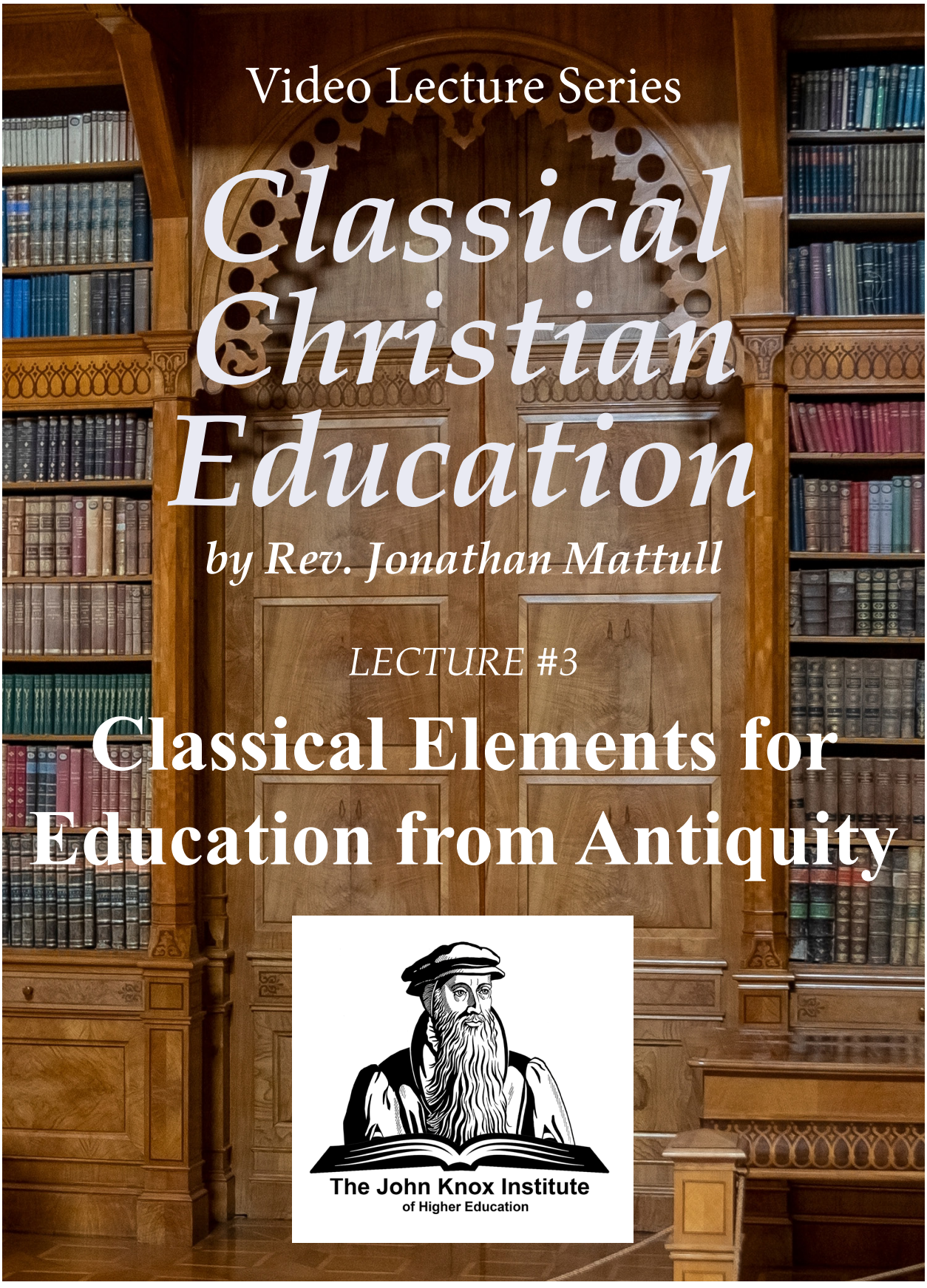
Video Lecture Series
Classical Christian Education
by Rev. Jonathan Mattull
LECTURE #3
Classical Elements for Education from Antiquity
The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

