

(cool music) (background noise)

- This is opening Sunday at Duke university. And it is in order that we use this occasion to examine the bearing of the Christian faith upon the process of higher education and vice versa. What I would like to do in this sermon, therefore is to look with you at an area in which the goals of Christian ethics and the goals of higher education are identical. So when you came to chapel this morning whether you were primarily motivated by a desire to become a better Christian or by a burning wish to derive the greatest amount of benefit possible from your college education. What we shall have our attention on for a little while is of very basic concern to you. Let me state the matter with utmost simplicity very often in academic life, as well as in non-academic life, for that matter, we disagree with each other. Sometimes we disagree severely and on very momentous issues. It is right, that we face these differences that we study them, that we debate them even vigorously, but both the goals of religious faith and the aims of higher education require that we disagree in an atmosphere of fair play. There's the sermon. You thought you were going to have to wait 25 minutes to get the main point, but lo and behold, I have recklessly exposed the central idea in less than two minutes. And now if there is a mass Exodus out of this chapel in the next two minutes I shall certainly regret having done it. But in case grandfather wants you to write and tell him what the chapel preacher's sermon was about. You see, you already know what to write. Just tell him that the Parson issued a call for a fair play in handling disagreements, and that he claimed to be representing both the church and the university in so doing, there it is. Well we've taken care of grandfather's request. So now let's forget him for a while. And right now let's think about you. Because although it is true that the ideal of this sermon can be described in very simple terms. It is not true that what is being called for here today can be accomplished very simply. Indeed you will have a very difficult time doing it so difficult, that when you achieve it you may be called a true and beloved son of the university and a shining member of the christian church. Isn't it true that when we are discussing a disagreement we usually like to win the argument rather than lose it. And isn't it a fact that we often argue as though we were more interested in winning than in learning new truth. And to be absolutely honest, for a moment, don't we have a tendency to import irrelevant matters into the argument at times, if we feel that these irrelevant matters would help us to strike down our opponent. Be honest, for instance a short time ago, one of our brilliant new law professors Mr. William Van Alstine offered a detailed and specific analysis of the legal and constitutional aspects of the so-called Speaker Band Law in North Carolina. A certain politician in this state disagreed with Mr. Van Alstein. But when he undertook to answer his legal and constitutional points, the most he could do was to say that he couldn't understand why a relatively new resident in the state like Mr. Van Alstein should be so interested in this law anyway. Well, what Mr. Van Stein's place or duration of residents had to do with the legal and constitutional dimensions of any given law completely transcends the imagination. This politician, however, apparently believed that an appeal to some people's prejudice against newcomers would help him to strike down his opponent. And no doubt it did. As is often the case. The politician may have been more interested in having his viewpoint prevailed with his constituency than he was in learning about the constitution. He therefore was willing to import extraneous and irrelevant material into the argument in his effort to win. Well as fascinating and as

important as law and politics are We have need this morning to apply this idea of fair play to some areas of conflict and disagreement within religion. And I want us to look briefly at three issues, over which Christians quarrel. And to see how important it is that we play fair with each other, when we disagree. We want to examine these three partly because of their own intrinsic importance but also because they can serve as representative types of other Christian disagreements. Now, I wanna make it perfectly clear in beginning that I have taken a personal position on each one of these three disagreements but I shall deliberately re frame from stating what it is in this sermon for obvious reasons. I'm going to be a deliberate fence straddle for once. In fact, if you do not happen to know already what my stand is on any of them I hope you will not even be able to guess what it is by hearing this sermon. And I warn you that if you do guess that it is one thing, well, that's not it. I take the other stand. First, let's consider the dispute which rages over the interpretation of the Bible. On the one hand, there are the so-called fundamentalists. Opposing them are the so-called liberals. The fundamentalists believe that the holy Bible is literally infallible and that it contains no errors of history geography, mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry. They regarded as a reliable textbook of medicine, anthropology, and biology. They think they're required to believe that Jesus of Nazareth was born of a Virgin, and that a flesh and blood man named Jonah spent three days in the stomach of a great fish after which he emerged undigested. Fundamentalists think, that they must believe that Elisha by the power of God made an acts head float on top of the rivers on top of the waters of the Jordan river. On the other hand, the liberals do not regard the holy Bible as being literally infallible. And they do not believe Almighty God intended it to serve as a textbook of history or science. But as an inspired record of the heavenly father's persistent attempt to realize the purposes of his creation in human life. And as a record of man's faltering response to the reconciling love of God. And so these two viewpoints, but more importantly the people who represent them stand over against each other, and survey the apparent Gaza which divides them. From time to time, a great debate boils up between them as in the case of the famous scopes trial in the last generation. And as in the case of last night's furious argument in the dope shop, Most of the time, however the fundamentalists do not charge to the attack choosing instead shake their heads in sad silence and pray for the conversion of the Lord's liberals. The liberals for their part do not mount an attack every day on the fundamentalists. Rather some liberals dispose of the fundamentalists by saying that if they are not extinct already they will join the Dodo bird in only a few more years. Actually within the christian church at the present moment there are multiplied millions who represent each of these viewpoints. And I think it is likely that the debate between them will continue for many years to come. The fundamentalists are gaining followers every day. They are more active on the college campus than ever before. And they have far more fundamentalists with PhD degrees from major universities today than at any time in history. We don't have to leave this campus to find PhD faculty members who are fundamentalists. The concern, which I am expressing in this sermon is that when fundamentalists and liberals debate their differences they seldom do so with either charity or humility. More often tending to resort to emotional appeals, to distortion and even to slander. They do not represent the position of their opponents as fairly as they would have their opponents represent their own position. Many liberals are inclined to call the fundamentalist stupid uneducated, brittle minded legalistic, pietistic, moralistic, and so on. Well now let's face it. These are not intelligent descriptions of the best representatives of the fundamentalist viewpoint. Instead, they are nothing more than emotional clubs with which to hit them over the head. This is not fair play. Many fundamentalists for their part refuse to believe that any person could be a Christian who does not agree with them. They call the liberal churchmen atheists wolves in sheep's clothing, betrayers of the

