

CBC Sunday School
Christian Ethics: An Ethical Approach to Marijuana Usage
December 19, 2021

I. Discussion Question

Christians have not often talked about the ethics of marijuana usage. However, this is increasingly becoming a topic of conversation in churches and among pastors.

- Why? What has shifted in our culture, and in our churches, that this topic is increasingly relevant?
- What must the church consider in order to think wisely about marijuana usage?
- What are the challenges of this conversation?

Marijuana Use Among 19-30 Years Old in 2019		
	Men	Women
Daily Use	11.5%	7.6%
Monthly Use	29.5%	24.1%
Annual Use	42.7%	39.9%

-From: Todd Miles, Cannabis and the Christian, p. 17

II. How Marijuana Affects the Body

- A. THC binds to cannabinoid receptors, producing a variety of results.
 1. THC produces psychoactive effects. Note: CBD does not.
 2. Affects our endocannabinoid system (ECS), which is responsible for regulating such bodily functions as appetite and digestion, metabolism, pain response, mood, sleep, the cardiovascular system, muscle formation, and more.
 3. Many cannabinoid receptors are found in parts of the brain that control thinking, pleasure, concentration, coordination, time perception, and memory.
- B. Marijuana is a stimulant and a depressant.
 1. Causes a short-lived and acute increase in dopamine levels. Results in general feeling of pleasure and euphoria.
 2. Decreases “firing” in the hippocampus, which regulates learning and assimilating new information, causing memory impairment and learning difficulties.
 3. Causes clumsiness in the cerebellum, which controls motor coordination.
 4. Decreases nausea by affecting the brain stem.
 5. Decreases frontal-executive brain function, diminishing complex thinking.
 6. Can increase heart rate and feelings of anxiety and panic and paranoia.
 7. Can increase appetite by affecting the hypothalamus.
 8. Changes brain function and alters mood and perception.
 9. Causes a mellowing effect for many.
 10. Alters pain sensitivity and perception of passing of time, along with overall perception of reality.
 11. The high caused by marijuana is difficult to predict, and experiences vary widely.

C. Potency

1. In the 60s-70s, a typical joint had a THC content of about 1-2% by weight.
2. Current marijuana strains regularly have THC contents from 17-25%.
3. There is no national standard for measuring marijuana potency, unlike “proof” with alcohol.
4. Additionally, alcohol has generally predictable impacts, and responses are often a function of body size and blood alcohol content. Comparatively, marijuana has much higher levels of unpredictability.

III. Scriptural Norms on Marijuana (Deontological Perspective)

A. Marijuana is not referenced in Scripture.

1. Weeds in Genesis 3 are no more a reference to marijuana than “pots” throughout Scripture refer to marijuana.
2. Some have said marijuana use is permitted because God made every green thing on the earth and called it good.
 - a. Yet hemlock is also a plant, and we are not allowed to poison people with it. It is not the plant itself that is bad or good, but how you use it. We see from Adam and Eve that God’s good creation can be misused.
 - b. Some may argue marijuana only exists because of the fall, but that would be speculative at best.
3. However, because God made the plant, and called all of His creation good, we have reason to believe there are good, valid, and helpful uses of it. This gets into the realm of medicinal marijuana, which we don’t have time or space to cover adequately here.

B. Our response to civil laws.

1. Where illegal, recreational marijuana use is biblically prohibited.
 - a. See Romans 13:1-7. Christians normally are ethically bound to obeying civil law.
 - b. “Marijuana is currently listed as a Schedule 1 drug by the federal government, making the possession and/or selling of marijuana a violation of federal law. But the federal government is on record as refusing to enforce the federal marijuana ban against individuals who comply with state laws.” Todd Miles, *Cannabis and the Christian*, p. 1
 - c. We can anticipate that recreational marijuana use soon will be legalized nationwide. So this consideration will soon be irrelevant to the conversation.
2. Where legal, we are not, as Christians, necessarily permitted to use marijuana.
 - a. Just because something is legal according to civil law, it does not follow that this action is justified before God.
 - b. Sexual immorality, gluttony, and idolatry are not punishable crimes by civil standards. Yet they clearly scripturally prohibited.
 - c. We cannot then defend marijuana use simply because it is legal.

C. Scripture consistently and repeatedly warns against drunkenness (or you might say intoxication), and calls for sobriety.

