience. If so, it is your own fault. Everything with a christian ought to be a matter of conscience—ought to be done promptly and well done, because it is *right*, and this sense of right when cultivated is powerful in its effect, both in moulding character and in moving to action.

But a student needs to be sustained in the frequent trials with which he meets,—trials arising from failure in the recitation room, from the success of a rival student, from the frequent jealousy springing up from various causes, from the feelings which arise when he is completely discouraged with his own efforts, because every new attempt at success is accompanied with greater failure. He needs to be sustained during those long days, that come only too often in every student's life, when from some unknown cause he cannot study with any success, when there are headaches and heartaches, when the mind wanders homeward in search of absent friends, or scenes long since past, when he grows weary of books and hates school, when the sight of his teacher is the sight of his master, to think of him is to think of a tyrant; when he grows almost desperate, and resolves to break away from his prison house and live free like the birds. Have you not realized such days and such feelings? I think there are few classes of men who work as hard, with as many temptations

and discouragements, and as little sympathy, as hard working students. The day laborer may toil to great weariness, but he can turn about each evening and see what he has done. The student may toil almost to exhaustion, for a whole year, yet be unable to see that he has accomplished anything permanently.

Many of you are anxiously looking to the future, impatient to complete your course, wondering what you will do, and where you will be when you get through. The great trouble with many of you now is a want of means. The future is dark, the way seems shut up before you. As many students are discouraged on this as on all other accounts. Now for all these ills—these temptations, trials and discouragements I have a remedy to suggest. It is to be so well acquainted with God that you can freely carry all these to Him, making Him your confident and private counselor. It is in these apparently little things that you most especially need assistance. Your teachers can do but little for you in these matters. The outside world cannot at all appreciate your feelings, you need not expect much sympathy from any earthly source. You may not be able to escape these trials but you can find much sympathy, comfort and help in Christ.

I am not now speaking at random, am not speaking in general terms which may or may not include these ills of the student. I speak of that in which I have had myself some bitter but some sweet experience. I speak also of what I know from the testimony of others, but most of all I speak from what I know of Christ Jesus, who taught both by precept and example. It was His chief business while on earth to bind up broken hearts, to heal wounded spirits, to sustain the weak and feeble, to feed the hungry and to supply those who were in want. He remains the same yesterday, to-day and forever. "*We have not a High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities.*" To sympathize with man seems to be the great work of his human nature, to administer to his wants and work for his good the part of the Divine nature.

Are you then in doubt as to a future profession? Do not decide on anything in your own strength. Carry the matter before God and in your daily communication with Him and in Christ's name ask His direction. Are you short of means? Is your return to study next year extremely doubtful on this account? Have you been going in and out these past few days with a heavy heart because the future was so dark? If you are God's child, go to your Father and ask, for He loves to give to you, more than you love to receive. He is more willing to give than earthly parents are to give to their children. If He withheld not to give his own Son when we were all enemies, since we are His children He will not withhold now these meaner things, which are but as the dust of His feet—as compared with the gift of His Son.

Acquaint then, yourselves with God, be at peace with Him, and all these good things will come unto you. In Him you have comfort and help, in Him you have direction and strength. He who said "*I will not leave you comfortless*", will verify that promise in every one of you who put your trust in Him.

4. When we follow the student beyond the threshold of his Alma Mater, when he takes his place among men as a scholar and a man, nothing more eminently fits him for his new place and relation than the spirit of Christ dwelling in him. So true does this appear to my mind that I cannot even conceive of success without it. Suppose that after graduation a young man becomes a merchant, a lawyer, a physician or a statesman, and accomplishes all that he undertakes,—gratifies the desires of his heart, yet is a stranger to God. Remember the wakefulness, the anxiety, the perplexity, the doubt, the fear, disappointment, planning, scheming and fretting, before the end was reached. Has the man succeeded? Has such a man reached the highest possible attainment even in this life? Have you ever met a man however successful in these respects, who expressed entire satisfaction? Lord Chesterfield worshipped at the shrine of pleasure, yet he grew so melancholy that his life was a burden to him. Of life he says, "It is a dull journey. . . As for myself my course is more than half passed over, and I mean to sleep in the coach the rest of the journey,"

- May be few of you will, upon the whole, be more successful than Lord Byron supposing that you are not christians. Yet in the bitter disappointment of his heart, he cries out,

"Alas it is delusion all,  
The future cheats us from afar;  
Nor can we be what we recall,  
Nor dare we think on what we are."

However scholarly you become, however successful in any profession or occupation, however wealthy you become, none of these things will, at the end of the journey, be so strong a proof of having spent a successful life, as to have so lived that this thought will be in the memories of those who mourn for you, or be engraved upon the monument that marks the spot where your body rests, "*He walked with God, for he knew Him, and was at peace with Him.*"

I have named some of the attendant benefits of Christianity. These are by no means all that might be named, nor am I sure that they are the greatest, yet they are sufficient in number and importance to demand the most careful consideration. I have not mentioned these as the chief motives by which you are to be guided and influenced in seeking an acquaintance with God, but only as happy consequences of living in such relation to him. The chief reasons for your becoming christians are of a higher and nobler kind. And in order that these effects be most permanent, it is necessary that your motives for becoming christians be most exalted and pure. God is to be sought for what He is,—for His own sake rather than

for yours. Think of Him and not of yourselves. Let what I have named be but helps to you, influencing you, that you may become acquainted with Him in all His goodness, love and mercy. And be sure that while you seek Him for what He is in Himself, in His infinite mercy He will save you, not for what you are, but because He loves you, and for the sake of His own dear son, who ever intercedes for you. I exhort you then, in conclusion, to make the glory of God the great end of life,—in school and out of it. Do this, not selfishly, but for the sake of God, the Father, Jesus Christ, the Son, the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier and Comforter. Let it be the chief study of life to know more of God, to become intimate'y acquainted with Him. Let it be the chief labor of life, to exalt the honor and excellency of His great name. Let those of you who are yet strangers to Him, make this coming commencement the beginning of a *new life* indeed—not of some new profession or employment—but of an eternal life, that has its great end in doing God's will.—May the church and the world be better for your having lived as educated men and women. With a sanctified education, yourselves consecrated to God, you may add much both to the church and the world. I believe that the time will then come when you will far more perfectly comprehend the great benefit of your education in being able to know more, and enjoy more of God in Heaven, throughout eternity. I believe that the advantages of an education in this life are few and small, compared with what they will be hereafter, only provided however that we are now given to Him. Believing this, I must on the other hand believe that being strangers to Him, our increase in intellectual power will only increase our suffering, by enabling us to realize more fully our miserable, lost condition—from which may, God in his infinite mercy deliver you. May the Holy Spirit co-operate with your most earnest efforts and lead you to a true acquaintance which shall result in, making you perfectly blessed in Him to all eternity. And though you now "*see through a glass darkly, you shall see Him face to face.*" "*for when Christ appears you shall see Him as He is, for you shall be like Him,*"—to which end may God lead you. AMEN.



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A sermon delivered before the students

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