

Christ and Culture – Is it OK for Christians to Use Recreational Marijuana? Or “How 1 Should Christians Make Decisions About Morally Gray Issues?”

I. Intro

A. Several years ago, on April 20, right after Colorado legalized marijuana, I arrived in Denver for a conference.

1. It did not start for about four hours, so I spent some time in the hotel’s coffee shop, reading and looking out a big window – mostly looking out the window, because I was surprised by the way people were dressed. This didn’t seem like downtown Denver. It felt much more like Boulder or Berkeley – and I kept thinking, “Wow, Denver is so much more progressive than I thought.”

2. About 4:00 I decided to go for a run. And on that run, I was in for another surprise, because everyone I ran past – and I mean, everyone I ran past - was smoking marijuana. The first couple times I thought, “Well, I’m not used to seeing that, but pot is legal in Colorado.” But as I ran past more and more groups, and everyone was smoking pot, I thought, “Oh my goodness. This new law is changing everything. Everyone is smoking pot all the time. How do they get anything done?” There was so much pot smoke in the air that I thought, I am going to get high on this run. I started trying to run away from people, but there was no avoiding the haze. Everywhere I looked, people were smoking pot.

3. It wasn’t until that night when the conference started, that I realized what was going on. I was in Colorado on April 20 – that is 420, or National Weed Day. And the hotel I was at was next to the capital. And I went for a run at 4:20. That means, I was near the epicenter of the big “smoke weed on weed day” event. Had I been one block over, I would have seen 15,000 people all gathered next to the capital building. At that point I might have clued in. I would have realized that all the people who looked like they were going to Woodstock were gathering for this event.

B. About two years ago, I was in Detroit meeting with some pastors who were leading churches in the very broken, blighted and bankrupt parts of town. And I met this one man – very colorful, very winsome, very much a character and a street-hustler - who had been one of the homeless men in the area, but had proven so gifted at serving and leading and caring for others in the name of Christ, that he had been given this special blessing by the Episcopal Church to serve as a priest in that area.

1. He did not have any formal training. In fact, I doubt he graduated from high school. But he was very dynamic and street wise and very effective working among the gangs in this burned out section of Detroit. And so, he had been made the priest of this particular parish.

2. And at one point, I asked him a question I often ask pastors – what are speaking on right now. And he told me about a sermon he had just given on personal holiness, which he had started by lighting up a joint and smoking it – while he was preaching - to make the statement that that kind of behavior wouldn’t help. He said, he had wanted to get their attention. And then he asked, “have you ever done anything like that?”

3. And I asked, “started a sermon by lighting a joint? Remarkably, no. I haven’t tried that....yet.”

Christ and Culture – Is it OK for Christians to Use Recreational Marijuana? Or “How Should Christians Make Decisions About Morally Gray Issues?” 2

C. And then about six months ago, when I went to visit my Mom, her 80-year-old friend kept trying to get me to try Hemp Oil – which is not marijuana, and usually has very little THC, which is the hallucinogenic compound found in Marijuana. But it’s sort of related, and operates in the shadows.

1. My Mom’s friend – a retired professor at the University of Arkansas, said, “Mike, I know you have some residual pain from your stroke. You need to try this.” And she didn’t just ask me once. It came up over and over again.

2. As I left town a few days later, I said to my Mom, “It’s not like I haven’t been around people trying to get me to use before. It happened throughout high school and I was in a fraternity in college. I have been around drugs. But, I didn’t expect to get pressured from your friends in the retirement village.

D. So, I have seen this topic coming. And I have been reading up on this for a few years, attending events and talking with others. That said, giving a sermon on Marijuana still caught me by surprise.

E. For a while I resisted it because I did not think it is one of the more important things in front of us. There are lots of issues out there. Bigger problems. And this was not one I wanted to take on. But eventually I was wore down by people encouraging me to weigh in.

II. Let me start by making three quick points:

A. First, I am not preaching about pot. As I was flying back from Turkey two days ago – a great trip – and was wading through emails. I ran across a #weedweek at Christ Church banner. And I thought, “Oh boy, here we go!”

1. We are going to be looking to the Bible for instruction on how to make ethical and moral decisions. It’s not my intention to talk about pot from a legal, political, medical or scientific perspective. You can gather that information in other ways, including coming back tonight.

