

# Biblical-Classical Education: A Mandate For Christian Parents

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Recently the mail arrived while I was with a friend. I opened it to find the latest Nehemiah Institute PEERS Test trend report.<sup>1</sup> As I looked at the continuing decline of Biblical worldview scores of Christian students in both Christian and public schools and the steady rise, year after year, of the scores of Christian students in Principle Approach schools, my friend became very thoughtful and sober. After a moment he said, "My wife and I were young and foolish when we had children. We made lots of mistakes with our kids. We didn't know much. Now, we would give everything we have if we could put our kids on the top line of that chart. If we had had information like this thirty years ago, we would have moved anywhere in the country to get this for our children." He sat back slowly and said gravely: "You must realize and make others realize that this is the most important thing that has happened in Christian education in two centuries." Overstated? Maybe. A poignant moment among friends? Of course. Yet an honest look at the world we've brought our children to and the future it predicts turns us back to this chart for hope.

It's impossible to look at the trends chart and not ask why the Principle Approach shows such distinctive results. What makes the Principle Approach line go up when the others go down? What makes it different? At one of our schools, 28 seniors last June earned \$1.25 million in merit scholarship dollars. Their SAT scores ranked with selective private schools charging twice the tuition. National merit scholar status is awarded to them at the rate of 12% of all graduates -- three times the national average. Why does the Principle Approach produce impressive scholarship? What prepares high school seniors to go to Bratislava every year and teach Christian history and government to adults? What prepares them to write and defend a 25 page thesis? What gives them the character to govern the programs of their own high school as precepts? What causes such astounding results? The simple answer: The Word of God. It is powerful; it is perfect, converting the soul; it is sure, making wise the simple; it is right, rejoicing the heart; it is pure, enlightening the eyes; it is true and righteous altogether; more to be desired than gold; sweeter than honey. And in keeping it there is great reward!<sup>2</sup>

The greatest force in all of history is Jesus Christ. He is the Word of God. When the written Word of God is at the heart of every subject in the curriculum, when its principles are applied to all of life and learning, when the transcending power of the Word enlivens lessons, inspires hearts, consecrates kids to Christ, it

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<sup>1</sup> [www.nehemiahinstitute.com](http://www.nehemiahinstitute.com) Chart following article.

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 19:7-11, New King James Bible.

also prepares them for life and commissions them for excellent service. The Bible unleashed in education is a powerful force.

Before I describe the distinctives of Biblical Classical Education, let me trace it to its source for you. The original definition of the Principle Approach from the author is: “*the historic method of Biblical reasoning that makes the Truths of God’s Word the basis of every subject in the school curriculum...*”<sup>3</sup> This is education as the Founding generation knew it. It is why Harvard College was established: “*Let every Student be plainly instructed, and earnestly pressed to consider well, the main end of his life and studies is, to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life, Joh. 17:3 and therefore to lay Christ at the bottome, as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning.*” (New England’s First Fruits, Harvard College, 1643)<sup>4</sup>

Biblical-classical education is the product of the march of Christianity westward, away from the eastern philosophies that limited it, and away from the control of kings. Its Biblical source is the Hebrew concept of knowledge and life in contrast to the Greek concept of knowledge and life. Let’s look first at the Hebrew model of education both from Jewish tradition and from the Bible:<sup>5</sup>

- The Jews are “people of the Book” – loving the Law and faithfully teaching it to their children when they “rise up, lie down,” etc. De. 6
- To the Hebrew parents, education inseparable from the rest of life. De. 32
- The Bible itself demonstrates a method of teaching that implants truth in the heart.<sup>6</sup> 2 Tim 3:16-17
- The primary purpose of teaching and learning is to train the whole person for lifelong, obedient service in the knowledge of God. Proverbs 1:7
- The parents, particularly the father, bear the chief responsibility for instructing the children. Proverbs 1
- The fundamental goal of education is to transmit an historical and ethical heritage. Psalm 78
- The law is made sweet to the child and described as “honey” in the Scriptures. Psalm 119
- The parent is concerned with identifying the child’s unique God-given individuality in order to cultivate its full expression. Psalm 139
- The parent and teacher observe each child to insightfully direct him to fulfill his particular providential purpose. Jer.29:11

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<sup>3</sup> Slater, Rosalie June. *Teaching and Learning America’s Christian History: the Principle Approach*, p. 88. FACE, 1965.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, preface.

<sup>5</sup> Wilson, Marvin R. *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith*, Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1989.

<sup>6</sup> Adams, Carole G. and Elizabeth L. Youmans. *The Noah Plan Self-directed Study in the Principle Approach*, p. 52, FACE, 2003.

