

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by John Heikoop

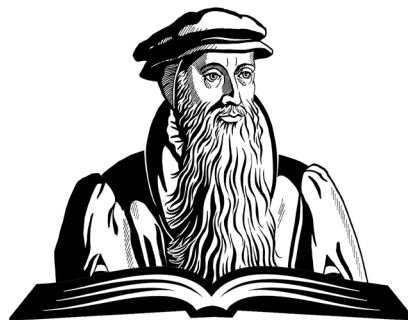
FOUNDATIONS

of

CHRISTIAN
EDUCATION

Lecture #5

The Teacher



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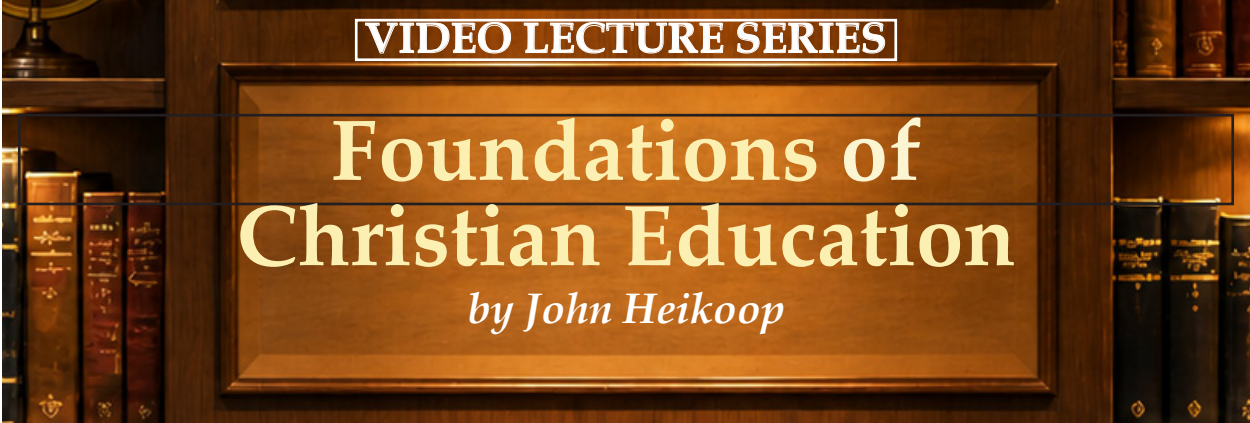
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Mr. John Heikoop has retired from his 32 years in Christian education, 16 years as a teacher, 16 years as Principal at the Rehoboth Christian School, in Norwich, Ontario, Canada.

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

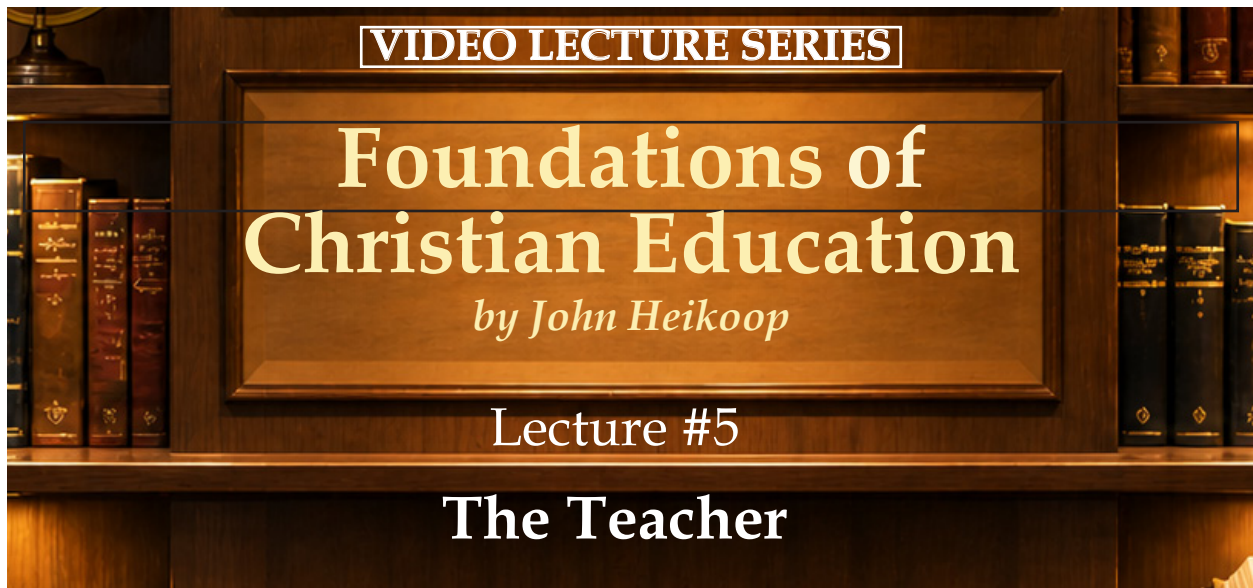
The background of the top section is a photograph of a wooden bookshelf filled with old, leather-bound books. A small lamp is visible on the left. In the center, a wooden frame contains the title and author information.

