

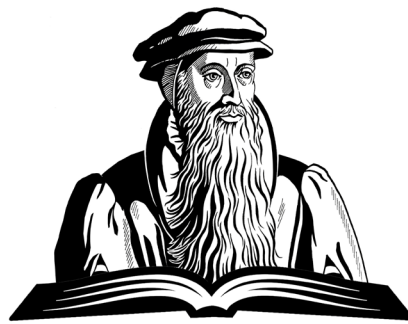
Video Lecture Series

Classical Christian Education

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

LECTURE #15

Remembering the End: Serving the Lord to God's Glory



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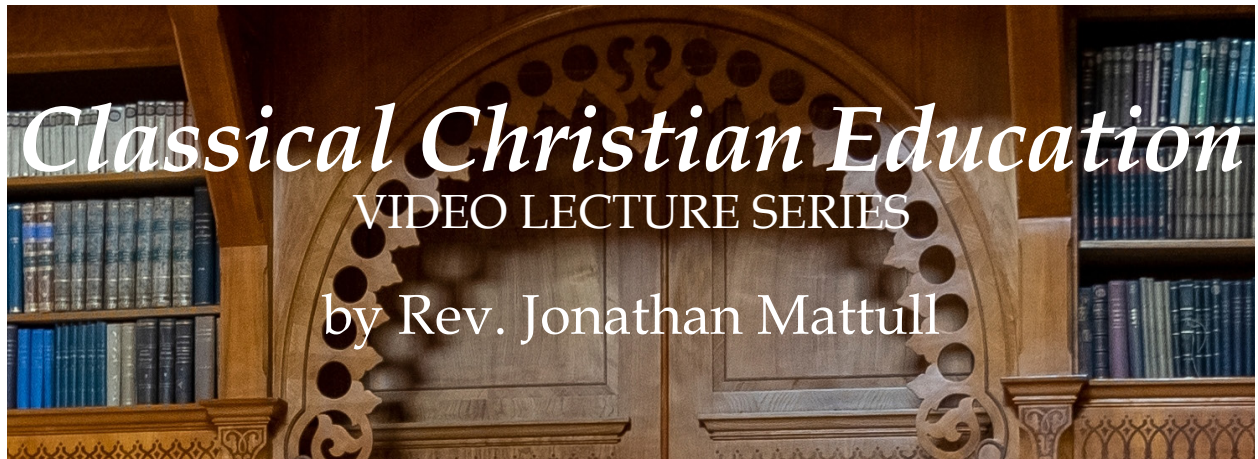
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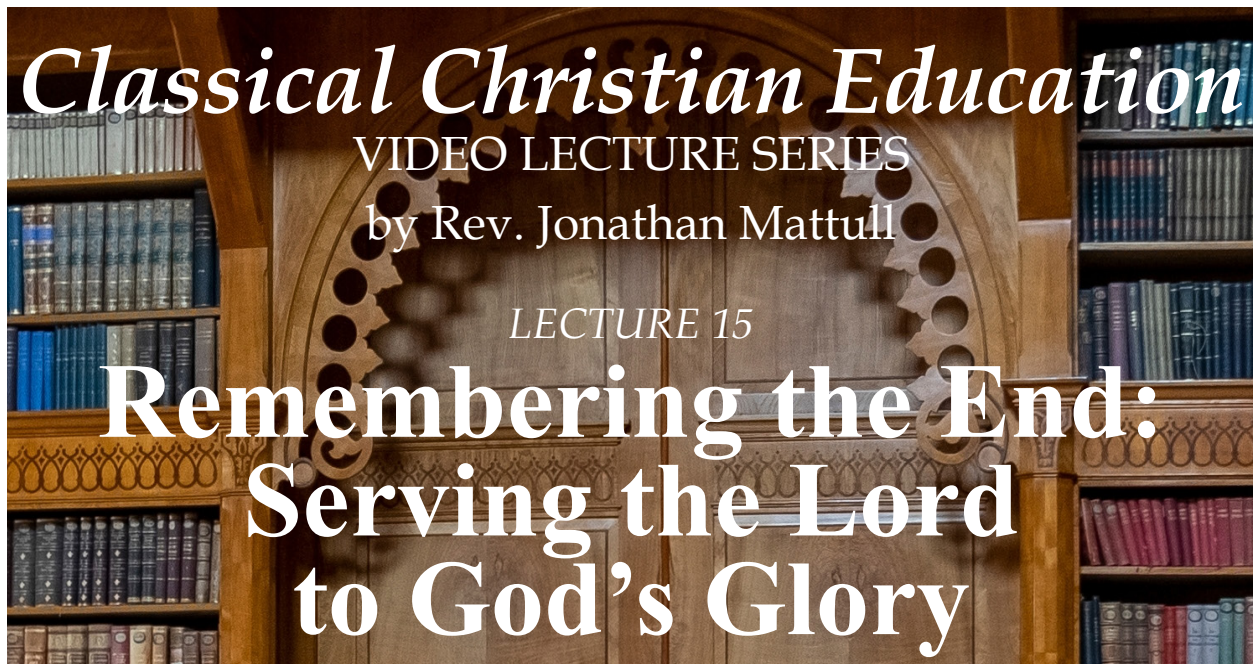
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Introduction

