

# STUDY GUIDE

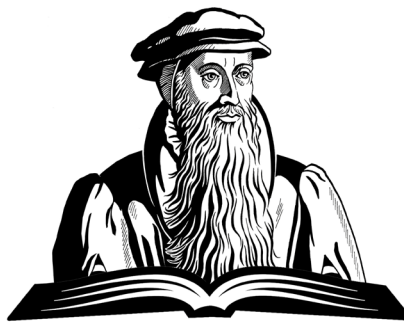
for

## *Classical Christian Education*

Video Lecture Series  
*by Rev. Jonathan Mattull*

LECTURE #8

## Historical Overview of Classical Education



**The John Knox Institute**  
of Higher Education

**John Knox Institute of Higher Education**

*Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide*

© 2025 by John Knox Institute of Higher Education

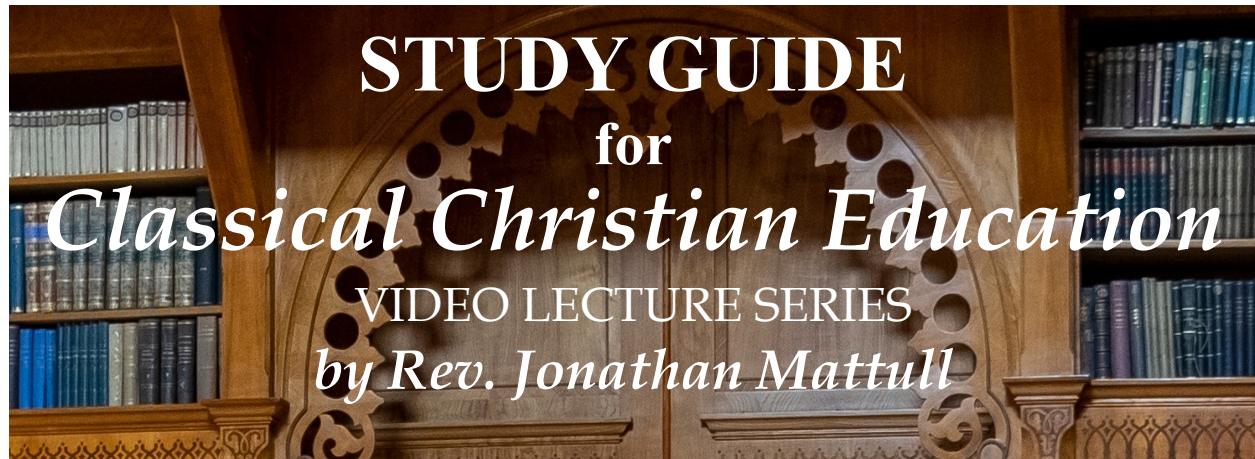
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means for profit, except in brief quotations for the purposes of review, comment, or scholarship, without written permission from the publisher, John Knox Institute, P.O. Box 19398, Kalamazoo, MI 49019-19398, USA.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the Authorized King James Version.

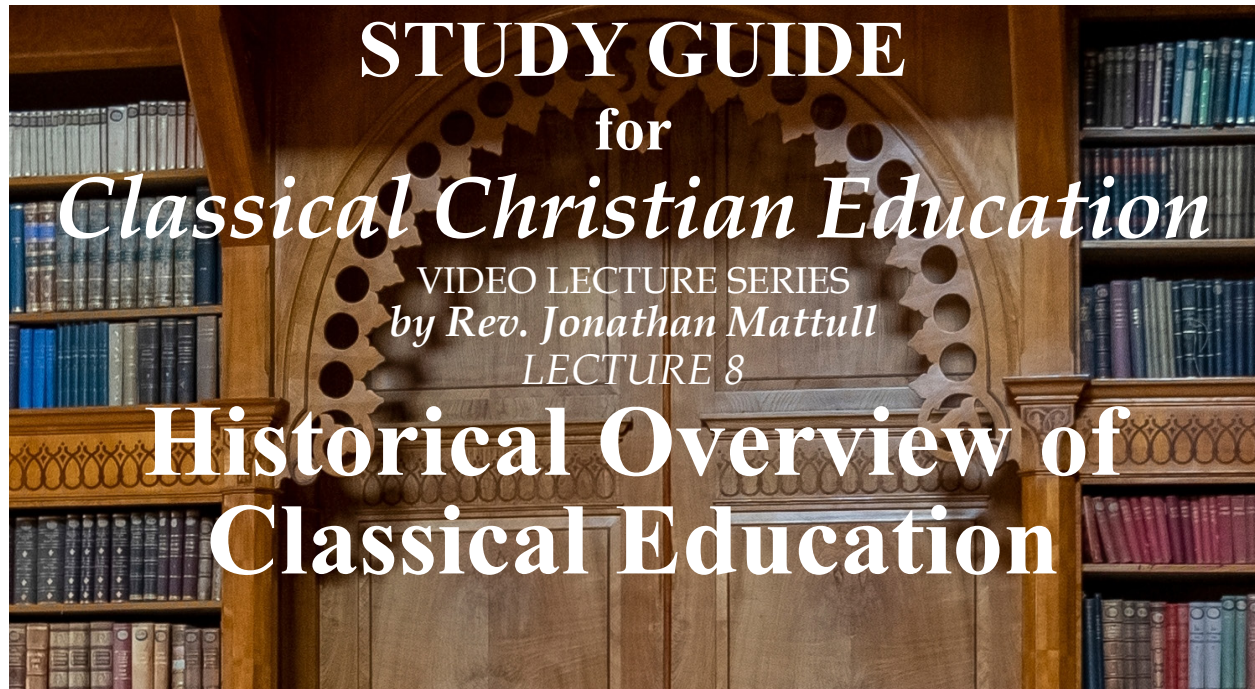
Visit our website: [www.johnknoxinstitute.org](http://www.johnknoxinstitute.org)

