

GRADUATION

I want to congratulate our graduates for a job well done. Whether you just finished your course of study in high school or college (or will soon be finishing), we recognize it involves a lot of time and hard work. Material had to be studied well enough to pass the required tests. At the time, those pesky tests seem like an unbearable annoyance which many students dread. There was all that reading and homework. Sometimes, it may have seemed like the subject matter is almost too difficult to understand. But, you persevered, put your time in and realized that graduating was worth all the effort.

Indeed, there are rewards for successfully completing your studies. For the high school student, it may be time for his or her first full time job. Then again, it may off to college for further preparation for a preferred career choice. For the college student, graduation usually means it is time to get that coveted job one has been preparing for ... often for four years or more if a higher degree was sought. Of course, this process of continuing education is time consuming, expensive and depends on the student getting adequate grades.

What is the connection between grades and graduation besides the obvious need for passing marks in each class? It's time for a little education about education and some customs associated with the completion of the process. Did you know that the word graduate is directly related to the word grade? As a transitive verb graduate means "To admit or elevate to a certain grade or degree; especially, in a college or university, to admit, at the close of the course, to an honorable standing defined by a diploma; as he was graduated at Yale College" (Webster's Dictionary). Notice the basic idea is of moving up higher from one level to the next. Upon passing the year's classes in high school the student is promoted to the next grade as in going from ninth to tenth grade. But, what does the word grade signify? The word grade comes from the Latin word *gradus* (also the root of gradual) which means "to arrange in order, steps, or degrees." Now, obviously, a person can take steps on a flat and level surface. But, we also know we can take steps up stairs as we climb higher in elevation. This same imagery is applied to the educational process by which the student gradually

ascends to a higher level of knowledge and skill.

During the graduation ceremony it used to be common for the speaker to remind graduates they are embarking on a new phase in their lives. That is, they are boldly stepping into the "real world." Having prepared for work through their studies, they are now ready to contribute to the building up of their world. Did you know that is why the ceremonial graduation cap has a square flat top? It is called the mortarboard because it resembles the "hawk" used by bricklayers to hold mortar. One source recounts that the mortarboard signified the graduates were now ready to go to work helping to build the world much like a bricklayer builds a building.

Please consider one more thing before we show the spiritual application of what has been revealed so far about graduation. A common mistake some graduates make shortly after graduation is feeling they have learned enough. After all, they just spent many years in school. They are tired of studying and just want to enjoy life. School seems like such a drag on their precious time and social life. Again, commencement speakers used to regularly point out this in hopes of convincing each person to keep a love of learning alive and burning brightly in his life. No one is too old to learn something new! Many employers generally encourage their employees to continue learning new skills to keep current in their fields. Some technical professions even require ongoing licensing or other forms of professional certification. A wise employee will seek ways to continue learning whether formally or informally.

So, what does all this have to do with Christianity? A lot! Hopefully, the parallels are obvious. Every Christian is responsible to keep growing in the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18). We start our Christian life of faith as babes when we are born of water and the Spirit (John 3:5). To grow in the faith we must have a healthy spiritual appetite as Peter said, "*as newborn babes, desire the sincere (pure) milk of the word, that you may grow thereby*" (1 Peter 2:2). Recall Jesus pronounced a blessing upon those disciples who hunger and thirst after righteousness (Matt. 5:6).

Generally speaking, most new Christians are excited about their salvation and are anxious to learn more about the Bible. This is similar to the

excitement young children have at learning new things about their world. This can be a time of rapid learning and spiritual development for the new convert. There are normal stages of growth in one's spirituality. John wrote about some disciples whom he called "little children," others he styled as "young men," and still others he described as "fathers" (1 John 2:12-14). Clearly, there is a need to progress from spiritual childhood through adolescence and finally arrive at full maturity, not just as adults, but as fathers. Sadly, this normal development does not always occur in every Christian. Some become satisfied with their knowledge of God's word and consequently quit growing spiritually. The writer of Hebrews admon-

ished his readers in this regard when he wrote, "*For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, you have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk and not of strong meat*" (Heb. 5:12). In other words, they were still babes in Christ when they should have been full grown and able to lead others to the knowledge of salvation.

Graduates enter their world and build it. So it is with faithful Christians who are able to teach others also (2 Tim. 2:2). One day we shall take the final step of faith as we graduate to glory with God in heaven above (Rom. 4:12; 5:2).

— *Douglas Hoff*
