

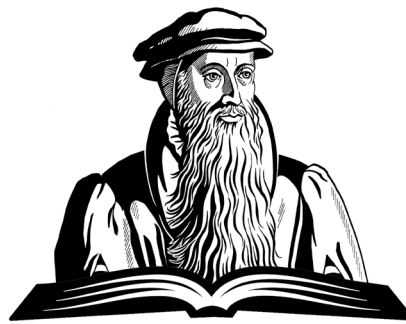
Video Lecture Series

Classical Christian Education

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

LECTURE #11

Benefits of Classical Christian Education



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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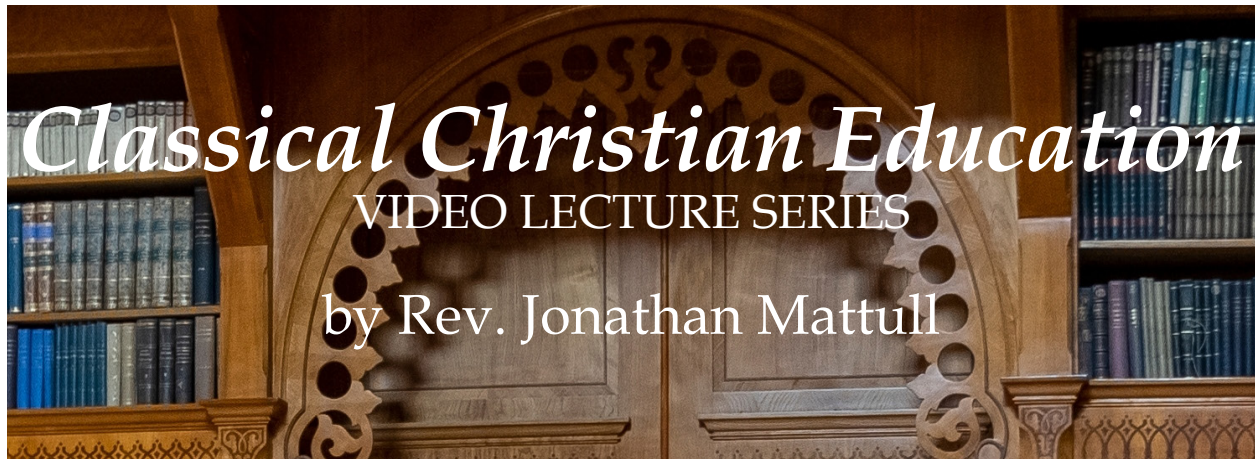
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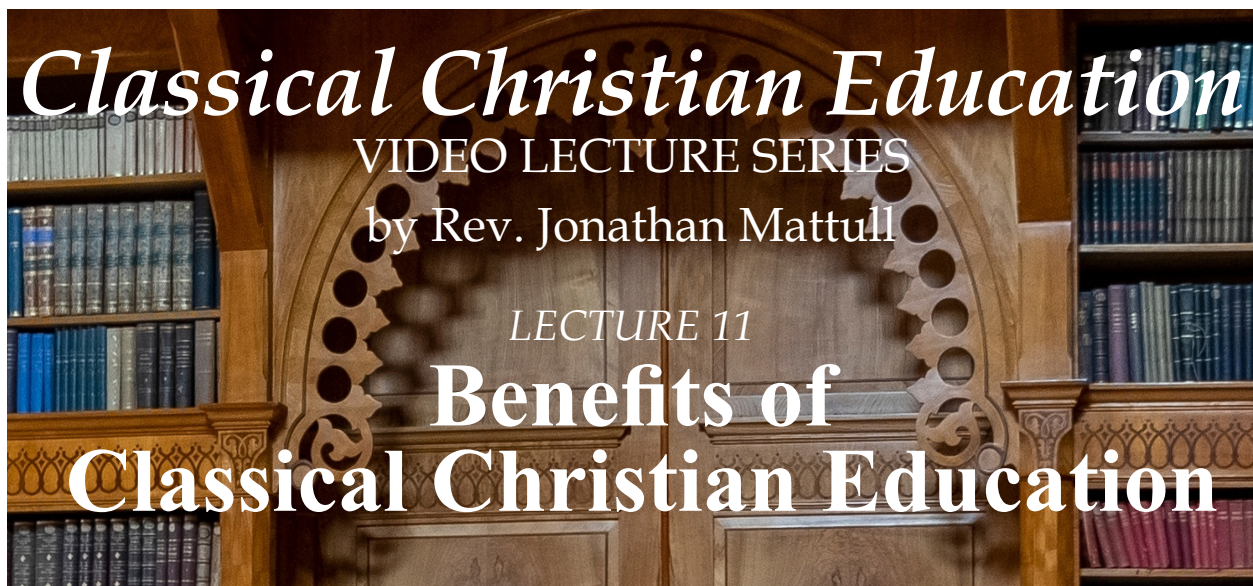
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1. An Introduction to Classical Christian Education
2. Christian Commitments in Education
3. Classical Elements for Education from Antiquity
4. Reading Authors from Antiquity with Discernment and Benefit
5. How Christ Transforms Classical Education
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