As we come to our final lesson in this series, we conclude with a call to remember your end. Your end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. This is comprehensively true. But it's also true if you're learning, if your teaching, whether that's in your home, or in a classroom. You are always to seek promoting God's glory, and you're seeking to enjoy him while you do so, in you're learning, in your teaching, and in your living.

So we wish to provide a clear reminder that the purpose of education, whether that's in the earliest grades of school, or till the last year of one's life, the purpose is ultimately to honor the Lord, and to do so all to his glory, by his grace, and to do so in the family, in the church, in society. And so, may the Lord give us help as we close out this series. Well, this has been a theme throughout our lessons.

In this lesson, we not only want to remind and emphasize that all education is ultimately to honor the Lord, we want to give some practical guidance to help glorify and enjoy the Lord in the classroom and beyond. So, five recommendations follow, and by the Lord's blessing, may they help you glorify and enjoy God in your education, and in your teaching.

1. Devote All that You Do to God's Glory

First, devote all that you do to God's glory. Begin with this end, or this goal in mind. This may seem simple, and in many ways, it is. However, it is also very easy to miss. It is easy to implement it in a merely formalistic or lifeless way. If we ignore this starting point, we quickly begin to

descend into aimlessness. We begin to embrace less honorable commitments. And we drift from a clear and primary goal.

And so, how do we do this? Well, begin your day, every day, by committing it to God's glory. This allows us to devote our day, including our teaching or our learning, to God. If you haven't, let me encourage you to memorize the first question and answer to the Westminster Shorter Catechism: "What is the chief end of man?"—"Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him for ever." If you've done that but haven't yet memorized the texts that are referenced as evidence of this answer—1 Corinthians 10:31, and Romans 11:36, and Psalm 73, verses 25 through 28—let me encourage you to do that.

So, we think of those verses, 1 Corinthians 10:31: Paul writes, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." Now, in context, he's talking about how it is we live with Christian liberty and that surrounded by others who may differ from us on some points. But notice that he provides this comprehensive thing, "whatsoever ye do"—whatever is done—"do it all to the glory of God." And that includes your learning. If you're a student, as you are struggling through a subject or a lesson, you should bring this back to mind, "I am to do this to God's glory." Think of how that instantly removes complaint, or at least challenges and checks complaint. If you're a teacher who is facing the difficulty of your child, or your children, or your classroom, think of how this transforms your attention, so that, instead of you grumbling, say, "No, no, I am to do this to God's glory."

Another verse that they cite: Romans 11:36, "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen." All things are from him, through him, and to him, including your teaching and your learning. So consciously, you are to be pursuing these things to his glory alone.

And so, there's a way in which we can approach every day with a reverent devotion to God, whether we're a math teacher, or a student in a math class; whether we're a rhetoric teacher, or a student in a rhetoric class; whether we're a principle, or a head master, whatever it is our role may be, as we approach our education, teaching or learning, we set this before us and devote our day to him.

The last verses that they reference is Psalm 73, verses 25 to 28. The psalmist says, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee. But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works." Such a passage as this will help us at all times, whether well educated or not, whether beginning, or nearing the end of our life, to remember that God is the portion of our life. It's not how well we master this subject or topic. It's not how great our IQ is, or how many books we've read. Our great comfort rests in the Lord. And strangely, this liberates us, then, to approach those things with renewed encouragement. For what purpose?—so that, as the psalmist says, "I may declare all thy works." That we then approach all of our learning, as well as all of life, with the focus of, this is to promote God's glory.