John Knox Institute of Higher Education
Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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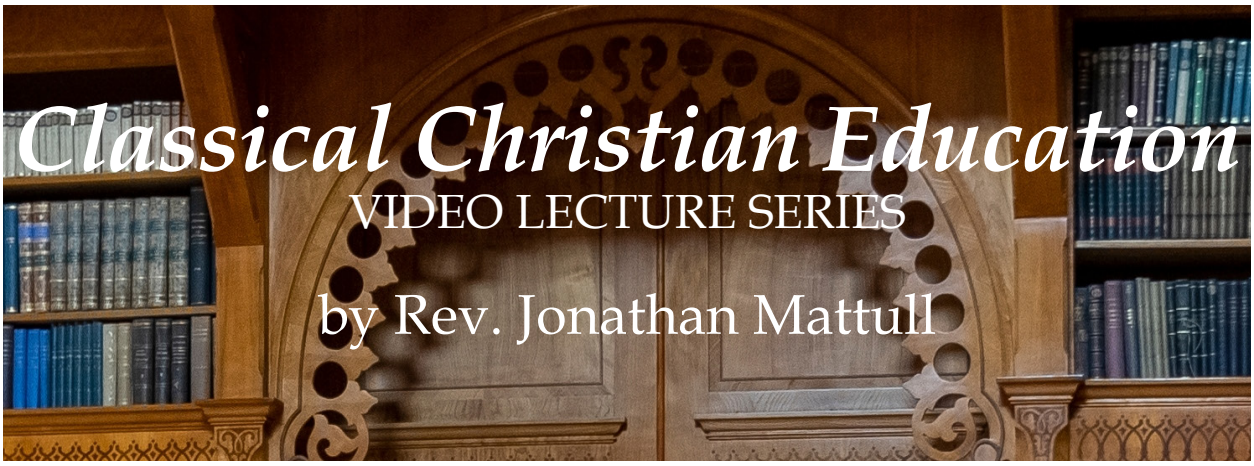

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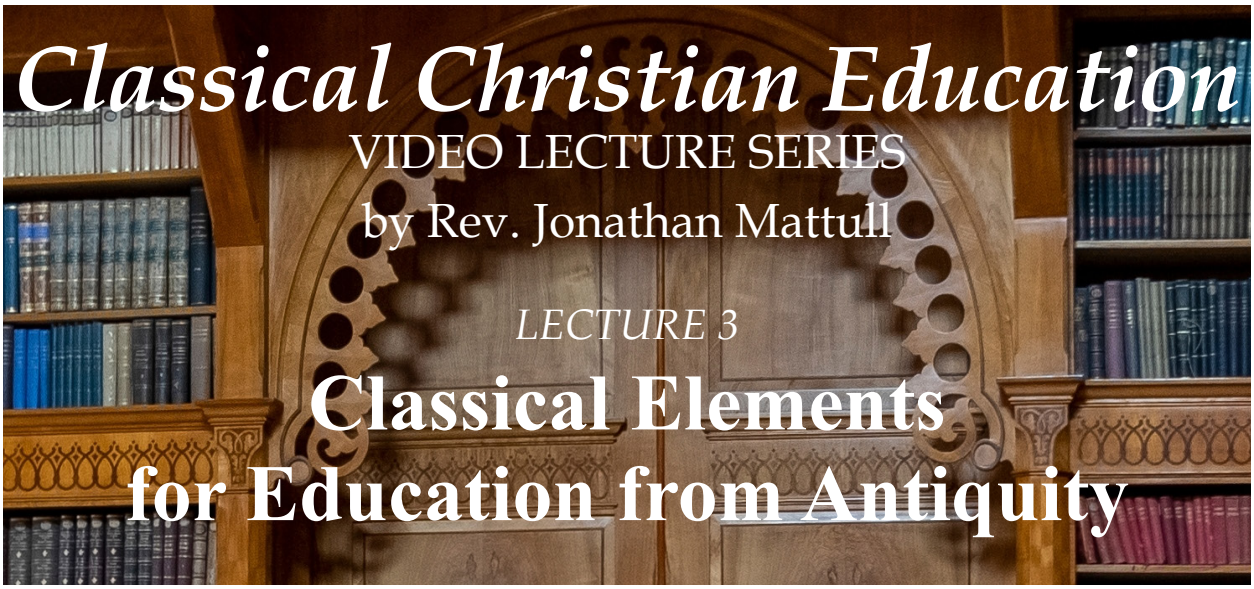

This marks the third lesson in our series on education. In our first lesson, we considered a brief overview of what is meant by *Classical Christian Education*, as well as the need for it. In our second lesson, we looked at fundamental *Christian Commitments for Education*. In this, our third lesson, we'll look at what we're calling *Key Classical Elements for Education*. We'll take a closer look at the key element of education that the ancients—the unbelieving ancients; the pagans—emphasized. In doing so, we look at education before it was transformed by Christianity. In later lessons, we'll look at how Christians adopted this form of education and implemented it in such a way that was to the glory of Jesus Christ.