i) Introduction

1. Benefits for the Individual
2. Benefits for the Family
3. Benefits for the Church
4. Benefits for Society

Introduction

In our last lesson, we considered some of the potential dangers associated with Classical Christian Education. As we noted then, the dangers are due to mishandling or misunderstanding this approach to education. We must approach the education of our children wisely and humbly, and in all of it, depending upon the Lord for his help. And what a blessing it is that he is able to help us, and has promised Christian parents to provide them help, to his glory. His help and his blessing will not only minimize and avoid dangers, but will also provide us the enjoyment of many benefits.

It's with this lesson that we take up some of those benefits that the Lord provides through Classical Christian Education. There are more than we can handle in one lesson, but I do hope to set before you some of them, in order to encourage you to press on in your pursuit of Classical Education. It may be that you are a single parent, or you're a Christian teacher, or an entire school, or a group of families, and you're thinking through beginning such a thing. And when you really start to look at it, you start to feel the burden and difficulty of all that's before you. You have many more questions than we can answer in our series, and you have many difficulties that are before you. It's helpful in such a moment to step back and to remember that all of those difficulties are worth your pursuit because there are many benefits that you're pursuing.

In our lesson today, we're going to look at those benefits, and doing so, acknowledging that God alone is the one who is able to provide any of these benefits, but if any benefit comes, it is from his mercy alone. But we do acknowledge that God is one who uses means. Classical Christian Education is preeminently a means, and history shows that it's a means that he's been pleased to use, and this to promote wise and virtuous adults. Surely there are those, and sadly so, that will pass through a Classical Christian Education, whether in the homeschool or traditional school

environment, who will prove to be foolish and vicious. This is due to the reality of sin and the matters we discussed in our previous lesson. As one pursues Classical Christian Education, and as God blesses, we look to him to produce wise and virtuous men and women.

So let's look at some of these benefits, and to do so, we'll divide our thoughts into four kinds of benefits: the first being *Benefits for the Individual*; the second being *Benefits for the Family*; the third being *Benefits for the Church*; and the fourth being *Benefits for Society*. So, first, let's consider,

1. The Benefits for the Individual

We should expect that years spent in such a pathway of education will impact those students significantly who are on that pathway. They are studying, and as we've considered, and in many ways just briefly, they're studying the things of wisdom and virtue. They're seeking to master language. They're being exposed to the patterns that God has planted in the world through the discovery of science and mathematics. And all of this begins within a well-planned approach aiming at the goals we've already identified. When one begins in that course, with a purposed and deliberate approach to pursuing wisdom and virtue, to the glory of God through Jesus Christ, the years of investment, by God's blessing, will benefit that individual child.

Well, what are some of those benefits for the individual? As it may prove helpful, let us quickly say what they are not. Very simply, the benefits are not consisting of outward wealth, or health, or prosperity. Now, there are many cases wherein Classical Christian educated men and women have enjoyed the very things of health, wealth, and prosperity. But these are not the benefits that are bound up with Classical Christian Education. Where they occur, we give thanks to God. But those that are more intimately associated with them are far better than health, wealth, and earthly prosperity.

