

Adult Evening Gathering: Christian Liberty in Daily Life

Beware of Entrance to a Quarrel

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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 ... Beware of Entrance to a Quarrel...]

Well, this is our last night
to talk about Christian Liberty in Daily Life.

Our subtitle for tonight
continues with the Shakespearean theme:
"Beware of entrance to a quarrel."
The relevance of the subtitle should be clear.

We'll begin by quickly recalling where we are in our study.

[SLIDE 2: Where Do We Stand]

I said in the beginning that there were
5 main questions that we'd try to answer.

So far we've answered the first three,
and lightly touched on the fifth.

[SLIDE 3: Definition reviewed]

Here's the answer we gave to the first question.

The definition is derived from
one of the OED definitions of liberty,
and it goes like this:

*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.*

This definition includes as part of it
the purpose of Christian Liberty
which is to bring glory to God.

[SLIDE 4: Recognizing Liberty Issues]

For the second and third questions,
I gave a procedure that we can use
for recognizing liberty 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.

Last week we
used educating our minor children
as the specific issue
to which we applied this procedure.

[SLIDE 5: Where We Stand]

So that's where we are.

Tonight we will concentrate on answering
questions four and five:

What do I do
when others disagree with me
about liberty issues?

and

Does respect for liberty
negate the pursuit of wisdom?

There are quite a few
different ways
we could talk about
disagreements that may arise
about liberty issues.

We'll do it within the context of
individual disagreements
between two people,

[SLIDE 6: Individual Disagreements]

I will assert, without proof,
that major disagreements between two people
are usually about *actual choices*,
and
not about
the *theoretical bounds* of liberty.

In other words,
two people who make the same choice
are unlikely
to have any real conflict between them,
even
if they differ
about the bounds of liberty.

So, in our discussion tonight,
we are going
to ignore disagreements about bounds alone.

I'm not saying that these kinds of disagreements
never happen,
just that they aren't nearly as common
as disagreements about actual choices.

Disagreements about actual choices
arise in two types of situations.

The first is when one person
thinks that another person is
sinning
(that is, choosing to do something
that is outside the bounds of liberty).

The second situation is when one person
thinks that another person is
being unwise
(that is, choosing to do something that,
although it is within the bounds of liberty,
is less than wise).

I'll quickly show you illustrations of these situations.

[SLIDE 7: Outside the Bounds: Sin]

Here's an illustration of the sin situation.

The blue polygon represents one person's liberty bounds
— let's call this person, Billy —
while the orange double underline
represents another person's choice
— let's call this person, Owen.

So here, Owen has chosen Option 3
which is outside of Billy's liberty bounds.

So, Billy must consider Owen's choice to be a sinful choice.

Using our example from last week,
perhaps Billy's liberty bounds for education
exclude public schools,
but Owen sends his child to public school.

[SLIDE 8: Within the Bounds: Unwise]

Here's the other situation.

Billy's liberty bounds are unchanged from the last illustration,
but he has eliminated options 5, 6, 8 and 11
as being unwise;
however, Owen has chosen Option 5.

Billy can't consider Owen's choice to be sinful,
but he may think it is unwise.

Why do I say
"May"
instead of
"Will" ?

Because it is possible that
the options that Billy has eliminated as unwise
apply to him but not to Owen.

Maybe,
for example,
we're talking about occupations,
and Billy is bad at math,
but Owen isn't,
and Option 5 is mathematician.

So that's the two main situations.

If you think about putting yourselves into these situations,
then we see that ...

[SLIDE 9: Where Are You? Accuser]

you can be the accuser,
that is,
the person who thinks that someone else
is sinning or being unwise.

Or

[SLIDE 10: Where Are You? Accused]

you can be the accused,
that is,
the person that someone else
thinks is sinning
or being unwise.

Let's talk about what you should do
in each of these situations,
starting with
you being the accuser.

[SLIDE 11: You Are the Accuser (Sin)]

If you believe someone has
made a choice that is outside the bounds
of Christian Liberty,
you have two basic options.

You may ignore it,
or you may follow Scriptural guidelines for confrontation.

1 Peter 4:8,
Proverbs 19:11,
and other Scripture give you the option
of ignoring the other person's choice.

1 Peter 4:8 — *And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins."*

Proverbs 19:11 — *The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, And his glory is to overlook a transgression.*

**What are some reasons
that you might choose to ignore it?**

You're not confident
that you are right that it is outside the bounds of liberty;
or
You don't know the person very well.
or
You consider the matter to be quite insignificant.

One thing that is very important to remember
if you choose to ignore it,
is that
ignoring it
means truly
ignoring it.

It doesn't mean
not bringing it up with him,
but complaining about it to everyone else.

It doesn't mean

not bringing it up with him,
but treating him differently because of it.

There is no such thing
as an issue
that is too big to ignore,
too small to confront,
but just right to complain about to others.

