

Adult Evening Gathering: Christian Liberty in Daily Life

To Be or Not to Be (a Liberty Issue)?

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*(Note: These notes are a lightly edited version of the notes that I used in teaching the class. The form is based on the style used by Winston Churchill for his speech notes.
The HTML version doesn't show indentation but the PDF does.
Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from
The New King James Version,
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[SLIDE 1: title slide ... To Be or Not to Be (a Liberty Issue)?]

This is our second night
to talk about Christian Liberty in Daily Life.

Those of you who have been in my Sunday School classes
know that I usually begin each new session
by reviewing what we've talked about
in previous sessions.

We'll do that very quickly tonight.

[SLIDE 2: Biblical Foundations]

Recall that the primary biblical passages
that discuss Christian Liberty are
Romans 14,
1 Corinthians 8 & 10,
Galatians 5, and
Colossians 2.

And also recall that
WCF Chapter 20 discusses Christian Liberty.

[SLIDE 3: Questions we've answered]

Last week we tried to answer the first
of the five main questions
that I said would be the focus of the classes,
namely,
What is the definition and purpose
of Christian Liberty.

[SLIDE 4: Definition reviewed]

We said that the purpose of Christian Liberty
is to bring glory to God.

And I gave a definition,
which was derived
from one of the OED definitions of liberty:

The condition

*of being able to act
in any desired way
to glorify God
without
biblical
hindrance or restraint;
faculty or power to do as one likes
to glorify God.*

[SLIDE 5: When Christian Liberty Applies]

We noted that
when God has
neither forbidden
nor required
particular behavior,
then Christian liberty applies.

That is,
so long as we operate
within the bounds established by Scripture,
we are able to glorify God
by doing what we want to do.

And we also said
that something is a liberty issue
whenever God,
through the Scripture,
does not reduce to one
the number of God-glorifying choices
available to His people.

[SLIDE 6: Convenient Labels]

Finally, last week I also introduced 3 convenient labels:
libertarian,
libertine,
and legalist.

We noted that these labels are issue specific,
that is,
someone might be a legalist about one issue,
a libertarian about a second issue,
and a libertine about a third issue.

That's our review of last week.

[SLIDE 7: Questions We'll Try to Answer]

Tonight,
we want to consider the next two questions
on our list:

How do I recognize

whether something is a liberty issue?

And

*How do I decide
what to do for a given liberty issue?*

These two questions are so closely connected
that it seems reasonable to
consider them together.

We won't finish with these questions tonight,
but we can at least begin.

[SLIDE 8: To Be Or Not To Be (A Liberty Issue)?]

OK,
let's begin talking about
how to recognize
whether something is a liberty issue.

Since I'm borrowing a Shakespeare quote here,
I'll ask you a Shakespeare question
before we go any further:

**Why do some people think
that Shakespeare wasn't
a particularly good writer?**

Because he used too many cliches.

It wasn't easy to decide
how to present the ideas
that I want to present.

One of the main difficulties
is deciding when to use examples;
without sufficient examples,
some people may have trouble
figuring how to apply the ideas;
but,
because this subject is so controversial,
It is possible that by using examples,
we could get bogged down
in discussion about the example itself,
and
lose track of the important ideas.

I've tried to strike a balance tonight,
with only some fairly simple examples.

Next week,
we'll try to tackle
at least one specific

detailed,
and almost certainly controversial,
example.

There's nothing particularly clever
about what I'm going to present tonight —
when you see it,
many of you will probably think,
“Well, of course we should do that,”
and you'll be right —
but I suspect that not many of us,
myself included,
really are quite as careful
in deciding about liberty issues,
as we probably should be.

So, here we go with one way
to go about deciding
whether something is a liberty issue.

[SLIDE 9: First Question to Ask]

A question that I think we can ask first is this,
for the issue we're considering

**Does the Scripture
explicitly or
by *good and necessary deduction*
require particular behavior?**

If so,
then clearly (by definition)
the issue is not a liberty issue,
since we've said that a liberty issue
is one in which there is more than one
God glorifying choice available.

Let's see a few simple examples of
issues we can resolve by answering this question.

[SLIDE 10: Not to Be (resolved by Question 1)]

My husband is ugly.
May I divorce him?