The first benefit we can simply touch upon is *wisdom*. The individual, by God's blessing, as they're exposed to these lessons, and as they're reading great books and well-tested insights into what man is, and what man is to be and do, and how they're to think, how society is to be set up, and what justice is, and all of these different aspects of what they're exposed to and trained in, they, by God's blessing, learn wisdom. Now, in a Christian school, in particular, they are greeted with the very beginning of wisdom: they have teachers, whether a parent or a teacher in a classroom, who themselves possess the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of wisdom. And so, you think, whether in the home, or in a school setting, a child who is passing through an entire curriculum, in every subject, wherein the teacher is one who fears the Lord, that child is going to gain the benefit of learning what wisdom looks like, how wisdom speaks, how wisdom approaches difficulties, how wisdom approaches weighty topics. And in doing so, they'll begin to learn what wisdom is, not just through propositional learning—reading books and other such things—but seeing it set forth by godly examples of parents and teachers. These influence the student to cultivate wisdom in ways that books, on their own, cannot. But when you couple a God-fearing teacher with excellent material, you have even a greater, joined-together influence for the benefit of the student.

You think for a moment, whatever the vocation is that this child may eventually enter in, to be wise, to carry themselves and speak wisely, to think well and carefully, not moved by the passing trends of the age, but rather, seeking truly wisdom which is from above. Think of the peace and purity that will, indeed, accompany that individual in whatever circumstances they may find themselves in—whether poor or rich; whether with many friends or no friends—this benefit of wisdom is a benefit that is truly incomparable. Now, there's much more that could be said of that,

but we simply assert it.

A second benefit to the individual is *eloquence*. Eloquence is that ability to speak truly, beautifully, and persuasively, according to the audience and needs at hand. When one has that ability, they may not prove to be a public speaker, in so many words, but they're able to take the matter of truth, to consider the one they're speaking to, and to form their words in such a way as promotes the cause of truth well. That is a great benefit in every area of life. Whether one does go into some vocation that demands much public speaking, or whether one is simply focused on their children at home, these things demand true eloquence. Forming our words, well-chosen words, beautiful words to promote the cause of truth. To be eloquent is a great blessing that far exceeds the passing vanity of being popular on social media. To be eloquent may not attract so many followers, but it will minister far greater blessings to the ones that one speaks to. This benefit is a benefit that exceeds what passing trends provide.

A third benefit, as God blesses these things, is the individual will cultivate *piety*. And piety is the outworking of fearing God. A pious person certainly will be one who treasures God's Word, and who is devoted to prayer and public worship, but the whole of their life will be one that's devoted to God. Now, preeminently, God teaches us piety through his Word, and in the very heart of Classical Christian Education, God's Word is found. It's taught in the earliest grades through the last grades. It's exemplified through the life of whether the parent teaching or the teacher in the classroom. The whole approach is one of cultivating piety. And not just in a vague and general sense, but rather in the concrete sense of cultivating the practice of prayer, the attentive reading of God's Word, the memorization of Psalms and other portions of God's Word, the attendance upon the preaching of God's Word in a chapel. All of these things are taking place in the context of the Classical Christian school. Moreover, as they develop in their ability, and maturity, and understanding, they're able to read some of the excellent standards of theology. They're able to read sermons that have influenced whole ages. And as their doing so, they're learning about God.

And of course, the parents and teachers are praying earnestly that the Lord would bless this means to impact their own soul, and to guide them into the living out of these principles of God's Word. To have this as a benefit, is to find a treasury that is not found in the majority of schools. And all of the wisdom and the eloquence, which we've already noted, which will be theirs by God's blessing, is now lived out in a God-fearing way. To put these three things together is to provide a great storehouse of blessing to the individual. In the end, the benefit for the individual is *maturity* for service to God and service to others. They'll be well equipped to that in whatever calling God gives them.