faith, destroyers of the Bible and worse. Well, now this kind of name calling is no better. And it all goes to prove that both the fundamentalists and the liberals stand in need of confession of pardon and sustaining grace and especially of charity. Actually, whether you are at this moment prepared to believe it or not. There are fundamentalists who have high IQs and there are liberals who devoutly pray to God every day. There are fundamentalists who open-mindedly ask God to show them any truth. He would have them to believe. And there are liberals who have gone before the firing squad rather than deny that Jesus Christ is Lord. Fundamentalists need to remember that there are Christians who deny Christ Virgin birth, but who constantly proclaim his divinity and his Lordship. Now the point I'm making is not that if fundamental is and liberals would only love each other, they would discover that they agree on everything. My point is that if they will love each other they can discuss their very real differences intelligently and creatively. The primary ingredient in any such discussion though is fairness. There must be a real desire to understand and a determination to be as fair to your opponent as you want him to be to you. So you have an urge to get into an argument about the Virgin birth, go to it, but remember no clipping, no piling on, no ineligible receivers downfield Well so much for that. Let's move now quickly to another good hot issue. Christians are divided on the question of whether a christian may drink, aren't we? One group says, no christian consume should consume any alcoholic beverage. The other group teaches that it is perfectly all right to drink alcoholic beverages in moderation and that it is not a christian issue. The first group has been referred to as the total abstainers, the T teetotalers, the dries. The second group has been called the wets, the drinkers, the tippler. Do you know of an issue on which there has been more heat and less light applied than this one? Do you know of a disagreement which has brought forth more caricaturing, more lampooning, more tongue lashing than this one. Do you know of a contest in which both sides have exhibited less play, less fair play than this one? I don't. The puzzling thing about it is that the church which is most often hurled by both sides against the other is that they haven't been fair. Looking at it from my point of view, I think they're both telling the truth. I venture the guests that even at this moment you dries are silently sitting there saying to yourselves, man, is he telling off the wets? And you wets are about to burst a blood vessel because you can't shout aloud. At last here's a preacher who will tell the truth about the dries. You see, this is only a token of how unwilling we are to play fair. When we discuss our disagreement about drinking. You know how the emotional ranting goes, many wets begin by either ignoring or denying everything the dry see that's for starters. And then they move on to picture total abstainers as a malicious bunch of killed joys who wanna make life as unpleasant as possible for as many people as possible. And after working themselves up into a ladder by listening to their own propaganda they gather enough courage to brand the dries as hypocrites and witch hunters. A wet will say to a dry I don't like you because you don't drink. And because you make me uncomfortable when I do drink and your sister doesn't like the Beatles and your grandfather fought on the wrong side during the civil war. (laughing) Now, a lot of dries think the settling of the issue can be short and blunt. Everybody who takes a drink is ticketed for hell, period. What's worse is that he will certainly drag an even dozen more with him when he goes, when they pause and listen to what they've just said, it makes them mad and they gather momentum. The attack becomes more vehement. All people who take a drink are callously unconcerned about the welfare of little children and old ladies. (laughing) Very likely somebody in their family must at sometime have played tackle on the Carolina football team. (laughing) And if we could only get at the facts there's probably more premature baldness in their families than there are in ours. Now, if the dries are going to play fair, they must begin by admitting that a lot of christian people take a drink. And that many of them are going to be admitted into heaven. They must concede that the

