

## Winners All

We are happy to share with you the blessing which we received from the Baccalaureate address of our own Dr. Ryrie at the Commencement season. As you read this, imagine yourself seated in our formal gardens in front of Emerson Hall, with Dr. Ryrie talking personally to the Seniors whom he loved and who greatly loved him.

We appreciate the kindness of a friend of the College which makes the publication of this message possible.

Dr. R. J. Voskuyl  
President

I remember only too vividly the day less than three years ago when I walked into my first college class. Some of you were in Greek 101 that day; indeed, I can still see certain of you sitting here and there as you did all that year, five days a week, eight o'clock every morning. I do not know how you felt that day, but frankly, I was scared to death. As I stand here this afternoon I find that in those three years I have made no progress—I'm still scared to death.

But you have made progress, else you would not be here today. Yet it is difficult to believe that those of you who seemed so young when I first came to Westmont (and weren't we all in those days!) are now men and women about to step out into your places in this world. Yes, you have made progress, and today marks a milestone in the experience of each of you. But what about three years hence? or six? or twenty? or the end of your days? What progress will you have made then? On Saturday next, if all goes well this week, you will win the prize for which you have been working these four years. And then you will embark on a very different phase of your lives, but someday you will come even to the end of that. I wonder what you will have gained then? But even more important is the fact that you have already embarked upon a Christian life; you have had a Christian education; and now you are stepping out as specially privileged Christian leaders into a dark and needy world to run the race of the Christian life in as many different ways as there are seniors of you here today. One cannot help but wonder how many of you will be winners in this race, in God's race.

The Holy Spirit often likens the Christian life in the pages of the New Testament to the games and contests of the ancient world. However, let it be clearly understood at the outset by all present, that one does not enter this Christian life or race because of any natural ability or inclination, but because of a Divine, eternal choice and a corresponding heart response of faith in the crucified Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. But once having believed on Him unto eternal salvation, all Christians are automatically entered in the race, and of all Christians it is expected that they shall be winners. Is it not fair to say further that this expectation is even increased in the case of Westmont college seniors? However, because it is expected is not the primary reason for our message today; rather because of an earnest desire that you shall be winners, I would like simply to point out to you from one of these New Testament passages concerning the race, Hebrews twelve, four things necessary for being winners all.

#### **DETERMINATION**

The first is determination—determination to run this race with patient endurance. Do not confuse determination with enthusiasm. The one concerns the running of the entire race; the other, often only the start. Make up your minds, seniors, as never before, that from this day forward you are going to be determined to run a winning race. The Scripture says:

*"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set*

*down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Heb. 12:1-2)*

But beware, there will be encumbrances. These are the weights of which the writer speaks. Now these weights are not sins; they are simply hindrances or encumbrances that impede the runner. In classical Greek the word signifies any superfluous weight or burden such as that which comes from stoutness or pregnancy. I have a cousin who weighs 240 pounds. Now there is nothing wrong with that, I suppose, except when it comes to doing one of the simplest things a man does every day—tying his shoes. Obviously there is a hindrance. Just so, dear seniors, many of the things which you will come against in graduate school, in your offices, in the homes which you will establish, yes, even in Christian work, will not be sins in themselves, but if they will encumber you in any way and thereby sap your determination to be a winner, then I exhort you to lay them aside. And remember this, it is only by running that you will learn what these things are. As long as you stand still you will never feel that they are hampering you. Determine to run, and to run stripped of all encumbering weights.

But beware again, for often a weight is but an outward manifestation of an inward heart of unbelief. This is the meaning of the easily besetting sin—it is unbelief in the Christian's life which entangles him as a long flowing garment wrapped around him. Can you visualize my running very far or very fast in this academic costume? Be very careful that unwillingness to trust God, which is unbelief, in the years that may lie ahead, not only for the necessities, but also for the luxuries, not only for the blessings, but also for the trials, not only for the strength but also for the weakness, not only for a few basic things, but for every thing

—beware that these things, which may take many outward forms, but which basically are the sins of unbelief, do not enrobe you with something that may be very attractive but which in the final analysis is sin. Be determined not to be entangled with unbelief.