The other option we have to is
to follow the Scriptural guidelines
for confronting sin that are given in

Matthew 18:15-17 — (NASB) *"And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer."*

So, you should go to the person in private,
and discuss the issue with him.

There are three possible outcomes
of this initial confrontation.

[SLIDE 12: Possible Outcomes of Initial Confrontation]

One, he may convince you
that his choice
is not outside the bounds of liberty.

In which case,
you're done,
because there is no longer a disagreement.

A second possible outcome is that
you may convince him that his choice
is outside the bounds of liberty,
and thus he repents.

Once again in this case,
there's no longer any conflict.

A third possible outcome
is neither of your opinions change:
He continues to believe that his choice is acceptable,
while you continue to believe it is not.

[SLIDE 13: Possible Outcomes ... escalate]

If that happens,
then once again you'll have a choice
between ignoring it,
or continuing with confrontation

according to Matthew 18.

Does anyone have a question or comment?

Let's talk a bit now
about the situation
in which you think someone else
has made an *unwise* choice
within the bounds of Christian liberty.

[SLIDE 14: You Are the Accuser (Unwise)]

I think you have two options here, too.

As before,
you can ignore it.

This might well be the best option
unless you have a fairly close
relationship with the person.

It is one thing to tell a close friend
that you think he's doing something unwise;
it is quite another thing
to tell a casual acquaintance the same thing.

As before,
ignoring it means just that.

Don't go around telling everyone else
what an idiot Owen is
for making such a poor choice.

If you can't ignore it,
then you should discuss it with the person.

[SLIDE 15: You Are the Accuser (Unwise) ... discuss it]

If you do so,
be absolutely clear that you are not claiming
that he has sinned.

Briefly express your concern
about the choice or action that you think is unwise,
then
allow him to explain fully
the reasoning that led to the choice.

Be sure you understand his reasoning
by asking whatever questions
you need to ask for clarification.

These should be real questions,
not accusatory questions.

So stay away from questions like,

“You really think that was smart?”
“Why would you do something like that?”
“Where’d you get that idea?”

If, after the explanation,
you still believe the decision was unwise,
give the reasons for your belief.

Have as many discussions
as the two of you together think are appropriate,
then let it drop.

So,
we’ve covered the two situations
in which you are the one
who thinks another has
made a liberty mistake.

Before we talk about the situations
in which you’re being accused
of liberty violations,
**Does anyone have a question
or comment about what we’ve discussed so far?**

[SLIDE 16: You Are the Accused (Sin or Unwise)]

Let’s suppose now
that someone tells you
that he believes that
you are in error
In a liberty matter —
for now,
let’s not distinguish between
an accusation of sin or lack of wisdom,
because most often
someone who confronts you
about a liberty matter
probably won’t make
the distinction either.

[SLIDE 16b: You Are the Accused (Sin or Unwise) - first]

On first glance,
the Bible seems to give contradictory guidance
about what to do
In such a situation.

[SLIDE 16c: You Are the Accused ... Rom 14]

On one hand,
Romans 14 seems to say,
“Give in,”

that is,
stop doing something
(even if it is within the bounds of liberty,
if others are offended by it).

For example,
verses 15, 16, 20, and 21 say:

{15} Yet if your brother is grieved
because of your food,
you are no longer walking in love.
Do not destroy with your food
the one for whom Christ died.
{16} Therefore do not let your good be spoken of as evil;
{20} Do not destroy the work of God
for the sake of food.
All things indeed are pure,
but it is evil
for the man who eats with offense.
{21} It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine
nor do anything
by which your brother stumbles
or is offended or is made weak.

[SLIDE 16d: You Are the Accused ... Col 2]

On the other hand,
Colossians 2 seems to say,
"Don't give in,"
that is,
don't stop doing something
that someone else says is wrong,
if you know that it is not wrong.

Verses 16, 17, and 20-23 say, for example,

{16} So let no one judge you
in food or in drink,
or regarding a festival
or a new moon or sabbaths,
{17} which are a shadow of things to come,
but the substance is of Christ. ...
{20} Therefore, if you died with Christ
from the basic principles of the world,
why, as though living in the world,
do you subject yourselves to regulations;
{21} "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,"
{22} which all concern things which perish
with the using;
according to the commandments
and doctrines of men?
{23} These things indeed
have an appearance of wisdom
in self-imposed religion,

false humility,
and neglect of the body,
but are
of no value
against the indulgence of the flesh.

These two passages certainly
seem to me at first glance,
and maybe even second glance,
to give contradictory guidance.

We know, of course,
that God doesn't contradict Himself,
so there must be a resolution
of the apparent contradiction.

Does someone want to propose a resolution
before I show you mine?

[SLIDE 17: A Resolution = give in.]

"Give in" applies
when you might
otherwise influence another
to do something against his conscience.

Romans 14:14, 23 says:

{14} I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus
that there is nothing unclean of itself;
but to him who considers anything to be unclean,
to him it is unclean. ...

