

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by John Heikoop

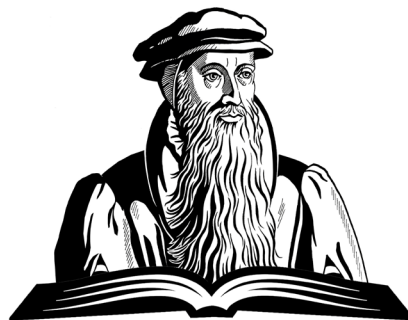
FOUNDATIONS

of

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Lecture #3

The Home



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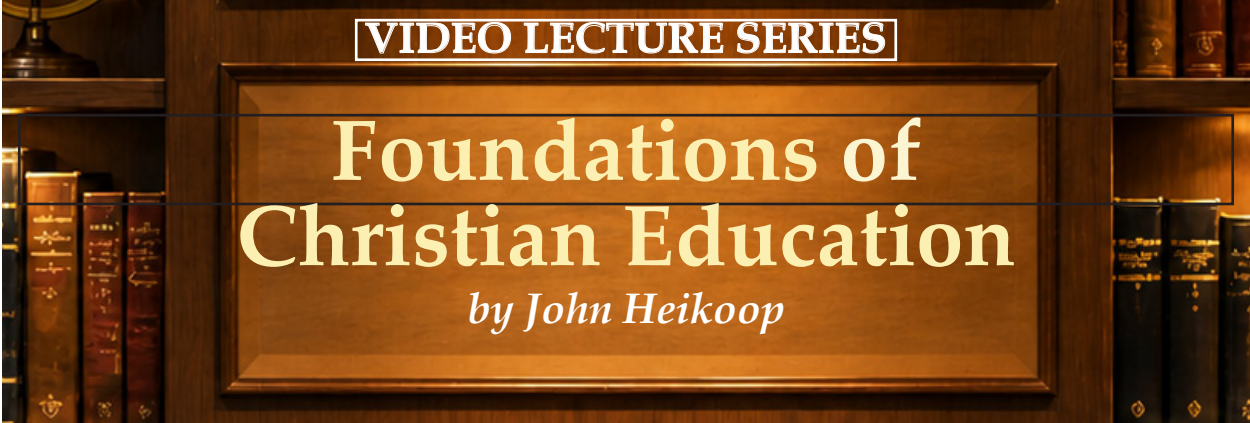
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Mr. John Heikoop has retired from his 32 years in Christian education, 16 years as a teacher, 16 years as Principal at the Rehoboth Christian School, in Norwich, Ontario, Canada.

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

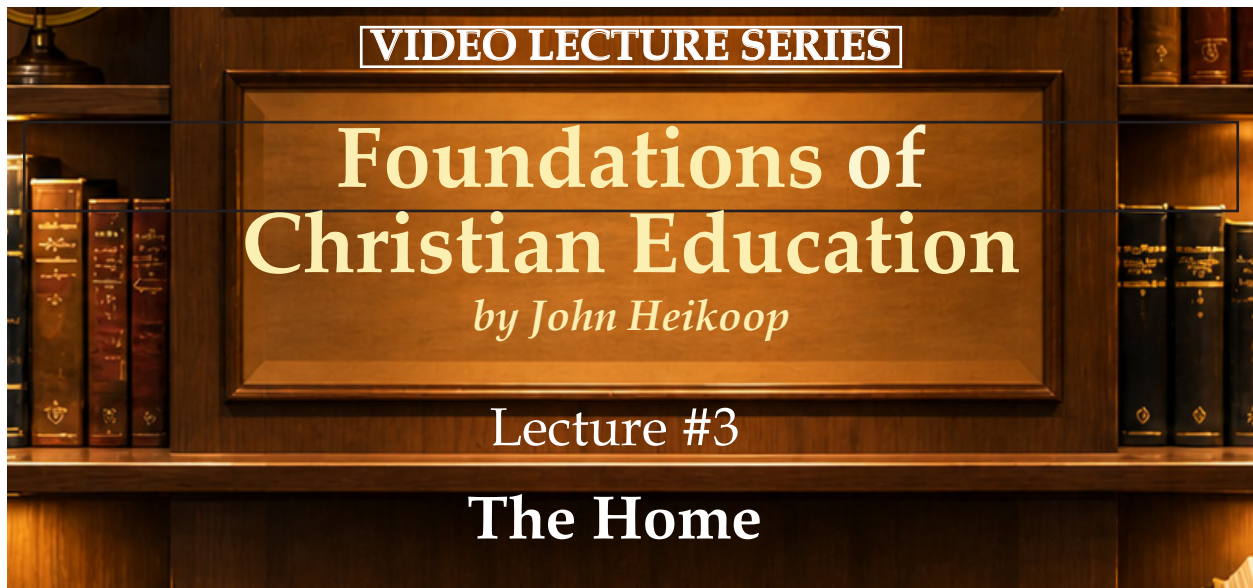
A wooden bookshelf with several books and a framed sign. The sign is made of wood and has the text "VIDEO LECTURE SERIES" at the top, "Foundations of Christian Education" in the middle, and "by John Heikoop" at the bottom. The books on the shelves are old and have gold lettering on their spines.

