

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by John Heikoop

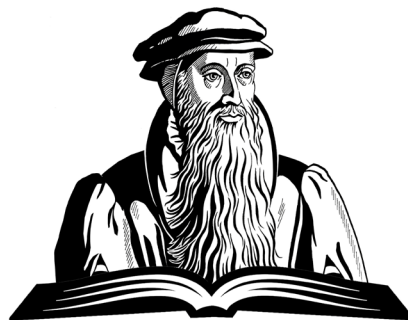
FOUNDATIONS

of

CHRISTIAN
EDUCATION

Lecture #6

Christian Education in Its
Various Forms



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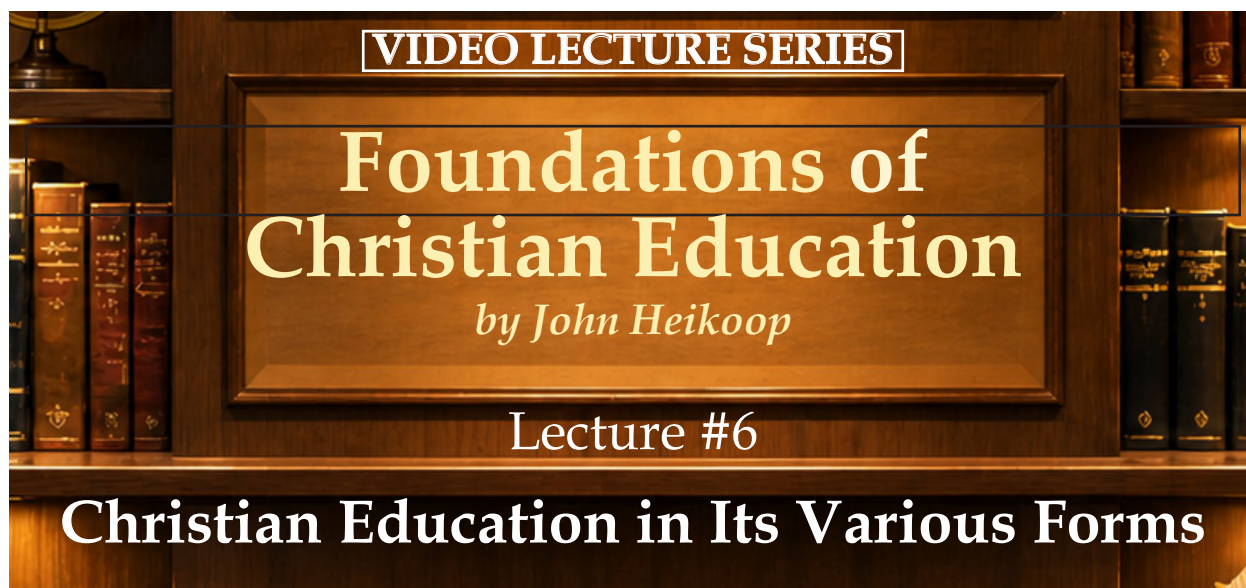
He and his wife, JoAnne, have eight children and a growing number of grandchildren.

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 to the sixth and final lesson of *The Foundations of Christian Education* series, presented by the John Knox Institute of Higher Education. Over these six lessons, we have asked the most foundational questions that any Christian school community can ask. We've considered why we educate—for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. We have asked who this child is that we are educating—a precious heritage, an image-bearer, a fallen sinner, in need of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. We have examined the Christian home as the primary institution of education, the curriculum as a declaration of worldview, and the calling and character of the Christian school teacher. Each lesson has built upon the one before, and together they form a foundation.

In this final lesson, we step back and ask a wider question. Given these foundations, how does Christian education actually take shape in the many different contexts in which it is carried out across the world today? And how do these foundations apply not only to the academically strong student, not only to the child who fits neatly into a school program, but to every child—including those with special needs, learning challenges, and diverse gifts, for each one of them is a heritage of the Lord.

We will consider three things: first, *The Church's Calling to Meet the Needs of Every Child*; second, *The Various Forms in Which Christian Education is Faithfully Carried Out*; and third, *The Worldview Challenge that Confronts Every Form of Christian Education in Our Materialistic Age, and How the Foundations We Have Laid Provide the Answer*.

1. The Church's Calling to Meet the Needs of Every Child

In Lesson Two, we established that every child is a heritage of the Lord, and that Christian education which attends only to the top twenty percent of the students has misunderstood what it means to educate children made in the image of God. In this lesson, we must develop that principle further, because it carries implications not just for how we teach, but for how we structure and resource our schools and communities.

The world around us has moved through several responses to children with special needs and learning challenges. In earlier generations, many such children were hidden away, regarded as a burden and a source of shame—ignored rather than educated. More recently, the pendulum has

swung to full inclusion, with the expectation that all children, regardless of their need, should participate in identical classroom settings with appropriate support. Both extremes miss something important.

The Christian approach is different from either. It begins with biblical reality. All children are created in God's image and have equal dignity and worth before him. We are not to rate children by their intelligence or gifts as if those with less are of less value to the Lord. He has sovereignly given each person the talents and gifts—some fewer and some more. These things are in God's plan. All are equally in need of salvation, and it can be a comfort to know that there are no obstacles with the Lord, when it comes to showing mercy and saving sinners.