1. Drunkenness got Noah in trouble, and was an immediate sign that humanity, though

- temporarily delivered, was still in need of perfecting and saving. See Genesis 9:21.
2. Drunkenness is seen as a negative trait throughout the Old Testament. See 1 Samuel 25:36; 1 Kings 16:9; 20:16; and Deuteronomy 21:20.
 3. Drunkenness is spoken against in the wisdom and prophetic writings of the Old Testament. The drunkard is seen as a sinful fool. See Proverbs 20:1; 23:20; 31:4; Isaiah 5:22, and especially Proverbs 23:29-35.
 4. Jesus refers to getting drunk with wine as sinful behavior. Luke 12:45 – “But if that servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed in coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk...”
 5. New Testament Christians are called to be sober-minded, rather than drunkards.
 - a. Ephesians 5:18 – “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit...”
 - b. 1 Peter 5:8 – “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”
 - c. 1 Timothy 3:2 – “Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach...”
 6. Drunkenness is listed in “sin lists,” and those consumed with drunkenness are warned that they will not inherit God’s kingdom. See Galatians 5:21 and 1 Corinthians 6:10.
 7. “Drunkenness” is a metaphorical condition associated with idolatry and sexual immorality. Revelation 18:3 – “For all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living.”
- D. Scripture allows for wine to be used, even to affect our mood.
1. It should not be overlooked that our Lord drank wine, and its use was expected in worship both in the Old and New Testaments.
 - a. Jesus’ first miracle was turning water into wine. See John 2:6-11.
 - b. Jesus himself stated he drank wine, and was even perceived (though wrongly) as a drunkard. Luke 7:33-34 – “For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’”
 - c. Wine was consumed at Passover. See Matthew 26:27-29; Mark 14:23-25; Luke 22:17-18.
 - d. Wine was consumed in communion. See 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.
 - e. Wine is associated with eschatological blessing and fulfillment, wherein Jesus will drink with His disciples. See Matthew 26:29.
 2. Wine was associated with gladness and blessing and favor from God.
 - a. Psalm 104:14-15 – “You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man’s heart.”
 - b. Ecclesiastes 9:7 – “Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do.”

- c. Amos 9:13-14 – “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit.”
 - d. Isaiah 55:1 – “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.”
 - 3. So, it seems we are allowed to use alcohol to affect our mood, but we are prohibited from drunkenness. To summarize, Scripture allows for alcohol use in moderation.
 - 4. The question then becomes, can we use marijuana “in moderation,” as with alcohol? Can we use marijuana without intoxication, as with alcohol? To answer that question, we must have some understanding of how marijuana works and affects us.
- E. We are called to not be mastered by anything, and to ensure we have “one Lord.”
- 1. Matthew 6:24 – “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”
 - 2. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 – “...You are not your own, for you were bought with a price...”
 - 3. Any behavior that dominates our lives, such that it has mastery over us, whether that be food, sex, entertainment, laziness, etc., is dishonoring to the Lord and spiritually damaging to us.

“because the Bible is sufficient, we have all the divine words we need in order to answer the question regarding the appropriateness of marijuana use. The goal, then, is to think like a disciple of Jesus Christ and apply the wisdom of Holy Scripture in a manner that glorifies Christ.” Todd Miles, *Cannabis and the Christian*, p. 31

IV. Consequences and Risks of Marijuana (Teleological/Consequentialist Perspective)

- A. We must consider what will be most beneficial to ourselves and others, and most glorifying to God.
 - 1. Consider 1 Corinthians 6:12 – “All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything.” The Corinthians tended to use their Christian liberty to justify all sorts of behavior. Paul calls them and us to think more deeply, about what will be most loving to God and neighbor, and spiritually healthy for the self.
 - 2. We have an obligation to do all things to the glory of God, honoring Him. See 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 – “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

- B. Marijuana is addictive, and potentially impairing.
1. Addiction can be defined as a compulsive and chronic/relapsing behavior, leading to harmful physical, practical, and/or spiritual and psychological consequences.
 2. “Studies show that 9% of adults and 17% of adolescents who use marijuana develop and addiction to it.” Todd Miles, *Cannabis and the Christian*, p. 35
 3. These numbers are lower in comparison to nicotine, heroin, cocaine, and alcohol. But marijuana has still been proven to be addictive.
 4. Marijuana has shown to be particularly addictive for young people, whose brains are “still developing.”
 - a. The brain develops over time, with the female brain reaching “maturity” earlier than the male brain. There is strong evidence that the prefrontal cortex does not fully mature until the age of 25.
 - b. Thus, brains of young males are particularly susceptible to long-term effects and brain-development interference from marijuana use.
 - c. “The studies linking impaired brain development with young recreational marijuana users are too numerous and conclusive to ignore.” Todd Miles, *Cannabis and the Christian*, pp. 41-2
- C. Marijuana use has been increasingly linked with mental illness.
4. A study in 2002 from New Zealand found that people who used marijuana by 15 years old were four times more likely to be diagnosed with schizophreniform disorder and depression by 26 years old.
 5. “One study in Great Britain demonstrated that using marijuana fives times or more increased the risk of psychotic disorders by a factor of almost seven, while another showed that teenage marijuana use tripled the risk of late-onset psychosis.” Todd Miles, *Cannabis and the Christian*, p. 45
 6. “Cannabis legalization has led to significant health consequences, particularly to patients in emergency departments and hospitals in Colorado. The most concerning include psychosis, suicide, and other substance abuse. Deleterious effects on the brain include decrements in complex decision-making, which may not be reversible with abstinence. Increases in fatal motor vehicle collisions, adverse effects on cardiovascular and pulmonary systems, inadvertent pediatric exposures, cannabis contaminants exposing users to infectious agents, heavy metals, and pesticides, and hash-oil burn injuries in preparation of drug concentrates have been documented.” Brad A. Roberts, “Legalized Cannabis in Colorado Emergency Departments...,” *The Western Journal of Emergency Medicine*, July 2019.
 7. “One study published in the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* shows that consistent adolescent marijuana use nearly doubles the risk of committing domestic violence by the age of twenty-six.” Todd Miles, *Cannabis and the Christian*, p. 47