Now, before getting into the main part of our lesson, there are a few clarifications that will be useful for us. First, we do not mean to imply that the ancients were united in every detail of educational theory or practice. In fact, just as today, there were arguments over what was fundamental to education, and even among those who shared much in common, there were nuances of differences that led to certain emphases unique to each individual teacher or school of thought. In this, the ancient world was not at all that different from the modern world. However, there were key emphases we find represented in their thought, to which we give attention.

Second, it's worth providing some historical background. We've already mentioned that when we speak of the Classical Era, or Antiquity, with which Classical Education is associated, we're generally speaking about the Greek and Roman civilizations spanning the eighth century BC, through the fifth century AD. Again, these dates roughly correlate to the life of Homer,[1] who is the author of *The Iliad*, and *Odyssey*, through the fall of Rome in the West. While a thorough study of education in the Classical Age would work through the specific developments over this time period, well, this is beyond our intention, or our ability in such a small lesson. But acknowledging this, we can distill the essence of Classical Education by focusing on the Hellenistic period within the Classical Age.

The Hellenistic period refers that period of Greek influence that followed the campaigns of Alexander the Great.[2] Typically, historians date the Hellenistic period from 323 BC to AD 30,

1 Homer (c. 8th century BC), ancient Greek poet credited at the author of *The Iliad*, and *The Odyssey*, two epic poems. One of the most revered and influential authors in history.

2 Alexander III of Macedon, AKA Alexander the Great (356 BC to 323 BC). Tutored by Aristotle, he succeeded

which date corresponds to the death of Alexander the Great, and the conquering of Egypt by Rome. As some of you may know, Alexander was a student of Aristotle,[3] one of the key philosophers and teachers of the ancient world. Well, just before this period we refer to as the Hellenistic period, there were such men as Socrates,[4] Plato,[5] Isocrates,[6] and Aristotle. Now, each of these are known to us through the Greek language. Thus, as Alexander conquered the land that would comprise his great empire—by the way, a land that spread from modern-day Greece to modern-day India—he brought the Greek institutions and customs with him. Among these included education and the Greek language. In some sense, it was Alexander the Great who was the vehicle that brought about the spread of Greek learning.

When the Roman Empire arose, immediately after the Hellenistic period, it largely took over the Hellenistic empire and its thoughts, its institutions, and its view. There were certain adaptations made, but the Romans largely adopted the emphases of Greek education. Thus, when we think of Classical Education in Antiquity, we're largely focusing on the advancements in the Hellenistic period, and the developments that took place in the subsequent Roman empire. There's a union in these things. this helps limit our focus to the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Isocrates, Cicero,[7] and Quintilian,[8] as representative of Classical Antiquity. They aren't the only voices, and there are other voices that we wish we could give more attention to, but they are representative of what is meant by Classical Education.

A third, and final clarification—if one looks into the educational practices during this period, it will be evident that there were practices that were entirely at odds with the teachings of the Bible. This includes certain things, like deliberate idolatry, as well as relationships between students and teachers that were, at best, questionable, and on several occasions, most immoral. Some ancients opposed these abuses during that time, but it would await the rise of Christianity within the Roman

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his father, Philip II, to the throne of Macedon at age 20. He conducted an extensive and lengthy military campaign conquering Western, Central, parts of South Asia, and Egypt, creating one of the largest empires in history, stretching from Greece to northern India. Alexander's death marked the start of the Hellenistic period.

3 Aristotle (384–322 BC), Ancient Greek philosopher and polymath. His writings cover a broad range of subjects spanning the natural sciences, philosophy, linguistics, economic, politics, psychology, and the arts. He founded the Peripatetic School of philosophy in Athens, and began the Aristotelian tradition which set the groundwork for development of modern science.

4 Socrates (c. 470 BC–399 BC), famous Greek philosopher from Athens, he is credited as the founder of Western philosophy, one of the first moral philosophers of the ethical tradition of thought. Accused of impiety and corrupting the youth, Socrates was sentenced to death by drinking poison.