B. Second, I am not talking about medical marijuana.

1. About five years ago, if you had a doctor’s prescription, it was no longer illegal to smoke pot, or use it in some other way. I am not discussing this. I have no medical training that qualifies me to do so.

2. In my experience, I’ve been around three groups of people who smoke weed: 1) the first was high school and college friends who smoked marijuana to get high; 2) the second are a few people I know who have used some form of marijuana to deal with nausea or physical pain; and 3) some others who have used marijuana to self-medicate for mental health issues.

3. I am talking today about those in group one. Those who are using marijuana because they like to get high.

4. For the record, I am a bit skeptical about medical marijuana. It doesn’t always feel very medical. When you can go to a beach in California and talk to a nurse in a bikini who will get you into to see a doctor who will write you a prescription for anxiety or insomnia after a thirty second check up – and then buy marijuana thirty seconds later, well, that seems a bit suspect.

5. And I suspect that many who are smoking marijuana to help quiet the voices in the head, are hearing voices because of the marijuana.

Christ and Culture – Is it OK for Christians to Use Recreational Marijuana? Or “How Should Christians Make Decisions About Morally Gray Issues?” 3

6. I believe there are legitimate uses of medical marijuana, and I am I do not have a principled objection to science pursuing others.¹ So though I am skeptical, I am open to this. I am not talking about medical marijuana today at all.

C. And the third thing I want to say is, I hope to offer insight without sounding like a self-righteous jerk.

1. Shortly after coming to faith I remember someone saying to me, “Christians don’t drink, smoke, cuss or chew, or go with girls that do.” That is such a harmful statement at so many levels. For starters, it misses the Gospel. It suggests that it’s all about us. That God loves us because we are so good. As opposed to the idea that we are all profoundly broken by sin but can embrace the amazing love and grace of God, it says we can be morally righteous and earn it.

2. We all have challenges. I do. Drugs are not mine. Perhaps they are yours. If so, my prayer is that our focus on this is helpful and hopeful.

III. By way of context:

A. On January 1st, Illinois will become the tenth state² to legalize recreational marijuana.³ And based on the way public opinion is changing – the last poll I saw showed 58% of Americans favor its legalization - it seems likely that pot will soon be legal everywhere.⁴

B. These numbers line up with it’s expanding usage. In 2005 there were about 3 million people who smoked cannabis daily. As of 2016, there were 8 million daily users. Correspondingly, the number of occasional users has grown from ten percent of the country to fifteen.

¹ “The U.S. Institute of Medicine in 1999 and the British Royal College of Physicians in 2005 published in-depth reviews of previous medical marijuana research. Because most of the studies reviewed were not controlled studies, the report concluded that there is little evidence to support the medical use of marijuana. However, products purified from marijuana, most notably a prescription drug called dronabinol, appear to be helpful. These products are legally available and have legitimate uses...In 2007, the first randomized controlled trial of marijuana smoking was published. Patients with painful HIV-related neuropathy smoked either marijuana or placebo cigarettes daily. Patients’ pain scores decreased an average of about one-third with marijuana. Since then, a few other controlled studies have produced beneficial findings for medical marijuana. However, these studies also showed that medical marijuana does not work well for everyone and has side effects. The prevalence and seriousness of the side effects is still debated.” (Dónal O’Mathúna, “Should Christians Smoke Medical Marijuana?” *Christianity Today* (June 14, 2011), www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/june/vg-medicalmarijuana.html?paging=off).

² As of today, recreational marijuana is legal in Alaska, California, Colorado, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nevada, Oregon, Vermont and Washington – and the District of Columbia.

³ According to a recent survey from Pew Research Center, 41% of respondents said they favored marijuana being legalized, and 52% were opposed. As age increased, respondents were less likely to be in favor of legalization: 58% of respondents ages 18–29 supported the legalization of marijuana, 42% of those 30–49, 40% of those 50–64, and 22% of 65+.

⁴ It seems likely that other states and the Federal government will soon follow. (See reference to a Barna study in “When Pot is Legal, What do we Say?, CT Pastors, 2013.