No, you may not,
because ugliness is not
one of the Biblically acceptable
reasons for divorce.

My employer doesn't pay me well.
May I steal property from him?

No, you may not,

because stealing is not excused by low pay.

Our music is dull.
May I stop attending worship?

No, the Scripture does not say,
do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together
unless your assembly has boring music.

My brother-in-law is really, really annoying.
May I have him killed?

No, you may not;
there is no annoyance exception
to the 6th commandment.

My wife is smarter than I am.
May she be the leader of the household?

No, the Scripture says that the husband
is the leader of the household,
with no exceptions made
for couples with smarter wives.

These examples are intentionally pretty simple,
and generally non-controversial.

However,
there are some issues
that can generate controversy
even at this level.

[SLIDE 11: First Question to Ask (2nd time)]

That is,
some people will answer our question, “No”,
while others will answer it, “Yes”,
for particular issues.

Let’s talk briefly about one of those,
namely,
acceptable ways to discipline children.

There are people who say that
this is not a liberty issue at all,
but rather that the Scripture
demands that children
be always disciplined by spanking.

People with this view will cite
verses such as Proverbs 13:24 and 22:15
to support their position:
He who spares his rod hates his son,
But he who loves him disciplines him diligently.

and

Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child;
The rod of discipline will remove it far from him.

And they will claim
that “Rod” always
refers to physical chastisement.

The problem with such a claim,
however,
Is that it ignores
other places in the Scripture
where “rod” is used figuratively
(Psalm 23, for example),
and it also ignores
the myriad of different ways
in which our heavenly Father
chooses to discipline His children.

Spanking is clearly permitted by Scripture,
but it is just as clearly
not
the only
permitted means of discipline.

There are other examples we could give, too,
but I hope this one
is enough to remind us
to be careful
as we answer the first question:

**Does the Scripture
explicitly or
by *good and necessary deduction*
require particular behavior?**

Let’s suppose that we’ve answered
“No” to the first question

There’s a second question
I think we should then ask.

[SLIDE 12: Second Question to Ask]

**Does applying
relevant Scriptural principles
require particular behavior?**

Once again,
if the answer to this question is “Yes”,
then we don’t have a liberty issue.

This question is,
as I’m sure many of you are thinking,

a tad simplistic.
That is,
it isn't really possible to answer
this question,
without asking a few more questions.

What are some of those questions?

[SLIDE 13: Second Question to Ask (further questions)]

There are surely some more derived questions
besides these,
but the two I want to talk about are

**What
are the Scriptural principles
that are relevant
to the issue at hand?**

and

How do I properly apply these principles?

It is nearly impossible
to answer either of these
derived questions
in a generic way —
that is,
the answers
depend very much on the specific issue
being considered.

However, we will talk a little bit
about some Scriptural principles
that may be relevant
to potential liberty issues,
and suggest some ways to assist
in applying these principles properly.

I'll have more to say about these matters next week,
as we discuss them
in the context of a specific example or two.

[SLIDE 14: Some Possible Principles]

For each of these
I've listed some Scripture passages,
but the ellipses are meant to
show that these are not the only
places where this particular principle is taught.

The first principle listed here is what I've called
the Chief End Principle,
that is,

Do that which gives glory to God.
1 Corinthians 10:31;
Romans 14:7-8;
Colossians 3:17
are just three of the many places
where this principle is taught.
We've already talked about how
this is the reason for our liberty in the first place

Another principle that might apply
to a potential liberty issue is
the Edification Principle,
which says that we should
do that which edifies others
See Romans 14:19-21; 1 Corinthians 10:23; Romans 15:2; ...

I applied this principle
when I was putting together tonight's talk.

I originally had a slide that was titled
"You might be a legalist if ... "
My intent was to be funny while making a serious point,
but I decided that it was likely
that some folks would be highly offended,
rather than amused and enlightened,
so I decided to not use the slide.

(If anyone is interested in seeing the slide
after we're done tonight,
and you will promise you won't be offended,
I'll be happy to show it to you.)

The Providence Principle
is another one that might apply —
Consider your abilities,
interests,
and circumstances.

We applied this principle,
when we went through our occupation example
last week.

Romans 8:28; Esther 4:14; ...

Another potentially applicable principle
is the Authority Principle.

