



Understanding Classical Christian – A Parent’s Primer

To many, the term “classical education” conjures images of ivy-covered institutions with more interest in striking a child’s knuckles and teaching dry subjects than in educating. As with any image, truth is determined not by the angle or spin applied by Hollywood producers in movies like *The Dead Poets Society*, but by the real and tested results proven through centuries of educating children with the classical method. Please take a moment to read through this brief outline of what classical education really was and is today. We believe that you will find more myth than truth in the modern image of classical education.

A Lasting Decision

We believe that all children are fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God and few investments have more potential than your children’s education. The way they see the world, the way they approach life, and the depth of their character are all influenced by education. The choice of where and how to educate your children can be challenging and complicated.



Classical Christian education is unique in that it seeks to faithfully restore the most proven form of education ever developed. This education produced the greatest thinkers, leaders, and scientists in the Western world from the time of the Greeks until the late 19th century, including America’s founding fathers.

What makes classical Christian education so effective?

First, it is a distinctively Biblical education understanding that the Bible is God’s Holy Word and His Word is the foundation of all history. His Word is pure wisdom and all truth. We believe that a thoroughly Christian education is part of what it means to bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. This curriculum provides a systematic approach with Biblical worldview embedded in the curriculum and better aligns us to our mission of educating, discipling and preparing our students to follow Christ and impact culture.

The second reason Classical Christian is so successful is because it is based on what has been called the Trivium. No matter how your child learns, he or she goes through three phases. In grades K-6, students are excellent at memorizing. In grades 7-8, students become more argument-oriented. They are ready to be taught logic and critical thinking. In grades 9-12, students become independent thinkers and communicators particularly concerned with their appearance to others. To this end, classical education teaches them rhetoric, the art of speaking, communicating, and writing.

Toledo Christian has always had pieces of Classical Christian integrated in subjects like literature, history, language, art, math, and science. Students read the great works of Western literature and philosophy. Classical languages (Latin and Greek) help students understand and think with greater depth about the world around them. Formal logic and rhetoric help students become great leaders and communicators. Classical teaching methods range from class lectures, to debates, to Socratic (discussion-oriented) teaching. Independent learning skills are sharpened at all grade levels.

Is classical Christian education still relevant? Yes, more now than ever. Our world is accelerating as technological, cultural, and geo-political forces reshape our daily lives. The subject matter and skills required in the market are evolving and changing rapidly. However, thinking, articulate people are always in demand. Those who are able to acquire new skills rapidly and independently are sought after regardless of the field. Classical Christian education has a proven track record of turning out these types of students.

Those who assume that methods used for millennia can be dismissed within a generation forget that time is the best laboratory, especially regarding human behavior.

It has taken modern educators only 50 years to disassemble an educational system that took thousands of years to refine and establish. The classical method was born in ancient Greece and Rome, and by the 16th century, it was used throughout the Western world. This system educated most of America's founding fathers as well as the world's philosophers, scientists and leaders between the 10th and 19th centuries. What other period can claim so many advances in science, philosophy, art, and literature?

Why Classical Education?

For education to be effective, it must go beyond conveying fact. Truly effective education cultivates thinking, articulate students who are able to develop facts into arguments and convey those arguments clearly and persuasively. Parents from Seattle to Orlando are recognizing that classical education adds the dimension and breadth needed to develop students' minds.

There is no greater task for education than to teach students how to learn. The influence of progressive teaching methods and the oversimplification of textbooks make it difficult for students to acquire the mental discipline that traditional instruction methods once cultivated. The classical method develops independent learning skills on the foundation of language, logic, and tangible fact. The classical difference is clear when students are taken beyond conventionally taught subjects and asked to apply their knowledge through logic and clear expression.

In 1947, Dorothy Sayers, a pioneer in the return to classical education, observed, "although we often succeed in teaching our pupils 'subjects,' we fail lamentably on the whole in teaching them how to think." Beyond subject matter, classical education develops those skills that are essential in higher education and throughout life – independent scholarship, critical thinking, logical analysis, and a love for learning.

We hope you agree that this movement back to and beyond classical education develops timeless skills that are as important in today's rapidly changing world as they were to our founding fathers.

A Love for Learning

Occasionally, parents who are interested in classical education express concern that it will be too difficult or too demanding for their children. Disciplining and challenging students is certainly part of the classical method. However, we believe that education is inherently enjoyable for children. The classical method is based on the philosophy that students should be encouraged to do what they naturally enjoy during particular phases of their life.

In Dorothy Sayers' essay "The Lost Tools of Learning," she promotes teaching in ways which complement children's natural behavior. For example, young children in grammar school are very adept at memorizing. They enjoy repeating songs, rhymes, and chants to the extent that they often make up their own. In classical education, the "Grammar" phase corresponds with this tendency by focusing on the teaching of facts. During the junior high years, children often become prone to question and argue. Classical education leverages this tendency by teaching students how to argue well based on the facts they have learned. We call this the "Logic" phase. During the high school years, students' interests shift from internal concerns to the external. Teenagers become concerned with how others perceive them. This stage fits well into the "Rhetoric" phase of classical education, where students are taught to convey their thoughts so that they are well received and understood by others. The education culminates with the debate and defense of a senior thesis.