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 back to *The Foundations of Christian Education* series, presented by the John Knox Institute of Higher Education. In our last lesson, we considered the child—who this child is that we are educating, what they truly are by nature, and what they truly need. We saw that every child is a precious heritage of the Lord, bearing traces of his image, fallen deeply in sin, and standing in need of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. That view of the child shapes everything that follows in this series.

1. The Most Important Institution of Christian Education

In this lesson, we turn to the first and most important institution of Christian education—*The Home*. Before there were Christian schools, before there were Sunday schools, before there were catechism classes, there was *The Home*. It is where education begins. It is where the character is first formed. It is where God's Word must be first heard, read, and lived. And when all other doors close, it is where Christian education returns as the faithful default.

The Lord does not leave us to wonder about the home's central role in education. He commands it plainly in the book of Deuteronomy, as Moses prepares the people of Israel to enter the promised land. Before describing the school, before establishing the synagogue, he addresses *The Home*. Deuteronomy 6, verses 6 and 7, "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

"When thou sittest in thine house...when thou walkest by the way...when thou liest down, and when thou risest up"—this is not a description of a school program. It is the description of the rhythm of daily life in a home—morning and evening, at rest and at work, indoors and outdoors. The Word of God is to guide the atmosphere of the home at every hour of the day.

This is firstly and primarily the duty of parents, not the school. The school is a help, a support, a resource that parents have come together to share, but it cannot and must not replace the home. The moment the school begins to think of itself as the primary educator of children, it has lost its way. The parent remains the first educator. The school is a servant to that calling.

Ephesians 6, verse 4, "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them

up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” Bring them up, not send them off, not outsource all responsibility, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. This is a father’s charge, and thus, together with the mother, it is solemn, personal, and non-transferable charge. Every Christian father will give account for how this charge was kept.

And Joshua, standing at the end of his life, gave the people of Israel the most memorable summary of this household calling: Joshua 24, verse 15, “And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” As for me and my house—the home is where the choice of whom we will serve is made visible every day, in what is valued, in what is spoken about, in what is prayed for, in what is permitted through the door. The Christian home is not accidental. It is to be intentional.

The Apostle Paul gives us one of Scripture’s most instructive examples of a child formed by a faithful home. Young Timothy had come to the faith and to faithful service under Paul’s ministry, but Paul traces that faith back further, to what Timothy had received at home: 2 Timothy 3, verses 14 and 15, “But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures—that phrase, “from a child,” is key—not when he reached adulthood, not when he entered formal training—from a child. And the one who had given him this from a child was, as Paul says in his earlier chapter or letter, his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice, women of unfeigned faith, who passed that faith to Timothy through the faithful instruction of the home. Notice here that Paul’s commendation passes by his father who was a Greek. May Christian women be encouraged to persevere even when circumstances may appear less than ideal in your home circumstance.