At the same time, the fall has entered every dimension of human life, including learning. We all now have weaknesses alongside our strengths. Some of these weaknesses are visible, particularly when they are physical. Others are hidden—the learning difficulty that does not show on the outside but shapes everything about how a child receives and processes the world. In Romans 15, verse 1, we read, “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.” What does God require of us when we encounter a child who struggles? he requires what he always requires, that we love our neighbor as ourselves, and that we do unto others as we would have them do unto us (Matthew 7:12). If there is a way to give a child an opportunity to succeed and experience fulfillment, we must be ready to help that child to do so.

The Lord Jesus himself gives us our pattern here. A great part of his earthly ministry involved healing the sick, showing compassion to the blind, to the deaf, the lame, and those with mental distress. He often put their needs above his own comfort, healing the sick well into the evening, and stopping on the road to answer the requests that others would have dismissed. He allowed the struggling to interrupt his teaching. He did not turn away the difficult cases, he received them, he blessed them.

In our Christian school communities, this means that the child with cerebral palsy, with autism, with Down syndrome, with a learning disorder, with emotional regulation challenges, with a developmental delay, that child is not a problem to be managed or a burden to be assigned to someone else. That child is also a heritage of the Lord. God makes no mistakes. He has given that child to our community for a reason, and the care that we give to that child reflects what we truly believe about human dignity, about the image of God, and about the community that we are called to be.

Practically, most Christian schools find that partial integration—that is, a blend of shared classroom experience and separate learning support—serves special needs children best. The goal is to address the whole child, to understand their physical, emotional and cognitive profile, to identify their strengths alongside their challenges, and to meet them with both accommodations and modifications where needed. *Accommodation* keeps the learning expectations at the same level as the other children while making allowances for different learning styles or challenges—reading aloud rather than silently, breaking long tasks into small steps, and allowing oral responses in assessment. *Modification* is adjusting the expectations themselves and teaching it at a different grade level, when a child's development requires it. Both have their place, and the wise school community will use both with care, under the guidance of those with knowledge, and with the parents always as the primary partner in the process.

Parents are key. They know their child most intimately. They are nearest to them day-by-day, year-by-year. And the school that keeps parents closely involved, that communicates honestly about the struggles and the progress, and that treats parents as partners rather than problems, will

serve the special needs children far more effectively than the school that works in isolation. And parents, on the other hand, need to submit themselves to the providential realities of their child's weaknesses or difficulties. The home and the school must function as one.

2. The Various Forms in Which Christian Education is Faithfully Carried Out

With that understanding in place, the foundations that we've built in this series apply to every child without exception. Let's consider *The Various Forms in Which Christian Education is Faithfully Carried Out*.

The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20) does not prescribe a single institutional model. Christ commands to teach all nations, and the history of the church demonstrates that faithful communities have obeyed that command in different ways, adapting the delivery to the circumstances while holding the foundations constant. The modes differ, but the duty is the same. The cultural context of a community, or of families at certain economic strata, or in certain circumstances may require different education. But all of it should be consistent with the principles of God's word.

The Christian day school, where it can be established, is always a wonderful gift. A community of families sharing teachers, resources, expertise, and the daily fellowship of learning together; each day shaped by the biblical worldview across every subject, in an environment that supports what the home and the church have established. This is the form that many of us know best, and in much of the world where this series will be viewed, however, it may not be available at all.

The Christian home school, however, is perhaps the oldest form, and long before institutional education existed, parents were the teachers. Deuteronomy 6 does not assume a school, it assumes a home. And there are families and communities across the world that are providing thorough, biblically-grounded education at home, often under considerable sacrifice and without significant resources. The three principles from the life of Timothy that we explored in Lesson Three apply with full force here: begin early, teach by example, and establish children so firmly in the truth that they will continue in it. The home school is not a lesser form of Christian education. When done faithfully, it is Christian education in its most original expression. Careful research in recent years—including work by Christian research organizations such as Cardus¹—has shown that home education, when undertaken consistently, can serve as an effective and faithful alternative to the Christian day school.

Hybrid and co-operative models have grown significantly in recent years, particularly in communities where a full Christian school is not possible, and where full home education is not feasible. Families come together to share teaching responsibilities, pool resources, and provide their children with a partial school community experience while maintaining home as the primary educational institution. These models require careful thought about governance, curriculum consistency, and the relationship between participating families in the wider church. The principles of Lessons Three and Four apply directly.

Distance and online education have made available to communities in remote or restricted contexts a quality of instruction that would previously have been unimaginable. The John Knox Institute of Higher Education is itself a form of this—bringing resources to communities across Asia and around the world who would otherwise have no access to the kind of training and equipping that this series represents. Distance education cannot fully replicate every aspect of the daily community school or of the university, but they can provide curriculum, formation, and support to teachers, parents, and parents working in isolation, and to students who are studying alone. And it

¹ Cardus Institute is a Canadian non-partisan think tank based in Hamilton, Ontario.

can connect communities across great distances in shared vision and a shared language.

