

STUDY GUIDE

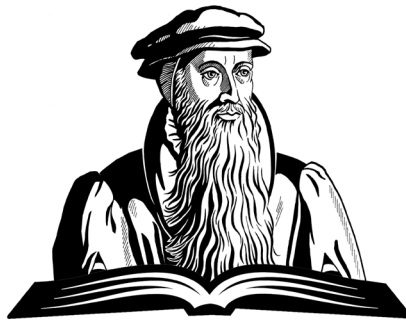
for

Classical Christian Education

Video Lecture Series
by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

LECTURE #4

Reading Authors from Antiquity with Discernment and Benefit



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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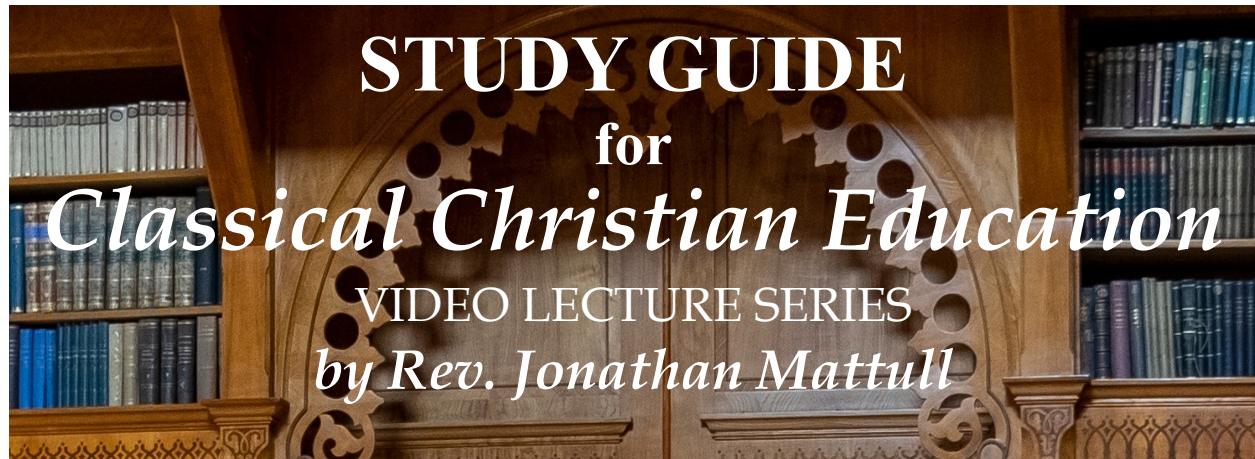
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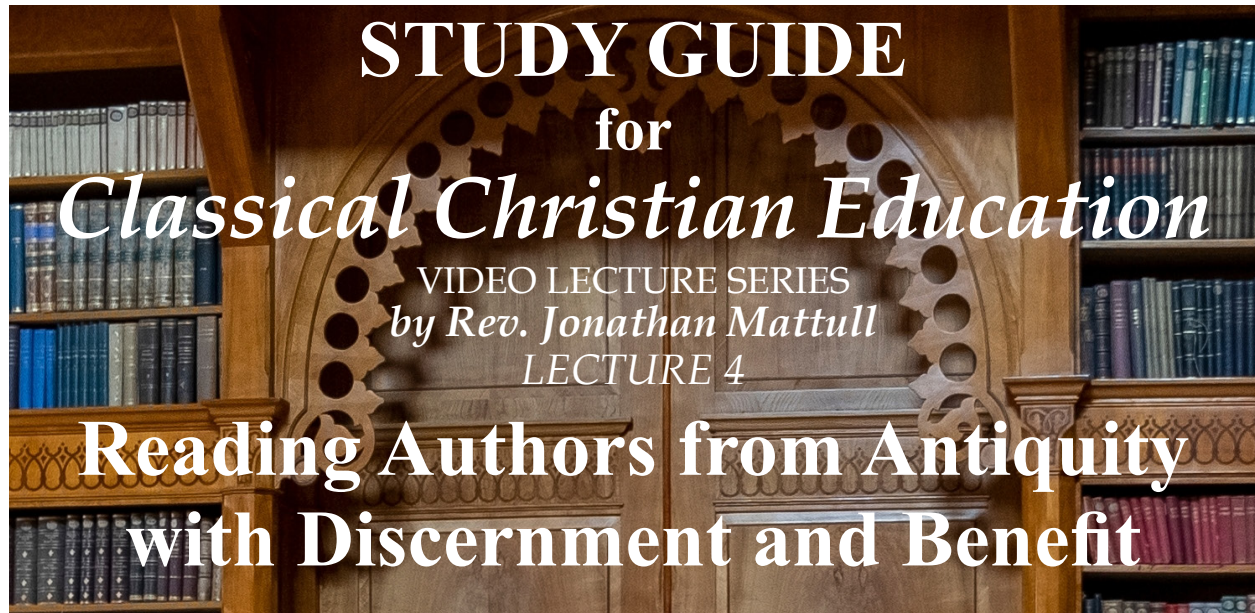
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Rev. Jonathan Mattull is minister of the gospel at Sovereign Grace Presbyterian Church, in St. Louis, Missouri, a congregation of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), Presbytery of the United States of America.

