

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by John Heikoop

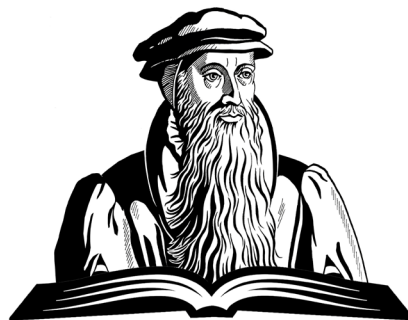
FOUNDATIONS

of

CHRISTIAN
EDUCATION

Lecture #1

Introduction to Foundations of Christian Education



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

John Knox Institute of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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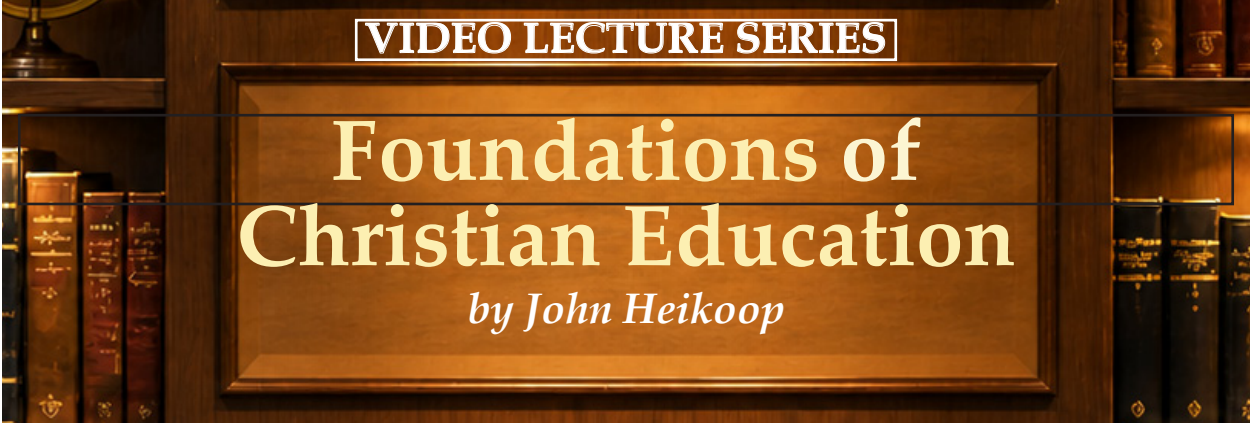
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Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the Authorized King James Version.

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Mr. John Heikoop has retired from his 32 years in Christian education, 16 years as a teacher, 16 years as Principal at the Rehoboth Christian School, in Norwich, Ontario, Canada.

He and his wife, JoAnne, have eight children and a growing number of grandchildren.

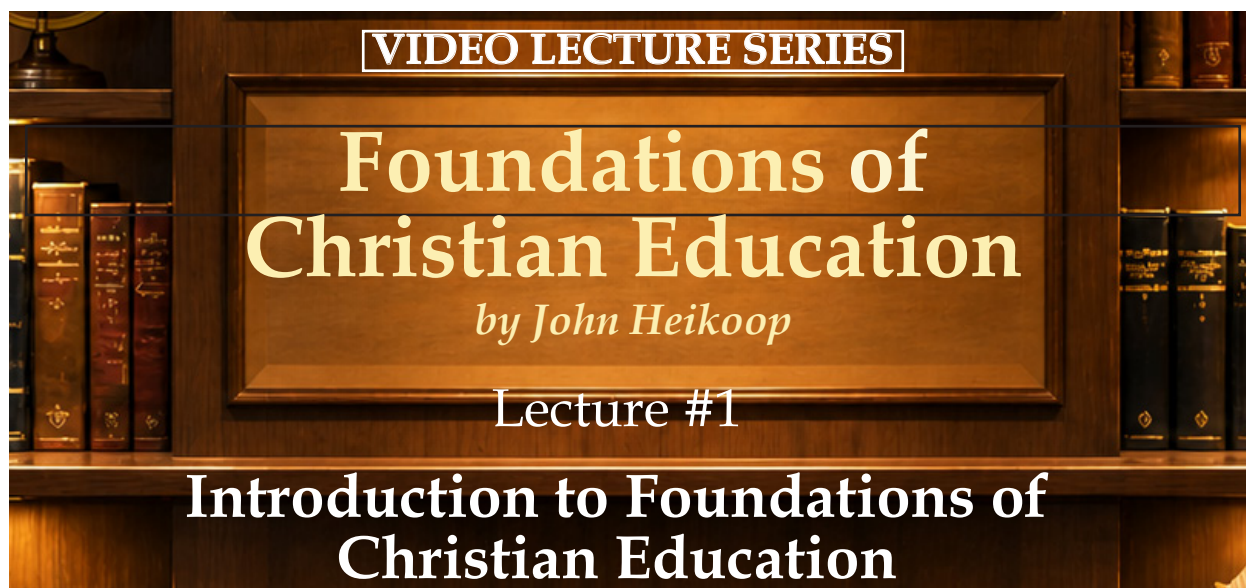
A wooden bookshelf with several books and a framed sign. The sign is made of wood and has the text "VIDEO LECTURE SERIES" at the top, "Foundations of Christian Education" in the middle, and "by John Heikoop" at the bottom. The books on the shelves are old and have gold lettering on their spines.

