



WHAT WOULD CHANGE A MAN'S MIND ABOUT EDUCATION?

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I was once told that it's hard to change a man's mind when his wallet depends on it. I have found this to be true: a principled stand is hard to make when one is at risk of financial loss, sometimes significant financial loss. I have found this to be exceedingly true in modern America, where capital gain offers great comfort and hope amidst life's difficulties. A man may live within a hundred philosophical or theological contradiction so long as his bank account is stable. Men have even been known to accept mounds of philosophical or theological contradictions to ensure their 401K is secure. But financial stability is not the only fetter which may keep a man from changing his mind. It may be hard to change a man's mind if his pride depends upon it. It may be harder still to change a man's mind if his social status depends upon it. And then we have the question of changing a man's mind about what. The topic upon which a man's mind may change offers yet another layer of complexity.

There are some subjects so superficial that a man may make up his mind at breakfast and have it changed by lunch. There are other topics so deep that a man may never find it reasonable to even consider that his mind ought to change. What then of the idea of education? I was once asked, "What do you think convinces parents and pastors and donors that classical Christian education really is the best education we could give our children? And not just the best, but the only proper education, if we intend for them to be educated at all?" I answered:

CHRIST IS KING.

Education is a Lordship topic, and by this I mean that someone decides on an education for their children based on who they think reigns and how they reign. Who has the authority to form my children? In what image? To whom does my child belong? Is the child the center of education? Is the state the authority on how one ought to be educated? Does the local church have a say-so? These are deep questions of identity, authority, and lordship. The very first step in someone being convinced of classical Christian education is that they must be convinced of Christ. Classical Christian education makes a bold claim: Christ ascended and is seated at the right hand of the Father, and for that reason we must have our children formed in a Christian institution and among Christians. Stephen F. Perks once said, "We are not at liberty, as Christians, to subject our children to an education which baptizes them into the godless image of fallen man. Man's humanity consists in his being the bearer of God's image, and it is this image which is of primary importance and the reference point in the child's



education at every level.” (*The Christian Philosophy of Education* by Stephen F. Perks) If a man is convinced of the Lordship of Christ, he would not want even a single dollar to be squandered, much more the imagination, soul, intellect, virtues, and abilities of his child. Education is not theologically neutral, at any point. At every turn it says something about God and man; and it forms that something deeply into the child. No matter how free an education may appear, if it does not saturate the institution, every class, and every decision with the great proclamation that “Christ is King,” you can bet that sending a child there will be the costliest mistake a parent could ever make. If Christ is Lord of all, then a child in a Christian home ought to be surrounded by adults, books, songs, art, and peers who affirm this watershed claim.

CLASSICAL IS BEST.

The second thing of which a parent or pastor or donor must be convinced is that the classical tradition is the superior philosophy and practice toward the goal of academic formation. Because we have lost the great academic tradition which has brought us to this point in history, we have likewise lost what it means to be educated, to be free thinkers, to be reasonable, articulate, prepared, and outfitted with the sharpened tools of our humanity. And so we have created short-sighted goals in all of our schools, most of our private schools included. We aim at computer literacy, early college credits, career readiness, low standards of high-stakes testing, and a “high school experience” crowded with social opportunities, athletic prowess, and American thrill. And what have we to show for it? What has then become of higher education, of public discourse, of financial sense, of spiritual maturity, of local churches, of sound reasoning, of academic competence?

I often tell the story of the principal who once contacted me concerned that his high schoolers (at the large private school in town) were struggling to write well, read well, and speak well. Test scores were dropping, teachers were frustrated, and that means enrollment numbers were dwindling. The school had pulled out all the stops: computers for everyone, big sports, online learning, AP credits abounding, technology classes, *ad infinitum*. This was a school much older than ours, much larger than ours, better endowed than ours, and yet showing a serious academic decline (on top of an increase of drug use among students). I asked him a few simple questions: do you have a logic class, a rhetoric class, a course of great poetry? He scoffed, “Of course not, parents and the board would never go for those.” I anticipated his answer. “Well, if we don’t teach a child the art and science of reasoning well, and we don’t teach a child the art and science of a good man persuasively speaking, then why should we expect from him an ordered mind and articulate tongue?” As C.S. Lewis said in *The Abolition of Man*, “In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ and demand the function. We make men



without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honour and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful.” We do not order a child’s soul and mind with the best works of art, the best academic subjects, the best literature, and we are surprised they lack linguistic and literary enterprise. We pull them back and aim them at the target of modernity, and we are surprised when they land so far from the target of eternity. If a person is to be convinced of classical Christian education, not only must he be convinced that Christ is King, he must also be convinced that man is not king, but that man has passed down incredible gifts which we ought not squander, especially if we expect our children to avoid being academically misshapen. Those gifts are found within the classical tradition, passed down to us by the Church.

ALL ELSE HAS GONE ASTRAY.

The third point of which a pastor or parent or donor must be convinced is that the other suitors, the other educational voices which beckon their time and attention and allegiance, are mere siren songs, siren songs leading down dimly lit paths of distraction, away from the light of clarity, virtue, and holiness. In a recent conversation with a colleague I mentioned that when I speak with educators who are new to classical Christian education, I always look for where they are in their downslide, toward the *nadir*, toward being disenfranchised with the whole new and young and shiny project of contemporary education. How disenchanting are they? How did they get this way? Were they former teachers? Did they finally read something before 1850? Did they see what it was doing to their child? Did they go to the principal and ask substantive questions? Did they know a family at their local church who was homeschooling or was in a classical Christian school? There are certain ideas that if a man is going to say “Yes” to, he must say “No” to all the competing ideas. Classical Christian education is one of those ideas. It has such grave consequences, that the alternatives would be unbearable. When a man becomes convinced that Christ is King, it means nothing else is. When a man becomes convinced that the classical tradition is not only the superior tradition for academic formation but the *only* one building academic competency, he will find all others lacking. And he will not hesitate to sell all he has in order to provide it for himself, his children, his church, his city, his country. This is indeed what has happened over the past few decades. Communities have become so convinced that there is a true, good, and beautiful way to raise our children and build culture that all other ways are confusing at best. And now there are many families, pastors, fathers, mothers, and scholars hearing about it for the first time. I look for those who are disenchanting with what the world has offered.



There is much work to be done in Atlanta. There is much work to be done in Georgia, to convince a Christian man or woman that there is indeed a way the Triune God has called us to form our children, and there are educational institutions, school systems, and philosophies of education working directly against the Gospel we claim, the Gospel which we say has claimed us, even the great education we claim to want for our children. So what would change an Atlanta man's mind about education? Christ is King. Classical is best. All else has gone astray. What's the alternative? Christ is dead. Classical has failed. All else will make it right. These three claims—by the testimony of Scripture, by the testimony of research, and by the testimony of personal experience—have been irrefutably proven wrong. It may be mighty difficult to change a man's mind when his wallet depends on it, but it is impossible to not change a good man's mind when his child depends on it. That great southern writer from Georgia once said that a good man is hard to find. Is she right? Oak Hill Classical School has something to say about that.