Christ and Culture – Is it OK for Christians to Use Recreational Marijuana? Or “How Should Christians Make Decisions About Morally Gray Issues?” 4

C. So, the question is: When it's no longer illegal for people to smoke marijuana – when you would not need to stash baggies above ceiling tiles to keep it hidden you're your Mom or your kids or whoever – does this mean that smoking marijuana is OK? A good idea? More to the point, is it OK for me – a Christ-follower – to smoke pot? Can I smoke a joint with friends in the same way that I might have a glass of wine at a party?

D. Ten years ago, the answer was, “No. It is illegal.” And given what Paul writes in Romans 13, Christians have understood that, lacking a very compelling moral reason to disobey a law, we are expected to keep it.

1. From time to time Christians have said that certain laws are unjust and chosen to violate them. It was not that many years ago that Dr. Martin Luther King led nonviolent protests against Jim Crow laws. So, there are times when Christians defy the law in favor of a higher law. But that aside, it is understood that as Christians we are expected to obey the state. And few have compared smoking weed with ending Jim Crow.

E. So, ten years ago, the question about whether a Christ-follower had a green light to smoke marijuana had an easy answer. No. On January first the question becomes more complicated.⁵

IV. As you might imagine, Christians have come out on all sides of the issue. Here is the spectrum (visual).

⁵ As Bill Clem notes in “When Pot is Legal, What Do We Say? (*Christianity Today*, Nov. 2013), “the question when we talk about things like smoking legal weed, for me, is not so much about the 'what' question,” Clem says. “I'm interested in the 'why' question. *Why* do we do what we do? So if I'm simply trying to numb myself and escape from life for a while, that is very different than my friend who was legitimately 'escaping' from neurologically damaging stress levels.”

We need to listen carefully, with Bible-transformed ears to hear the plights of our fellow men and women. Dumping a 750 ml jug of wine into a lonely woman's gut on a gloomy day is very different than the same bottle of wine sipped into the same tummy during her wedding celebration with friends and family, especially if the wedding is held in Cana. Clem is right. The “what” question pulls us backwards, toward the lifeless power of Johnny Law. But the “why” question spurs us forward, toward the living freedom of Jesus Love.

Christ and Culture – Is it OK for Christians to Use Recreational Marijuana? Or “How Should Christians Make Decisions About Morally Gray Issues?” 5

A. At one end, there are a few who think like Rastafarians – the Jamaican religious sect associated with Bob Marley, for whom Marijuana use is not just OK, it is a sacrament.⁶ In like manner, there are Christians who promise that the recreational use of marijuana is not only fine, it helps you grow spiritually. For them, smoking weed is almost a requirement.⁷

B. Moving slightly to over on the spectrum are those who say: God gave us marijuana and we are free to use it. This group cites a number of passages:

1. Genesis 1:29f is one: It reads: Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.” Those in this camp say, “this verse gives us a green light.”

2. Ezekiel 34:29 is another. The KJV translation – which is what is generally cited – refers to a “plant of renown.”

3. Revelation 22:2 likewise talks about “a plant for healing the nations.”⁸

4. In recent times there is an argument that the Hebrew term, *Kaneh Bosem* – which shows up a dozen or so times in the Old Testament - should be translated as Cannabis. *Kaneh* is reed and *Bosem* is fragrant. I am not convinced this is right, and can find no Hebrew scholar who does. But even if they are right, I am pretty sure the THC levels of cannabis years ago was likely very low. In the 70s it was about 5%. Nothing like today’s medical marijuana – which is around 25%, or some of the stuff you can get on the streets, which is two or three times higher than that. Which means, if Kaneh Bosem was referring to marijuana – and I do not think it is – it would be talking about near-beer or watered-down wine, not grain alcohol.