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Introduction

This marks the fourth lesson in our series on education. In it, we look at Classical Christian Education in reading the pagans. In Classical Christian Education, students and teachers will be exposed to the reading of pagan literature, poetry, rhetoric, and philosophy. While acknowledging a need for discernment, this lesson must show why and how one must incorporate this material into his education.

Theme

Reading Authors from Antiquity with Discernment and Benefit

Key Points

1. A Biblical Model

a. Moses, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were all trained in pagan schools.

1) Acts 7:22

b. The Apostle Paul must have been schooled in pagan literature because he made use of it in his public speaking and preaching.

1) Acts 17:28—he quoted from Greek poets, Aratus and Epimenides, to teach his audience the truth about the true God.

2) 1 Corinthians 15:33—Paul quoted from Menander, another ancient poet.

3) Titus 1:12—Paul quoted again from Epimenides.

c. Paul discerned elements in the pagan literature that stated truth, and he used it to argue for the one true and Triune God.

1) 2 Corinthians 10:5—Paul adopted truths in pagan writings to support his arguments.

d. Paul was not saying everything the ancient pagans wrote was true.

1) Paul read the pagan writers and studied them, then memorized certain portions and adopted their writings to the service of Christ.

2. A Theological Explanation as to Reading the Pagans

a. General revelation and special revelation.

1) God has revealed non-saving truths about himself and mankind through creation.

2) Saving truths about God, about Jesus Christ, and the way of salvation is only revealed through the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

b. We can learn earthly things from the pagans in how they observe the world—John Calvin.

3. A Pastoral Warning.

a. When reading Classic literature, the teacher needs to help their students to exercise discernment, to receive the truths, and reject the errors.

1) A quote from Augustine—all Christians should understand truth.

2) Teachers need to warn students of problems, errors, and faults in the ancients.

b. Some Classical literature is not appropriate for certain ages, and other Classical literature is not appropriate for any age at all.

1) We need to exercise care that the literature we use is pure and noble, but warn students if there are errors or problems.

2) We should help students to formulate their own ability to see truth and error—teach them to compare Classical literature with the Scriptures.

3) This will help the students to discern truth and error in the present world

4. Conclusion: Where does all this lead us?

a. It gives us warrant to read the ancient writers well.

b. It demonstrates that we need to do this with discernment.

c. It directs us to make use of what is good and beautiful in the ancients, and employ it to God's glory.

Study Questions

1. Where do we see pagan literature being used in the Bible? How do we know that key biblical figures themselves had been educated in the ancient pagans? How do we understand this providence?

2. It is recorded in the Bible that the Apostle Paul quoted pagan writers in his speech in Acts 17:28, and again in his epistles in 1 Corinthians 15:33, and Titus 1:12. Which pagan writers were quoted in those texts? What does that tell us about Paul's education?

3. Why was it important for Paul to be able to discern what part was pointing to truth in the pagan literature, and what part was corrupt? How did Paul use this in the service to God?

4. We acknowledge that not everything in pagan literature is noble, good, and worthy of our acceptance. How important is it for students to develop an ability to discern the truth? How is that a key feature in the examples in our biblical model?

5. What is general revelation, and what is special revelation? What truths can man learn about God from studying the general revelation, according to Romans 1, verses 18 to 21? Why were the ancient pagans unable to learn saving truths about God?

6. John Calvin said that we could learn much from the ancient pagans because of their observations of the world. How did Calvin explain the work of the Spirit of God in general revelation? What does that imply about how we can benefit from reading the ancient authors?

7. In what ways can a teacher help students to learn to exercise discernment when reading the ancients? What should they compare it to? What was the point that Augustine made regarding discernment in his book *On Christian Doctrine*?

8. We recognize that some Classical literature is simply not appropriate for certain ages, and other literature is not appropriate for any age. How should this influence our selection of books and writings for our students' curriculum? How should we present this literature to our students to help them develop their own skills in discernment?

9. How does this give us warrant to read the authors from antiquity? What is the Christian's standard for what is acceptable before God?

10. What does it mean to "plunder the Egyptians"? How should we employ all these skills that we're gleaning in our education?

Further Study

1. Please study the quotes from John Calvin and Augustine that are given in this lecture. See if you can find them in their works and read them in the broader context. Keep a notebook of your thoughts.

2. What are some books of the ancient writers that you have read? Please share the benefits you derived and how you employ them in your Christian service. What difficulties, literally or morally, have to encountered in your reading the ancient authors?