majority of those who drink do not become alcoholics they must acknowledge that Jesus of Nazareth drank wine. They must grant that many people who have blessed mankind by their achievements were not total abstainers. They must admit that the mere refusal to drink is in itself not a positive virtue, unless it be linked with something that is a positive virtue. If the dries are going to play fair, they must concede that many intelligent physicians have prescribed an alcoholic beverage for medicinal purposes. On the other hand, if the drinking Christians are going to play fair. They must begin by admitting that liquor has been at the root of a vast amount of the world's troubles. They must grant that although in Jesus day there were good reasons for his drinking wine. None of those reasons exists in America today. The wets must admit that although alcoholic drinks can be beneficial in certain diseases, the greatest medical authorities in the world, reports that medicines now exist which can perform all of the benefits of alcohol without any harmful side effects. To play fair the wets must admit that there exists the case for total abstinence which is completely respectable academically. Finally, they must admit that according to present knowledge every person who takes a drink, runs the risk of becoming an alcoholic and that there is no way to decide who will become one until he already is an alcoholic. Now, the position of the christian who totally abstains and the christian who drinks is not the same position. There are very real issues between them. Issues which relate to the most important values in life. The facts which bear upon those issues should be brought to light, should be discussed, debated and evaluated. Indeed the entire subject needs much research and reasoning. But in the process, the ends of religion and of human welfare will be very much better served by light than by heat. Well, can you endure one more quick one? If you can we will escalate to a third area of christian disagreement. In Vietnam, there is a hot shooting war going on involving fire bombs, machine guns intentional death and destruction on a very vast scale. Some Christians, including several of Duke's most distinguished professors say we should not be involved in that. Other Christians, including many of Duke's most distinguished professors, say that as Christians we should be involved. Now, when we try to label these two groups of Christians we immediately find ourselves scorched by the very heat of the controversy. Not all of the labels, which one group applies to the other group, is acceptable to the other group. And often the label is more an instrument of distortion than of description. The Christians who contend that war is always the wrong way to stop evil and to establish good have been called pacifists. The Christians who while hating war like the pacifists nevertheless see it as the lesser evil in some situations have been called non-Pacific Christians or christian interventionists. I do not have to tell you this morning that the issues between the two groups of Christians have been as great as they have been ancient. For 1900 years they've been debated and never more than in the 20th century. Even if the debate between them were carried on in an atmosphere of fair play, the questions of fact, and of interpretation would tax the intelligence and the courage of the church's greatest scholars and prophets. But when be clouded by prejudice and distortion the issues become well not unsolvable. Sometimes when the pacifist notices that his christian brother rises from the communion table and goes away to drop bombs into fire machine guns, he sadly accuses him of hypocrisy of militarism and war mongering. Yet to do this, is completely unfair to the agony of a soul that is tortured by a horrible conflict between his love of peace on the one hand, and a fear that monstrous evil may take over on the other hand. The pacifist needs to know, and to remember that some of history's greatest soldiers have been Christian men who loathed war and at every opportunity showed compassion on the enemy. Now matching the unfairness of some pacifists is the distortion perpetrated by some non-Pacific against conscientious objectors. They often label them traits, cowards, stupid men, collaborators with the enemy and so on. Is George Buttrick stupid? Is Ralph Soman, a collaborator with the enemy? Was

Mahatma Gandhia coward? We often follow in the, if we would become mature men and women, We would realize that it is possible to disagree with someone without calling him an ugly name whatever the issue. If we would develop a genuine love of truth we would discuss and debate controversial issues without feeling that we have to win every argument. Once in a while, we would see a new truth and admit a new idea into our minds. From our discussion with our brother, we would learn to discuss issues on their merits and not by importing irrelevant material into the debate. The goals of higher education and of ethical religion parallel each other at this point. That is, to develop in every person, the ability and the determination to resolve disagreements and to settle issues by examining the relevant data. Not by slurs and slander or by bigoted emotional appeals to extraneous considerations. The proper instrument for an educated man to use is the lamp, rather than the lampoon. Thy word, a lamp unto my feet wrote Psalmist, you know science would be unable to progress at all. If scientific discussions proceeded along the lines that we follow in debating issues such as I have mentioned this morning, suppose for example, that professor Robby, the distinguished professor of physics at Columbia and Dr. Gordy, the James B. Duke professor of physics at Duke. Were discussing at some scientific meeting the apparent inconsistencies Of the quantum theory and the field theory. And if a disagreement should develop between them would never occur to either of them to import into that discussion, any reference to personal stupidity to cowardice, to place of residence or anything like that. They would discuss the issue on its merits. Now why cannot we be as wise in our disagreements over ethical and theological issues, and obtained the same benefits. The scripture lesson, which Dr. Knight read this morning recounted the approach which Philip made to Nathaniel. Phillip said, Jesus was the Messiah. And he backed Nathaniel to come to him. When Nathaniel heard that Jesus was merely from Nazareth. He had serious doubts about Jesus. But Philip challenged him to give Jesus an open-minded hearing and to decide on the basis of who he was, not the town from which he came. It was a call for a fair hearing, a call for fair play. And that call comes down through every century and it comes to us at Duke today. Almighty God our heavenly Father give us the spirit of fairness and of charity and humility. That we may open-mindedly learn new truth. And that we may in charity give our fellows the benefit which we call for ourselves. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. (cool music)