Finally, be determined to be aware of all the examples of faith which God has given to us. A number of them are mentioned in chapter 11. There you will find all kinds of people: the young, the old, those whose circumstances favored them; those whose circumstances were against them; those who had too much; those whose families were against them—you will find all these different people accomplishing a multitude of different things by faith. In other words, keep yourselves constantly in the Word of God, and with the encouragement found there, fight the good fight of faith. But above all, look to the greatest of all examples, the Lord Jesus, who was not only the author, that is, the leader of the long procession of all those who believe, but also the finisher, that is, the one who manifested faith in its complete form. Do not look behind, for we are to forget those things which are behind. Do not look within to your natural abilities and talents, for you will soon discover, as Paul did, that within you dwells no good thing. Do not look ahead, for only God knows what the morrow will bring. Do not look around, for like Peter you will soon be overwhelmed by the giant waves of circumstances. Do look unto Jesus and find in Him moment by moment sufficiency for everything, and when our gaze is fixed on Him all else will fall into its proper place. In running the hurdles I am told that one's entire leg may be barked and bleeding and yet it will not even be felt during the race, so intent is the runner on the goal to be reached. Even in the training period, foregoing for the

athlete is pleasant even though it is foregoing something he and others value, because he is determined to win the prize. Have you that kind of determination in God's race to be the person He wants you to be and to live the life He wants you to live? I trust so, for it is essential to winning.

## DISCIPLINE

But all the determination in the world may be of no avail unless it is disciplined, and this is the second thing necessary to a winning race. This is not a pleasant subject to contemplate, especially for young people, but it is an absolutely necessary one. Often it helps to know why a certain thing is happening, and regarding discipline, God has given us two very good reasons for it. First of all, it is part of a normal Christian experience. In verse three we are exhorted to remember that this was Christ's experience. Of course, He was not disciplined in order to purge Him from sin, for in Him was no sin; nevertheless, it was a vital part of His human growth and maturity. So it is with God's discipline of His children. It includes not only the times of purging and cleansing but also the whole process of maturing in the Christian life. Indeed this is the meaning of the word that is used throughout this passage. It is the same word that is translated *nurture* in Ephesians 6:4 and includes the entire process of moral training, not merely particular lessons. This is the reason why it is necessary to a normal Christian experience. In verse four we are reminded that other Christians have experienced it—indeed some of them even unto death. And it would not be surprising if this was your blessed lot in these last days. Do not seek the easy way out, for then you will become a part of that group spoken of in verse five, those who have forgotten that this is to be expected according to the Word of God.

In the second place, God's discipline is a proof of a normal Christian relationship. Christianity is the greatest love affair that man knows anything about, and a very vital part of that love relationship is chastisement. It proves that God loves us in a very special way. Therefore—

“Stay still in the hand of the Potter,  
Lie low 'neath His wonderful touch;  
He shapeth and moldeth in mercy  
The clay that He loveth so much.”

I sincerely covet for you many such experiences that you might know more of that love which passeth knowledge.

Furthermore, it proves that God is our Father. I hope that you have had the blessing of having had parents who corrected you Scripturally, that is, who spanked you. I saw a man once who tried to spank a neighbor's child, and although the child certainly deserved the spanking, nevertheless, fatherhood was quickly proved when it came to determining who was to spank the child. How wonderful is the application in the spiritual realm. Only our Heavenly Father can discipline us, and nothing touches His child that does not come from His hand of infinite love. No other person in all the universe has this right. Isn't that sufficient reason for even desiring the chastening of God?