5 Plato, *nee* Aristocles (c. 428–348/347 BC), famous ancient Greek philosopher of the Classical period, considered a foundational thinking in Western philosophy, and innovator of written dialogue and dialectic forms. His main studies were Epistemology, Metaphysics, Political philosophy. He was teacher to Aristotle.

6 Isocrates (436–338 BC), ancient Greek rhetorician, one of the ten Attic orators, made many contributions to rhetoric and education through his teaching and written works. He starved himself to death, two years before his 100th birthday.

7 Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 BC–43 BC), a Roman statesman, lawyer, scholar, philosopher, orator, writer, and Academic skeptic, who tried to uphold optimate principles during the political crisis that led to the establishment of the Roman Empire. He's know for treatises on rhetoric, philosophy, and politics, and he served as consul in 63 BC, and was assassinated by Mark Antony's followers.

8 Marcus Fabius Quinilianus, or, Quintilian, or Quintillian, or Quinctilian (c. 35–c. 100 AD), Roman educator and rhetorician, born in Hispania, he opened a public school of rhetor, surviving under several Roman emperors including Domitian, who made him tutor to his two grand nephews in AD 90.

empire to address these abuses more fully.

Well, with these clarifications, let's move into the main portion of our lesson, the *Key Elements in the Classical Period.* We can generalize these key elements into three. First, *Education Was to Lead a Child unto Maturity*. Second, *Education Was to Cultivate a Love for Truth*. And third, *Education Was to Engage the Whole Person*. There are many more details, of course, within each of these elements, but if we understand these three elements, we'll understand something of the essence of Classical Education.

First, *Education Was to Lead a Child unto Maturity*. The ancients shared a view that education had a goal of maturing the child. In Greek, there developed a word for education—*paideia*. This word referred to the comprehensive training up of a child. In fact, the word *paideia* comes from a Greek word, *pais*—in general, a word referring to children. The idea of *paideia*, then, was the teaching of the child all that was needed in order for that child to become a man. We find the word actually used in the Bible, in the general sense of a comprehensive training, for instance, Ephesians 6, and verse 4: "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord"—"nurture"/ *paideia*. Second Timothy 3, and verse 16: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness"—*paideia*/"in righteousness." We find the idea of discipline in Hebrews 12, verse 5: "And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening"—the *paideia*—"of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him." For the ancient Greek, *paideia* was a comprehensive approach to training a child, in order that that child would become a fully-equipped adult. The goal was to lead the child toward excellence, which is represented by another Greek word—*areté*. This is a concept that the Romans adopted into their education. They saw this as the development of the human. So, the Greek word, *paideia,* was translated into the Latin word, *humanitas.* From *humanitas*, we derive the word "humanities," that is, the study of the Liberal Arts. Both the Greek concept of *paideia,* and the Roman idea of *humanitas,* identified studies that were necessary to develop a child unto a mature human.

Traditionally, an education in the Humanities, was an education in what was required in order to become a fully-developed and mature human being. In fact, the "virtuous man"—so often a theme in these ancient writers—was the goal of education. And this idea of the virtuous man comes from the Latin word, *wirtus,* or, *virtus,* which is rooted in the idea of "man". In fact, the word, *wirtus*, or *virtus,* is from the Latin word *wir,* or *vir*. And so, this notion is being brought together throughout Classical Antiquity that the goal of education is to bring one who is immature unto the state of maturity. And what's interesting is, the ideal concept of this "virtuous man" was one who is courageous, wise, self-controlled, and just—the four virtues: courage, wisdom, temperance, and justice. It wasn't what the child currently was, but what the child should end up becoming, that directed the course of lessons. There was a clearly-defined goal, which was not just, in our sense of the word, "academic," but it was comprehensive to the training of a child into adulthood. Each child was seen as one who should be developed into a virtuous, mature adult. However, the goal couldn't be realized in a short time. Instead, the ancients instructed the child little by little toward this ideal. This is true with reference to Mathematics; it's true with reference to Science; it's truth with reference to Language.