C. One click further over are those who say, “Since the Bible does not list it as a sin, it’s OK.”

⁶ Interestingly, the Rastafarian religion has dietary laws in which marijuana is a religious sacrament while other substances (such as coffee) are not permitted: “The most observant Rastas follow a dietary law called Ital (from the word ‘vital’). Ital food is completely natural, not canned, free of chemicals and preservatives and eaten as raw as possible. Old Testament prohibitions against pork and shellfish are part of Ital; most Rastafarians are vegetarians or vegans. Coffee and milk are also rejected as unnatural, and Rastafarians condemn the use of alcohol, since it is a fermented chemical that does not belong in the temple of the body, and it makes a person stupid, thereby playing into the hands of white leaders. This is contrasted with the holy herb of marijuana, which is natural and believed by Rastas to open their mind and assist in reasoning.” (Marc Emery, “Rastafari: The Secret History of the Marijuana Religion,” *Cannabis Culture: Marijuana Magazine* (August 28, 2009), <http://www.cannabisculture.com/content/rastafari-secret-history-marijuana-religion>).

⁷ I am thinking here of Craig Gross, whose web site is Christian Cannabis. (Alex Norcia, Jesus Would Have Been Cool with Weed, Says Christian Cannabis Pastor, Vice.com, 11.7.2019).

⁸ See, H. Wayne House, What Does the Bible Teach About Cannabis Plant?” Feb. 15, 2017.

Christ and Culture – Is it OK for Christians to Use Recreational Marijuana? Or “How Should Christians Make Decisions About Morally Gray Issues?” 6

1. There are some who say, if the Bible doesn't say it is wrong, it is OK. And at the other end are those who say, “If the Bible doesn't say it is OK it is wrong.”⁹ Both of these interpretative approaches are naïve, and no one actually follows them consistently.¹⁰

2. If the Bible says we are supposed to do something, then obviously we are supposed to do it. And if it says we are not to do something, then we are to try to avoid it. The Bible doesn't have specific advice about most of the decisions we need to make. So we look to the Bible – and reason and tradition – to develop a wise approach to living.

3. Today's topic is one of many that fall into what we call a Gray Area. These are topics for Bible study, reflection and prayer.

D. A fourth group is made up of those who say, the use of recreational marijuana is wrong if it's illegal, but OK if legal.¹¹ This group is essentially treating the state as the final word.¹²

E. The fifth group says something just a little bit different. Those in this camp say, if it is illegal, it is wrong. But if it is legal, then we should treat recreational marijuana the way we treat alcohol.

⁹ There is a biblical guide that some follow – mostly for worship practices – called “the normative principle.” It says if it is not listed in the Bible, it is not OK. Those embracing this view will only allow instruments listed in the Bible, to be used in worship. I am not a fan of the normative principles.

¹⁰ Few are interested in ingesting marijuana as food, and it isn't added to brownies for taste.

¹¹ The Christian's decision about marijuana is simplified when the government takes a stance on the issue. Douglas Wilson claims that the government does not stand in direct contradiction to Christian Scripture when they outlaw marijuana; as such, the faithful Christian has no warrant for disobeying the governmental ruling on the issue. Christians are to be obedient and submissive to governing authorities and only to disobey those authorities when the governmental restrictions or requirements necessarily entail that one directly violate Scripture either by failing to do something that one is required to do or doing something that one is prohibited from doing. So, as long as marijuana is regarded as illegal by the government, Christians are required to abstain from using it. In the same way, the use of alcohol is wrong for persons under age 21 in the United States because the government has declared it illegal. If, however, the government makes marijuana usage legal—either recreationally or medicinally— the Christian cannot simply embrace the practice because the government has made it legal. Instead, he or she must ask whether the practice is one that Scripture views as morally acceptable. The following three positions each answer this question in a different way. (Douglas Wilson, *Future Men*, 173–74).

¹² In a *CT Pastors* article titled, “When Pot is Legal What do We Say?,” the point is made that the state should not be our personal guide for holiness. Is “OK to use” the Christian's measure of goodness? I could be an alcoholic, adulterous, deceitful, prescription-abusing, manipulative, hate-filled connoisseur of grotesque pornography and still be OK, legally and socially. Does the government's stamp of approval mean I should partake, or even can partake with moral uprightness? What about dope smoking is truly profitable for you and, more importantly, for your neighbor? What would Jesus smoke?