There are not only these two reasons for discipline, but God sees to it that it brings certain results into our lives. First of all it produces reverence, and how sorely the Christian church needs this today. Learn early and learn well, young people, reverence, absolute subjection to Almighty God, for the result of this is life itself. This is just the opposite from the world's viewpoint, for real life, according to the Scriptures, comes not by the way of freedom, but by the way of subjection; and subjection is learned through discipline.

In the second place, discipline results in righteousness. This means righteous conduct which will result in a fruitful life, for the phrase in verse eleven literally says, “Fruit consisting in righteousness.” I ask you—Are these not worthwhile and even desirable results?

“In prunings oft  
The heart cries out for mercy  
As, cut by cut,  
The soul is tested deep,  
Till Christ, the wondrous Gardener,  
Comes to comfort,  
And whispers in the darkness,  
“I will keep . . .”  
’Tis then we see the plan  
Behind the prunings;  
For, walking in the soil  
Of sorrow's calm,  
The Gardener searches—  
Finds the fruit He wishes,  
And holds it  
In His tender,  
Nail-scarred palm.  
He prunes in love,  
This Jesus,  
Lord of gardeners;  
He sends the pain,  
The fruit-producing scar;  
For in the wake of sorrow  
Comes the harvest—  
A richer crop,  
A fruitage greater far.  
He knoweth best;  
His wisdom  
Is omniscient;  
Beneath His pruning hand  
The soul is still;  
For in the fragrant presence  
Of this Gardener,  
The soul doth learn  
Surrender . . . to His will.”

What is your reaction to all of this? May

I urge in the words of the text itself, do not faint under discipline, do not forget this truth, above all do not despise it, but rather be exercised by it. It is so easy to leave a place like this, as some have done, and become indifferent to all the spiritual truth learned. Oh, you may become a leader in the world, but only a proper reaction to God's discipline will result in true Christian leadership. For listen:

*“. . . lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed. (Heb. 12:12-13)*

I like to summarize it this way: let your reaction to discipline be one that makes you straighten up, which makes you put up your hands for the conflict and make your knees strong so that your walk and warfare will strengthen and not stumble those with whom you will live and work. The way to Christian leadership, the way to being out in front in the race, whether in home, factory, office, neighborhood, classroom, mission field, is the way of discipline.

#### **DIRECTION**

But again, no matter how determined you may be, or even how well disciplined that determination is, it will mean nothing unless given direction; thus, right direction is the third thing absolutely necessary to a winning race. We read:

*“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing he was rejected: for he found no place*

*of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.” (Heb. 12:14-17)*

The word *follow* here gives us the picture of pursuit, as the hunter his game or the athlete his prize. The tense of the verb reminds us that it is to be a continuous experience. But the point of the verses is that we are to run *after* certain things and run *away* from other things. The first object of the race is peace in all of our individual relationships with other men. Without doubt a great deal of wisdom is needed in this matter, for while our aim is to be at peace with all men, nevertheless none should be so innocent as to believe that a true follower of Christ with a faithful testimony will not meet opposition. It was our Lord Himself who said, “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace but a sword” (Matt. 10:34). Just be sure that the reason for the opposition is your message and not you.

The other aim of our race is personal purity. Please take careful note of the fact that this is not something you may choose or reject in your Christian lives, for without this no man, no matter how excellent his profession of Christianity, will see the Lord. Sanctification is a necessity, not a luxury, in every Christian's life. This is not a second work of grace but a lifetime practice of personal holiness. The verse says, *Pursue it*, not attain it; and the very pursuit of it is the proof of new life within. One cannot help but pause here and ask in all kindness but in all sincerity, How holy is your life? Has there been growth in the months or years in which you have professed to be a Christian? If not, then one must ask, Are you really a Christian by God's definition? Is Jesus Christ your own personal Saviour? Remember that the standard of this holiness is not your neighbor, or teacher, or pastor, but God Himself, and

if you wish to see how far you have come in the race, then measure your life by the standard of God Himself as revealed in His Word. It is not fame, job, money, security, position, or family but holiness which you are pursuing. Another has well said, "He is the holiest who, however poor his intellect and mean his earthly lot, is most possessed by the presence of God through the Holy Spirit."