So let me give you one example—there are many that exist, but one example to help us understand this. Today, there's sometimes an emphasis on what is called "creative writing." A young student, sometimes even as young as five, six, or seven, is given great liberty to write what and how he or

she desires. They are to express themselves. They are to have no boundaries; just put their thoughts on paper. To do otherwise, in many modern schools, is looked upon as too restrictive. However, the ancients had a different understanding. They understood that the child needed training before they could write their own thoughts well or beautifully—before they had good thoughts, virtuous thoughts. This is seen in the Greek writing exercises known as the *progymnasmata.* The word could translate as "the before exercises," that is, the writing exercises one performed before higher levels of rhetoric. These exercises were restrictive. They prescribed such things for the young that consisted in variations of direct copy, retelling, memorization, imitation. In other words, a simple story or fable would be given to the student; they would recite that; read it; they would repeat after the schoolteacher; they would memorize it, these kinds of things taking place. And when they'd done that, they would then write the story as it was. They might then give attention to the grammar of the sentence, understanding the way in which the language works together. They might make notes about what the meaning of certain words was. All of this is an attempt to understand the language, the concept, the story as well. A slightly advanced assignment might be to retell the fable without embellishment. They're not developing things—they're simply retelling it. Then, a more advanced assignment might be to write a fable after the manner of the fable that was read—an imitation. So, there isn't an initial, at an early age, liberty to the student to do what they thought was to be done, or what they wanted to do. Instead, the teachers were giving the students precisely-prescribed exercises they were to master.

What is important to know in this abbreviated example that's been simplified, is that the ancients understood that before one could engage in what we today call "creative writing," or perhaps even "self-expression," the students needed to have mastered excellent stories from others. They needed to see and understand how language worked. They needed to be filled with excellent models before they could begin to work with those models to write original stories or speeches. This is one example of the ancients understanding that a child needed to be developed unto maturity. They shouldn't be expected to write well, or to know what good writing was until they had been exposed to it, understood it, imitated it, mastered it, been mastered by it. They then would be able to go forth, having mastered these things, unto true and beautiful expressions of their own thoughts. The ancients had a goal, and they had a plan to develop a child well to reach that goal.

A second element—*Education Was to Cultivate a Love for Truth*. Now, of course, in the ancient world, there were teachers who were simply trying to make money. And there were others in Antiquity, generally identified as "the Sophists," who taught students how to win any argument in court, by whatever means that would work. In other words, truth is not the main thing for them. However, the emphasis that has stood the test of time from the ancient schools has been a quest to know the truth. We see this just before the Hellenistic age, through the discussions of Socrates, as written by Plato. We can also see it in Plato's student, Aristotle. We see the same emphases later in Cicero, a significant Roman orator and teacher, and likewise in Quintilian, an orator and teacher in the first century AD. Each of these men wielded overwhelming influence on education, and each of them emphasized a quest for truth.

If you read Plato's *Dialogues* you'll be struck by how engaging they often are. They often don't fit the contemporary view of what philosophy is. Additionally, you'll find that the participants in his *Dialogues* were often working back and forth in debate, in lacking clarity, seeking clarity toward an understanding of the truth. Many times there's a sense that they are near to understanding the truth, but they cannot fully comprehend it. Among the more famous sayings of Socrates is found in Plato's *Apology of Socrates,* wherein he's recorded to have said, "I know that I know nothing."

However, what is clear in Plato's *Dialogues* is that they know there is truth. Socrates is represented as knowing that there is truth, but he's not fully comprehended it; they're striving to understand it.

The works of Aristotle that we have are often more direct. If you read Aristotle's collection of six works on logic, called *The Organon*, or "instrument," you'll be impressed by the detailed thought he gave to the right method of reasoning, in order to distinguish truth from error. Quintilian, arguably the best teacher of classical rhetoric, considered that the best orator would be a good man in the highest sense, a virtuous man who was committed to the truth. What's more, each of these men, in their associated schools and influence, emphasize the study of "what is"—that is, what's around them. They were to look at these things, consider these things, and represent these things well, and learn from the things that surrounded them. Aristotle's works, for instance, spread across the topics of logic, and biology, ethics, meteorology, and more. He was interested in knowing the truth of the world that was, and directing his students to know the truth as well.

The ancients were limited, of course, in that they only had the natural revelation of the world around them. They did not have the inspired Scriptures of the Old or New Testaments. Because of this, they were often wrong about important truths, and they were without any ability to articulate saving truths. However, what they were able to observe and think through, by careful attention, led them to obtain great insight regarding the world and man. They were not interested in merely following their own preferences or desires. Instead, they saw that they needed to discover and discern what was true. This stands in contrast to much of our own world today. Many have lost the thought that there is something that is actually true. People speak of "my truth," or "your truth." But the ancients rightly understood that there is actually truth. This aligns with the teaching of Scripture; there is objective truth that we ought to learn—something we'll consider in the rest of our lessons.