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.

[stlpresbyterian.org](http://stlpresbyterian.org)



1. An Introduction to Classical Christian Education
2. Christian Commitments in Education
3. Classical Elements for Education from Antiquity
4. Reading Authors from Antiquity with Discernment and Benefit
5. How Christ Transforms Classical Education
6. The Liberal Arts in Christian Education
7. The Importance of Language in Classical Education
- 8. Historical Overview of Classical Education**
9. Learning from Our Heritage: Education from the Protestant Reformation
10. Potential Dangers in Classical Christian Education
11. Benefits of Classical Christian Education
12. Navigating the World of Education Today
13. Getting Started with Classical Christian Education in the Home or School
14. Continuing the Quest: Life-long Learning
15. Remembering the End: Serving the Lord to God's Glory



### Introduction

As we've seen, Classical Education refers to that education practiced in Classical antiquity. We've noted that it has developed over time, as generations have adapted it for their own particular cultures and their own identified needs. While Rev. Mattull has hinted occasionally at the history of Classical Education, this lesson provides a very brief but illustrative historical survey. While he could have placed this historical survey earlier in our series of lessons, he deferred it until now to emphasize the essence or key commitments of Classical Education. We hope that, having touched on the essence of Classical Education, this historical survey will provide helpful context and illustration of how previous generations practiced Classical Education.

### Theme

An Historical Overview of Classical Education.

### Key Points

1. This lecture is an accurate sketch of the landscape; it will not provide nuances and detail.
  - a. Some authors and books are recommended for further study.
2. Ancient Greek Education.
  - a. Greek education was largely centered in the *gymnasium*.
    - 1) Included music, physical training, philosophy, letters, and language.
    - 2) Formal education was for those who were better off—free citizens, not for slaves.
    - 3) Boys received the main focus of education, but there were schools for young girls.

- b. Ancient Greece had different city-states, each focused on different aspects of education.
    - 1) Sparta focused on promoting military ability.
    - 2) Athens was the center of Classical Education, focused on pursuit of wisdom.
  - c. Ancient Greece is from 800 BC to 31 BC.
    - 1) Classical Greece—800 BC to the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC.
    - 2) The Hellenistic period—323 BC to start of the Roman Empire, 31 BC.
    - 3) Alexander advanced the Greek language and institutions across his great empire.
  - d. Education was divided across three phases: *primary, secondary, and higher education*.
    - 1) *Primary* – taught by the *grammatist*, who taught letters, syllables, and spelling.
    - 2) *Secondary*—taught by the *grammarian*, who taught the *progymnasmata*.
    - 3) *Higher education*—taught by the *rhetor*, who taught finer points of formal rhetoric.
  - e. Greek schools focused on mastering language—the *Trivium*—for 2 reasons:
    - 1) To preserve the Greek heritage of virtues and ideals.
    - 2) To prepare the student for life in the Greek democracy.
  - f. Illustrious teachers in ancient Greece.
    - 1) Socrates (470 to 399 BC), best known through Plato’s *Dialogues*.
    - 2) Plato (428 to 327 BC), founded The Academy school in Athens.
    - 3) Aristotle (384 to 322 BC), studied with Plato; was tutor to Alexander the Great. He established his own school, the Lyceum, in Athens.
3. The Ancient Roman Adoption.
- a. Classical Rome embraced Greek education.
    - 1) Same system, same approach: primary, secondary, and higher education.
  - b. The pinnacle of Roman education was rhetoric.
    - 1) Cicero (106 to 43 BC), a Roman senator and well-respected scholar.
    - 2) Quintillian (AD 35 to 100), lived in the time of the New Testament church. Best known for his work, *Institutes of Oratory*.
4. The Christian Adaptation.
- a. All of New Testament history took place within the Roman Empire.
    - 1) During the Pax Romana, 200 years of Roman peace.
    - 2) The church encountered the culture of the Roman Empire and its institutions, including its approach to education.
    - 3) Early Christians struggled with Roman’s Classical culture because of its idolatry.
    - 4) Tertullian: “What hath Jerusalem to do with Athens?”