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

Foundations of Christian Education

by John Heikoop

1. Introduction to Foundations of
Christian Education
2. The Child
3. The Home
4. The Cuirriculum
5. The Teacher
6. Christian Education in Its Various Forms



Dear friends, welcome to this introductory video for *The Foundations of Christian Education* series, presented by the John Knox Institute of Higher Education. This series aims to strengthen and to encourage those in some way responsible for carrying out Christian education—parents, teachers, pastors, and church leaders. Over six lessons we will lay the biblical foundation of this most important calling: why we educate, who this child is that we educate, where education truly begins, what we teach and toward what goal, who the teacher must be, and the many forms in which Christian education is carried out across the world today.

We begin, as we must, with the foundation itself. The Lord Jesus Christ concludes his Sermon on the Mount with a simple yet searching message about the importance of a solid foundation. In Matthew 7, in verses 24 and 25, we read, “Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.” As the house on a sandy foundation will not stand, likewise our efforts to educate our children must be built on the solid foundation of God’s Word. Matthew Henry¹ draws this line further:

“The hearers of Christ’s word are here divided into two sorts; some that hear, and do what they hear; others that hear and do not...Hearing alone will not make us happy if we do not make conscience of doing Christ’s sayings. To do Christ’s sayings is to abstain from the sins he forbids and to perform the duties he requires. Our thoughts and affections, our words and actions, the temper of our minds, and the tenor of our lives must be conformable to the gospel of Christ.”

Our homes and schools must be built on the lasting foundation of the living Word of God. The rock points to Christ, “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Here lies the foundation for imparting eternal wisdom.

We often assume that Joshua was naturally strong and courageous, since there is a repeated exhortation to be so at the beginning of the Book of Joshua. Yet, might it not have been Joshua’s

¹ Matthew Henry (1662–1714) was a British nonconformist and Presbyterian minister and author, best known for his six-volume biblical commentary, *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*.

very fearfulness that led to the words needing to be repeated again and again: “Be strong and of a good courage” and “fear not”? The calling placed before him was immense. He was to lead God’s people into the promised land, bearing responsibility not only for conquest, but for faithfulness. In this, Joshua becomes a mirror for many of us. Those entrusted with leadership in the church feel the weight of responsibility for the flock. Parents feel keenly their weakness and inadequacy in raising their children. And educational leaders—whether homeschooling parents, classroom teachers, principals, or school board members—know the burden of educating young minds and hearts. The repeated exhortation to courage speaks not to human strength, but to human dependence. At the heart of God’s encouragement stands a central truth. When the Lord called Israel to inherit the land, he directed Joshua not first to military strategy or personal resolve, but to his Word: “This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.”—Joshua 1, verse 8.

From the very beginning, at the heart of our Christian heritage, we find an open Bible placed at the center of family, faith, and life. Insofar as our society has departed from this divine wisdom—this true key to lasting blessing—we have likewise lost our way on the path to real happiness and wisdom. When I have spoken in the past about a vision for Christian education shaped by its three dimensions—the heart, the mind, and the life—I often pictured an open Bible standing at the center where those circles meet. That open Bible points us to Christ, who is “the way, the truth, and the life,” and it also continually reminds us of this enduring truth from Joshua 1, verse 8. True success flows from faithful submission to the Word of God.

In this opening lesson, I will focus on three things: first, *Why Christian Education Is So Important*; second, *What Christian Education Is*; and third, *God’s Command, Which, if Obeyed, Comes with a Precious Promise*.

