

# REV. CURTIS' BACCALAUREATE SERMON

## STUDENTS STILL WITH PURPOSE.

II Timothy 3:15.  
 Graduating class faculty, students and patrons of the Dallas high school, I deem it a privilege and an honor that I have been invited by this splendid class of young men and women, to deliver before them the annual sermon, this being the custom of the day, and as we believe, one that is most fitting and proper. When invited by this class to bring to them a baccalaureate sermon upon this occasion, I want to say that I took them seriously, believing that it was a sermon that they desired and not a class address. I say this because so often in hearing comments upon the discourses on such occasions, we are reminded that many consider that when they take on the form of a sermon, the speaker has missed the mark. We learn in our study of sermon building, that a sermon is an oral address to the popular mind, upon religious truth, as contained in the scriptures, elaborately treated in view to persuasion. Notice: "Upon religious truth." Religion has to do with man's relationship with divinity. Therefore, we believe that a baccalaureate sermon must be the setting forth of religious truth that will inspire the hearer to the highest ideals and the noblest living.

Class, in bringing to you the thoughts of the evening I am not making any great claims of originality. I have gleaned from various authors, and to give credit for all that we have thus gleaned would be impossible for me and unprofitable for you. I bring you thoughts from Jesus of Nazareth, who, being divine, was and is the greatest teacher of earth; from Paul, the greatest inspired human teacher and from many teachers, great and small who claim no inspiration, and many of whose names it would be impossible to mention, because of an erring memory.

One of the redeeming features of this address will doubtless be that the fact that it is not all my own will be no small relief to the hearers. I am not so much concerned, as to the charge of plagiarism, as was the young man who said that if he had a decent thought he was afraid to utter it for fear of being charged with theft. A companion preacher once met your speaker and said that he had just met a man who declared that he had a book at home with every word of my sermon of the previous Sunday in it. This statement was the cause of no small concern on my part, for I was sure that I had no knowledge of the existence of such a book, when he kindly revealed to me that the book was a dictionary.

Some of these older men with their higher degrees and riper experiences, doubtless could have brought you more original thought, but for me it seemed impossible and for you "it would not be expedient." With the motto of I. S. class I am greatly pleased, and I hope and believe that it is the true expression of the heart of each member of this splendid class. "To seek, to strive, to find and not to yield." That does not sound like cessation, like stagnation. That sounds like ambition, like aspiration, like a realization of the heights to be attained and a determination to scale those heights however great may be the cost. It sounds like a paraphrase of Paul's memorable words: "Not that I have already attained or am already perfect, but I press on, if so be that I may attain unto that for which I was laid hold on by Christ Jesus."

Friends, there was thought behind the selection of this motto. There was purpose behind the selection of that motto. There was manhood and womanhood expressed in the selection of the sentiment clothed in the words of that motto. Did we not have before us the personnel of this unusual class of high school students, and this their motto were conveyed to us, we should know at once that it represented an unusual combination of young manhood and womanhood.

And this I take as a compliment upon the faculty of this school, for what these young men and women are, is in no small measure, what this faithful and capable faculty has made them, by their contact with them, their influence over them and their instruction to them. Likewise we feel this to be complimentary to the board, who has to do with the selection of the faculty and the decisions as to the school which we believe ranks high among schools of its class. I have spoken of Paul as being probably the greatest inspired human teacher of history. It is from the words of this man of wisdom and righteousness and inspiration that we have chosen the words upon which I shall base this discourse.