Christ and Culture – Is it OK for Christians to Use Recreational Marijuana? Or “How Should Christians Make Decisions About Morally Gray Issues?” 7

1. If we say alcohol is permissible then this group says, “you should be consistent and say pot is OK as well.” This could be a sermon in itself. Let me briefly say, I believe that moderate alcohol consumption can be OK in some situations: but there are guidelines offered and we need to be aware of them. These are principally spelled out in Ephesians 5 and in I Corinthians 8 – 10.
2. Ephesians 5:18 makes it clear that getting drunk is wrong. It reads: Do not be drunk with wine. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit.”
3. The three-chapter discussion found in I Corinthians 8 – 10 is indirect but important. It speaks about eating meat sacrificed to idols – which is not an issue today, but it models how we think about issues in the gray zone.¹³ Briefly:
 - a) Corinth was a decadent place – if you’ve read I and II Corinthians you know this. It was filled with many pagan temples, which in addition to being places of animal sacrifice, were places of lots of sexual orgies.
 - b) Well, the meat from the animals that were sacrificed there, was often sold for people to eat. And this meat was often cheaper than other meat. The question Christians asked was, can we eat it? And the situation was complicated by the fact that you couldn’t always know whether the meat you were buying – or that your neighbor was serving you - had been sacrificed at a temple or not.¹⁴

¹³ In *Be the Leader You Were Meant to Be*, Leroy Eims develops what he calls his 6, 8, 10 principles which help us make decisions about Gray Issues – which include lots of life-style matters: entertainment, dress, Sunday activities, etc. I Cor. 6:12 leads us to ask: Is it helpful or will it pull me down?; I Cor. 8:12f we see a discussion about how our actions affect others; and 3) I Cor. 10:31, does it glorify God?

¹⁴ See Romans 14:14-23. Also, the topic is discussed by Luke in Acts 15:29 and John in Revelation 2:20.

Christ and Culture – Is it OK for Christians to Use Recreational Marijuana? Or “How Should Christians Make Decisions About Morally Gray Issues?” 8

c) When you read all that Paul writes here – and also in Romans 14. You see how he thinks about moral issues. What he says is he does not think eating food sacrificed to idols is wrong in itself – because he argues there is no real entity behind an idol.¹⁵ However, he feels that eating meat sacrificed to idols is wrong if: 1) it is part of a public worship of the idol;¹⁶ 2) if it violates your conscious;¹⁷ or 3) if less mature Christians might see you eat it, misunderstand what you are doing and be weakened by your actions. In other words, having the right to do something doesn’t mean we are free to do it in any situation. We need to be aware of how our actions affect others. We need to be especially careful not “to cause a weaker brother to stumble.”¹⁸

4. On the basis of these two passages, some Christians choose not to drink at all. Which is certainly fine. Some choose to drink in moderation in some situations – which I think is also fine.

5. There are others who say, it is wrong for any Christian to drink ever – which I do not think lines up with what Paul is saying. For starters, this is not what Ephesians 5 says, nor does it line up with the fact that: 1) Jesus drank; 2) He turned water into wine; and 3) He used wine in setting up communion.

6. Furthermore: 1) in Psalm 104:14, we are told that God has given “wine to gladden the heart of man;” and 2) both I Tim. 4:3 and Col. 2:16-23 warn against setting up extrabiblical prohibitions.¹⁹

7. I think a straight reading of the Bible permits the moderate use of alcohol, even though it has psychoactive effects.

¹⁵ Paul contends that physical idols are really nothing but carved pieces of wood or metal, not a real god as the pagans believed. Therefore, meat sacrificed to them and then resold is not tainted with evil. Meat is meat, and we need food to live. Therefore, if a person strolls through a meat market, they shouldn’t stress about whether the meat had previously been used in some silly idol worship festival.

¹⁶ The condemnation of eating sacrificed meat in Acts 15:29 and Revelation 2:20 probably refers to participation in an idol feast, but could also refer to the sin of leading others into sin by eating it.

¹⁷ Titus 1:5; Romans 14:22f.

¹⁸ In fact, we need to think of our Christian liberty not as something that allows us to do what we want to do, but as something that allows us to serve others more aggressively.

