

## Recreational Use of Weed and Christian Discipleship

### *A Guiding Document from the Elders of ITC on the Recreational Use of Marijuana*

Recently, we received a question from one of our church members asking if one could be a Christian and use marijuana recreationally. Stated another way, we might ask is the use of recreational cannabis, whether by smoking, vaping, edibles, or tinctures, biblically permissible? A couple of related questions seem to be, 1) Does the state government's legalization of marijuana use then make marijuana ethically permissible for the Christian, and 2) Could one use marijuana in a way that is similar to alcohol, where it is biblically permissible if it is used in moderation and does not violate one's conscience nor causes a brother to stumble?

In years past, government laws against marijuana use have made it easy for the church to prohibit its use. Using marijuana would be a blatant violation of Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17. But now we find ourselves in a cultural context where many if not most states are legalizing the recreational use of marijuana. However, just because the government makes an action permissible does not mean that Christians are automatically free to participate. As Christians we are brought into a new life with Christ where we are called to obey all that Christ has commanded (Matt 28:20), which in many cases will run contrary to what is culturally acceptable (see 1 Peter 4:3-4). Jesus said that if we love Him, we will obey his commandments, knowing that all that He commands us is for God's glory and our good (John 14:15; 1 John 5:3). Our highest allegiance is not to earthly government, but to God. Therefore, each of us Christ followers are called to "not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2).

So, what does the bible say about the use of weed? Not surprising to any student of God's Word, one cannot find the words cannabis, marijuana, or weed in the bible. However, if we are careful bible students and eager disciples, we will look for principles in God's Word to guide us so that we may learn what is pleasing to the Lord. This is the process of the renewal of the mind and the discernment process to which we are called. With this endeavor in mind, below are several biblical principles that we have found relevant to the question at hand:

#### **Principle One: God created all things good, but He created all things to have a good and proper use**

Did God make the cannabis plant? The answer is, unequivocally, yes. God is the Creator of all plant life (Gen 1:11-12). Furthermore, God pronounced that all the plants, trees, and vegetation, that he had made, good (Ge 1:12). However, just because all things were made good, this does not mean that all the good things God made have the same good and proper use or that someone could use a good gift from God for evil and be morally justified. To use a basic illustration, God made trees, but for me to take a tree branch and hit my fellow brother over the head with it would not be a proper or good use of what God had made. Positively, if I took that same tree branch and used it to rescue my brother or sister from a river, this would

be a good use of that branch. So, this is true of the cannabis plant. And God will guide us to know good and evil through his Word and as we ask him in prayer:

1 Timothy 4:4–5

[4] For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, [5] for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer. (ESV)

The question, then, comes down to whether a follower of Christ can use cannabis as a recreational drug for the glory of God and for the good of mankind. Let's look at principle two.

### **Principle Two: God prohibits intoxication and debauchery**

The bible clearly prohibits taking or using any substance that brings one to a state of intoxication or drunkenness. The clearest biblical prohibition is from Ephesians 5:18, but there are many clear passages on this subject (Prov 20:1; 23:29-35; Rom 13:13; 1 Cor 6:10; Galatian 5:20; 1 Peter 4:3). Ephesians 5:18 states:

Ephesians 5:18

[18] And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, (ESV)

To be drunk or to be intoxicated means to be affected by using a substance to the point where mental and physical control are markedly diminished and behavior and mental function are altered. The bible does not prohibit the drinking of alcohol, because alcohol can be consumed in a responsible and moderate way, where one does not get drunk. Recreational use of weed, on the other hand, is designed to get one high and to create an altered mental state. The THC<sup>1</sup> levels in today's recreational marijuana have a high degree of potency for the purpose of creating a high in the user. The common design or goal behind recreational weed use is to experience this high. While it can be true that THC can affect users differently and to different degrees, again, the aim in recreational use is to experience the high that it produces.<sup>2</sup> If intoxication is the goal or the effect, then using weed recreationally would go against God's will.

In relation to this, Christians are not to be given to debauchery or sensuality. These behaviors carry with them the idea of living for one's excessive pleasures, in reckless abandon to what is proper, good, and productive. Pleasure is not evil if experienced within the confines of what God permits. But seeking pleasure apart from the constraints God provides is sin and should be avoided.

### **Principle Three: God calls Christ followers to be sober-minded, self-controlled, and filled by the Spirit of God**

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<sup>1</sup> TCH stands for tetrahydrocannabinol, which is the cannabinoid chemical in recreational marijuana which is responsible for creating an altered state of mind.

<sup>2</sup> Medical use of marijuana could have different aims. Medical use of marijuana, although an important topic to consider, is beyond the scope of this paper.

The second part of Ephesians 5:18 is particularly instructive. The Christian is not just prohibited from drunkenness and debauchery, he or she is called to be filled with the Spirit. God has provided all Christians with the gift of the Holy Spirit upon conversion (1 Cor 12:13; Eph 1:13). The Holy Spirit's role is to help the Christian know Christ and grow in Christlikeness (John 15:26; 2 Cor 3:18). So being filled with the Spirit is living in such a way where we are dependent upon God and His Word and walking in step with His will for our lives (Eph 5:15-21). To walk in step with God's will for our lives requires sober-mindedness and self-control. In other words, we are to be in our right mind and in a state of sobriety. Consider the following verses which encourage such behavior:

1 Thessalonians 5:8

[8] But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. (ESV)

1 Peter 1:13

[13] Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (ESV)

1 Peter 4:7

[7] The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. (ESV)

1 Peter 5:8

[8] Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (ESV)

As seen from the above Scriptures, there is so much in our Christian walk that requires us to use our minds and engage them in Spirit-filled activities. To use a substance that would alter one's mind would run contrary to God's call for us to pursue him and his will with a sober mind.

#### **Principle Four: God has called us to steward our bodies for his glory**

In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 states, "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." The basic thrust of Paul's argument is that because we have been purchased by Christ death to be a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit, we must seek to glorify God in our bodies.

Anything we put in our bodies or use our bodies for must be seen as a stewardship for God's glory. Our bodies matter to God. They matter because he purchased them. Therefore, Christians must care about what kinds of substances they put in their bodies and even the health effects of using such a substance.

Research shows, increasingly, that there are detrimental health effects that result from the habitual use of weed, especially in the younger ages while the brain is still developing. Addiction, lung disease, heart issues, hindered brain development (for young users), psychosis, mental illness, and increased risk of violent behavior have all been noted in modern research as possible health risks to marijuana use.

## CONCLUSION

From the biblical arguments stated above, we believe disciples of Christ should avoid recreational marijuana use and seek recreational activities that are more in line with biblical virtues. While there may be many uses for cannabis that might be good (i.e. hemp food items, cannabis without THC like CBD oils, etc.), recreational use of weed runs counter to what God has called us to be in Christ.

### Romans 13:13–14

[13] Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. [14] But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. (ESV)