The classical method not only cuts with the grain, but it develops a true sense of accomplishment in students. Many educators are artificially positive and soften grading scales in an effort to bolster their students' self-esteem. We believe that a sense of self-worth comes from accomplishment. The student who excels after working hard achieves a greater sense of accomplishment than one who is given the grade. By holding students to an objective standard, they gain a true understanding of their abilities. Where self-esteem offers an artificial appreciation, classical education provides a realistic and true estimation of a child's ability. Students who work hard to achieve a C based on accomplishment are more satisfied than a class of students who all receive A's and B's.

Finally, we believe that learning, hard work, and fun are not mutually exclusive. Learning should be a joyful endeavor – one that presents a challenge. A visit to The Toledo Christian campus and you will quickly see the delight of students who love to learn. Learning is exciting, especially for children. In our experience, children who transfer from a conventional classroom to a classical classroom usually develop an increased appreciation for education and for the pursuit of knowledge.



Latin and the New Millennium

The most frequently questioned piece of classical education is its use of Latin. Why do students in the Information Age need something so arcane as Latin? Considering the number of quality schools that for centuries taught Latin as an integral part of any good academic training, the instruction in Latin should need no defense. However, like many traditions lost in the name of "progressive" education, Latin's advantages have been neglected and forgotten by recent generations. Latin was widely taught even in American high schools as late as the 1940's. It was considered necessary to the fundamental

understanding of English, the history and writings of Western Civilization, and the understanding of Romance languages.

Why Latin?

Latin is a language that lives on today in almost all major Western languages, including English. Over 50 percent of English vocabulary comes from Latin. Training in Latin not only gives the student a better understanding of the roots of English vocabulary, it also lays the foundation for learning other Latin-based languages. Learning the grammar of Latin reinforces the student's understanding of the reasons for, and the use of, the parts of speech being taught in our traditional English classwork (e.g., plurals, nouns, verbs, prepositions, direct objects, tenses). For additional information, I encourage you to read the article entitled "Ten reasons for learning Latin" by Cheryl Lowe.

Classical Christian Education is a Biblical Education

Classically educated students will not distinguish between God's creation and science; between God's order and mathematics; or between Church history and world history. Throughout the curriculum, an inseparable association exists between subject-matter and spiritual matters. Today, this association is only possible through private Christian education, as government schools have become increasingly unable to present the complete picture, including the spiritual viewpoint.

Conventional education operates on the philosophy that education is neutral – that it merely conveys fact and that facts do not require a spiritual context. We believe that facts, whether scientific, mathematical, historical, or otherwise, can only represent truth if they are taught in the context of a Christian worldview. There is no neutrality. For this reason, we found our classical curriculum on biblical truth to provide an education that is pervasively Christian. The classical method's Christian worldview is more than a Bible class. It shows the natural world and its history through the lens of God's sovereign will and decree.

Reading List

Below is a small selection of our recommended reading for parents.

- *The Lost Tools of Learning* by Dorothy Sayers
- *The Abolition of Man* by C.S. Lewis
- *Recovering the Lost Tools of Learning* by Douglas Wilson
- **The Case for Classical Christian Education by Douglas Wilson**
- *Classical Education and the Homeschool* by Douglas Wilson, Wes Callihan and Doug Jones
- *The Seven Laws of Teaching* by John Gregory
- *Repairing the Ruins* edited by Douglas Wilson
- *Classical Education* by Gene Edward Veith, Jr. and Andrew Kern

Four Myths about Classical Education

As more and more parents adopt classical and Christian education, many others are left with questions. Unfamiliarity with the classical method seems to have given rise to some common myths. While you may find some truth in each myth, we believe your concerns about classical education will begin to fade as your knowledge increases. In fact, you may be surprised by the same enthusiasm that has motivated thousands of parents to return to an education that works.

Myth #1: Classical education was fine back then, but we need modern education in a modern world.

Fact: Classical education teaches students facts, provides them with logical tools to use those facts, and perfects the student's ability to relate those facts to others. This fundamental skill-set is more valuable today than it has ever been. The process of teaching students to think extends far beyond filling their heads with knowledge. Modern education, to varying degrees, has succeeded in teaching facts and some skills. Classical education helps students draw original, creative, and accurate conclusions from facts and then formulate those conclusions into logical and persuasive arguments.

Modern subjects based in science and technology are taught in classical schools, through classical methods. Parents who are exposed to classical education recognize that the back to the basics approach contrasts with the distractions of modern education. Is the classical method applicable in a modern, technological age? The technology we have today was invented, in large part, by the classically educated. Man inhabited the earth for thousands of years without developing technology until the last two centuries. It is no coincidence that the groundwork for these achievements was laid within the last 400 years when classical education was at its height. Classical education teaches children the timeless skills of thinking, reasoning, logic, and expression. Our subject matter is as up-to-date as that found in other schools. We simply add a depth and dimension through this time-tested method. We will continue to use technology as a learning accelerator.

