

Adult Evening Gathering: Christian Liberty in Daily Life

Though this be madness, yet there is method in 't

7 March 2004

by C. Michael Holloway

*(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,
copyright 1982, 1980, 1979 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.)*

[SLIDE 1: title slide ... Though this be madness ...]

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

In keeping with the Shakespearian theme for subtitles,
I've called tonight
"Though this be madness,
yet there is method in 't."

"Madness"
because I'll probably upset some of you
by some of the things I'll say —
I may even upset all of you,
although by different parts of what I say.

"Method in it"
because, as I said last week,
specific examples are necessary
to illustrate in detail
the ideas we've been discussing.

Let's very, very quickly review the last two weeks.

[SLIDE 2: Questions We're Trying to Answer]

Recall that these are the five questions
that we're addressing in this series.

So far we've fully answered the first question,
and partially answered the second and third,
with tonight's example
intended to finish up those answers.

[SLIDE 3: 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 4: Definition reviewed]

Remember that the purpose of Christian Liberty
is to bring glory to God,
and our working definition,
which is derived from
one of the OED definitions of liberty,
is

*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: Recognizing Liberty Issues]

Last week,
we talked about a basic procedure
that can be used to recognize liberty issues,
and to decide what to do for such issues.

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

If so, then the issue is not a liberty issue,
and we simply should do
what the Scripture requires.

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

If so, then the issue is not a liberty issue either,
and we do what is required.

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

We also talked a bit
about how deciding relevance
is issue-specific,

although I listed
several principles that might apply.

That's a very, very quick review.

Now it is time to move to
to a detailed example.

After this,
I'll ask that you hold
your questions or comments
until I specifically ask for them,
which will probably be at the end tonight —
some things that might not seem to make sense,
will perhaps make sense by the time I'm done.

[SLIDE 6: Specific Example]

Here's the question we'll consider:
How shall I
educate my minor children?

We'll try to decide
whether this is a liberty issue,
and if so,
what the bounds of liberty are.

Before going any further,
recognizing that this
is a very sensitive subject for many,
I want to give
a couple of disclaimers.

[SLIDE 7: Warnings and Disclaimers]

First,
tonight's discussion
will be necessarily incomplete,
for three reasons:
We will have to
make many simplifications;
We will not
be able to fully develop
any arguments,
and (most importantly)
This discussion is
an *example*
of how to address liberty issues,
not as a self-contained discussion
of this particular topic.

Second,
nothing
that I say tonight

should cause
 anyone
 to change the way
 you currently educate
 your own children.

However,
 depending on your current views,
 some of what I say
 perhaps *should* prompt you
 to reconsider what you think
 about how *some others*
 are educating *their* children.

With that out of the way,
 let's get started.

When we think about education,
 we tend to think in terms of
 three or four options:
 Christian School,
 Public school,
 Home school,
 and
 Private, secular school.

In reality, 'though,
 that's almost as gross a simplification
 of the real options
 as my 17 occupation world in the first week
 was of the real number of occupations.

[SLIDE 8: Incomplete Universe of Options]

Here's a fairly detailed,
 but still incomplete,
 picture of the real universe of options.

Not every community will have
 all of these options,
 but many do today.

Now,
 I said that this is still incomplete.

One way it is incomplete
 is that it is missing
 anything about
 school quality.

For example,
 in any real community,
 there are probably several
 Benignly non-reformed Christian schools,

which almost certainly differ
in the quality of the education
they provide
(no matter how we measure quality.)

There's another way in which it is incomplete,
a way that is even more important.

The major incompleteness is that
the options listed here are primarily
for the,
for lack of better words,
"formal, academic"
part of education.

In reality,
every one of the options listed here
needs to be expanded to
include the various options
for the other aspects of education.

[SLIDE 9: Incomplete Universe of Options: Expanded]

So for example,
taking just one of these,
Private School (secular),
we see it really,
this isn't one choice,
but a whole host of choices.

For example,
secular private school
+ intended parental instruction
+ unintentional instruction
+ family devotions
+ worship
+ Sunday School
+ sports teams
+ books

is not the same educational choice as
secular private school
+ intended parental instruction
+ unintentional instruction
only. + books

This probably isn't the best way possible
to illustrate the point,
but I hope you all get it anyway:
formal education
in the matters usually
taught in schools
is only one part
of the education of children.

Some of the controversies that arise
seem to be rooted,
at least in part,
In a failure to understand
this important point.

Now, let's ignore all this for a little bit,
and assume we're only interested
in the "academic" part of education.

And let's also simplify our universe of options
even more.

[SLIDE 10: Very Simplified Universe of Options]

In this simplified universe, the options are
home school,
secular private school,
public school,
and three varieties of Christian schools:
reformed,
non-reformed,
and Roman Catholic.

Given this set of options,
I think that it would be fairly easy
to find groups of believers who would
support any of the following liberty bounds.