Now, the world may not consider this a significant benefit. We can say without any hesitation, the world needs such individuals more than they need wealthy and prosperous men and women. What a blessing it is that wealth and prosperity are given to wise, and eloquent, and pious men, because then their wealth is not used for selfish ends, but for service to others. But even without wealth, and health, and prosperity, what a blessing to the world to have wise, eloquent, and pious men and women that will prove to be a blessing, and indeed, the world will look back and say, "These were the ones we needed."

Well, from the individual benefits, second, let's move on to consider,

2. The Benefits that Come to the Family

In almost every case, the individual student will be part of a family. There are, however, instances where there are orphans receiving a Classical Christian Education. And yet, even they

will be in the context of some one or group of individuals that provide them care, wherein the life of that individual will take place. So, even in the exceptional case, as an orphan receiving such education, there are benefits that are similar to what it is to be in a family. The benefits for the family are not limited to homeschooling families. If a child is sent to a Classical Christian school, by God's blessing, the family will receive certain blessings as well. Furthermore, if that student marries, his or her future family will enjoy these benefits, as they are still being lived out.

So let's be clear—the benefits do not make family life easy or without friction. Every family—the family that attends the most faithful church; the family with the most faithful doctrine; the family that goes to the best school, will encounter a broken world. Indeed, they are part of it. Every individual brings sin into the home. Every individual contributes to the friction in the home. So, we're not saying that Classical Christian Education solves that, and that such families have fewer problems. Rather, we mean that the culture of Classical Christian Education influences what the culture of the home is. Diligent attention to language, and history, beauty, God's creation as discerned through the diligent use of science or mathematics, and of course, the study of His Word—these provide a great opportunity to impact the family for good. Let me emphasize, this needs to be pursued in the home outside of the actual schooling as well. Far too often, families can fall into the trap of thinking, "I'm sending my children to the school," or, "They're studying this curriculum in the home, and that's enough." For the benefits to come to the family, the family needs to participate in a variety of ways.

Well, let's look at one of the main benefits the family will enjoy, if they engage actively in the process. The family is given the opportunity and the benefit of engaging in deep and meaningful conversations about truth, beauty, and goodness. We don't mean that lighthearted conversations about passing things is unhealthy or unprofitable. There are helpful things that come through a moment's lighthearted discussion. There are common things that we talk about in our homes that need to be talked about. There's a place for this in the course of the day, and of the week, the month, and so on. However, we mean that the studies and attention of the classroom bring benefits to the discussions that will take place in the home. As the child is studying the meaning of justice, think of the many ways a mom or dad can bring that topic into relevant discussion of the matters that take place in the world today. They can make connections that, perhaps, the child is not yet making. Or, when the child is older, and the parents are discussing some of the relevant matters, the parents are able to engage in that, and there's a multiplying of the benefit, both to the individual, but also to the family. And things of substance, things of worth, things of meaning start to permeate the very family life.

All of this demands effort, but the effort is well worth it. When the child, for instance, is memorizing various passages of the Bible, it may be tempting just to say, "What are you memorizing?" But think of the opportunity that family has to consider the passage together, and to allow God's Word to permeate their home. Think of the great privilege it is for a family to find out what's being studied in the classroom about a book of Bible, or the history of Israel, and start to discuss that in the home, as they rise up, as they walk by their way, as they lie down. And so, what's going on in Bible class, or theology class is then carried into the home. The student will be encouraged by that and helped by it, but the family will receive blessing as well. Well, the Lord's Word begins to permeate the whole of the home, by his blessing, bringing many benefits.

Or think for a moment, when the child is wrestling through difficult parts of history, and the

evil of man is in the forefront of his attention, and he thinks, for instance, of the Holocaust,¹ or other cruelties throughout history, and is wondering and struggling to understand such evil. The family has an opportunity to lament the wickedness of man, and to acknowledge that the world is broken, but also, to remind the student, the child, that there is hope in the gospel. And likewise, when there are great things and heroics that are remembered and recounted in history, or as they're reading such things in literature, and as their hearts are moved to aspire to such heroic, self-denying actions, what an opportunity is given for the parents to discuss that, the siblings to discuss that, to encourage similar things, by the grace of God.