Whatever the form—school, home, hybrid, distance, or some combination—three things must be constant. The foundation is the Word of God. The goal is the graduate formed in heart, mind, and life for the glory of God. And the primary institution is always the home, which the school serves but never replaces.

3. The Worldview Challenge that Confronts Every Form of Christian Education in Our Materialistic Age, and How the Foundations We Have Laid Provide the Answer

Every form of Christian education faces a common enemy—not a person, but a worldview. We live today in a materialistic age. The world around us teaches, with great sophistication and relentless consistency, that happiness comes from possessions, and that success is measured by achievement and accumulation, and that the purpose of education is to secure a prosperous career, and that the “self” and its desires are the ultimate authority.

This is not a new temptation. The seed of it was planted in the garden: “Ye shall be as gods” (Genesis 3:5). “You shall determine your own good.” “You shall serve yourself.” But in our age, it has been given extraordinary new tools—*advertising* that creates desires we did not know we had; *social media* that measures worth in likes and followers; and *consumer culture* that measures every relationship and every institution by what it produces for me. And all of this reaches directly into our homes, and schools, and communities, where we’re trying to raise children in accordance with God’s Word and for his glory.

The materialistic worldview is the enemy of everything that we have described in this series. It produces the opposite of the child formed in heart, mind, and life. It produces a child who seeks his own glory rather than God’s, who uses their education for personal advancement rather than faithful service or obedience, who measures their worth by comparison with others rather than the image of God that they bear, and who has no category for the bruised reed, the struggling learner, or the child with special needs, because in the materialistic framework, those children have diminished value.

The Lord Jesus gave the clearest answer to materialism’s claims in a single sentence in Matthew 6, verse 33, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” Seek ye first—not career first, not security first. not comfort first—the kingdom of God first, and its righteousness. That is the ordering the fear of the Lord will produce. That is what the whole series has been describing. A child formed in the fear of the Lord, in a home where God is honored, by a curriculum that places his Word at the centre, under the care of teachers who are themselves servants of the Word, and in a community that meets every child with the love of Christ that he has shown us. That child is being equipped to seek first the kingdom, whatever form their education takes.

We can stop here for a moment to apply this also to *career planning*. Many are seeking careers that will only lead them further away from the Lord. Or they’ll follow education paths that take them away from their home and from their church communities, even from their country, and leave them without the supports that God has blessed them with, but also apart from the providential needs that surround them. Therefore, it’s so important that we be submissive when we are prayerfully considering our own path, and the path of our children. What is the Lord calling us to?—not, What do we want? And maybe we have to change the way in which education is delivered or the goals and aspirations that we have, even career outcomes, and take a place that God gives us. That we might serve him and seek his honor and his glory.

Dear friends, we have come to the end of this series. Six lessons, and six foundational questions, and through all of them, one answer: God's Word is the Rock, Christ is the way, and the generation to come is the inheritance that he's placed in our hands. We've seen that Christian education is not an institution, it's a calling. It is not a curriculum, it's a worldview. It's not a school building, it's a home, a community, a church, a teacher, a parent on their knees for their child. It's a faithful work done with imperfect means, depending entirely on a sovereign God who works through those means to accomplish purposes that go far beyond anything that we can see or measure in the years that we spend with these children.

We do not know, when we send a child home on the last day of school, what God has done in that child's heart. We do not know which lesson has spoken to the heart, which prayer was answered, and which Word from Scripture was quietly working below the surface. We do not know which of our students will one day have it said of them, as Paul said of Timothy, that from a child he had known the holy Scriptures, being taught faithfully by his godly parent and grandparent, Eunice and Lois. We commit our children to the Lord who knows, and trust the means he has appointed.

Duties are ours, events are the Lord's. Our duty is to be faithful in the home, in the school, and in whatever form God has given us to work in, with every child he has placed in our care, against every worldly pressure that tries to draw us away from the one thing needful. As we were reminded at the outset of this series, in the feeding of the multitude with only five loaves and two fishes, the Lord remains able to bless our little, when it is placed in his hands.

If we now feel the call to provide Christian education, to go forward in the Lord's way, and if we see before us only human impossibilities, may we be given grace to see the divine Captain of the Lord's host, as Joshua did in Joshua 5, verse 13–14, “And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho”—and we have to think of those high walls—“that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come.”

Joshua stood alone with the walls of Jericho's impossibility before him, and with the call to go in and possess the promised land. May our constant prayer be that of Joshua, as we read in verse 14, “And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant?” It was similar to the Apostle Paul, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:6)—“What saith my lord unto his servant?” It was there, in that place of duty and apparent impossibility that the Captain of the LORD's host revealed his divinity as the great I AM: “And the captain of the LORD's host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so” (Joshua 5:15). Here, the second person of the Trinity promised to be the Captain of the LORD's host to lead Joshua into the promised land. Likewise, before Christ ascended to his throne in heaven, he has promised to remain with and to empower those that he commissions.

Let us conclude with reading together Matthew 28, verses 18 to 20 once again:
“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. Amen.”