Well, the third key element—*Education Was to Engage the Whole Person*. While we tend to think of philosophers today as people who are only concerned about abstracted thought and questions that have little to do with everyday living, the ancient philosopher, a lover of wisdom, recognized the importance of the whole person—his body and soul, his mind, his affections, and so on. Well, first, we can see the ancients' understanding of this importance, in that the ancients emphasized the importance of music. To the ancients, music was more than vocal or instrumental music, as we refer to it today. Our word, "music," comes from the Greek word for the muses, the mythological daughters of Zeus. These mythological daughters were supposed to be the ones who provided understanding and skill in a variety of arts. Thus, "music" referred generally to poetry and dance, and what we think of today as music as well. Plato, in his book, *Republic,* and his book, *The Law,* has taught the importance of this broad understanding of music and its role in education. In general, he saw that melody, and poetry, and dance were necessary in order to help form the mind and soul of the student. It was training, not just their understanding of measure, and so on, but it would actually have an impact upon the cultivation of their desires to love what's beautiful, to love what's good, which would then help them to love what is morally beautiful, and morally good. It's interesting, Homer's *Iliad,* and *Odyssey*, two of the most important books of the Ancient era, they stand above other books. These books are not simply literature, as we think of them like a novel. They are actually epic poems. They were written in specific meter, and with developed imagery, and figures of speech, descriptive language. And in these, we find such heroes, as, for instance, Achilles, the great warrior in *The Iliad,* playing the lyre and singing. *The Iliad* and *Odyssey* themselves were likely works that were recited and sung for generations before being put into writing. Additionally, music, in its vocal and instrumental sense, was understood as an

important aid to learning and cultivating character. Plato taught that music could exemplify and cultivate harmony. Just as melodic harmony is beautiful and pleasing, virtuous harmony and civil harmony should be seen as beautiful and desirable. Music taught ideas of balance, beauty, and courage. He cautioned against certain melodies and rhythms which could lead to various vices. Plato and other ancients didn't see music as indifferent. Instead, they saw music as an important piece of one's education, and one that could either direct one toward virtuous maturity, or childish immaturity. Music was a way to address the whole man—his thoughts, his understanding, his affections, and emotions.

A second way we see the whole man in education is the importance that the ancients placed on developing one's body. Now, clearly, this could become, and oftentimes did become too much of a focus. In fact, separated from God's grace, it seems that it often did. However, this is not to ignore an important truth. Humans have a mind and a body. If you read the ancients, you'll often see them refer to "the gymnasium." This was a place where students developed their athletic ability and control over their bodies. They were taught certain exercises; they engaged in activities like running, and jumping, and wrestling, and boxing. They also learned basics of hygiene and medicine, and these were things that children were being taught and trained in. Now, there were occasionally various purposes for these things, like preparing for war, and other such things. But as they were incorporated into the general education, they were seen as an important foundation for training the whole person. The physical actions were needed for the mature adult.

Well, there are many things that we could say about this, but we must move on, to raise a question in conclusion: *What do we do with these things?* We've only hinted at them. We've only pointed them out. But we've had enough to at least raise the question, What do we do with it? You may be homeschooling young children, or you may be a teacher in a classroom, and you're convinced that some of these things need to be incorporated. But what do we do with it? As you're asking, how do you better engage the students before you, these are things that we can start to apply. We aren't in a position to offer a full statement right now, of how Classical Christian Education can apply, but there are a few things we can glean from these three key elements.

First, remember *that you, as the teacher, are leading these children toward a goal.* The ancients saw this as the virtuous man—courageous, wise, self-controlled, and just. Again, there's more to say, and we our goal fully informed by the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, but we can at least start here. You can assess your curriculum or your lessons, and ask, Are these leading them to learn how to be virtuous? Are the stories they read exposing them to the heroic, to self-sacrifice, to self-control? Are they leading them to love what is wise? Although they are still children, you have the responsibility to be leading them along the path toward maturity. Now, this, of course, comes with a personal application. In order to lead them toward maturity, you, as the teacher, need to be mature yourself. You need to be cultivating wisdom and all the virtues. You need to be exposing yourself to those things which are beautiful and noble, and which will continue to cultivate maturity in your own life. If you are to lead them toward that, you have to have some sense of what that is.