Myth #2: My child is not intelligent enough to attend a classical school.

Fact: Students at Toledo Christian vary in intelligence from exceptionally intelligent to below average. Many parents assume that a classical education is only accessible to gifted children. In fact, all children benefit greatly from the classical method. If you were educated in Western society prior to 1850, you were classically educated.

Often, myths start from a spark of reality. Many parents observe the classroom and curriculum of Toledo Christian and assume the children are abnormally bright. In reality, classical education challenges children and is uniquely able to leverage their natural abilities during different stages of childhood. In short, we help ordinary children and deliver extraordinary results by employing proven methods tested for centuries.

Because the school is not equipped or funded to adequately deal with special needs children, we cannot accept students with severe learning disabilities.

Myth #3: Classical education is too extreme.

Fact: Classical education teaches children with the grain – complementing their developmental phase with the appropriate teaching method. The classical method is different from today’s conventional education. Parents are rightfully skeptical of anything that differs from the norm. However, classical education was the norm 100 years ago because it worked.

Conventional education has taken an experimental approach to educating our children over the past four decades. Many different methods have been tried and later scrapped when they fail. This constant state of change in education creates an environment where anything traditional seems extreme. Unfortunately, this is where modern educational thought is upside down. Classical education provides a basic structure upon which we can build effective, successful students. We are not advocating an experiment. Rather, we are seeking a return to a system proven for over 1,000 years.

Myth #4: Classical education is unnecessarily difficult or harsh.

Fact: Children enjoy learning. They are wired for it. Assuming that a child will not be able to succeed in a challenging environment is tempting, but simply untrue.

A common assumption is that a demanding curriculum results in unhappy children. As adults, learning new things can be uncomfortable. However, most children are fascinated by what they learn at Toledo Christian. The excitement of children learning Latin grows as they become able to describe the world in a language that most adults do not understand. The rich and complex texture of classical literature is strangely amplified by youth. Science and the history of Western Civilization come alive for those who hunger to know about their world. For the unconvinced, a visit to Toledo Christian is sure to demonstrate that our students love to learn.

Classical schools maintain order in the classroom. This does not translate to stoic classes where interaction is limited to an occasional downcast “yes, sir.” In fact, Toledo Christian encourages extensive interaction between students and teachers. Students are not allowed to be disruptive, but they are constantly encouraged to offer observations, ask questions, interact, and make comments. The classical method at Toledo Christian encourages and succeeds at creating a stimulating and enjoyable learning environment for students.

The Trivium at Toledo Christian

In 1947, Dorothy Sayers articulated the educational concept of the Trivium, an educational model that had been used for centuries. When Douglas Wilson helped found Logos School in Moscow, Idaho, during the 1980’s, he revived this framework to bring about the rebirth of classical education. Presently, over 230 classical schools are operating in the United States, most of which use the Trivium to set their foundational educational philosophy.

The Trivium is simply a means of describing the learning stages of children as they mature. Parents often recognize the stages through which their children pass as they mature. The Trivium focuses the educational method to best develop a knowledgeable, thinking, and articulate student. As the name implies, there are three stages represented in the Trivium: Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric.

(Knowledge)**Grammar – Grades K-6**

During the Grammar phase, children are particularly adept at memorization. Young children learn songs and rhymes, and recite facts with relative ease. Because young children are so eager to memorize that they will make up non-sensical playground rhymes, we challenge them by providing substantial subject matter for them to memorize. Each subject has its own grammar. In science, children memorize facts about nature. In math, children memorize times tables. In Latin, teachers emphasize vocabulary. Throughout each year in Grammar School, classically educated children learn the factual foundation of each subject. We use songs, chants, and rhymes to help children enjoy the learning experience.

(Understanding)**Logic – Grades 7-8**

The Logic phase involves ordering facts into organized statements and arguments. During the middle school years, children are beginning to think independently. They often develop a propensity for argument. Classical education teaches children in this phase to argue well. The study of formal logic helps students understand the fundamentals of a good argument. Practice in making written and oral arguments helps to further develop these skills. Teachers encourage the use of argumentation in each subject. Again, each subject has its own logic. In science, we use the development and testing of hypothesis. In math, we develop a student's ability to logically orient numbers through the more abstract concepts of algebra and trigonometry.

(Wisdom)**Rhetoric – Grades 9-12**

Rhetoric is the art of communicating well. Once a student has obtained a knowledge of the facts (grammar) and developed the skills necessary to arrange those facts into arguments (logic), he must develop the skill of communicating those arguments to others (rhetoric). During the high school years, students become concerned with what others think of them. Classical education helps students develop their minds to think and articulate concepts to others. Writing papers, researching, and orating ideas are skills required in all subjects. Toledo Christian adds polish to these skills to create a well-rounded student who can communicate effectively. We leverage these skills through the final requirement of the defense of a senior capstone project.

While each component has a primary focus during a particular phase, all skills are developed during all levels. A second grader will develop certain skills in logic and rhetoric. A high school student will still acquire extensive knowledge in specific subjects. Emphasis is simply placed on different phases during different ages.