If you are going to be pursuing peace and purity then you will be obliged to avoid certain things. First, backsliding. "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God." Actually the picture is of lagging behind or not keeping pace with the grace which God wishes to show you day by day. It is being a laggard to His blessing. What tragedy! Second, turn away from bitterness, for by that many are defiled. Third, turn away from fornication, and I take this to mean any impurity in our lives. It is all that is opposite from the holiness we are pursuing. Do not forget that spiritual fornication is avoided by not only not loving the world and its things but also by not being friendly with the world, for friendship with the world is spiritual adultery. Fourth, turn away from flippancy, for this is the point of the example of Esau's rejection. He had a flippant or light attitude toward the spiritual blessings which rightfully belonged to him that resulted in his rejection, and though afterward he earnestly desired to retrieve that which he had lost, it was too late. Be careful, seniors, that you do not become flippant toward the spiritual truth which you now know, and, as a result, make a wrong step and thereby lose the blessing which ought to be yours. It will mean a common life for you, for that is the meaning of the word *profane* in the text—common, outside the realm of the holy. Isn't the contrast striking? Ignoring the

things of God leads to a common existence; obedience to the things of God in holiness leads to the presence of God Himself. In which direction are you heading?

#### DESIRE

But all the determination in the world, though disciplined and rightly directed, does not necessarily make a winner. There is a fourth requirement for winning, and that is simply a real desire within you to win. You must *want* to win, and may I suggest that the best way to cultivate that desire is to learn as much as possible about the new covenant into which you have been called as a Christian and of which you are a representative. It seems to me that this is what the writer is trying to tell us in verses 18-24 by his contrast between the old covenant or the law and our position in grace under the new covenant.

The contrast is striking. Under the old covenant, the law, there was nothing but helplessness and hopelessness, for they "in-treated that the word should not be spoken to them any more." So it has been with all who have tried to find lasting blessing in keeping the law. There may even be some here today who are striving to please God by keeping the ten commandments. Learn a lesson from Israel. They said they could and would keep the law but "they could not endure that which was commanded." Even the best man in all Israel, Moses, said, "I exceedingly fear and quake." And so should you who are trying to be justified by the works of the law. Oh, cast yourself upon Christ who is plenteous in mercy and ready to pardon because He paid the full price for your sins by His death on Calvary's Cross.

But in bold relief stands the new covenant. It guarantees, first, a place, for "ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the

city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." Right now this is our position in the sphere of guaranteed blessing; in a soon-coming day it will be our actual location. And all of this is offered freely on the basis of the death of Jesus Christ to anyone who will simply receive it for himself. Does not the knowledge of this create within you who are Christians a real desire to make these blessings known far and wide?

When we arrive in this place we shall find other people there. There will be myriads of angels, a full gathering of them; there will be the church of the firstborn, the members of Christ's own body; there will be God Himself in all His unveiled glory; there will be the spirits of just men made perfect, that is, the company of Old Testament saints. Will you be there?

But most important of all, there will be a particular Person there, our Lord Jesus. And as He welcomes us with the hands that bear the scars of the nails, He will ask, "What kind of a race did you run?" Won't the excuses we make now seem so worthless in that day? Then it will be too late to desire to be a winner in the race, for the race will be over. Now is the time to learn about the blessings of the salvation which you have in Christ. Now is the time to live in the light of that knowledge.

The race lies before every Christian here today, but in a very special sense before you seniors. Thank you, seniors, for letting us have had a part in your training and a place in your fellowship. It is not easy to see you leave, but as you do, it is our earnest prayer that God will bless you with resolute determination, rigorous discipline, right direction, and real desire, in order that you, class of '51, may be winners all!

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