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

In keeping with the Shakespearen 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.

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.

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 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
    + 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/catl) 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-glorying 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,

\textit{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, \textit{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.

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.

Psalm 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:

that any of these options

is necessarily out of bounds?

That is,

**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, 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 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.