2. The Heartbeat of Christian Home Education

Three principles emerge from this passage that are the heartbeat of Christian home education. The first is, *Begin Early*. Childhood is the learning age; it is when the impressions are deepest and habits most readily formed—“the older, the colder,” as the saying goes. God’s Word gives special encouragement to those who seek him early: “Those that seek me early shall find me,” he says (Proverbs 8:17). What a tragedy to waste the precious years of childhood filling a child’s heart with the world, when those years are the very time when the fear of the Lord can most naturally and most deeply take root.

The second is, *Teach by Example as Well as by Instruction*. Timothy knew not only Paul’s doctrine but his manner of life, his purpose, his faith, his longsuffering, his charity, his patience. Children learn the truth not only by hearing, but by seeing it lived. A consistent Christian life marked by integrity, patience, charity, and endurance under trial will validate the instruction given in the home. A parent who teaches the Word on Sunday and lives a different standard on Monday has taught more powerfully by the Monday than by the Sunday.

The third is, *Establish Children Firmly in Truth So that They Persevere*. Paul urges Timothy not merely to have learned the truth, but to continue in it; to be so established, so assured, so grounded in what has been received that the inevitable pressures and deceptions of the world cannot shake him loose. This is the long-term goal of home education. Not merely that a child knows the catechism, but that the catechism has become theirs—believed, loved, and lived-in,

and that they have seen it lived-in, in their home; that these are not just doctrinal notions, but they represent practical godliness.

3. Five Aspects of a Christian Home

What does this look like in practice? Let me give five aspects of a Christian home. When faithfully maintained, they will affect all areas of life and they will have a lasting influence on the child.

The first is, *Godly Unity*. The home's key aim is consistency—to live and learn the same Word, the same doctrine, and the same practice in all areas of life. The home should be an extension of and support to the truths brought in church. When a child hears the same Word at church on Sunday, and reads the same Word at family worship on Monday, and sees that same Word lived out in the daily conduct of father and mother, that consistency becomes a wall of protection against confusion and doubt. Paul expresses this desire for the Romans. He says, “I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil” (Romans 16:19), knowing much of truth and little of sin, rather than the reverse.

The second principle is *Family Worship*. The example of Abraham is given us in Scripture as the pattern of the faithful household. And God says of him, “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him.” The daily gathering of the household for the reading, of prayer, and praise, suited to the ages and needs of those present, is one of the most powerful means of grace available to the Christian family. It need not be elaborate, but it must be regular. Again, Genesis 18, verse 19: “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.”

The third is *The Lord's Day*. The fourth commandment is not merely a religious observance, it is a gift. Already in creation, man's first full day in paradise was spent in communion with the God of creation. Israel was later called to remember God's mighty hand in deliverance from bondage in Egypt. And since the Son of God arose from death and appeared unto his followers, the Christian church remembers that Christ is risen, pointing to the eternal rest that belongs to the people of God. A family that keeps the Lord's Day faithfully, and does not allow sports, commerce, entertainment, or social media to crowd out that which God has set apart for himself, receives a blessing that strengthens the whole week—a day set apart for worship, and for hearing the Word preached, for family instruction, for prayer, for singing of God's praises, for rest and spiritual exercises. The Lord calls us one day in seven not to be thinking our own thoughts or doing our own pleasure on the day that he has sanctified and declared to be holy. Israel's neglect of the Sabbath was among the sins that brought judgment. Here, the student may rest from the academic pursuits of the six days to a day of rest and worship. Exodus 20, verse 8, “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.”

The fourth is *Doctrinal Instruction*. The catechism has been the church's greatest instrument for passing the faith from one generation to the next. Whether through question and answer, through Bible story and Christian biography, through reading and discussion, parents who take doctrinal instruction seriously are giving their children an inheritance worth more than gold and silver. The child who knows what he believes, and why, and from whose Word it comes, is a child equipped to stand when the pressures come.