We don't mean to set forth a romanticized view or version of what takes place in the home. All of this, rarely, if ever, happens at home. People get sick; there's a hard day's work; there's stuff going on in the home. Parents need to take an active interest in this process. The parents need to make the connection. They need to tease out the relationships of what's being learned in the classroom, what's going on in the world, what's going on in the heart, what's going on in the home. That's difficult, and it requires work, but it's work that well worth it. The discussions at the dinner tables, and even in down time, can become some of the richest moments the family will enjoy. And to enjoy them well in the family, there must be prayer. And, as a parent, perhaps, or as a teacher, it's important for you to pray for your children, for your students, that what's going on their learning would be carried on and confirmed in the home. Because it's there that the Lord will most wondrously bless the truths of his Word, and cultivate, and to bring forth much fruit.

These conversations will provide opportunity for the family to engage in some of the weightiest matters that ever the world has faced or will face. And this will contribute to the family's growth as well. Fathers and mothers will be able to share their insight, and pass on their learning and their experience on the important topics covered in history, literature, and science. Siblings young old will participate; the younger starting to be stretched, the older being able to contribute. This will develop a family whose thought it focused upon important matters. This, by God's blessing, will lead to important action.

As they're discussing things of substance, the parents can direct that to activity. The home then becomes a place where these things are nurtured and matured. Instead of a family focused on the passing trends of the day, the family will be engaged in the lasting subjects of our past, present, and future. This is the kind of family we want, and one of the benefits, by the Lord's blessing, that comes as we engage in Classical Christian Education. Well, third, let's continue our thoughts by looking at,

3. The Benefits for the Church

As the students and families are members of local congregations, they'll bring with them benefits to the church, by God's blessing. We don't mean that Classical Christian Education is, in and of itself, absolutely necessary for bringing blessings to congregations. There are plenty of examples throughout history, where, so far as we can tell, none of the members received this education we've been discussing, and yet were richly blessed by the Spirit, through the Word of God.

However, we have witnessed the great blessings enjoyed in the church, both through reading the pages of history, but also in witnessing it today, those great blessings to the church when

¹ The Holocaust, known in Hebrew as *the Shoah*, was the genocide of European Jews during World War II. From 1941 to 1945, Nazi Germany and its collaborators systematically murdered some six million Jews across German-occupied Europe, which was about two-thirds of Europe's Jewish population.

families have embraced this approach to education. We can divide these benefits into two kinds—*that kind that is immediately enjoyed*, and second, *that kind which may potentially be enjoyed*.

So, for the first, *the benefits that are immediately enjoyed*. Churches will witness children in families with greater attention to the written and preached Word. If anything approximating what we've discussed historically regarding attention to language is practiced in schools that we're discussing today, if anything like that takes place, there will necessarily be a diligent attention to words. And of course, the Bible is God's written Word for us. So, preachers that are faithful are preaching his Word, and they're often making points—look how this word relates to that word, or how this word is to be understood, how this passage relates to this context, or how this book relates to that book, or this event to that event. And then children and families who are engaged in this approach to education will be better equipped to understand the points being made. Moreover, as they're studying history, and they study the ancient empires, and they come to such a book as Daniel, they'll be able to understand something of what was going on at that time, and be able to place Daniel in the timeline of history. Or when the visions are given of the various empires that were to come, the students will be able to realize how this relates to Alexander the Great, and how this is just a backdrop for the more glorious kingdom of the Jesus Christ. And they'll be able to appreciate the message of Scripture even more, all of this, most certainly requiring God's blessing. But because it requires God blessing doesn't permit us to say, "We're going to sit back and wait for it to happen. Instead, we're seeking him, in making use of the best means to provide, as it were, the context for blessing.