1. Why Christian Education Is So Important

As we consider the duty of Christian education, we must first ask why? Why do we sacrifice time, resources, and comforts to ensure our children are taught according to our religious convictions? The answer begins not with ourselves, but with the glory of God and the souls of our children. We must educate with an eye on eternity. Our children not only need to be prepared for a future career or a place in civil society. As sons and daughters of Adam, they need the saving work of God’s Spirit in applying the Word of salvation.

Psalm 127, verse 3, “Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.” If children are the Lord’s heritage, then parents are stewards, answerable to God for how we bring them up. We are entrusted with the souls of our children that must be instructed, not for selfish ends, but for the glory of the One who gave them. God’s faithfulness is promised from generation to generation. We are called to teach the next generation the praises of the Lord, that they might set their hope in God—not merely to know facts about him, but to trust and to love him.

Proverbs 22, verse 6, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” This is a promise joined to a duty. The training must take place. The direction must be set. And insofar that it is, God promises to crown these efforts with blessing—sometimes immediately, and sometimes after many years of patient waiting. The seed sown in faith does not return void.

Isaiah 55, verse 11, “So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I

sent it.” We also do this to protect our children, not merely physically, but spiritually, morally, and intellectually. We live in a world where two fundamentally opposing belief systems battle for the minds and the hearts of our children. Secular humanism quietly teaches that there is no sovereign God, that each person determines their own truth, and that self is the ultimate authority. Christian education stands as a protective wall, guarding what our children are taught, the environment they learn in, and the worldview that shapes everything they understand about themselves and the world.

Most importantly, Christian education confronts our children honestly with their need for genuine conversion, pointing them towards a personal and saving interest in Christ as the only hope. As parents, we made a solemn promise before God at our children’s baptism to raise them in the truth. Christian education is one of the most important ways that we keep that promise. So the “why” is clear—we do this for the glory of God, because our children have never-dying souls, and because eternity is real.

2. What Christian Education Is

Dear friends, what is Christian education? It’s a common mistake to think that Christian education begins with a school building, a desk, and a curriculum. It does not. Christian education starts in the home at the birth of a child—indeed, even before the birth in the prayers and the expectations of Christian parents. Long before a child reads a textbook, he or she is watching and listening, reading something far more powerful than any textbook—the lives of their parents. We will explore the Christian home more fully in the next lesson. But the home must be named here, because everything rests upon it.

Proverbs 9, verse 10, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.” Without the inward illumination of the Spirit, there is no saving understanding. This is the most important truth in all of Christian education. The school is only a servant, a handmaid, to the parents and to the church. The most important need of every child is not academic achievement. It is to be born again. As Christ told Nicodemus, the piously educated Pharisee, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).

What is Christian education aiming at? The three dimensions tell the story. *The Heart*—teaching biblical truth and stressing the need for personal conversion that students would seek wisdom and know the Lord. *The Mind*—developing God-given talents and skills for careful thinking and faithful service in whatever calling God provides. And, *the Life*—cultivating Christian virtues: humility, diligence, respect, honesty, and compassion, so that our children’s conduct may be conformable to Christian values. In the lessons that follow, we will develop each of these dimensions more fully.

A word of clarification is needed here. God’s Word speaks with authority over all of life, and much of what we teach in the school belongs to knowledge that is common to all of mankind, knowledge made accessible through what the Reformed tradition calls natural revelation and common grace. Mathematics, the natural sciences, grammar, history—these are not outside of God’s sovereignty, but much of their content is not drawn from Scripture. We must be careful not to try and make common things unnaturally spiritual, nor to make spiritual things common. The child who learns to reason through a problem in mathematics is developing the logical mind that God gave him, equipping himself with tools for future life in the world, and that is a legitimate and God-honouring purpose in itself. But the teaching that comes from above—the knowledge of God, of sin, of grace, of redemption—that is of a different order entirely. It’s a spiritual knowledge and indispensable to salvation, and it belongs to a category no classroom or curriculum can

manufacture. Recognizing this difference between natural and spiritual revelation, we'll teach all three dimensions—the heart, the mind, and the life—in a context of divine revelation, allowing God's Word to provide the proper framework in which all knowledge finds its proper place.

3. God's Command, Which, if Obeyed, Comes with a Precious Promise

Where do we find the authority for this work? We see the pattern of faithful teaching running through the entire history of God's people—in Abraham commanding his household, in David instructing Solomon, in the schools of the prophets, in Christ's three years of patient daily instruction of his disciples. Christian education is not a modern innovation. It also belongs within the Great Commission that Christ has assigned to his church. [Matthew 28](#), verses 18 to 20, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

Christ, who has all power, commands to teach all nations all things that he has taught. This mandate of teaching and baptism also falls upon established churches and families. Young Timothy was instructed from childhood by his mother and grandmother, converted under Paul, and became a blessing to another generation. That pattern—faithful teaching passing from one generation to the next—is exactly what we are called to continue.