My theme is: "Students Still, With Purpose." My text: II Timothy 3:15. "Study (or give diligence) to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright (or rightly dividing) the word of Truth."  
**Give Diligence.**  
 Primarily this admonition has to do with the written revelation of God, the bible, but a general application is certainly allowable. A course of study that produces men who feel independent and self-sufficient is in some way misdirected. Education should teach dependence. The man who is greatest in point of education is that man who feels most his dependence and acknowledges his indebtedness to those who have lived before him, to those who live contemporaneous with him and to the true source and fountain head of all knowledge. Humility is a proof of greatness.  
 Young friends, your education is not a possession that is inherently yours, but it is a gift, a benefaction, bestowed upon you by those who have lived before you, by those who live with you, the friends of education. Your attainments in the use of this education, will be measured by your humility, as shown by your readiness to bring to your aid the results of the labors of those who have lived before

you, those who live with you, and those who come after you in point of the time of the completion of their course of study. We must be willing to bring to our service the results attained by those younger than ourselves, for we shall grow old while the younger generations are bringing forth the results of their labors built upon the achievements of our past, and we shall grow old before our time unless we receive these results and allow them to help us in remaining young and progressive. I mean by this that the most brilliant graduate of the highest institution of learning on earth can not count himself, in the absolute, an educated man. Here his growth will cease. Paul says: "I count not myself yet to have attained."

Paul was an unsatisfied man, but not a dissatisfied man. It is my desire to make the above the basis of an admonition to higher education.

Some of this class will doubtless enter college, some will enter upon business and professional careers and some will establish homes. We can not place too much emphasis upon the admonition to higher education. If it is possible to you each one should enter college and pursue a course of higher education, but if it is not possible to you, remember that education is ever possible to you by the proper application of your self and your time and opportunity. Most young people are in too much of a hurry to leave the school room and enter upon the activities of life. You can lengthen your business or professional life by taking years from its beginning for more thorough preparation. The prepared man is not early upon the shelf. The real student studies that he may do, and that college students are does is shown by the financial recognition given to their service in the business world.

Ever remain students. "Forgetting the things that are behind and stretching forward to the things that are before." Lot's wife looked back and became a pillar. The man who looks back upon past educational victories has the same disastrous experience, he becomes a pillar, a fixture. The only difference between a pillar and a sleeper is that the one lies down and the other stands up, the one is just as sleepy as the other. The man who looks back has reached his destination. Cease to study and you fall out of the procession. Then you must stand and watch it go by to the triumph that might have been yours. We have the expression, "Go way back and sit down," but you do not need to do that today, just get out of the procession and you will very soon be away back, and then all that is left to you is to sit down and you are the personification of failure and dejection. The preacher said "God pity the lazy man, for it requires divine patience to pity a lazy man."

If you labor that you may acquire and acquire as an end, the sacrifice made on public education is lost so far as you are concerned. There is danger in the theory of perfection. Perfection in church or state or person, we hold to be a dangerous doctrine. Even our almost idolized constitution must be some day outgrown if we are to be a growing people. Shall we affirm that the fathers of '76 were infallible? When perfection begins development ceases. As the tree is perfected only in its fruitage, so the works of your illustrious predecessors are only perfected in you and can not be fulfilled without you. They certainly have waited for you of the Dallas class of 1915. Are they disappointed in you? Who dares say that they are or have reason to be? Shall they ever be ashamed of you? You that can answer this question, but, as we look into your faces, our hopes are large and assuring. Lincoln, in speaking of Washington, said: "To add brightness to the sun, or glory to the name of Washington is alike impossible. Let none attempt it. In solemn awe pronounce the name in its naked deathless splendor and leave it shining on."

Someone has bitterly criticized these words as being beautiful but not true, and added, "If Washington is the father of his country, and if the glory of the father is in the glory of the child, then we can add to Washington, and we can, by our own successes or failures, brighten or dim the lustre of his achievements." If the republic endures through many centuries, holding alike in its bosom the rich and the poor, the strong and the weak, the founder will be robbed in its glory. If it shall perish, through its own poverty of thought or rottenness of life, to its father will cling the garments of its shame.

