

Rhetoric at The Oaks

By Kevin Kimball

When most people hear the word “rhetoric,” they think of deceptive manipulation. So what place does rhetoric have at a Christian school? Christ says, “By your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matt. 12:37). Our words are an outpouring of our soul. Rhetoric is not about playing with words. If it becomes to anyone simply a game of words, then it reveals an empty soul. Not only that, but it even strips the cross of Christ of its power (1 Cor. 1:17). Rhetoric at The Oaks is not just another check mark on the way to graduation. Through words rhetoric reveals where the heart is: is it saturated with a love for the redeeming cross of Christ, or is it ruled by love of self?

Although this is a strong warning not to misuse rhetoric, Christians have a duty to use it well. We have a powerful message to communicate, and God has given us a powerful tool to use: words. God Himself *spoke* all things into existence. Christ is the *Word*. God specifically chose the written word as the means by which to declare to us the most important truth ever, the truth of the gospel, of Christ’s death in the place of us, the sinners. The Bible is filled with carefully crafted language: simile, analogy, parallelism, alliteration, satire, and much, much more. God has given us the gift of language in order to know and love and serve Him more fully. It is the pleasure of the wise to make use of this gift, as Solomon made clear: “the heart of the wise makes his speech judicious and adds persuasiveness to his lips. Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body” (Prov. 16:23-24). The Oaks desires its students to pursue this gift with the passion and energy that can only be awakened by the love of Christ.

For this reason The Oaks seeks to train students in the careful use of language in submission to God. A lawyer defending justice, a politician piercing to the heart of an issue, a pastor shepherding the church, a missionary proclaiming the gospel, a teacher leading his class to truth, a businessman conducting affairs with integrity, a scientist describing the mysteries he’s discovered, a father or mother bringing up a child – in all of these God has designed language to be used with care and pleasure, not for self-exaltation, but for Christ-exaltation. No matter what career graduates pursue, The Oaks desires its students to use words to display the Creator and the work of His hands.

Although not Christians, the ancient Greeks and Romans were careful observers of the way God created language. As a classical school, The Oaks uses the work of the ancients to turn all eyes to the sum of all truth, Christ Himself. At The Oaks students learn the three classical kinds of speeches (deliberative, ceremonial, and forensic), the five canons of rhetoric (invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery), and the six parts of discourse (introduction, statement of fact, division, proof, refutation, and conclusion). They learn how to develop a well-rounded persuasive speech applying *logos* (logic), *ethos* (character), and *pathos* (emotion).

While we have more to learn (and find great pleasure in doing so), we hope you enjoy the rhetorical finale of the Class of 2011.