V. Marijuana and Christian Witness (Relativist Perspective)

- A. We are called to live holy lives, as light in darkness.
1. 1 Peter 2:12 – “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”

2. Matthew 5:14-16 – “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”
 3. We are called to live not according to the world’s standards, but to the Lord’s, and His holiness (of course doing so by grace).
 4. While we know we will not live perfect lives, we should consider our responsibility not to condone that which will expose us to charges of hypocrisy or debauchery.
 5. Part of our approach must account for how the use of marijuana is seen by the broader culture.
- B. Do we have a sufficient understanding of cultural views on marijuana, and what would ultimately be most effective for evangelistic witness?
1. Cultural norms are shifting, and yet it is safe to say that the non-Christian world still expects a higher or different standard of living from Christians.
 2. We may think that being “more like the world” will help us to build bridges and gain a hearing with the gospel. However, joining in debauchery has never been effective for gospel witness.
 3. 1 Peter 2:9 reminds us that we are, and are to be, a godly people *so that* we may proclaim Christ. Being more like the world around us has never enabled the church to better witness to the truth of Jesus. Scripture repeatedly tells us that greater godliness leads to more effective witness.

VI. Marijuana and Christian Maturity (Christian Virtue Perspective)

- A. The Christian heart and marijuana use.
1. We should admit there can be a blurry line between medicinal and recreational use.
 2. That said, with recreational use, is there any purpose besides mind alteration – i.e. getting high?
 - a. What is the heart and mind of the person that desires that high?
 - b. With recreational use, is there any purpose other than coping, forgetting, escaping, numbing, intoxicating, etc.
 - c. With that, can we honestly say there is a right-hearted, sober, edifying and righteous recreational use of marijuana?
 3. Can we steward our bodies, hearts, and minds to bring greatest honor to God, while recreationally using marijuana?
 4. Can we honor Christ, and grow in Christlikeness, while high?
 5. Can we resist the devil and be alert to his deceptive schemes while intoxicated?
 6. Can we be full of the Holy Spirit, and pray without ceasing, while high?
 7. Can we be ready to preach the truth of Christ in season and out of season while high?
 8. Can we be spiritually discerning and take every thought captive while under the influence of marijuana?
 9. Can we proactively go out and make disciples while regularly getting high?
 10. Can we use marijuana and be fully convinced in our mind and conscience that we are not in sin?

11. Some will argue that they think more clearly (or can even only think clearly) while using marijuana.
 - a. If true, might it be that a dependency (i.e. mastery) has overtaken you?
 - b. Are there better ways to treat a cloudy, unfocused, or perturbed mind than treating it through regular marijuana use?
12. Some will argue that marijuana helps tap into an otherwise unattainable (or difficult to access) component in their consciousness.
 - a. If that is the case, is it beneficial to be dependent upon anything other than the Spirit for spiritual growth?
 - b. What kind of spiritual growth and practice is being pursued? Does it have more to do with mysticism than with pursuit of biblical Christianity?
 - c. Christians are not called to empty their minds, but to meditate on (mull over) truth, consciously interacting with it, to be guided by it
13. “The idea that marijuana could unlock portals to a newer and better relationship with the Lord is sub-Christian and makes a mockery of grace and of our true predicament.”
Todd Miles, Cannabis and the Christian, p. 105

B. Questions for Ethical Decisions on Matters Not Directly Addressed in Scripture

1. Am I fully persuaded that this activity is right? (Romans 14:5, 14, 22-23)
2. Can I practice this as “unto the Lord”? (Romans 14:6-8)
3. Can I engage in this without being a stumbling block to my brothers and sisters in Christ? (Romans 14:13, 15, 20-21)
4. Does it promote righteousness, peace, and joy? (Romans 14:17, 19a)
5. Does it edify others? (Romans 14:19b)
6. Is this practice profitable? (1 Corinthians 6:12a)
7. Does this activity enslave me? (1 Corinthians 6:12b)
8. Is the Holy Spirit guiding me into this? (Galatians 5:16-18; Romans 8)
9. Does it bring glory to God? (1 Corinthians 10:31)

From: Todd Miles; SFS 504 – Growing into Ethical Maturity; Western Seminary