¹⁹ I am referencing John Piper here, in *Marijuana to the Glory of God?* In this article he writes: Quick, pat answers to the question of recreational cannabis use are often unhelpful. Responses without nuance will not best serve the church in the long run. To say that alcohol is permissible, and cannabis is not, because “Christians drink beer and wine for the taste, but people only smoke pot to get stoned,” just won’t do. Such a simplification distorts the truth. For one, Christians don’t drink beer and wine *only* for the taste. Even moderate drinking, which is biblically permissible, has lubricating psychoactive effects. From a biblical perspective, this lubricating effect can be acceptable. While drunkenness is clearly prohibited (Ephesians 5:18; Romans 13:13; Galatians 5:19–21; 1 Peter 4:3), God has given “wine to gladden the heart of man” (Psalm 104:14–15).

Christ and Culture – Is it OK for Christians to Use Recreational Marijuana? Or “How Should Christians Make Decisions About Morally Gray Issues?” 9

8. So, I do not think the Bible prohibits moderate alcohol. Well, there are some that say, if you say alcohol is OK – or if you say that coffee is OK – then you have to say recreational marijuana is OK.²⁰ What is fair for one is fair for the other.

F. The sixth category is made up of those who say, “even if it is legal, it is wrong (or at the very least unwise) for Christians to smoke marijuana recreationally,” but who are open to the medical use of marijuana.²¹

G. And finally, there is a seventh group made up of those who are against all uses of marijuana – not only recreational marijuana, but also medical marijuana.²² This was the view of the Roman Catholic Church in 2007. It may have changed.

V. I am not going to keep you in suspense, I land with option six. I am OK with the medical use of marijuana, but I believe it is wrong for Christians to use marijuana recreationally.

A. I would not necessarily use the word “sin,” to describe the use of recreational marijuana, but I would say it is profoundly foolish and quite dangerous.

B. How did I reach that decision?

VI. Let me share the five reasons I will not try recreational pot.

A. I believe using recreational marijuana is a violation of Ephesians 5:18 – the passage that says: do not get drunk on wine.

1. To me, smoking weed to get a buzz – which is what recreational marijuana is all about - is a clear violation of Ephesians 5.

²⁰ Pat Robertson recently said, “I really believe we should treat marijuana the way we treat beverage alcohol...I’ve never used marijuana and I don’t intend to, but it’s just one of those things that I think: this war on drugs just hasn’t succeeded.” (Jesse McKinley, “Pat Robertson Says Marijuana Use Should Be Legal,” *New York Times* (March 7, 2012), http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/08/us/pat-robertson-backs-legalizing-marijuana.html?_r=0).

²¹ In fact, a variety of Christian denominations and groups have supported the medical use of marijuana: “The Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Methodist Church, the United Church of Christ, the Progressive National Baptist Convention, and the Episcopal Church have all either issued resolutions or signed statements supporting the use of marijuana under the supervision of a doctor. The Episcopal Church’s 1982 resolution even delves into politics by saying that it ‘urges the adoption by Congress and all states of statutes providing that the use of marijuana be permitted when deemed medically appropriate by duly licensed medical practitioners.’” Bosch, “What Would Jesus Smoke?” // As Bosch notes, “There are biblical rationales for such a position. The Presbyterian Church’s position on pot-smoking, which they adopted during a June 2006 General Assembly, notes that Matthew 25:35 calls for people to give aid to those who are suffering. Many Christians in favor of medicinal marijuana use this line of argument, saying that if it helps ease the pain of people dying from cancer, it’s a good thing.” Bosch, “What Would Jesus Smoke?”

²² A variety of churches agree with this position. “The Catholic Church says that drugs ‘constitute direct cooperation in evil’ and does not seem to make exceptions for marijuana. The Vatican has condemned legalizing ‘soft drugs’ like marijuana, and its newspaper, *L’Osservatore Romano*, recently scolded Italian lawmakers for liberalizing pot-possession laws. The Mormon church (whose members consider themselves Christians) also strongly advises members to refrain from smoking marijuana, though it has no established position on medical use.” Torie Bosch, “What Would Jesus Smoke: The Christian Doctrine on Bong Hits,” *Slate* (March 20, 2007), http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/explainer/2007/03/what_would_jesus_smoke.html.

Christ and Culture – Is it OK for Christians to Use Recreational Marijuana? Or “How 10 Should Christians Make Decisions About Morally Gray Issues?”