{23} ... he who doubts
is condemned if he eats,
because he does not eat from faith;
for whatever is not from faith is sin.

And 1 Corinthians 8:9-13 says:

But beware
lest somehow
this liberty of yours
become a stumbling block
to those who are weak.

{10} For if anyone sees
you who have knowledge
eating in an idol's temple,
will not the conscience of him who is weak
be emboldened to eat those things
offered to idols?

{11} And because of your knowledge
shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?

{12} But when you thus sin against the brethren,
and wound their weak conscience,

you sin against Christ.
{13} Therefore,
if food makes my brother stumble,
I will never again eat meat,
lest I make my brother stumble.

These verses teach,
I think,
that we need to be very careful
to avoid allowing our liberty choices
to encourage others
to make the same choice,
when they are not convinced
in their own minds
that the choice is a right one.

That is,
we ought not let our liberty
influence others
to violate their consciences.

Can anyone think of some
situations to which this might apply?

One series of situations in which this applies,
I think,
is entertainment choices.

For example,
If you have friends who
have narrower standards than you,
say in movies,
you ought not be inviting them
to go with you to movies
that you know violate their standards —
they might go out of friendship,
but feel sinful the whole time.

So that's when the "give in" part guidance applies;
let's look at the "don't give in" part now.

[SLIDE 18: A Resolution = don't give in.]

"Don't give in" applies
when others
with narrow liberty bounds
try to impose
their narrow bounds on you.

For such people,
their personal liberty choices
become rules of righteousness,
which they seek
to force others to follow.

And they look down
(with either contempt or pity)
on those who do not
follow these same rules.

There is absolutely
no danger
that your liberty choices
will influence such people
to violate their consciences,
so the principle we just discussed
doesn't apply.

When we encounter people such as this,
then I believe that the teaching of Colossians 2
compels us to resist them,
and to refuse to give in to their demands.

As an example,
consider the home school only folks.
Should you give in to them,
and home school your children
(even if that's not the best option for you),
because unless you do,
you might cause one of them to stumble?

No, you shouldn't.

Those people aren't going to stop home schooling,
and thus violate their consciences,
just because you don't home school.

That's one example,
I'm sure everyone can think of others.

Before I stop for questions and comments,
there's one more point that I want to make.

Please listen very carefully to this,
because it is one of the most important things
that I've said these whole 4 weeks.

[SLIDE 19: Thus Says the Lord?.]

That point is this:
We ought not
underestimate the damage
that is done
when believers
falsely assert, "Thus says the Lord."

I think we often do underestimate the damage,
but the damage can be quite severe,
both internally within the body of Christ,

and externally within the world.

Internal damage that results from
this form of legalism includes

local church conflict and splits
(as we well know);

unnecessary guilt,
when believers who are doing nothing wrong,
are made to feel as if they are;

and

skeptical children,
when the children are unable to understand
why they're being told the Bible says something
that they realize it does not say.

The external damage
includes

misrepresenting God's truth to the world,
and

lost opportunities to witness to others,

and

seeming support for non-believers' prejudices
(things such as,
Christians are not very intelligent).

Are there any questions or comments
before I give a few concluding remarks?

In concluding this series on
Christian Liberty in Daily Life,
I want to make three broad statements.

[SLIDE 20: Concluding Remarks - 1.]

First,

you may be as strict as you want
in your own liberty choices.

Some people like to erect
big fences around sinful choices.

So, for example,

if God forbids going to New York City,
they might stay south of Baltimore,
Just to be sure they don't
stray into New York.

You may be as strict as you want
in your own liberty choices
so long as you do not ...

... claim that your choices
are mandated by God,
without strong Scriptural & historical support
for the claim.

or

... make conformance to your choices
a condition for fellowship.

Don't claim that God forbids going to Philadelphia,
for example,
to continue this rather silly analogy,
nor refuse to fellowship with folks
who've been to Newark.

If you do either of these things,,
then you're a legalist,
who does not rightly understand Christian liberty.

[SLIDE 21: Concluding Remarks - 2.]

Second,
you may be as loose as you want
in your own liberty choices,
so long as you do not
either
... ignore clear Scriptural teaching
against your choices

or

... influence others to violate their consciences.

Go to Newark, if you like,
so long as it's not really forbidden to go there,
and you don't try to get
the fellow who wants to stay
south of Baltimore
to go with you.

If you do either of these,
then you're a libertine,
who does not rightly understand
Christian liberty.

[SLIDE 22: Concluding Remarks - 3.]

And finally,
"Whatever you do,
do all to the glory of God."

Remember that God has given us liberty in Christ
for His own glory,
not for our simple pleasure;
Do what you do to bring Him glory.

[SLIDE 23: We're Done.]

That's all that I have.

To the extent allowed by the time we had available,
I believe we've answered the five questions
we set out in the first week.

Thank you very much
for your attention
and your participation.

Are there any final questions or comments?

[SLIDE 24: 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.