[SLIDE 11: (complete) Some Claimed Liberty Bounds]

That is,
there are some believers who
would say that

[SLIDE 12: (every) Some Claimed Liberty Bounds]

all these options are within the bounds of liberty.

There are others who would say that

[SLIDE 13: (all but public) Some Claimed Liberty Bounds]

all but public schools are within the bounds of liberty.
Most likely,
these people wouldn't use the term "public schools" though,
they'd call them "government schools".

Still others would put

[SLIDE 14: (- pub/privl) Some Claimed Liberty Bounds]

secular private schools outside the bounds.

Still others would probably eliminate

[SLIDE 15: (- pub/priv/cat!) Some Claimed Liberty Bounds]

Roman Catholic schools from the acceptable alternatives.

Some reformed people might also eliminate

[SLIDE 16: (ref + home) Some Claimed Liberty Bounds]

non-reformed Christian Schools —
that is, if there is a reformed Christian School
in your area,
you shouldn't consider any non-reformed ones.

Finally,

[SLIDE 17: (home) Some Claimed Liberty Bounds]

there are the home school only people,

and

[SLIDE 18: (reformed) Some Claimed Liberty Bounds]

the reformed Christian school only people, too.

[SLIDE 19: (complete) Some Claimed Liberty Bounds]

That's how diverse
the range of opinion seems to be today.
I suspect that there are representatives
of several of these opinions —
although probably not all of them —
here tonight.

This diversity of opinion
about what makes up
the God-glorifying options for education
is a source of much friction
within the church today.

Well,
let's see where following
the ideas we've been discussing
will take us.

[SLIDE 20: First Question]

The first question to ask is this:
Does the Scripture
explicitly
or by **good and necessary consequence**
require

that I educate my minor children
in a particular way?

[SLIDE 21: First Question: Explicit]

To answer that question,
we must first ask,

**What does the Scripture
explicitly say about educating
minor children?**

The Scripture does not say a whole lot explicitly.

[SLIDE 22: Explicit Statement]

I think that the about only thin
the Scripture explicitly says is that
Parents are responsible
for teaching their children
about God's Word.

That's all that is explicitly said in
such famous passages such as
Deuteronomy 6:5-9; 11:18-19
and Ephesians 6:4.

[SLIDE 23: First Question: G&N Consequence]

So, we should now ask,

**What does the Scripture say
by good and necessary consequence
about educating minor children?**

[SLIDE 24:G&N Consequence]

Although I don't have the time
to give an argument to prove it,
I think it is reasonable to say that
the Scripture teaches
by good and necessary consequence that

Parents are responsible
for educating their children
about everything else, too.

So does this mean,
as some people today will say,

[SLIDE 25: Home School Only Then?]

that home schooling is the only
God-glorifying option for schooling?

Pete explained why it isn't
a few weeks ago
in his sermon about
patriarchy and education.

(See
<<http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?sermonID=11804113124>>)

I won't repeat what he said,
but I do want to give you a few
Scripture passages that show
that the Bible
does not assume that parents
are always doing the teaching.

[SLIDE 26: Counter Examples]

In 1 Samuel 2,
we learn that Hannah and Elkanah
left Samuel at the temple with Eli
at an early age;
thus, Samuel's parents
were definitely *not* home schooling him.

Psalms 119:99 and Luke 6:40
talk about teachers in a way
that makes no sense if
teachers must only be the parents.

Finally,
Galatians 4:1-2 explicitly mentions
a son being under guardians and stewards.

As I mentioned last week,
The idea of looking for counter examples
is an important one for resolving liberty issues —
if you think the Scripture demands something specific,
search the Scripture to be sure
that there aren't passages that show
that your understanding
can not possibly be right.

Let's move on to the second question
in our procedure now.

[SLIDE 27: Second Question]

Does ***applying***
relevant Scriptural principles
require that I educate my minor children
in a particular way?

Following what we mentioned last week,
to answer this question,

we first have to ask the question:
What are the Scriptural principles
that are relevant to educating my minor children?

We don't have time tonight
to do this in detail,
so I'll just list a few,
and then suggest
a statement that
ties them all together.

[SLIDE 28: Some Relevant Principles]

From the principles we talked about last week,
there's certainly

Chief End:
Do that which gives glory to God,
and teach your children to do the same.

Providence: Consider your
(and your children's)
abilities, interests, and circumstances.

Diligence:
Do all things to the best of your ability,
and teach your child to do the same.

Some new ones that are relevant are

The **Root of Truth** principle,
that is God is truth,
and understanding truth
must begin by seeking Him,
as taught in
Proverbs 1:7; Proverbs 9:10; John 17:17;
and other places.

Another is the
companion principle,
which is taught in places such as
1 Corinthians 15:33 and Proverbs 13:20 —

Do not be deceived:

"Evil company corrupts good habits."

and He who walks with wise men will be wise,
But the companion of fools will be destroyed.