These passages, with that helpful summary in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, question and answer #1, will provide you a good summary of your calling all things, including education. To begin your day, call this purpose to mind explicitly, and give thanks to God for the privilege of so noble a calling that you have the privilege of glorifying him and enjoying him in all that you're doing. Confess your failures and your sins.

You may be a very mature Christian, and yet, if so, you'll be sensitive to your failures. Though your life may be more free of scandal, yet you'll be more sensitive to the inward ways in which you have cultivated pride in your learning or in your teaching. You need to confess that to the Lord, because that's a whisper, if not a shout, that you haven't actually remembered your end, your goal. Confess it, and draw from Christ's provision of grace in order to live each day consciously to God's glory. It will only be as you do so that you will remember and pursue your end. So, whether teaching or learning, begin your lesson with this purpose in mind as well.

Why am I teaching this lesson? Well, there are many particulars in a curriculum, a scope and sequence that tells you how this lesson fits into this unit, and this unit fits into this greater purpose, but ultimately, all of that is to glorify the Lord and to promote the enjoyment of him. Therefore, if that's the answer, this is how we approach it. "Therefore, God, help me to teach this lesson to your honor, while I enjoy you and the truth of this lesson." Now, such a prayer can become merely routine. But it doesn't need to become routine, especially as you grow in your desire to know and serve the Lord, it becomes more of an earnest desire. And the more we mature, both in our understanding of a subject, but our growth as a human, the more will our desire grow to know and serve Him. If you begin this way, it will begin to order all that you do and how you do it. So first, devote yourself to this calling.

2. Does This Glorify the Lord?

Second, implement your lessons, or pursue your studies with this as your filter: *Does this glorify the Lord?* If you've begun your day devoting all to glorifying and enjoying God, you cannot fail to consider whether your lesson or your studies will glorify the Lord. This does not only touch on content, it also addresses the manner in which we approach that content. Certainly, we must teach material that glorifies the Lord. However, we must teach it in such a way that glorifies him as well. We may understand our material very well, but there's no place for pride or arrogance. Similarly, unkindness dishonors the Lord. Love—love to God, love to our students, love to our classmates, love to our teachers, love to our enemies—must always dominate how we approach our learning. And so it is, if we're to ask that question well, we should think through the content, but we also need to think through our approach to that content. As I handle the best of material, am I doing so humbly, am I doing so kindly, lovingly? Have I grown sinfully impatient with my students, with my children? Or as a student, have I grown sinfully impatient with my classmates, or my siblings, or my teacher? You see, there's a way in which this question asks far more than we originally think.

Let me touch on what could be a debated point. Depending on what our subjects are, we will eventually need to teach things with which we disagree. While I don't mean that we teach error, as if error as truth. That would be a sinful compromise. I mean that we'll need to teach error in such a way that our students discern the error. In other words, our students have to understand religious errors, whether that's with reference to Christian cults, as Mormonism or Jehovah's Witnesses, or false religions, as Islam or Hinduism. We need to be able to teach those things so that our students can understand, answer, and, by God's grace, overcome them. Similarly, we're going to be exposed to great works of literature wherein there are things that are "off", and we need to teach those things clearly, so that our students understand what's in the book, but also, what's wrong about what's in the book.

Now, to honor God with these things, we must teach with integrity. We must not set up straw men, that is, it doesn't glorify the Lord to present error in the weakest way. That won't help our students. It won't help our children. We should avoid caricatures of error. This gives rise to

what some have called presenting an opposing thought in the strongest way possible. Instead of presenting a straw man, we present a steel man—a man made of steel—the strongest possible way of understanding the error. Now, why do we do that? Well, for many reasons.

One is, personally, we would want our position represented fairly and accurately. We never want someone misrepresenting our beliefs or practices or other such things about us. We want them to present us faithfully. So we are offended, we are angered when people misrepresent what we believe or do. Well, similarly, we should take care to represent what others believe or do with integrity. But another reason is, if we and our students understand the strongest display of the error, and they're able to see through it, and overcome it, they'll be able to overcome all of the lesser, weaker ways that it appears.

To give you an example, it does no good to teach our students, Islam is filled with people who all want to see Christians suffer and die. While there's certainly radical and extreme groups in Islam, others, without any display to the contrary, live lives of kindness, humility, and generosity. We need to represent those things fairly. In my own nation, a nation that's torn apart by divisive parties in politics, but often in other places as well, it's easy to get sucked in to side against side, instead of trying to look as objectively as possible to what the issues are. As educators, and as students, it glorifies the Lord, when we, with patience, seek to understand what the matter is. So we need to handle our material well. And this will, in turn, prepare our students well, and that will, in turn, help to honor the Lord, and glorify him, and serve others well.