Second, *Remember that you're to help them discern and embrace truth*. Ultimately, this is taught to us in the Holy Scriptures, and we'll discuss this more. However, we shouldn't forget that God made the whole world. He made the animals and plants; he made the sun, the moon, the stars; he made our minds and emotions. He made the foundations for civilization. There are understandings that align with what these actually are. There are understandings that do not align with what they are. This is the difference between truth and error. You are to be the teacher of truth.

Teach them to know what truth is. Teach them how to discern truth. This, eventually, demands that our students learn formal logic. Logic is not to be the master, but a servant to the truth. Does this mean that our young children have to be reading Aristotle, or some treatise on logic?—no. Our eight-year-old is able to begin learning what is the difference between something that's true and untrue, and begin to learn what a good argument is versus a bad argument. And as they mature over time, then yes, they'll be able to pick up various books that deal with logic directly.

But likewise, again, this means that your arguments should be sound. You should be one that is holding forth the truth. You shouldn't be cultivating prejudice against something, but rather, showing what it is that is before them. In English, we have this expression of a "straw man" versus a "steel man". And a straw man is this weak argument representing our enemies. We put their weakest argument forward, and we destroy that. But in doing so, we haven't actually helped others learn the truth. Better is to put the best argument of our opponents before us—the steel man—and show what's wrong with it. Well this is one way that we can help our students. Don't satisfy yourself with the straw man argument. But rather, cultivate the steel man argument, so that you'll help your students see that truth has no fear.

Well, there's more, again, that could be said, but a third application to help us implement these things in our classrooms, *Remember that your children or your students are whole people*. They're physical, their spiritual, they have a human body, a rational soul; they have emotions, affections. Yes, you must teach their mind; we'll talk a lot about this. But you must also address their bodies. Just as Plato observed, and our own experience confirms, music lyrical and instrumental can influence our thoughts and desires. Music can bring our thoughts to a noble height. But music can also influence us into a very vain and flippant attitude. We can only know these through our physical sense of hearing, but it influences our thoughts and our feelings. While music cannot teach us directly two plus two equals four, it can assist us to learn about beauty, and harmony, and desire. So find time-tested, noble, and beautiful music to play for them. In time, teach them what makes some music beautiful—certain tones, certain melodies, harmonies. Much of what passes for music today is simply not virtuous. It is neither cultivating courage, self-control, or wisdom, or justice. Instead, it's often cultivating selfishness, self-abandonment, self-absorption. We need to reassess these things, and expose our children to the beauty of dignified music. And though they may not want to like it at first, remember, you're the one leading them in this path.

We should similarly ensure that we're teaching our children and students basics of physical development—basic things, like good posture, and balance. These are, of course, appropriate. However, we should also include physical competitions—running, and jumping, and throwing things, by which they can be challenged and grow. These teach healthy habits of physical fitness. They also teach us how to lose in a way that is honorable, because not everyone can win. In a day that awards all children trophies and awards all the time, it doesn't teach us, the world doesn't teach us how to lose gracefully. Competitions in classrooms can help us with that. They expose certain selfishnesses, and they help the teacher to then guide and shepherd them in a way that's honorable. It can also help us to learn how to win graciously—not proud and puffed up, but rather giving thanks and honoring those who didn't win. Though sports seems to rule the Western world, this shouldn't lead us to neglect the fact that our bodies are real things that need development. As many can testify personally, our minds are often at their best when our physical bodies are doing well. We've exercised our bodies, eaten a healthy meal, we've slept well at night, and these assist our ability to think and focus. Now, the physical activities shouldn't dominate our attention, however, they shouldn't escape our focus either. Be sure that your children and your students are

learning the basics of a physically healthy life, and are engaged in it.

Well, we've come to the end of this lesson, and again, we've been only able to hint at some key elements in ancient education, as summaries. And if you read more deeply, you'll see that these are but points where you can go further into the reading of ancient education. I hope that these hints have helped you have a better sense of what the ancients emphasized. In our next lesson, we'll deal with a question that often arises as we begin to think about Classical Education, and that is, Why should the Christian spend time reading the ancient pagans? Well, we'll look forward to that, until then, may the Lord bless you.