**To Present Thyself Approved Unto God**  
 Study as one that must stand before God. The highest possible tribute that could be paid to a man is that he stands approved of God. "We are laborers together with God" for the fulfillment of his purpose in man. His purpose in man is the glorifying of himself. Jesus glorified the father in the accomplishment of God's purpose in him. "Father, I have glorified thee in that I have accomplished the work that thou hast given me to do." He received God's approval. Upon the mount of Transfiguration, we hear the voice from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." With some it is considered a great thing that they should receive the approval of men. Such make it the supreme purpose of their lives that they may receive man's plaudits.  
 We must get the viewpoint of the great apostle: "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you or of man's judgment, yea, I judge not mine own self—but he that judgeth me is the Lord." God's approval will rest upon that man who recognizes God's right to work in and with him in God's own way. But God can not work through the man who is himself living in rebellion against God. Jesus said, Matt. 23:31, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto

one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me."

In a bitter cold night a Russian soldier was standing on guard in an unprotected place where the piercing wind struck him. A poor laborer, passing by, was touched with pity when he beheld the shivering soldier. He took off his overcoat and gave it to him as a protection against the cold, bitter wind, saying he would soon be in his warm cottage and bed, whereas the soldier would have to spend the night at his post, exposed to the inclement weather. But the night was so bitterly cold that the soldier was found dead the next morning. Sometime after this the laborer was lying on his death-bed. In a dream he saw Jesus wearing the overcoat that he had given to the soldier. The sick man said, "You are wearing my coat." "Yes," said the Saviour, "It is the coat that you lent me on that cold night when I was standing guard. I was naked and thou didst cloth me."

One thing that we must remember, we must meet him, approved or disapproved. This life is a trust and we are stewards.—Acts 17:31; Rom. 14:10; I Cor. 4:5.

## A Workman That Needeth Not To Be Ashamed.

We are workmen under God. I Cor. 3:9: "For we are laborers together with God. Ye are God's husbandry." To be a workman, alone, is a great honor. Thus our lives become constructive. But to be a workman under God is a still higher honor, and to be a workman with God is the most exalted position that could have been assigned to man. Jesus dignified labor and thus pronounced his blessing upon it. A carpenter, and the son of a carpenter, he plied his trade in Bethlehem of Judea. His words were "My Father worketh even until now and I work." That God rested on the seventh day from his creative work, does not signify that he ceased to work. His initial creation work being completed, he rested or closed it. He is still actively employed sustaining all things, carrying out his divine purpose, in his universe, in co-operation with man whom he has honored with the chief place in his infinite scheme.

There has been drawn a false line of distinction between the sacred and the secular. We have arbitrarily lifted certain lines of human activity to the realm of the sacred and all other lines we have termed secular. This is largely without warrant. Every honorable vocation of the man who places himself under the guidance of Almighty God, is a sacred calling, and should be regarded as such. Shall the life of the minister of the gospel which is devoted to the guiding of men in the right paths of life be regarded as more sacred than the life of that man who sincerely follows that direction? I affirm that, in the eyes of God, it is not more sacred.

God wants more self-sacrificing men in positions of strictly religious leadership. There should be more lives devoted to these definite callings. Many men should be working in these lines who are not, and many are working in these lines who should not be. Many a man has devoted his life in a vain struggle for success in the pulpit, who could have attained the highest success with much less effort in law, in medicine, at the desk, at the forge, at the work shop or on the farm. Such have been bound to this profession by the desire to devote their lives to a sacred calling, with a mistaken idea of the mark of distinction between the sacred and the secular.

We are not urging that fewer men enter into these callings, far from that, we are pleading for more, and better prepared, and more gifted men in these callings, but we would have no young man or woman choose these callings with the idea that they alone are sacred, nor with the idea that young men or woman who chooses another line in life's activities to feel that those lines are less sacred.

Life is a sacred trust and should be contemplated sacredly. Say, young friend, entrust your life to the keeping of Almighty God and subject it to his direction in whatsoever vocation you may select, and you may make it most sacred by regarding it as such. God wants men in every vocation of life who regard their places in life sacredly. God has not given in his word one guide book, one standard of perfection for the minister of the word and another for the so-called layman. The distinction between the clergy and the laity in this respect is a distinction of men. I Peter 2:5: "Ye also as living stones are built up to a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ," who is our priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. Va. 9: "But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood."