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 Curriculum
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 four previous lessons, we have considered the foundations of Christian education, the nature of the child we are educating, the Christian home as the primary institution of that education, and the curriculum—what we teach, toward what goal, and by what biblical principles. In this lesson, we turn to the person who stands at the intersection of all these things, *The Teacher*.

This is not a lesson about pedagogy or professional development. It's a lesson about calling, character, and the nature of the work itself. Whatever specific methods, strategies, or qualifications a teacher may develop over time, what we address today comes before all of that—what the teacher is, what place they occupy, and what kind of work they are engaged in.

When I came into teaching, the Lord had inclined my heart toward Christian service, and my prayer had become, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" I did not set out to be a teacher as such, but when the way opened up to serve at a Christian school in desperate need of staff, knowing my conviction that Christian education is not an option but a duty for every Christian family and church, I could not say, to their plea for a year of help, I could not say "No." The one year became two, and then three, and then soon it was sixteen. And then a similar need arose for administrative leadership, and I left the classroom for the principal's office.

I missed the classroom and the firsthand interaction with the students, which is at the heart of Christian education. But I came to see that it takes a whole community to support and raise a child within the Christian school family. And in that community, I observed what I can only describe as a reflection of God's design, that no two snowflakes are alike, and so, no two teachers bring the same gifts to the work. Each one, fully dedicated and rightly placed, has something irreplaceable to contribute to the Christian education of the children. And even those who feel the limits of their own abilities can model something the classroom or the homeschool needs as much as any lesson—humility, perseverance, and a willingness to learn and accept help from other sources.

1. The Importance of a Christian Teacher

What distinguishes the Christian schoolteacher from any other teacher? The subjects are often the same—Mathematics, Science, History, Language Arts. The daily tasks of preparation, instruction,

assessment, and classroom management are largely the same. But there is one distinction that takes and changes the entire nature of the work. The Christian teacher recognizes that every child in the classroom has a soul, and that there is a life to come. The teacher who is simply concerned with preparing students for success in this life—for employment, for social participation, for the gaining of credentials—is doing something genuinely good and necessary, but it falls short of the full picture.

The question the Lord Jesus puts to us is the question that should stand behind every lesson that we teach: Mark 8, verse 36, “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” That question does not make the teaching of Mathematics or History less important; it makes it more important. Because every subject becomes an opportunity to form a person who will one day give an account to God for how they used the gifts and knowledge that they received. The Christian teacher is not simply instructing minds. They are, in the providence of God, shaping persons who are made for eternity.

Research in education consistently confirms what experience already teaches us: the teacher is the single most important factor in the effectiveness of a child’s schooling—more important than curriculum; more important than buildings, technology, or furnishings; more important than policy or program design. The teacher who is diligent in preparation, personally competent in their subject, and genuinely caring toward the children in their care, makes a difference that no other element of education can replicate. And in a Christian school, that influence extends beyond academic formation, because the life the teacher lives, the values that they model, and the spirit in which they teach speak louder than the words they say.

But we must also be clear about what the Christian schoolteacher is not, and where the boundaries of their calling lie. Within the broader structure of church, home, and school, each institution has its own proper calling and jurisdiction. The minister of the gospel is the God-appointed preacher of the Word, and the primary shepherd of souls. The Christian parent bears the primary responsibility for the spiritual nurture and instruction of the child. The Christian schoolteacher is a vital aid to both, serving within the boundaries of that calling, supporting and reinforcing what the home and the church have established, but not displacing either.