The very nature of Classical Christian Education promotes care with language. This demands attention. Today, the attention span of most people has plummeted. With that, there has been a sharp decrease in the ability to follow an argument, to think deeply upon sustained discussion, and consequently, the difficulty to attend upon the preaching of God's Word. Classical Christian Education cultivates the attention span, and the reasoning ability, the thinking ability of its students, which, blessed of God, is a great benefit, when it comes to listening to God's Word and joining in God's worship.

Additionally, such students will be familiar with the Scriptures that are before them. In classes, they'll be learning the books of the Bible. They'll have what we can call a biblical literacy—not only able to read God's Word, but to understand the basics of it: the relationship of the Old and New Testaments; the historical timeline that takes place throughout the Bible. They'll be able to have the books of the Bible memorized, and understand what the books of the Bible are about—their themes and relationships with one another. They'll have key passages memorized. All of which has taken place over the course of the year in the classroom. What a great provision and help that is for the church, to have such children who have such learning.

All of these things are benefits that, in the end, help the church. The preacher, of course, will be greatly encouraged to see young ones attending upon God's Word. But similarly, as these children grow and mature, they'll be helps to others in the church. We think as well, as the students are well-steeped, not only in the Bible directly, but through the classroom, the Catechism, and doctrinal teachings of the church, what a blessing that will be, to give them a great ability to understand what the preacher is sharing.

All of this is showing a simple point—Classical Christian Education provides a seedbed of opportunity for pastors and elders. Yes, you'll always need the divine blessing of God, but think what a blessing it would be should such boys and girls be converted. In fact, we don't have to imagine it so much, but simply to look back in history and see the fruit of such things. Yes, God is

pleased to save the foolish and the untaught, the unschooled, and God is able to do extraordinary things with them. But we shouldn't deny the fact that there have been great movements of the church where men and women who received such an education were converted and made serviceable in humility with these tools and skills they've gleaned, and the approach to life that they have had cultivated in them. This would prove to be a great blessing to the church, and through the church, to the world.

Let me move to *those benefits which may potentially be enjoyed in the church*. While, in some sense, all of these benefits are potential, we mean by this something very particular. The education that a student received prepares them for the future in a variety of ways. Parents will not know what God has in store for their children, but some of our sons will be converted and called to serve the church as pastors, or elders, or deacons. Now, that's not something that we're simply to look upon as a desire for our children, as if one is unable to live out a life that glorifies and enjoys God if they're not a pastor, or elder, or deacon. But it is to indicate something important. There can be many things done to enhance and help those who are called to office in later years. But the benefits that come to such men who have received a Classical Christian Education are almost impossible to assess fully. Let me limit my point to considering simply the benefits that would come to a pastor.

So, we think in general terms, a pastor is charged to preach the Word. Well, what is the Bible made up of?—words, sentences. It's made up of thought that needs to be understood faithfully, rightly, clearly. And then, what does that preacher have to do? He has to understand the message; he has to understand his people; and he has to formulate a message to preach, faithful to the Word, whereby it would be said he's not teaching his own word, but preaching the Word, as Paul tells Timothy. But he has to preach that Word with words that are understandable by the people, and noble, as God's Word says, and dependent upon the Spirit. This is fundamentally what a Classical Christian Education assists in—an ability to understand the words that are before one; the ability to discern the audience before him, whether an individual or as a group, as a pastor would have before him in a congregation; and the ability, by God's blessing, to present the truth to others faithfully.

A pastor must exercise discernment. There's great need to understand the temptations of mankind, and the difficulties, and the trials, and the afflictions that can, in many ways, paralyze individuals in this life. One who has been classically trained in a Christian school has been exposed to the full breadth of human experience, from the most agonizing of miseries, to the most attractive of temptations; the tragedies of one who has chosen what seemed to be right, but was wrong; and the great joy of those who have sacrificed much. They've studied this in literature, in history, they've seen it in the Bible, and they're well equipped then with an ability to discern what's going on in the lives of others. They're able to exercise, not only discernment with propositional truth, but with relational matters as well; to be able to read a person well; to understand motivations; to understand fears, anxieties; to understand that men are sinful, and how to find out what's going on. Among other things that come to one who's been Classically trained in a Christian school, they've been given a great background of understanding mankind. And a pastor has various men and women before them. And from this great background, they're able to discern what's going on, of course, by God's blessing.

