

What Did the Greeks Really Teach?

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Today's classical education system attempts to resurrect what the Greeks and Romans did, as if they had it right back then and we had better emulate them. Here we ask: do we copy the Greeks correctly?

Greek "Grammar"

Did Greek children memorize language? No. In fact, they memorized Homer, not grammar. They did not have printed books in those days, so they memorized and copied in order to talk about the poems and learn elegant use of the language. This study of literature is what the Greeks called "grammar." That system of studying language does not resemble what we call grammar today.

Actually it was impossible for the Greeks to study our kind of grammar or the Latin version. The system had not yet been invented. Only in later Greek times did Dionysus Thrax work at the "science" of breaking down language into parts and classifying the parts. This science was not intended to help teach or to help children grasp their language. Instead, it analyzed the words of language, just as geometry was a science of analyzing points, lines, planes, and solids. Thrax studied the great writings, and he listed letters, syllables, words, and parts of speech. Later Greeks expanded his work until they had twenty-four classes of nouns, eight categories of verbs, and eighteen prepositions categorized as one-syllable and two-syllable words. This was a primitive beginning for classifying parts of speech, and it did not classify parts of sentences. Romans did that later.

Thrax's system was a matter of mental gymnastics for adults and not a means for children to learn to speak and write well. Homer and other poets, playwrights, and classic philosophers had already written without the benefit of Thrax's grammar. Grammar came from literature, not literature from grammar.

Did the Greeks believe in "stages" of child development, the first one being the grammar stage or memory stage? No, again. This began with writer Dorothy Sayers, who proposed the idea in an essay. For some reason, this idea caught like wildfire among homeschoolers, and they turned it into a full-blown psychology of child development and learning. It is true that young children can memorize large quantities. It is also true that older students can memorize huge amounts. Many teens, motivated by competitive Bible quizzes, memorize whole Bible books. They do not outgrow a so-called memory stage or grammar stage. Today's child development systems are more likely to label an early learning stage as concrete. They would save abstractions like grammatical declensions for later.

Greek Paganism

Homer's poems were the bible of the Greeks. The end of studying that literature was to learn moral truths, and this involved knowing the heroes who had become gods. Since Greek gods often acted immorally, the students and teachers interpreted in a way that made sense of that immorality. One method was to allegorize the events. Some Bible interpreters, notably Origen, known as a heretic in the third century, picked up this system of allegorizing and used it on the Bible.

The bible of the Greeks permeated their education and their life. They did not newly invent this pagan belief system but inherited it from the most ancient times. The city of Athens was named after the pagan goddess Athena. At first she was called Athana. *Than* means death, so *a-thanatos* meant without death, the deathless one. Athena is simply the Greek name for Eve. Other

Greek gods and goddesses likewise date back to the beginning of history. Zeus and Hera were the first couple in the world. In other words they were Adam and Eve.

Athena was also an Eve, reborn after the Flood, emerging full-grown from the head of Zeus. A larger-than-life ivory and gold statue of her stood in her temple, the Parthenon. Scores of sculptures around the Parthenon show her with the serpent and tree and other Eve settings. Other people we know from the Bible also became gods – evil people like Nimrod and his father Cush. The Greeks descended from very early pagans at the time of the tower of Babel.

By elevating men as gods, the Greeks looked for truth in man's reasoning rather than in God's revelation. The whole point of Greek philosophy is to find truth through man's thinking. Greek philosophers searched for answers to the big questions of life, such as where we came from and questions of life after death. The Greek meaning of philosophy is "love of wisdom." The Bible says, however, that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Psalm 111:10 and Proverbs 9:10).

Greek classicism and Christian teaching, then, are diametrically opposed. The literature, the philosophy, the religion, the worldview, the education – everything about the Greeks was pagan. Our Christian roots come from the Hebrews, not the Greeks or Romans. In the end, the Bible is the proper center for our Christian home-schools.