So as this class may go forth into life, if you will place your life under God's direction, and live with a constant recognition of his right to reign and rule in your lives, whatever line of activity you may follow, it may be with the consciousness that you are engaged in a co-workmanship with God, in a sacred work, ever to be held sacred, with sacred responsibilities. Thus we may present ourselves unto him in the day of final reckoning as workmen not ashamed. Be you a teacher, a preacher, a lawyer, an artisan, a farmer, a home keeper, or whatsoever it may be, and doubtless all are represented in this class, you may face life and face God and man as workmen never ashamed, but glorying in that you have had a part in the fulfillment of God's infinite purpose in man.  
**Handling Aright, or Rightly Dividing.**  
**The Word of Truth.**  
 As I have once suggested, this text has to do, primarily, with God's revealed word as found in the sixty-six books of the bible. However, a broader application of the text is justified, and especially of this particular division, in view of the diversified form

of revelation, and I believe that such broad application is demanded. Romans 1:20: "The invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity, that ye may be without excuse." The man who does not follow truth is a slave to error. Jesus in speaking to his disciples said, "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." Jesus said concerning his disciples to his father, in prayer, "Sanctify them in the truth, thy word is truth." This does not mean the oral word alone, neither the written word alone, but the expression or declaration of God. Jesus was the expression of God to man and hence the "word" of God. John 1:1. Every expression of God may be said to be this "truth." That his power and divinity may be seen through the things that are made, according to Rom. 1:20, prove that his created things are also his word or his truth. The man who can only see God's word in his written revelation, must concede himself to be narrow in his interpretation of God.

I do not mean by this that God's plan of salvation, His great scheme of redemption, his guidance in spiritual life may be found apart from this written revelation, indeed, I affirm that it can not, and this is the specific purpose of this written revelation. But God has manifested and revealed himself to man through His prophets, through His Holy Spirit, through His Son, and through His universe.—Psalm 19: "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork, day unto day uttereth speech and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech or language, their voice is not heard." These last words are a declaration of the thought just expressed, that oral or written words are not demanded in God's expression of Himself, but we may know him through his wondrous works. Psalms 33:4 declare "For the word of the Lord is right and all His works are done in truth."

The expression, "handling aright or rightly dividing the word of truth" may, with this broader application of the text, be interpreted, "The acceptance and proper classification of all truth. No man can afford to repudiate one truth. God's truth comes to us from every realm of His universe. The Psalmist says Psalms 85:11 "Truth shall spring from the earth." I brought before this school, in assembly, but recently, in a brief lecture along the line of Archaeology, some striking evidence of the truth of this scripture.

During the past century, history has been carried back through a period of more than forty centuries prior to the birth of Christ. This has been accomplished by the use of the pick and shovel. These records have been discovered written upon clay, and granite and wood and papyrus. Thus, explorer, Archaeologist and linguist, have become workers together with God, in declaring to us the records of what, until the middle of the last century, was declared to be prehistoric times. Prior to these discoveries we had no record of these times other than the Old Testament records, and, having no corroborating history, they were looked upon with doubt. Thus to have such men as Jean Champollion, decipherer of the Rosetta stone, Rich and Botta and Layard and Henry C. Rawlinson, decipherer of the Behistun rock, as benefactors of the human race, in that they became laborers together with God, who despised not the truth, though springing from unrecognized and undreamed of sources, and who brought to light the records of the dim past, and thus became the fulfillment of the scripture, "The truth shall spring from earth." By such discoveries as these, God's revelation to the Hebrews, the Hebrew Old Testament scriptures, have been corroborated and their claim of inspiration greatly strengthened. In spite of the fact that the written revelation suffers no loss, but receives great gain by truth thus brought to light by men in wisdom who will be made instruments in God's hands. "Workers together with God" in the working out of his infinite plan and the declaring of his infinite truths. Think for a moment of the great and valuable truths that have been brought to our very door by the indefatigability and persistence and faith of our students of the heavens, as they, have, hand in hand with God, solved many of the wonderful and stupendous mysteries of his universe, until the sun and moon and planets can be weighed as so much produce from the market and their paths measured as accurately as our familiar county roads and city streets.