Since Luther's² day, Reformed churches have established schools to teach the young. The authority Protestants gave to the Holy Scripture resulted in every plow boy needing to learn to read the inspired Word. John Knox³ envisioned and then established schools for every boy and girl in every parish in Scotland. His vision included local primary schools and regional secondary education feeding district universities across the nation. Schooling was also important in the time of the growth of missions and the mission endeavor. For example, the China Inland Mission established at least 125 schools across China before Hudson Taylor⁴ died in 1905. Today this command is carried out in many forms—Sunday school, Christian day schools, homeschooling, hybrid co-operative schools, and distance education. While the modes differ, the duty is the same.

Christian education is not just an option. It is what God is calling parents to do. When other possibilities exist, how can they in good faith subject their children to the hostile pressures of an ungodly and a hostile education system? Apart from the special grace of God, our children and youth are especially vulnerable to the influences of their peers and of ungodly temptations. And you, fathers, you are specifically and solemnly charged in [Ephesians 6](#), verse 4, to bring up your children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Nothing of what we do, or fail to do, should be the means to turn our children's hearts away from the LORD, the God of the covenant.

Before concluding, it's right to briefly address the real challenges that come with this calling. Carrying out Christian education as God would have us do it is always a struggle. As my father-in-law used to remind me, in my role a Christian School principal, Satan is no friend of Christian education. The three-headed enemy of God's church must be engaged: Satan, the world, and our

² Martin Luther (1483–1546) was a German priest, theologian, author, hymn writer, professor, and former Augustinian friar, who was the seminal figure of the Protestant Reformation in Europe. He is widely regarded as one of the most influential figures in Protestant Christian history.

³ John Knox (c. 1514–1572) was a Scottish priest, theologian, author, and leader of the Reformation in Scotland; founder of the Church of Scotland.

⁴ Hudson Taylor (1832–1905) was a British Protestant Christian missionary to China, the founder of the China Inland Mission (now OMF International), and is regarded as one of the most important and influential missionaries of all time. He was known for his zeal for evangelism, and preached the gospel in several different Chinese dialects.

own sinful hearts. There will always be challenges, with resources, time, staffing, finances, and keeping unity. Many who have started private Christian schools were not wealthy or experienced, and yet, under a sense of need and duty, God has blessed these schools, and they have been set up.

Hebrews 11, verses 24 to 26 gives us further instruction: “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.” Moses’ costly choice became a blessing for the whole people of Israel and for the generations following. The choices that we make today will become the inheritance of those who follow after us. “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). Christ’s words here mean that the victory of true Christianity is already decided. It is *his* pleasure to give it; the outcome is not in doubt.

Joshua 1, verse 9, “Have not I commanded thee? Be strong of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.” “Have not I commanded thee?”— God’s command is itself the ground of our courage. He does not send us where he has not promised to go with us. We commit our children, body and soul, to him who will never forsake the work of his own hand. Those who feel the weight of this calling, with limited strength and resources, may take encouragement also from the feeding of the five thousand (Matthew 14:14–21). Faced with overwhelming need and painfully small provision, the disciples saw only what was lacking. And yet, when what little that they had was placed in the hands of Christ, it became more than enough. The lesson is not that the loaves were sufficient, but rather, that Lord has everything we need.

In this opening lesson, we have asked *why*, and found our answer in the glory of God and the salvation of souls. We have asked *what*, and found that Christian education addresses the whole person—heart, mind, and life—beginning in the home, upholding the fear of the Lord. And we’ve heard the command to teach all things found in God’s Word to every generation. Christian education is our God-given duty. And that truth leads us directly to our next lesson, because before we can speak about the home, the curriculum, the teacher, or the school, we must ask the most foundational question of all: *Who is this that we are educating? What is their nature? And, What do they truly need? And, What does God require of us in response?*

In the lessons that follow, we will explore the child, the home, the curriculum, the calling of the teacher, and the many forms in which faithful Christian education is carried out across the world. Each lesson builds on this rock: God’s Word is the solid foundation, Christ is the way, and the generation to come is the inheritance that he has entrusted into our hands. May the Lord bless this series to your encouragement, and may he strengthen your hands and hearts, and may the generation to come set their hope in God. Thank you.