3. In the Strength of God's Grace

Well, third, we need to pursue this goal in the strength of His grace. If we rightly pursue this as our end, we will very quickly see that we are insufficient to do this in our own strength. Praise the Lord, though, for he gives us strength by his grace, all that's stored up for us in Christ Jesus. He's the one who said, "I am the vine, ye are the branches;" apart from me, you can do nothing (John 15:5). And he also reminds us, the one abides in him, and he in them, they will bear much fruit.

Well, we think of Colossians 2, verses 2 and 3; Paul writes, "That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." What a reminder that is. It's in Christ that all those treasures are found. So let us be much "in Christ," to find them.

More to the point, notice 1 Corinthians 1, verses 30 and 31; Paul, as he sets aside the glory of himself and self-attainment, he says, "But of him"—that is, of God—"are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." Notice that it's Christ who is our wisdom; Christ who is our righteousness; Christ who is our sanctification; Christ who is our redemption. And so, if we are to be wise; if we are to be righteous; if we are to be holy; if we would enjoy the great privilege of redemption, we must draw all from Christ.

Similarly, Paul says, in Philippians 4, verses 12 and 13, "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Now, Paul is not addressing particularly education in the technical sense. But remember, education is about the cultivation of wisdom and virtue. And so, notice what Paul is saying, "My life, and the way I live my life"—wisdom and virtue—"I know how to do so in a way that honors the Lord, glorifies God, and enjoys him in all circumstances—when I'm abased and brought low;

when I'm exalted and abounding; in all circumstances; whether I have nothing to eat, or if I have a rich table provided for me. I know how to do it, because I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Now, certainly it is only by God's mercy that we learn. Notice, then, that Paul is speaking about living out a life of maturity and wisdom to God's glory, and this is only by Christ Jesus.

It's true, whatever our subject, whatever our course, whatever our lesson, we need Christ to help us learn those things. Well, remember that learning in true education is not just filling our mind and our understanding. It's that we would be transformed to live out our life to God's glory. And there's where we see the most fundamental need of Christ in us, and we in Christ. Christ is able to strengthen and help us to honor him. Whether teaching or learning, we should never forget that it is God who knows all subjects best, whether Bible, science, math, or geography, whatever it is. And we should also remember that it is only by his strength that we will be enabled to put the lessons learned into practice in such a way that glorifies him and enjoys him forever.

Well, this leads us, fourth,

4. Put into Practice What You Learn

Doubtlessly, there is some knowledge that is hard to put into practice regularly, especially if it's outside of our daily focus. For instance, it's hard to put into practice the mathematical principles of calculus deliberately every day, unless you engage in a field that has to put those into practice directly. However, the greater aspects of learning should be implemented regularly. For instance—to return to calculus—calculus not only teaches us how to understand continuous change, it provides one with the ability to analyze, to think deeply. It also teaches humility, by experience, in approaching very complex questions. And so, although there may not be the direct application of the principles of calculus in every aspect of our day, we should take care to analyze matters carefully, to approach with humility all matters in our life. And that's definitely a lesson that calculus will help us with.

Well, more directly, as you learn about the nature of wisdom, seek God's grace to live out that wisdom. This applies to all the virtues. Let me give you some simple examples to help you think through this.

Proverbs 9, verse 8 says, "Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee." Now, you can learn that; you can memorize that; and next week, you can recite it. But if you're going to learn that in the way that it is glorifying to God, it means that you don't just understand the terms; you're not just able to recite them from memory; it means that, you, by God's grace in Christ, receive reproof with gratitude, putting it into practice. It's most likely the case that within the next day, or week, and certainly the next month, there will be cause for someone, whether very overtly, or less directly, to reprove you for something you've done, and your temptation, as is mine, would be to receive it in some awkward way, or to resist it altogether. But see, this is the point. If we're to put in practice these lessons, that means we're cultivating that grace now. And we're asking, "Lord, I've seen this truth," here, from Proverbs 9, verse 8, for instance that a wise man receives rebuke with gratitude. I need that grace. Prepare me for that time, that when it is someone comes to me with reproof, instead of all of that natural and sinful resistance, I would come and say, "Thank you, for you're helping my life." Put it into practice.