These discoveries have touched and quickened industry and greatly affected public welfare at many points and are making rapid strides in the declaring of the truth of the declaration of the scriptures. The achievements of man of almost infinite foresight and vision in the discovery and the demonstration of the possibilities of electricity of liquid air and of radium have been marvelous demonstrations of the fact that God has fabulous stores of wisdom and truth to reveal to his children when they are ready to receive it and use it.

For lack of time we have had to withhold the names of those who have thus achieved to our advantage and benefit, many of whom I should have delighted to mention, but their names are familiar to students and it is the facts which accomplish our purpose in pointing out to you that God is continually declaring his truths to us in diverse portions and in sundry manners, and those who have brought to us these great benefits, have been workers together with God. Men ready to receive truth from whatever source, and apply it in wisdom to the lives and works of men. "Handling aright the word of truth."

In conclusion: The test of education is a life, a character. Its end is utility. Divinely directed consecrated character was never more needed than today. The harvest, indeed is plentiful but the laborers, right metal, and moral fiber are few, as compared with the need. Do not enter upon life with the thought that the world will always appreciate your efforts. The world will not always receive you with open arms, meet you with brass bands and sumptuous banquets spread. They will often mercilessly tear down your structures, erected through toil and tears as wantonly as the young ruffian heedlessly kicks the foundation from under the child's blocks, and laugh at your failure while you weep and toil in its reconstruction with well worn tools.  
 The world has ever persecuted its benefactors, afterwards to lift them to pedestals of glory and honor them. Be students ever but not as an aim or end. Be workmen indeed under the Almighty hand, working for God's humanity, remembering that we are ever exalted by the common touch. Ever be gleaners and dispensers of truth, though the world may often prostitute that truth. All that we have said and more may be found, under the surface, in Rudyard Kipling's little poem "If" which I have considered one of the greatest uninspired productions that has ever touched my life, and seems almost like it might have been prompted by inspiration though it contains not the name of God.

If you can keep your head when all about you  
 Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;  
 If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,  
 And make allowance for their doubts and toos;  
 If you can wait and not be tired of waiting,  
 And being lied about, don't deal in lies,  
 And being hated, don't give way to hating,  
 And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise.

If you can dream and not make dreams your master;  
 If you can think and not make thoughts your aim,  
 If you can meet with triumph and disaster  
 And treat those two imposters just the same;  
 If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken  
 Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,  
 Or watch the things you gave your life to broken,  
 And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools.

If you can make one heap of all your winnings  
 And risk them on one turn of pitch-and-toss;  
 And lose, and start again at the beginning  
 And never breathe a word about your loss;  
 If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew  
 To serve your turn long after they are gone,  
 And so hold on when there is nothing in you,  
 Except the will which says to you:  
 Hold on.

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,  
 And walk with kings—nor lose the common touch,  
 If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,  
 And all men count with you, but none too much;  
 If you can fill each unforgiving minute  
 With sixty seconds worth of distance run,  
 Yours is the earth, and every thing that's in it,  
 And—that is more—you'll be a man, my son.

Young friends:  
 Go forth to win, the day is thine.  
 By guiding strength and grace divine,  
 For martyrs, saints and angels see,  
 And wait the cry of victory.

Go forth, go forth, O soldier strange and brave,  
 Go forth, go forth, nor let thine armor fall the weak to lift, the lost to save.  
 Go forth to fight as soldiers must,  
 Nor ever let thine armor rust.  
 Thy leader to the front has gone,  
 And heavenly voices call these on."

As workmen under God, "Be ye faithful unto death, and He will give you a crown of life."

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The graduating exercises of the Perryville high school was held at the Christian church there on Friday evening. A class of eight in number was graduated.



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