

Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

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Patterson Issues Father-Like Charge To Southeastern Graduates

By Dwayne Hastings

WAKE FOREST, N.C.--Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary awarded degrees to 112 students May 13 in ceremonies in the school's Binkley Chapel. The largest graduating class for the Wake Forest, N.C., seminary since May 1990 -- the occasion also marked the first full master of divinity class to study and graduate under Paige Patterson, who assumed the school's presidency in 1992.

Telling the parents they would now have to share their graduating children with him, Patterson said in delivering the charge to the graduates, "In a sense, I look at myself as daddy and father to them."

Then turning to the pews of black-robed graduates, Patterson said, "So like Jacob of the Old Testament gathering his children around him to say a word to them about the future: My children -- I gather you today. I have a word of warning first of all.

"Our world is full preachers who have failed to maintain their moral integrity in a day when the whole world watches. My first challenge to you today is for you to determine in your heart that under no circumstances will you bring sorrow to the kingdom of God," Patterson said.

Noting the abundance of self-willed missionaries, pastors, preachers and workers in the world, Patterson said, "It is the character of the task to which you have been called to crucify self to become the servant not only of the Lord but of all the sheep of the flock. And whether you are appreciated or unappreciated by the flock, it is yet your responsibility to labor among them as a servant and slave."

Patterson challenged the graduates to a ministry of fruitfulness: "Would you bring the word of God -- out of hours in the study, out of patient wrestling with God -- until your soul is as full as your mind is full? And when your mouth opens may there be a confluency of that which you have studied and that which has welled up in your heart as the fire of God has fallen."

Warning the students they will encounter those who will hate them for their

stands on certain issues, Patterson exhorted the graduates to stand fast for what is right.

"You will stand for something so I suppose in a way I am praying that you will be hated. You will be bitterly opposed on occasion. There is no defeat in mere opposition -- by the hands of the mighty God you will be delivered."

Patterson continued, "But if you wait upon God and you linger before him and you never become so busy about worldly things that you don't have time for the one who made you and saved you -- I will promise you that all the conflict in the world will do nothing but make you stronger."

Along with degrees in doctor of ministry, master of theology, master of divinity, master of arts and associate of divinity, Southeastern also awarded its first bachelor of arts degree in biblical studies. The undergraduate diploma was granted by the new Southeastern Baptist Theological College which began accepting students for upper level undergraduate work in January.