

Love the Lord Your God

Former President Chase returns to Edman Chapel to deliver the graduate and undergraduate commencement addresses, May 6 and 7.

by Dr. J. Richard Chase
President Emeritus

Bob Vernon, a retired deputy chief of police of Los Angeles, was a member of the Board of Trustees at Biola University when I served there as president. He told great cops and robbers stories, but he also had some insights into society that stimulated our thinking.

At one board meeting he told us about the questions officers were being asked after they had made presentations in the public schools: Should I join a gang to survive? Do drugs really hurt you? How do I handle sex?

Why ask such questions to police officers who had just given presentations on traffic safety, the importance of laws in society, and the role the police play in communities?

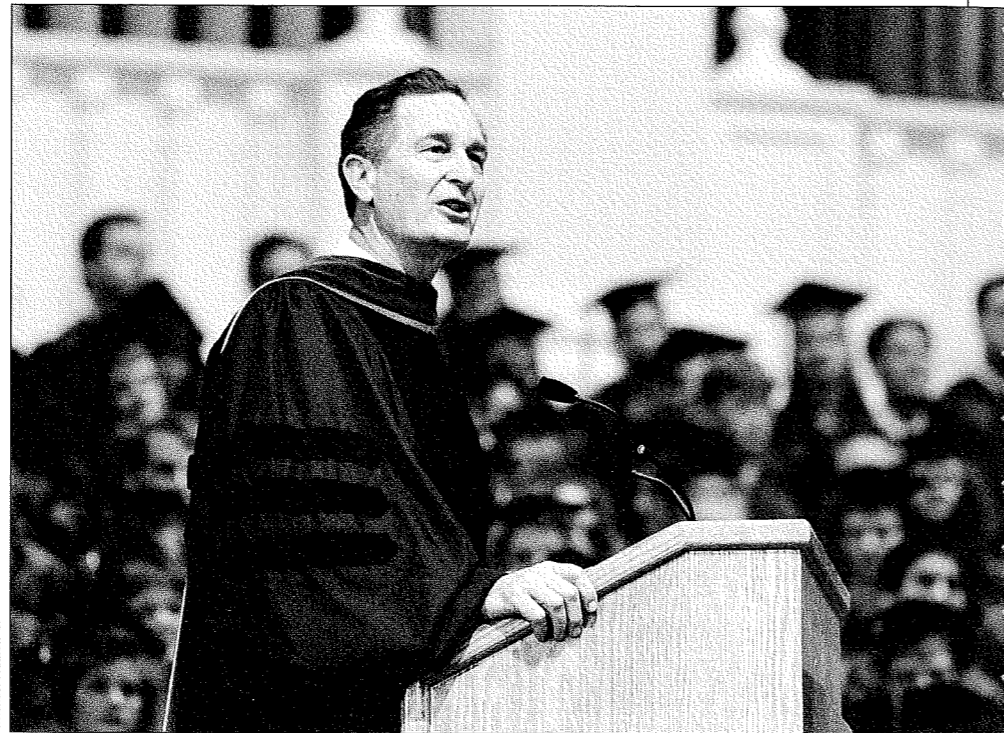
"When you wear a police uniform and talk about law and order," Bob explained, "many children assume you also have straightforward answers for other questions where they are getting conflicting responses. They are looking for boundaries and helpful guidance in the game of life."

We all need a simple, well-defined place to stand, and then the mental insight and determination of heart and soul to use that foundation for the benefit of humankind and the glory of God.

Changes and Challenges

Graduates, the upheavals of change—experienced by people throughout time—are sure to swirl about you for as long as you live on the earth. The challenge to think and act Christianly today is tough. It is tough here in Wheaton, and, I suspect, far tougher in Burundi, Bosnia, and the barrios of the world.

Society has never been an ideal cocoon for moral living: righteous



Michael Haden '89

living has never been the art of riding on society's coattails. It has ever required a commitment to a guiding principle or foundation and the resolve to act responsibly. You may pick a time in ages past when you could travel with a "supportive" crowd in a "supportive" society, but true, righteous living is a matter of the heart, not a herd instinct.

Is it tough today? Would you like to try frontier America and blend that with a biblically-based sanctity of life agenda? Think about standing against slavery in the eighteenth century. What about life during the Renaissance and Reformation—when seated academics and governing theologians were challenged, where rulers were often selfish tyrants, where plagues destroyed life and hope, and where remnants of the Inquisition dug their nails into lives? Would you care to join Galileo or Luther?

A Pharisee, a teacher of the Law,

asked Jesus, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" (Mt. 22:36, NIV). The Pharisee's predicament was not much different from that of modern man. He was caught in the turmoil of both his foundation for life and his career. In a matter of months, Jesus had turned this Pharisee's world upside down. His conversation with Jesus and our Lord's response, "You are not far from the kingdom of God" (Mk. 12:34), suggest that he was agonizing in mind and soul. There he was, caught between his past occupation and pattern of life and a new, revolutionary way of trust, faith, and commitment. And this is to say nothing of the oppressive Roman rule under which he lived, and, as a religious leader, of the accommodations he had to make with the ruling officials to hold his position.

