



## Patristics and Christian Learning with Dr. Jordan Wood

### Lecture 5: Virtue and Knowledge: Basil the Great and John Chrysostom on Education

#### Outline:

#### Virtue and Knowledge: Basil the Great and John Chrysostom on Education

- Paideia: Educate the student by forming their character to be in harmony with the values and principles of the Cosmos itself.
- What is the Lord's instruction?
- Saint John Chrysostom (golden-mouthed):
  - He lived from 347 – 407 AD.
  - He was known for his extreme eloquence.
  - Both Chrysostom and Basil wrote works directly confronting the issue of the Christian relation to classical education.
  - **An Address on Vainglory and the Proper Raising of Children (addressed to parents):**
    - How ought we to form our children (paideia)?
      - Raising children is like crafting living statues.
      - He also compares the task of parenting to governing the city of the soul.
      - Education is like training athletes.
      - In all of the images it is clear that you have to make judgements about what is good to the end of raising a mature, virtuous Christian.
    - The five gates:
      - The first gate is the tongue because it is the busiest gate: no ill word should exit it (gossip or slander).
      - The second gate is the gate of hearing: Who will you let in? Use good stories like that of Cain and Abel.
      - Smell
      - Touch
    - For the Christian child, the only way is virtue. Virtue is fundamental for virtue.
- Saint Basil:
  - Basil is educated in Constantinople and Athens.
  - He was not enthusiastic about what he learned in that education.



- **Basil wrote a letter titled, “An Address to Young Men on the Proper Use of Pagan Literature.”**
  - Basil takes a modest approach, where it isn’t total fear nor is it total obsession with the text.
  - “Do not surrender the rudders of your mind,” be judicious:
    - Bees are discretionary they skip over some flowers.
    - It is like plucking blooms from the rose bed. Reach for those things that are healthful to the soul.
    - Look for nourishing food, and all the more so for the soul. It is not just about information, it is about formation.
  - Anything that is good only for this life, discard this. Anything that raises the soul to eternity, and uplifts the soul is worthwhile.
- Critical questions of this approach:
  - Is this approach sufficiently nuanced?
    - On Basil: Can you get to the point of being sufficiently critical of that education if you’ve never gone through it? The bee image is from Plutarch.
    - We can no more neglect education than we can neglect the world itself that we live in.
    - Isn’t human knowledge just as much a work of God as nature?
    - The art of medicine is no less also a work of God just because it is the work of human beings.
  - Some of the things that John and Basil say about the dangers of the poets are no less dangerous in scripture itself.
    - If scripture presents the same obstacles that certain Greco-Roman classics present, why can’t you adopt a similar strategy that you do for scripture for the classics if you do so with the right eyes.