The fifth is *Practical Application*—the teachable moments that schools can replicate. Parents model Christian education in the principles of ordinary daily life—how they speak to a difficult neighbour, how they respond to hardships, how they give, how they forgive, how they treat those

who serve them, how they care for the elderly or for the struggling in their community. These are the lessons that sink deepest because they are not taught in the abstract. They are lived out before watching eyes.

One more thing must be said, and it belongs here more than anywhere else in this series. The Christian home must guard what comes through its doors. The Apostle Paul gives us the governing principle in one sentence: 1 Corinthians 15, verse 33, “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.”

Evil communications corrupt good manners—the home that is intentional about the Word of God, about family worship, about the Lord’s Day, about doctrinal instruction must be equally intentional about what is allowed to enter through the door of entertainment, of media, of digital technology, and of friendship. Not because we can create a completely isolated environment, but because the atmosphere of our homes is shaped as much by what we avoid as by what we encourage. The church of the Old Testament and of the New were called to come out and to be separate. A parent who diligently guards what enters their home, while faithfully teaching what God requires, is laying a double foundation of protection and guidance.

3. Some Special Situations

There are parts of the world where this series is being viewed in which formal Christian education is not available, where there is no Christian school, no sound congregation nearby, or catechism class within reach. And even in places where Christian schools do exist, there may come times when financial pressures, government interference, or community breakdown closes those doors. To those parents, we say that the home has always been the primary institution. While a Christian school is a wonderful blessing when God provides it, it is not the foundation of our children’s education. The foundation is the Word of God, the faithful parent, and the covenant-keeping God who has promised to be a God to his people and to their children after them. When all other doors close, the home is not a last resort. It’s, rather, a return to the origin.

The task is great, the challenges are real, but the duty is clear, and the God who commands it is faithful. The great seventeenth-century Scottish divine, Samuel Rutherford,¹ writing to a friend in great difficulty, gave this encouragement that I have often found helpful as a father and an educational leader. Rutherford writes, “Duties are ours, events are the Lord’s. When our faith goeth to meddle with events, and to hold a court upon God’s providence, and beginneth to say, How wilt thou do this and that? we lose ground. We have nothing to do there. It is our part to let the Almighty exercise his own office, and steer his own helm.” Duties are ours, events are the Lord’s. Our duty is to be faithful to command our households after us, to teach diligently, to maintain family worship, to guard the Lord’s Day, to instruct in doctrine, to model the truth in daily life. What the God of all grace does with that faithfulness is his to determine. And he has promised that the seed sown in faith will not return void but will accomplish that whereto he sends it.

In this lesson we have seen that *The Home* is the primary institution of Christian education, not by accident, but by God’s design and command. We have heard God’s call to parents in Deuteronomy 6, to fathers in Ephesians 6, to households in Joshua 24. We’ve drawn three principles from the life of Timothy: begin early, teach by example, and establish this in the truth. And we’ve considered five practical dimensions of faithful Christian homes: Godly unity, family worship, the Lord’s Day,

¹ Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661), was a Scottish Presbyterian pastor and theologian, and author of many widely read letters, sermons, devotional and scholastic works. He is known for *Lex, Rex: the Law and the Prince*, a defense of constitutionalism and limited government against the supposed divine right of kings.

doctrinal instruction, and practical application.

The psalmist gives us the picture of what God promises to the home that fears him in the family Psalm, Psalm 128, verses 1 and 3, “Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways....Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table.” May the Lord make our homes such places. May fathers command their households after them. May mothers teach and pray and model the truth before watching eyes. And may the children raised in such homes rise up to praise the God of their fathers, and to build faithful homes of their own.

In our next lesson we will turn to *The Curriculum*, asking, what we teach, how we decide what to teach, and what we are hoping will form in the young people God has entrusted to our care. Thank you.