- B. Two: Smoking marijuana does not line up with the life I want to live.
1. To the extent possible, I want to live my life for God and others. I want to be a good stewards of the gifts and opportunities God has given me. That means, I am ask questions like: will this activity cause me to love others more?; will this help me grow closer to God.
 2. It also means, I am generally headed down the wrong path when I ask, how far I can go in this direction before I get in trouble?²³
- C. Three: Smoking marijuana is not the example I want to set.
1. Paul makes it clear that we need to think about how our actions will impact others. As an adult, as a Dad, as a pastor, I do not want to do something I do to hurt others.
- D. Four: I will not try marijuana because I do not want any addictions.
1. As a pastor, I have seen how devastating addictions can be. I talk with people who are stuck and feel trapped. Who confess a desire to go in the opposite direction but appear unable to do so.
 2. The evidence is growing that today’s Marijuana is not only much stronger than the Marijuana of ten and twenty years ago, but it is much more addictive to some, in particular, younger people.²⁴
 3. And in conversations with a friend who smoke weed nearly daily for six years and then quit – he says his experience suggest that fifty percent of his friends were unable to quit (and that about fifty percent of his friends who have smoked now have forms of mental illness). This is anecdotal. But I can say this, life is hard enough without addictions.
 4. I am avoiding marijuana because I do not want to lose my freedom. It doesn’t even come close to meeting any risk / reward grid I set up.
- E. Five: I do not find the arguments offered in defense of recreational marijuana very strong:
1. To those who say: well you drink coffee, and that has caffeine with is a psycho-active ingredient. I would say, “Nice try. Well not really. This is a very weak argument. People drink coffee to be more alert not less.”²⁵

²³ In *Marijuana to the Glory of God?*, Piper notes that we want to experience the full and undistorted reality of the glory of God (I Cor. 15:12-49; Phil. 3:20f; I Cor. 13:12). In an email to me, one of my readers recalled the regret of a John Sebastian (a musician) who played at Woodstock, but does not remember any of it because he was high.

²⁴ The literature suggests that regular Marijuana use can impair problem solving, concentration, motivation, and memory. It can also cause birth defects, and teen users are more likely to become delinquent, schizophrenic, depressed, and suicidal.

²⁵ There is a reason that marijuana has long been associated with the couch, a bag of chips, and a television remote. Put another way, marijuana has never been associated with engaged parenting. Regular marijuana use causes disengagement, dulling individuals into a long-term, slow, and subtle numbness. If you ask almost anyone who has formerly used cannabis on a regular basis, he will speak about this phenomenon. To confirm this testimony, studies have shown a high correlation between regular cannabis use and the clinical diagnosis of Amotivational Syndrome.

Christ and Culture – Is it OK for Christians to Use Recreational Marijuana? Or “How 11 Should Christians Make Decisions About Morally Gray Issues?”

2. To those who say, smoking a joint at a party is no different than having a glass of wine, I would say:

a) This argument slowed me down, although in the end it did not make me think I should green light smoking marijuana - especially since the TCH levels are now so high that it's impossible to smoke so little that you do not get high. Instead, it makes me feel as though I should be saying more cautionary things about alcohol. If : 1) you are drinking to cope, you have a problem. If you are drinking every day – or nearly every day – you have a problem; 3) if you are drinking alone; or 4) hiding how much you are drinking from anyone – you have a problem.

b) If the goal of the glass of wine – or beer, or scotch – is to get buzzed, that is wrong.

3. Do I think you can drink moderately in some situations – and it not be a problem? Yes. I know that many who have a drink at a party are being careful about not drinking so much as to get buzzed.²⁶

F. Finally, number six: I think distress can have value – that it can prompt us to go after core problems.

1. I do not want you to be in lots of pain. But some physical pain is not bad, and our efforts to remove all pain have led to a lot of problems.

2. And we should be aware that 100 years ago, when people had trouble sleeping or were melancholy, they often thought, God is trying to get my attention. Today we can be too quick to seek easier living through chemicals.²⁷

3. Please hear me, I am not against medications. If you are taking them for depression or other physical or mental challenges, do not stop on the basis of what I am saying. As I have said before, I take medication for ADHD. I am not against medications.