One more important principle for education is
what I'll call
the Diversity of ability principle,
which says that
God is not egalitarian with gifts.

Matthew 25:14-30,

1 Corinthians 12,
and many other passages teach clearly
that God gives different abilities
to different people.

These, of course,
are not the only principles
that apply to education.
but they are all I'll mention tonight.

I'll now suggest that we can summarize
many of the applicable principles
in a single one,
which I'll call education principle.

[SLIDE 29: Education Principle]

This principle says the following:

We should strive
to educate our children
so that
 (by God's sovereign grace)
 they will become adults
 who are able to use
the gifts and abilities
given to them by God
to glorify Him
and further His kingdom on earth.

Let me say that again:

We should strive
to educate our children
so that
 (by God's sovereign grace)
— that is,
 if God is pleased to
 bring our children to salvation,
 and grant them the grace to please Him —
we want to educate our children
so that
 they will become adults
 who are able
 to use the gifts and abilities
 given to them by God
 to glorify Him
 and further His kingdom on earth.

So,
what's all this mean for our inquiry
about liberty in education?

[SLIDE 30: Are Any Necessarily Out of Bounds?]

Well, the question now reduces to this:
can we,
based on Scriptural principles,
confidently say
that any of these options
is necessarily out of bounds?

That is,
do any of these options,
necessarily prevent **all believers**
from educating their children
so that
(by God's sovereign grace)
they will become adults
who are able
to use the gifts and abilities
given to them by God
to glorify Him
and further His kingdom on earth?

Or, not to put too fine a point on it,
are there any of these options
it would be
a sin
to choose?

That's the liberty question.

What's the answer?

I think the answer has two parts.

[SLIDE 31: Are Any Necessarily Out of Bounds? NO]

The first part of the answer is
NO.

That is,
we cannot generically
(for all believers in the aggregate)
conclude that any one of these options
is necessarily out of bounds.

Because this is the case,
I think we ought
to be much more circumspect
than we often are in
criticizing educational options.

That's the first part of the answer.

[SLIDE 32: Are Any Necessarily Out of Bounds? - YES]

The second part of the answer is,

I think,
YES,
specifically
for individual families.

That is,
for any specific individual family,
I doubt very much
that every option is truly suitable.

The situation is, I think,
very much like the situation for occupations —
although the liberty bounds are wide,
the suitable choices for individuals
tend to be much more narrow.

Because of this,
we ought to make our own choices
very, very carefully,
keeping clearly in mind
all the principles that should guide our choices.

Let me give an extreme example,
chosen specifically
because the result may seem shocking
to some of you.

Suppose someone has
a child who has severe learning disabilities.
Except for perhaps in a few rare communities,
of which ours is not one,
it is almost certain
that a Christian School
is not a legitimate option,
because there won't be any such schools
that have the ability
to meet the needs
of a severely learning disabled child.

Because few parents are equipped
to meet such a child's educational needs, either,
public schools,
or perhaps private, secular schools,
may be the only real options.

So for such a family,
the choices may look like this.

[SLIDE 33: One Specific Application]

The generic liberty bounds are unchanged,
but the only wise options for this family
are the two here that aren't crossed out.

This isn't the average situation,
of course,
but situations like this certainly exist.

Time is very short,
so let me make some concluding remarks,
and then take your questions.

[SLIDE 34: Concluding Remarks]

How we educate our minor children
is a Christian liberty issue.

As such,
it ought *never* be the cause of divisions
within the Church.

Those who make a specific educational choice
a condition for fellowship *are wrong*,
far more wrong than those
they ostracize.

However, Christian liberty
is not
an excuse for sin.

Parents who fail
in their responsibility to educate their children
are sinning,
no matter what
formal educational method
they may have chosen.

Just as no particular choice
by itself entails sin,
no particular choice
by itself prevents sin,
either.

Home schoolers can abrogate their responsibilities,
just as easily
as can those who send their children
to Christian schools,
or other private schools,
or public schools.

I think that if we remembered these things,
there might be
a little less needless controversy
within the body of Christ.

One final comment as an aside —
in saying that public school is within the bounds of liberty,
I *am not* saying that the state

has a legitimate right to make laws
such as compulsory attendance laws.
That state has no such right,
given to it by God;
but that, in an of itself,
doesn't place public schools outside
the bounds of Christian liberty.

I'll take questions and comments now.

[SLIDE 35: Where We Stand]

Well,
here's where we stand on our list of questions:
We've fully answered the first one,
and answered as much as we will
the second and third one,
and touched very briefly on the fifth one.

Next week
the plan is to concentrate
on the fourth and fifth questions.

[SLIDE 36: Notes and audio ...]

As in the past,
my notes and the audio from tonight
should be available on the web
within a couple of days.