- b. Many Christians were trained within antiquity, and used their education to God's glory.
    - 1) Clement of Alexandria (AD 150 to 215).
    - 2) Tertullian (AD 155 to 220).
    - 3) Augustine (Ad 354 to 430).
  - c. If you were a Roman citizen, and you were able, you could send your children to schools.
    - 1) Apart from seasons of persecution, :Christian families sent their children to primary and secondary schools in the Roman Empire.
  - d. Centers of monasticism began, formed isolated societies to escape the paganism of Roman culture. Monasteries were not Classical education, but they preserved learning.
  - e. Important ministers would offer schools to train young men in the faith. They would often learn the Classics while learning the Bible and theology.
  - f. When Constantine legalized Christianity, parochial schools were established.
    - 1) Classics were taught in the three-phased way. Christians were trained in the Classics to read, write, to think, and to speak.
  - g. At the Renaissance, there was a conscious embrace of the Classics.
    - 1) An appeal to go back to the sources, to read the New Testament in Greek, to learn Greek, which was massively recovered at the Reformation.
  - h. Prior to the Reformation, The Brethren of the Common Life was a conscious effort to train children well; great thinkers came out of that:
    - 1) Thomas á Kempis.
    - 2) Erasmus of Rotterdam.
  - i. During the Protestant Reformation, there was a conscious embrace of Classical Education.
5. Conclusion:
- a. We hope to embrace Classical Christian Education with the same concerns that our forefathers had.
    - 1) But all under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

**Study Questions**

1. What was the *gymnasium* in ancient Greek schools? What kinds of studies were held there?

---



---



---



---

2. Why was there not a uniform approach to education in the ancient Greece schools? Can you please give some examples of this?

---

---

---

---

---

3. How was education in ancient Greece divided into three phases? What were the teachers of those stages called, and what did they teach? What division of education became the primary focus in all of these phases of education?

---

---

---

---

---

4. What are the two reasons given in the lecture for the Greek's emphasis upon the *Trivium* in these three levels of education?

---

---

---

---

---

5. The names of several illustrious teachers of ancient Greece were given in the lecture. Please select one of them, show when he lived, and provide a little of his background and his contributions to Classical Education.

---

---

---

---

---

---

6. How did it come to pass that the Roman Empire adopted ancient Greek education? How much of the Greek approach to education was embraced by the Romans? What was changed?

---

---

---

---

---

7. Which language Art was the pinnacle of Roman education? Please tell a little about the two ancient Roman scholars from the lecture. What did the Romans emphasize as the most important purpose for Classical Education?

---

---

---

---

---

8. Rev. Mattull reminds us that all of New Testament history took place within the Roman Empire. How did this affect the expansion of the church? What affect did this have on the adaptation of Classical Education for Christians?

---

---

---

---

---

9. Who are some of the great church fathers named in the lecture who were trained in Classical Education? What does this imply about Classical Education for Christians? What do we learn from Tertullian's quote, "What hath Jerusalem to do with Athens"?

---

---

---

---

---

10. What were some of the other historical movements in Christian education? How did those movements contribute to the development of education?

---

---

---

---

---

**Further Study**

1. For further study on this topic of the history of Classical Education, we recommend to you the following books:

- *A History of Education in Antiquity*, by Henri Irénée Marrou, or H. I. Marrou (1904–1977).
- *Dialogues*, by Plato
- *Institutes Oratory*, by Quintillian
- Some works by Cicero are recommended as well.

2. Tertullian’s warning is worth remembering. What should we always bear in mind as Christians regarding the adaptation of Classical Education? What temptations could arise in the process? How can the Christian avoid them?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---