He approached Jesus with a question to test him. Although this Pharisee

wanted to put Jesus on the spot, he was curious. I suspect he wondered, *Could this man Jesus, who answered the Herodians and Sadducees so powerfully, help me?* He asked, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" (v. 28).

And Jesus responded, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself" (vv. 30-31).

Living effectively and righteously is never easy. But our Lord's brief response gives us a place to stand. Here is a foundation that helped Daniel in Babylon, Deborah the prophetess as she led Israel against the Canaanites, Wilberforce as he stood against the slave traders, and countless numbers of God's people in every age.

This commandment tells us to love the Lord and our neighbors with such passion that it can invigorate our minds, direct our actions, and enrich our souls. It provides an overpowering focus for lives cluttered with competing goals and distracting desires. Further, it is as valid and all encompassing today as it was 20 centuries ago.

The Pharisee who posed the question to Jesus knew well the trauma of living with change and confusing options. This poor soul had much in common with us today. He's buried under the details and noise of life, is experiencing future shock, and desperately needs an anchor, a single defining focus for life.

All this is well and good, but how do we make it work?

Making it Work

Chuck Colson in his book, *Loving God*, writes the story of Myrtie Howell, a woman who lived in a shabby nursing home and filled her days corresponding with women and men in prison. Loving the Lord and her neighbors who were behind bars was an act of thinking and doing. Myrtie thought carefully—even used the few Bible commentaries she had—before she responded to their questions. *Loving God* is about using the mind and persisting despite your personal circumstances.

But the published book did not end with the story of Myrtie. With what Colson thought was the final draft of the manuscript neatly stacked on his

desk, he leaned back in his chair to reflect on the stories of the book and how they had influenced and helped him. Just then the phone rang. An old friend, Dave Chapman, was at the local airport and wanted to come by and share some exciting news before he caught a connecting flight. Chuck invited him over and listened to his story—all the time gazing at Dave over the finished manuscript that was stacked on his desk.

Dave's life had been that of a businessman whose life in Christ was growing stale—pushed aside by the press of other matters and the contradictions he saw in the lives of "good" Christians around him. He had no answers and was just muddling along in a state of confusion and misery.

Challenged one night to truly love God and to find, both in the Bible and in life, a way to put such love into action, he began to move. With encouragement from others, but without specific counsel on what to do, he began to pray for wisdom before making tough decisions. In each situation he thought about his love for God and his neighbors and searched the Scriptures before he took action.

He began to change, becoming excited about living even though he had opened up a new world where the living was tough and demanding.

When Dave finished his story, he asked Chuck, "Well, what do you think?" Colson wrote in his book:

What do I think? You want to know what I think? I exclaimed. "I think you've just rewritten the ending of my book!"

For, of course, he had. As much as I wanted to leave my book with its orderly flow of logic and theological soundness, concluding with the poignant but triumphant story of Myrtie Howell, life isn't like a book. Life isn't logical or sensible or orderly. Life is a mess most of the time. And theology must be lived in the midst of that mess. . . . Life is not lived in the bleachers, but on the muddy fields by human beings who get bloody and bruised and who contend for the score to their last gasp.

So I decided to end this book with Dave Chapman.

Colson's story about Dave points out that tough times call for tough decisions. But Dave's story also shows the hard work of reflection demanded by tough decisions. Among all the nice things moral and righteous living takes, you do indeed need to mix in a healthy dose of brains and guts.

Graduates, I'm sorry to say, on the eve of your graduation from Wheaton, that the toil of study, the agony of "all-nighters," and the dilemma of multiple choices, will plague you till death or senility.

But the good news is that the faculty has equipped you well for loving God properly. To love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength is as succinct a statement of the importance of thought—careful, deep, reflective thought—as exists.

Our God is a communicating God. The Bible is his story, his message to us. Jesus Christ is the Word: the divine message in the flesh. His life of acts and wonders is laced with discourse, explanation, stories, parables, and dialogue.

He has given us minds—minds that can be renewed by the Spirit of God and sharpened by the rigors of careful thought based on good information. Yes, the Spirit of God moves within us in wondrous and mysterious ways; yes, prayer sustains, directs, and enriches; but the plodding life we live on this earth is also set before us with the biblical call to consider, think, reason, and then to act.

Whether you are five or ninety-five, following Christ is a thinking person's life.

My gift to you on this commencement day is but a reminder that Wheaton has brought you in contact with faculty who have informed, badgered, prodded, encouraged, guided, and yes, even graded you, in an attempt to equip you for a life of thinking. Think as you paint, play, perform, and counsel; think as you assist, teach, pray, relate, react, grieve; and think as you play and as you rejoice. Think within the context of an all-consuming love for our God and our world of neighbors.

Dr. Chase's address has been condensed because of space limitations. An audiocassette of the complete message can be ordered by writing the Media Resources, Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL 60187. For each tape, the cost is \$3.75 plus \$1.50 for shipping and handling. Illinois residents, add \$.25 for tax.