Well, a pastor must also serve, and he must serve selflessly and sacrificially. Preeminently we see this in the Scriptures and in the person and work of our beloved Savior. But a Classical Christian Education will assist that one, through all of the learning they've had, to employ all of the things that they've gleaned, to the benefit of others. This means that one who is educated in a Classical Christian setting and is called to the ministry by the grace of God, is one whom God has

equipped with necessary tools to pursue such an office to the glory of God and the good of others.

Well, fourth, and finally, let's touch on,

4. The Benefits for Society

The benefits of Classical Christian Education are not limited to the individual, to the family, or to the church. They extend to all of society. It is impossible for us to know what role our children will have in society, however, they will have a role. It may be as a stay-at-home mom; it may be as a pastor; it may be as a single person; it may be as a lawyer; it may be a man who works in the trades; it may be as a small business owner. The possibilities are almost endless. However, whatever role they play, whatever circumstances surround them, they will have been equipped with wisdom, eloquence, and piety. These are blessings that will make their role a blessing in however they are called to serve.

What society would not want a citizen committed to wisdom, justice, temperance, and courage? A doctor may be very gifted in his medical field, but if he's not wise or just, think of the harm he could and would inflict upon his patients. A politician may be very popular and influential, but without virtue, he will only bring his city, his state, or his nation problems. On the other hand, think of the blessings a gifted doctor brings if that doctor is, indeed, wise, just, temperate, and courageous. He will be diligent and fair, and bold to do what is right for his patients. Isn't that what you and I want from our doctors? We don't want someone who will just prescribe medicine or perform a surgery. We want someone who's skilled to do that—they need to have mastered medicine. But we want someone who has mastered medicine, while they themselves have been mastered by wisdom and piety. We want them to understand the whole picture of what we need, and how they are to make use of medicine in a way that is honoring and just. We live in an age of scientific advance, but we also live in an age where science has set aside virtue. We see the effects of this in our world. What should be unthinkable has become regular. In the name of scientific advance, boys and girls are now faced with medical procedures that challenge their very masculinity or femininity. Of course, one of the greatest scourges that the modern world has known is how easy it is to murder a child in the womb. That's because of medical abuse.

We need a society where the workers, the leaders, the scientists, the professors, the moms, the dads, the single people, the married people, indeed, all its citizens are committed to virtue. Now, we don't have such an arrangement yet where Classical Christian schools permeate any nation, but this is what Classical Christian Education aims at—not only training the individual, not only benefiting the family, not only benefiting the church, but benefiting society, to the glory of God.

Now, none of this is meant to imply that only Classical Christian Education cultivates these benefits. Surely there are examples of those who have gone through such schools and failed not only to realize them fully, but in some ways, failed to realize them at all. But I would also assert that when Classical Christian Education is done well and joined with God's blessing, it tends to bring these benefits.

Now, this can help you, whether parent or teacher. The journey a long one you're on; it can be wearying too. But if you remember these benefits, you can remember, it's a long-term investment. You may not see all the immediate blessings right away, but you have your eyes not only upon when they're seventeen or eighteen years old, but when they're forty, or fifty, or sixty years old. Oh, what a blessing such an education will prove to be, by God's blessing, then!

Furthermore, this should motivate churches to support Classical Christian Education, whether by virtue of supporting families, or beginning schools, or supporting schools. It's a blessing that

further the advance of God's kingdom. If we're going to enjoy these benefits, we need two things. We need the means—Classical Christian Education; and the blessing that comes from God. And so, with some sense of the benefits before us that come from this approach, let us resolve to employ the means diligently and faithfully, but let us, before, during, and after, apply ourselves to prayer, asking, yea, beseeching God that he would provide his merciful blessing, and that the field of our children's souls would bring forth lasting fruit to his glory forever.