This has two prongs:
Give deference to those
God has placed in authority over you
and
accept responsibility for those
in submission to you
Ephesians 5:22-6:6; 1 Timothy 5:17; Heb 13:5.

This principle particularly applies
to the liberty of Christian children —
if your parents choose
to restrict your choices
more tightly than required by Scripture,
then you should accept these restrictions
with a good attitude.

[SLIDE 15: Some Possible Principles - 2]

In many situations,
the Counsel Principle might apply,
that is,
we should seek the counsel of fellow believers.

Proverbs 12:15; Proverbs 13:20; and many other places
teach this principle.

We need to be careful in applying this principle
that we don't just seek out the counsel
of those people who are just like us,
or those who we know will agree with us —
the idea is to seek counsel
not confirmation.

The Diligence Principle
says to do all things to the best of your ability,
as taught in
Proverbs 6:6-11,
Proverbs 20:4,
Colossians 3:23
among other places.

The final principle that I'll list tonight
is what's called here the Holding Principle,
which says that I should
Be convinced that any action
I am considering is not sin.

That is, if I'm not sure
something is acceptable to God
then I ought not do it.

Romans 14:23 puts it this way:
"But he who doubts is condemned if he eats,
because his eating is not from faith;
and whatever is not from faith is sin."

As I said,
these are only some of the principles
that might apply.

Are there any questions at this point?

We now have a conceptually simple
procedure for recognizing liberty issues,
which looks like this:

[SLIDE 16: Recognizing Liberty Issues]

First, ask the question,
“Does the Scripture explicitly
or by good and necessary consequence
require particular behavior?”

If so,
then it isn't a liberty issue.

If not,
then ask the second question:
Does applying relevant Scriptural principles
require particular behavior?

If so,
then it's not a liberty issue.

If not,
then we can apply the relevant principles
to establish the bounds of our liberty.

So, really,
not only do we have a procedure
for recognizing liberty issues,
but also a procedure
for deciding what to do
for a given liberty issue.

Of course,
as I've said throughout the evening,
the difficulty comes
when we get to specific issues.

We might agree that this procedure
is a reasonable one,
but then disagree strongly
on the results of applying this procedure
to a particular issue.

There are lots of reasons
for these disagreements and difficulties.
Let's talk very briefly about some of them.

[SLIDE 17: Difficulties May Arise Because We ...]

Here are five common reasons
why difficulties may arise.

First, difficulties arise

because we misunderstand Scripture,
as we've already talked about
in the disciplining children example.

Difficulties may also arise when
We are too lazy to search for the truth.
Perhaps instead of searching for the truth,
all I do is search for just enough Scripture
to provide a justification for what I want to do.

Difficulties may arise because
We think everyone else is just like us,

That is, when we think that it is *always the case* that
"What's wrong for me
must be wrong for you;
what's right for me
must be right for you."

I give an example of this type of thinking
in a newsletter article that will be coming out soon.

There are people who assert
that "only same-sex friendships are acceptable."

Of course, Scripture does no such thing,
but Scripture does
forbid fornication, adultery, and lust.

For some men,
obeying these prohibitions
will require
that they not have any women friends,
because they would be unable
to avoid lust if they did.

Any such man
who also
has a tendency to assume everyone else is like him
is likely to believe
that the Scripture forbids
friendships between men and women.

Because he can not handle it without sinning,
no one else can either.

That's one example, many more could be given.

On the flip side,
we can also get into difficulties
when we think we are better than everyone else.

Finally,
a fifth reason why difficulties may arise because
We too easily believe what our heroes tell us,
without checking out what they say

according to Scripture.

As something of a protection against this,
I strongly suggest
that all our heroes should be dead;
This isn't perfect protection,
but at least it'll keep us
from being actively led into error
by a hero who is going astray
before our eyes.

[SLIDE 18: Questions We're Trying to Answer]

Well,
here's where we stand on our list of questions:
We've fully answered the first one,
and answered abstractly
the second and third one.

Next week
the plan is to get into
one or more specific examples,
and see where applying our procedure
will lead us.

I have not decided for certain
on the examples to use,
so suggestions are welcome.

[SLIDE 19: Notes and audio ...]

My notes and the audio from tonight
should be available on the web
within a couple of days.