2. The Christian Schools Bear a Duty to Teachers

Those who are charged with the responsibility of establishing and maintaining Christian schools bear a solemn duty toward the teachers that they call to this work. Clear expectations must be set, and those expectations must be supported with careful oversight, patient monitoring, and ongoing guidance. The work entrusted to the Christian schoolteacher is weighty and must not be treated lightly. Compensation, likewise, should reflect the value of a life poured out in service to the school, the families it serves, and the wider Christian community.

While smaller schools may require less formal structure, larger schools especially must commit both time and resources to principals and administrators, enabling them to fulfil their essential task faithfully. When the importance of a Christian schoolteacher’s formation is rightly understood as foundational, time will be given for supervision, professional development, encouragement, and correction where needed. These are not secondary concerns, but vital supports that help preserve the health of the school and the longevity of those who serve in it.

The same principle applies within the Christian home. Parents who undertake the work of home education must not underestimate the commitment required to equip themselves for the responsibilities that they assume. The growing complexity of education for life in this present world

demands humility, perseverance, and willingness to learn. Not all fathers or mothers begin equally prepared, and while the support of associations, parent groups, churches, and sound curricula is a great blessing, these supports do not remove the need for continual growth, self-assessment, and, at times, professional assistance.

When academic or social benchmarks are not being met, wisdom calls for action rather than discouragement. Reaching out to trained specialists for assessment and appropriate intervention is not a failure of calling, but an exercise of faithfulness—a recognition that God often supplies help through the gifts and callings of others.

Think of Moses on the hill during the battle of Rephidim (Exodus 17:8–13). While Joshua fought below, Moses stood on the hill with the rod of God. But Moses' hands grew heavy. And Aaron and Hur took a stone, set it under him, and stayed up his hands, one on either side. And Israel prevailed. Aaron and Hur were not Moses. They did not carry his office. But through their faithful support his work was sustained. And so, the Christian schoolteacher is not the minister, and is not the parent. The teacher supports and reinforces what both have established. A threefold cord is not easily broken. How much stronger for a child when church, home, and school function as one. Ecclesiastes 4, verse 12, we read, “And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.”

John Knox¹ held a similar conviction. He envisioned a schoolmaster for every parish in Scotland. Teachers are essential pillars of a Reformed Christian society, tasked with teaching Grammar, Catechism, and the reading of Scripture. Knox argued that teachers needed to be well trained, and that their work was inseparable from the broader educational mission of the church. The Reformation² had a profound impact on the development of schooling, precisely because it understood that the formation of the next generation required a partnership between church, home, and school, and that vision is not outdated. The blessings of the Protestant Reformation have actually spread throughout the entire world and this focus on the importance of education is as relevant today as it was then.

That same conviction was expressed with institutional precision by the Synod of Dordt³ in 1618 and 1619—that same great synod that produced the Canons of Dordt, which gave careful attention to the place of the schoolteacher. The church order required that the schoolteacher be godly, well-qualified, and committed to instructing children in both academic subjects and the Reformed faith. Ministers were to visit schools regularly to ensure soundness of doctrine. Teachers were not expected to be independent preachers, but they were considered partners in a larger educational structure, assisting parents and the church in teaching the next generation the knowledge of God. They were to be examined by the church consistories, and supervised in their work, and faithful to the doctrine of the church whose community they served. The school was not a church, but it worked alongside the church.

Just as a school may employ a range of people to serve different tasks or certain aspects of the educational task, some with full agreement with the school's confessional identity, others serving in more limited roles within it, the school is an institution that bears a confessional responsibility

¹ John Knox (c. 1514–1572) was a Scottish Christian minister, theologian, author, and leader of the Reformation in Scotland. Founder of Presbyterianism and the Church of Scotland, he continued to lead Scotland's Reformed church, preaching daily at St. Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh up until his death in 1572.

² The Reformation (c. 1517–1648) was a 16th and 17th-century religious, political, and cultural revolution across Europe that split Western Christianity, creating Protestantism, and challenging Roman Catholicism.

³ The Synod of Dordt, or the Synod of Dordrecht, was a European transnational synod of Protestant Christian churches, held in Dordrecht in 1618–1619 by the Dutch Reformed Church, to settle divisive controversies caused by the rise of Arminianism.

that does not necessarily depend on every individual within it being a confessor of experiential faith in every particular. What the school requires is that all who serve within it teach within and not against its confessional identity, and those in positions of leadership model and uphold the school's vision faithfully. The school is not a church. But it serves the church and the home, and in doing so, it takes its own calling seriously. We think of parents who hire a babysitter. They are always very careful about who it is that they put in charge of their children. And when the Christian school employs a teacher, they're seeking for the best example and the most consistent instruction with that of the home and the church.

