

## It's time to graduate

Dan Nelson – pastor

Calvary Chapel of the Ojai Valley

It's that time of year where excitement is in the air because, for many, the reward of years of hard work culminates in the recognition of the commencement ceremony and the receipt of the long-sought-after certificate. It is always interesting that for the graduate, this joy is usually mixed with a seasoning of intense duress. Academic pressures of final exams, social stresses of being forced to say goodbye to friends, some of whom you never see again, and imputed tensions of decision-making regarding the next season of life. After all, graduation implies that one is headed into a new chapter. You see, just as many people spend more time preparing for their wedding than for their marriage, most students spend years considering their graduation but very little energy planning their future. People live out their spiritual lives in the same way.

The Bible encourages people to move past the elementary school principles of Christ and to graduate to what comes next (Hebrews 6:1-2). Just as in school, we are to successfully complete each course and then grow beyond it. Can you imagine how foolish it would be if you and I were still repeating addition and subtraction lessons every day when we have learned these things as young children? Instead, after we learned these foundations, we went on to multiplication, then division, and beyond. In the same way, according to this passage, turning away from dead religious observance or spiritual self-accomplishment to real surrendered faith in God is the beginning of courses in spiritual basics. As it says in Proverbs 1:7 "The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom." Not the culmination of wisdom, but also the genesis. It is the starting place; the point of conception in the spiritual journey.

Perusing these verses, one discovers that other elementary school topics include teachings about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. But truth be told, these are some of the very things that are debated, rejected and misunderstood. If one is seeking truth and wants to know where to start, these verses are like a compass pointing a clear direction. Begin with the acknowledgement of the authority and power of an almighty creator God, for the Scriptures state that "a fool says that there is no God." Recognize your own inability through anything you do to commune with him, except he grants you entry. Seek that access point through Jesus Christ, then discover what these various teachings and truths are all about in light of your developing faith in God; that he loves you and has saved you.

If you have been a Christian for some time, and are still stuck in the rudimentary things, it is time to move on. Imagine attending the graduation of someone you care about only to discover he cannot read his own diploma. Doesn't make sense, does it? In the same way, we are told to grow up! Let's learn the fundamentals, but then proceed to weightier things. "So what are those more substantial aspects of life in relationship with God?" you ask. "What are the identifying marks of

someone who is mature in Christ?" one may wonder. And this is the best part. Just when some may presume I am about ready to get into some really heavy theological issues, I am not. You see, even those are mere middle school in spiritual things. It is possible for you to go right to college and beyond if you have "love for one another." Yes, it is true! The by-product of spending time with God and his presence in your life will be love, joy, peace, long suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Spiritual maturity is described here as you begin to enjoy that abundant life that Jesus said he came to bring us. No longer looking to one another to judge or to criticize each other, but looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2).

Congratulations to every graduate. You have accomplished your goal. We wish you great success in your future and may we also follow that lead and go on to what God has called each of us to in our lives; to answer the call and fulfill our purpose in living a life in connection with Christ.

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Dan Nelson is a frequent contributor to the Ojai Valley News and currently serves the Ojai Valley Ministerial Association and community as editor of the Religion Column. Permission is freely granted to reprint the article in its entirety. Dan Nelson is pastor of Calvary Chapel Christian Church of the Ojai Valley.



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**Sunday Worship:**  
**9:00 & 10:30am**

Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley  
195 Mahoney Ave, Oak View

**Mid-Week Study:**  
**7:00pm Thursday**

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