4. But I will not choose to self-medicate with Marijuana because I think some distress has value.

VII. Well, there is more that could be – maybe should be – said about marijuana.

A. This brief sermon has not even begun to ask the question: why are so many people feeling the need to navigate life with an artificial high. And I am aware that if you came in here with a strong opinion, I have not ticked off your talking points.

B. Those who are against the new law want to point out that:

²⁶ As an aside, I have heard some argue that “Christians drink beer and wine for the taste, but people only smoke pot to get stoned,” but I think that is a very unhelpful (and perhaps dishonest) comment. For one, Christians don't drink beer and wine only for the taste. Even moderate drinking has lubricating psychoactive effects.

²⁷ Dr. Henry Cloud addresses this idea, stating: Shortcuts often spell failure, and our failure is Satan's goal: Satan tempts with quick riches and money-making schemes; God offers the blessing of long-term faithfulness; Satan tempts with instant intimacy through sexual impulse and passion, but God offers the faithful building of a loving relationship. Diet fads tempt with quick weight loss, but such diets do not develop the long-term habits and self-discipline needed to maintain weight loss. Drugs and alcohol hold out immediate relief from suffering, but do not build character that can endure.

Christ and Culture – Is it OK for Christians to Use Recreational Marijuana? Or “How 12 Should Christians Make Decisions About Morally Gray Issues?”

1. Marijuana is often a gateway drug;
2. That it’s so complex – with over 100 cannabinoids – that we do really understand its impact;²⁸.
3. That we now see strong correlation between marijuana use and the development of schizophrenia and psychosis.
4. That legalizing marijuana will likely only further divide the middle class, pulling down those with the least resources to get pulled down.

C. Meanwhile, those arguing for its legalization want to say we need to do this because:

1. The problems caused by alcohol are much worse;
2. We cannot win the war on drugs;²⁹
3. Our drug laws are discriminatory (even racists);
4. If we make pot legal we can then control its quality, redirect police officers to other issues and benefit from the tax revenue.³⁰

D. You can come back tonight for those discussions I am not going to weigh in on any of that, although I can’t resist asking, “What tax revenue?” The promises of tax revenue are, at best, naively overstated. They have not materialized so far anywhere it’s been tried. And, in fact, I suspect the societal costs will soon overwhelm any bump in state’s income.”³¹

VIII. Let me pause and say – there is a lot more to say. You can show up tonight.

A. The question I am trying to address is now is not what our laws should be, but how someone who wants to follow Christ – and is looking to His counsel – should live. Do I think using recreational marijuana is a good idea for a Christ follower? No. I think it would be very foolish, short sighted and dangerous. I will not do it.

B. If like if harder than you can handle, you need a deeper walk with Christ and better friends.

IX. Questions:

²⁸ Even if both plants have the same exact amount of THC (the primary psychoactive chemical in cannabis), the same amount of the drug from two different marijuana plants can have very different effects on a person. This is because of it’s complex chemical makeup. There are at least 113 different chemical compounds (cannabinoids) inside the cannabis plant that combine to cause a variety of effects on an individual when smoked or ingested.

²⁹ Pat Robertson said as much in a NYT article a few years ago. Jesse McKinley. Pat Robertson Says Marijuana Should Be Legal,” NYT, March 7, 2012 is in this camp. Robertson’s reasons for arguing for the legalization of marijuana, however, are primarily economic: “Mr. Robertson has now apparently fully embraced the idea of legalizing marijuana, arguing that it is a way to bring down soaring rates of incarceration and reduce the social and financial costs.” (McKinley, “Pat Robertson Says Marijuana Use Should Be Legal.”)

³⁰ They also suggest that if Marijuana was legal, perhaps the opioid crisis would have been smaller.

³¹ See: 1) The True Cost of Marijuana Legalization: Current Compliance; 2) Mike Adams, “The Reasons Marijuana Legalization Seems to be Failing,” Forbes Nov. 2019.

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- A. Review the sermon
- B. Where did you agree with what said? Where did you disagree? What important points do you think he left out?
- C. What would you say to a friend who is using marijuana to manage anxiety?
- D. Do you think you are likely to allow / recommend your children use Marijuana?
- E. Explore the 6, 8, 10 principles from Leroy Eims writing related to I Corinthian.
Click [here](#) for more.