- The Hebrew system edified and nourished through teaching while leading the child in critical thinking through debate and discussion to evaluate and conclude. (The yeshiva)

In contrast the Greek system of education, the source of the secular classic tradition, is pagan. Its source, goals, purpose and object are oppositional to the Hebrew model. In classical education, we must be careful to identify the philosophical system of the ancients as we teach them and give proper emphasis to truth. There is a rampant disregard among many scholars of the real source of western civilization – the Bible – that often gives Greek and Roman thought too much credit through the supposed influence of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment when in reality both movements were a step backward and an obstacle to western progress.<sup>7</sup>

Comparing the Greek and Hebrew Systems of Knowledge	
Hebrew	Greek
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Starts with the knowledge of God</li> <li>• The goal is to know God as the first requirement of true wisdom</li> <li>• Purpose of learning is to revere God</li> <li>• The object is to know God and submit to the authority of His Word</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Starts with the knowledge of man</li> <li>• The goal is to elevate man’s higher nature through knowledge</li> <li>• Purpose of learning is to comprehend life.</li> <li>• The object is “know thyself”</li> </ul>

The Biblical-Classical model rose to its highest expression in colonial American education as exhibited in the character, statesmanship, reasoning, skill, eloquence, productivity, vision, wisdom and knowledge of our Founding Fathers. It is documented in the writings of that era and in the lives that demonstrate its effects. As the pre-eminence of the Bible was displaced over the decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and as evolution, communism, transcendentalism, and humanistic socialism secularized American education, the Biblical-classical was gradually abandoned. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, radical secularism had free reign resulting in the triumphant removal of the Bible completely from the schoolhouse, banning prayer, God, Christmas, and now even crosses. The vacuum has been filled with every form of evil and is now busily devouring our sacred institutions – the family, the marriage, the church.

Let’s look now at the model that works so well and gets the results we want for our children.

<sup>7</sup> Amos, Dr. Gary. *The Role of Religion in America: Historical Christianity and the Roots of Religious Liberty, Individual Rights, Equality, and secular Reform*. Paper presented at FACE Apprenticeship 1997, then unpublished.

1. It enables the student to internalize convictions that are his own possessions -- the Truth of the Gospel as it relates to all of life and learning and the ability to articulate his convictions confidently.
2. It builds a structure of truth into the student's understanding – a context of providential history in which to place every subject to make all knowledge relate and fit a whole worldview.
3. It gives the student ready principles to apply to every challenge, every life decision, every relationship, and every daily choice.
4. It builds reasoning that fortifies Christian self-government and forms Christian character
5. It inspires the child with a personal life purpose as he learns to see himself as a unique individual gifted for a particular purpose.

**Biblical-classical education is truly excellent – because excellence comes only through Christ.** The following excerpt from Robert Winthrop<sup>8</sup> summarizes the value of the Bible:

*Diffuse the knowledge of the Bible, and the hungry will be fed, the naked clothed. Diffuse the knowledge of the Bible, and the stranger will be sheltered, the prisoner visited, and the sick ministered unto. Diffuse the knowledge of the Bible, and Temperance will rest upon a surer basis than any mere private pledge or public statute. Diffuse the knowledge of the Bible, and the peace of the world will be secured by more substantial safeguards than either the mutual fear, or the reciprocal interest, of princes or of people.*

*Diffuse the knowledge of the Bible, and the day will be hastened, as it can be hastened in no other way, when every yoke shall be loosened, and every bond broken, and when there shall be no more leading into captivity . . . The world, which seems to outgrow successively all other books, find still in this an ever fresh adaptation to every change in its condition and every period in its history. Now, as a thousand years ago, it has lessons alike for individuals and for nations; for rulers and for people; for monarchies and for republics; for times of stability and for times of overthrow; for the rich and the poor; for the simplest and the wisest . . . men may as well build their houses upon the sand and expect to see them stand, when the rains fall, and the winds blow, and the floods come, as to found free institutions upon any other basis than that morality and virtue, of which the Word of God is the only authoritative rule, and the only adequate sanction.*

*All societies of men must be governed in some way or other. The less they may have of stringent State Government, the more they must have of individual self-government. The less they rely on public law or physical force, the more they must rely on private moral restraint. Men, in a word, must necessarily be controlled, either by a power within them, or by a power without them; either by*

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<sup>8</sup> Winthrop, Robert C. "The Bible: Address and Speeches on Various Occasions," *Consider and Ponder*, FACE. Pp. 10-21.

*the word of God, or by the strong arm of man; either by the Bible or by the bayonet.*

*It may do for other countries and other governments to talk about the State supporting religion. Here, under our own free institutions, it is Religion which must support the State. And never more loudly than at this moment have these institutions of ours called for such support . . .*

As Christian parents, we have been called to a work begun many centuries ago – a work of liberating man to God’s governance. You’re here because you are part of a massive revolutionary force that is returning to Christ what is rightfully his – beginning with the children. “A nation which is humble enough to begin with its children in the constructing of its foundations for liberty may once again have the opportunity to lead nations to Christ . . . ‘a little child shall lead them . . .’”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Rosalie J. Slater, *Teaching and Learning*, p. 107