As another example, again from Proverbs, 14, verse 16: "A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth, and is confident." Notice, the wise man is prudent. He's not overconfident; he's not overzealous; he's reflective. He considers the danger and he departs from it. Think for a

moment the illustration that's provided us with reference to Peter. Christ says, "You're all going to flee from me." And Peter says, "Not so! Though all should forsake thee, yet surely not I." And he says, "I will die with thee." And Christ says, "You'll deny be three times this evening." And sure enough, it comes to pass (Matthew 26:31–35; 69–75). We don't mean that Peter was not a believer, but at that moment, he wasn't putting into practice this truth of wisdom. He didn't humble himself with the Lord's warning, just as we often don't. He didn't turn unto Christ, just as we often don't. He trusted in himself. Notice what Proverbs tells us in chapter 3, "Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil" (verse 7). Don't you see? It's not wisdom to know these verses, it's wisdom to be transformed by these verses and to put them into practice. Seek God's grace in Christ, and do the same.

Well, we could talk on a lot of Proverbs, and what a blessing that would be to us. These are simple applications, but I hope you get the point. As you glean something from the Bible; as you glean something from Augustine; as you glean something from the Puritans, or John Bunyan; as you glean something from Plato; as you glean something from Cicero, or others that we haven't mentioned, don't just think about them. You need to think about them, but ask yourself the question of, "How does this," or, "How should be impact my life?" And then, as we've already noted, go to Christ for grace, so you can put those things into practice.

5. Give Thanks to the Lord

Well, fifth, be sure to give thanks to the Lord when he provides you wisdom. The surest way to end your quest and fail to reach your goal, is to learn without gratitude. For each insight, each lesson, each advance in maturity, be sure to give thanks to the Lord. Think of it. We pray for his help, we've started our day, devoting it to the Lord, and our lesson, devoting it to the Lord; we ask him, "Help me," "Help us," "Help my students," "Help my classmates," "Help our school." And then he gives help. We've come to him, depending upon him, relying upon Christ, rejoicing in God, that so great a Savior is given us, to save us both from the guilt of our sin, but also the power of our sin, and not only from but unto holiness and growth in wisdom. Remember earlier, in a previous lesson, we referenced 2 Peter chapter 1, and there were all these promises given to us. And we lay hold of his promises, and we plead them, and say, "Help me to add to these virtues, still more virtues." And what happens? God gives help. You see how fitting it is, then, that we should give him thanks for the help that he gives. And as we so, notice what that's doing. It's cultivating greater intimacy with the Lord, delight in the Lord, and thereby, glorifying the Lord, for we're giving him thanks and praise for the good things that he's done.

In praise, our glorifying and our enjoying of the Lord come closest together in our experience consciously. We're explicitly thanking him, or exalting him for what he is, and our hearts are filled with joy. Gratitude is the surest sign of enjoyment. If we are to glorify God and enjoy him, let us return thanks to him for his many mercies.

Well, five recommendations, then, to help you remember the end, the goal, and to glorify the Lord in your education, whether as a student or teacher. First, do all that you do to God's glory, and do it every day, every lesson. Second, ask, "Does this glorify God?" and if needs be, make corrections. Third, pursue this goal in the strength of his grace in Jesus Christ, who is the vine, and we are the branches. Fourth, put into practice what he teaches you. And fifth, give thanks to the Lord for his provision of wisdom.

By God's grace, as you keep these before you, and as you seek them in Christ, you will remember your end, and by his blessing, you will promote the glory of God, while you enjoy him

in your teaching and learning. What a privilege God gives us. May the Lord add his blessing as you pursue them, and as you implement these things. And as, Lord willing these blessings promote further study, that you take up and read, put into practice, or address and teach your children or your classroom. And whatever it is the Lord has for you, may it be to his praise.

Well, this then concludes this series of lessons introducing Classical Christian Education. Oh, it only touches on the very edge of the continent of all that is contained within this realm. Through these lessons, I hope that you have gained a sense of what this education is, and why it's needed today, why it's needed in your life, in your school, in your classroom, in your children. Moreover, I hope that you have discovered some resources that will help you. There are many more yet that could have been referenced. I hope you've seen clear ways that Classical Christian Education can and should be implemented. And I hope these lessons have encouraged you in this high calling. I hope that you have begun or will shortly begin to implement this approach, as appropriate to your own circumstances, whether in the home, or in the classroom, or in the entire school. But above all, I hope that you will devote whatever you have gleaned to the glory of the Lord, and that by Jesus Christ.