3. The Role of the Christian Teacher

With that understanding of jurisdiction in place, let us consider what the work itself requires. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesians of the calling every Christian receives, and the spirit in which it must be carried out. His words speak directly to the teacher's vocation. Ephesians 4, verses 1 to 3: "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called—lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, forbearing one another in love—these are the qualities that distinguish effective and honorable teachers. A teacher who is harsh, disrespectful of his colleagues and superiors, dismissive of struggling students, undermining of Christian unity, or who teaches without genuine care for the children before them, is failing the calling regardless of any other qualifications that they may hold.

And alongside the care and diligence in the profession itself, we read in Ecclesiastes 9, verse 10, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest." And the same Apostle calls us to diligence in the Word of 2 Timothy 2, verse 15, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

A workman that needeth not to be ashamed—not perfection, but faithful, wholehearted effort. The teacher who prepares carefully, reflects honestly, remains open to growth, and brings freshness and care to their lessons year after year is honoring both the children and their calling.

No account of the teacher's calling is complete without speaking of the relationship between the teacher and the parent. These two, the parent and the teacher, are the primary influences in a child's development, and how well they work together affects what the school is able to accomplish.

Parents are called to support the teachers who serve their children. They should pray for them. They should not immediately accept every story that comes home from a child as a full account of what has happened, but they should reserve judgment until they have heard all parties involved. A child's report is real and should be taken seriously, but it's rarely the whole picture. A parent who undermines the teacher's authority in the eyes of a child does harm to the child's education and to the school community.

A teacher, likewise, must work diligently to build trust with the parents. The school that keeps parents closely informed, that communicates honestly about both progress and difficulty, that treats the parents as partners rather than as problems, is the school that will have the support it needs to do its work. The duty of care that is legally required and morally expected of every teacher—that care which any loving parent would provide—is also the foundation of trust that makes the parent-teacher relationship work. When parents see that their children are genuinely cared for, known by name, and taught with both competence and love, they will be the school's greatest supporters.

But there will be days—every teacher who has served for any length of time knows this—when the question arises in the heart, Who is sufficient for these things?—when the discouragement is real, when a student seems unreachable, when the resources are too few, and the needs are too many. And when the community around the school is divided, or when the fruit of years of faithful work is simply not visible. The answer is not found in our own sufficiency. It never was. The teacher who prays, who brings the weights of the classroom to God, who seeks his help and wisdom in the work, is working from the only adequate resource available to any of us. Psalm 127, verse 1, “Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.”

And in those dark and cloudy days, the teacher does well to remember past mercies—the student who changed over a year, the parent who gave thanks, the child who came to ask a question that showed something was working beneath the surface. These are not small things. They are gifts from God, given precisely to sustain through days when the fruit is not yet visible. Faithfulness is its own reward, and the labor done carefully and lovingly in the service of children is not lost, even when we cannot see where it has gone.

Dear friends, the Christian schoolteacher holds an honorable position—honorable not in the eyes of the world, which does not always understand it, but in the sight of God, and in the long reckoning of eternity. Every faithful lesson prepared, every child taught with patience and genuine care, every prayer offered for a student whose heart is known only to God—these are not lost. The work is great. The days are not always bright. The sufficiency is never our own. But God, who has placed these children in our care, has promised to be with those who faithfully serve within the calling that he has appointed.

Christian communities that value their children will in turn value and support those who teach them. They will recognize the weight of the teacher’s responsibility and the honor of their position. They will pray for them, thank them, and publicly stand behind them. And teachers who know they are supported in this way will serve with greater courage, and greater faithfulness, and greater joy.

We close now with a charge that belongs to every teacher who has wondered whether the work is worth it—1 Corinthians 15, verse 58, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

May the Lord sustain every Christian schoolteacher in this honorable calling. May he give wisdom, patience, and genuine care for the children. And may he strengthen the bonds between teachers and parents. And may the fruit of this work be seen in this life and in the life to come, to his glory alone.

In our final lesson, we will step back and consider the wider picture—*Christian Education in its Various Forms*, meeting the needs of every child, and the vision of a generation raised up to fear the Lord across the world. Thank you for listening.