

**Graduation Address  
2018**

**Moore College**

Lawyers study law; historians study history; astronomers study the heavenly stars; journalists study the earthly ones. What on earth do theologians study?

Ah, but that's the point isn't it? What they study is not on earth.

Whatever it is, they take a long time about it. If you are a family member here tonight, you will know that the person you are supporting has been at this study for a year, for three years or for four years, six days a week. This is in addition to previous degree or trade, not to mention, in many cases, two years ministry training. And now a Master degree as well.

You may also know that this course is quite complex, involving such strange sounding creatures as exegesis, hermeneutics, systematics, homiletics and including tamer-sounding beasts such as philosophy and history and Bible and Greek and Hebrew.

You may not realise how academically difficult this study is. In my experience, students coming from other disciplines report that Moore College is a step up in demand. You may be sure that the award you are receiving tonight is as tough and demanding as any. Our congratulations to these graduates is well deserved.

So what do theologians study? Well, we can talk about philosophy and ethics and history and languages, but they are only the framework. The

actual heart of the matter is that the study of theology is the study of God.

Now there are a few rules when you study God. Here are three.

First you study what he has revealed about himself, not what you imagine may be true. That's is why the Bible is the real text book – it is God revealing himself to us.

Strange? You did not think the Bible was that important anymore? Think again – it is the fundamental book in western civilisation and increasingly world civilisation. If you don't know your Bible, you are ill-informed about yourself and who you are. Not to mention where you are going. And who God is.

A second rule is this: that, where possible, you study the Bible in a family setting. Now don't get me wrong. The Bible is for everyone and you can and should read it in your own. But God set us up to read it first of all in families, with parents reading it to their children; then in a special family called the church, where again we read it together.

That's why at Moore College we do all we can to help students to study in community. The aim of our study is to know God and to help others to know him. If you are not doing that at College, and, while you are at College in the churches and the world, there is little point in spending so much time and energy. It would be like training to be a doctor on your own and never near a hospital.

And the third rule is this: the study of God is not like the study say of mathematics. This is not an abstract, non-involving sort of business. It's personal. You will be changed by it. You study God, and you are studying the most alive Person there is – and remember, he is studying you at the same time. Except of course he knows all there is to know about you. But he is, so to speak, looking at you.

That is why it is not so helpful to say that we are studying God. It is better to say that we are seeking to grow in knowing God. We are relating to him on his terms, because this is not something to be undertaken lightly. Part of that growth is, of course speaking to him, singing his praises, learning to obey him. It's like a family relationship.

It would be pretty futile to study God without a relationship with him.

Why do this dangerous thing? According to Jesus, coming to know God is eternal life, life with joy forever, life as it is meant to be. According to Jesus, not to know God is to miss out on the meaning of your life. It is disaster. You will fall, and not rise, at the last hurdle.

Now I was expecting to be stopped at the very beginning of this address by cries of outrage from those who have studied theology. I did say something wrong. But they were too polite, perhaps.

I asked, what do theologians study? And I said, 'what they study is not on earth.' But that is only partly true. God is not part of the furniture, he not a bigger version of us humans. He is not tethered to earth. He is not the natural world. He is one, almighty spirit, supreme, invisible, all-knowing, the Creator of all things, present everywhere, absolutely good

and righteous – yes that God. The Creator of the world, but not part of the world.

All that is true and it is what sets this one God off from all the man-made gods of this world. The recovery of the truth about this God in the 16<sup>th</sup> century contributed significantly to the rise of modern science. Yes that God.

But I said, ‘what they study is not on earth.’ Well you know why I said it – to make sure we understood the might and majesty of God and that he is not like us.

But on the other hand this book our graduates have been studying is very much here on earth. It is very human.

You know that you get to know another person when they use words you can understand to disclose themselves to you? Well we can only get to know God when he discloses himself. But he hasn’t overwhelmed us by his voice or his appearance. He has given us the book, a very humble way for God to reveal himself. Very kind.

But even that is not the end of the matter. For the book reveals that the God who is not on earth, came to earth – not like a space visitor. Better than that. He is so humble that he became one of us. A human – a man who ate and slept and had friends, and wept real tears. He was so human, you could crucify him and kill him. Yes, Jesus Christ is the Son of God, truly God and truly man, who comes to us to welcome us home. He knew we are lost and he said: ‘I am the way and the truth and the life; no-one comes to the Father except through me’.

So now, graduates, what is your task? Well it is the same as before. But now I hope you can do it better, because you know God better. It is to know God through Jesus and to introduce him to others.

And what if we wanted to sum it all up?

Well what would Jesus say?

‘For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in him may not perish, but have everlasting life.’

So what are you going to say: well many things out of an incredible stock of learning you have been blessed with. But whatever you do say, say what Jesus just said:

That we human beings are a perishing race, without God, without hope, without eternal life and rightly condemned because of our failures. We will fail at the last hurdle of death and judgement.

That to our utter astonishment, God loves the world; more, he loved the world by sending his precious Son, his only Son, his very self, into the world as one of us, to stand with us, to bear the cost of our failures by dying for us on the cross, to bring forgiveness and hope;

That, receiving God’s gift does not depend on human effort or goodness or merit – it depends merely on believing, that is the trust which turns its back on self and surrenders to the living God through Jesus Christ – it depends on knowing God on his gracious terms and conditions.

That God's great gift is eternal life – the resurrection of the dead; the defeat of death, and life as it was meant to be, with Christ for ever.

Well, you may have done four years study, or now have the MA or the MTh. Whatever you have done, your family and friends have every right to be proud of a very, very considerable achievement.

But let me remind you: it will all have been wasted if you are not prepared to tell the world this great truth: 'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'

And one last thing: why don't you friends and family give the graduates their last test? Ask them to explain to you in as simple a way as possible how a person comes to know God? When they pass that test, you will know that all the effort has been worth it!