

August 21, 2022

Sour Subjects: Week 7

Question: How many have ever had an experience that just didn't sit right?

Here's a subject that I never thought I would have to address in church! But pastors are struggling to speak with their congregations about the *legalization and ethics* surrounding the use of what were once illegal drugs.

Todd Miles, author of "Cannabis and the Christian: What the Bible Says About Marijuana." "A lot of older pastors, in particular, don't think this is an issue because they doubt anybody in their congregation would be smoking pot," he said. "That's just not the case."

Why talk about this?

Erie has a drug problem. We also have a growing Medical Marijuana industry in town!

- In reality, research has shown that nearly as many Americans use marijuana each year as they smoke cigarettes!
- Already, more than 1 in 3 Americans live in states where it's legal to smoke pot recreationally!
- 60% of U.S. adults say both medical and recreational marijuana use should be legal, according to Pew Research Center.

Miles continues... "If pastors think their congregations aren't wondering about what to do with marijuana, whether it's recreational or medical, they're fooling themselves."

- People need help knowing how to apply the Bible's wisdom to issues it doesn't directly address.
- Pastors need to equip church members to think Biblically about something that isn't explicitly mentioned in the Bible.

The Dope on Pot

1. Proponents of recreational marijuana point out that the Netherlands legalized it in the 1970s, and it did not lead to widespread crime, much less the collapse of Dutch society.

2. Supporters of legalization argue that cannabis is safer than alcohol or tobacco, *if used in moderation.*

Marijuana Legalization: What Everyone Needs to Know.

While some users report a heightened awareness of sensory experience, *studies conclude that the net effect of using marijuana is some degree of cognitive impairment, and a less “executive function.”*

“Being under the influence of marijuana can impair verbal and working memory, attention, and psychomotor performance.”

The *National Institute on Drug Abuse* concludes that... *frequent users of large amounts of marijuana are more likely to have lower life satisfaction, poorer mental and physical health, and greater relationship problems.*

The *American Academy of Pediatrics* states that... *marijuana use in teens and young adults results in “impaired short-term memory and decreased concentration, attention span, and problem solving... Alterations in motor control, coordination, judgment, reaction time, and tracking ability have also been documented.”*

The *American Medical Association*, the largest association of physicians in the country, believes that... *cannabis is a dangerous drug and as such, is a serious public health concern.”*

The Question: What should pastors say to an adult Christian who intends to use marijuana responsibly, which is to say, in moderation, in the privacy of his or her own home?

3 Understandings for the Believer

I. The Contrast between being lawful and being expedient

1 Corinthians 6:12 (ESV)

“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful.

Paul argues that what we do with our bodies is part of our Christian witness, because “... It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me...” (*Galatians 2:20 (ESV)*).

1 Corinthians 6:12; 10:23 (ESV)

Paul makes his meaning even clearer by what he goes on to deny, “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything... “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up.

II. The reminder to keep watch—a framework in terms less of morality (right vs. wrong) than of discipleship (wise vs. foolish)

The second consideration takes its cue from Jesus’s command to keep watch and stay alert (*Mark 13:32–37 (ESV)*).

III. Adhering to Biblical standards in light of a Legal position?

Sadly, the church for a long time has leaned too heavily on the overlap between the state and the church for the strength of our conviction concerning what is right and wrong.

John Piper says- The church has *leaned* on the Culture for its catechism, its teaching, its inspiration, its conviction.

In other words, if the state has regarded something as wrong or illegal, then the church hasn't had to work very hard to teach any deep roots for the conviction or any thorough biblical argumentation or any conviction-strengthening inspiration, because everybody just assumes that the behavior is out of bounds.

Why do we talk about this? Consider the number of behaviors that were once illegal and are no more.

- Divorce was once illegal.
- Adultery and fornication were illegal.
- Homosexual practices were illegal.
- Sabbath-breaking was illegal.
- Abortion was illegal in every state.

1 Peter 4:3–4 (NIV)

For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They are surprised that you do not join them in their reckless, wild living, and they heap abuse on you.

For centuries, most Americans would go to church, NOT in spite of being maligned, but because NOT to go would be maligned.

The biblical, spiritual, parental church responsibility over time has been significantly neglected. And that neglect is now being exposed by the *speed and flagrancy* of the cultural normalization of sin.

The Primary Focus should be to do...

- What only the Bible, what only the gospel, what only the Holy Spirit, the truth, and Jesus can do in transforming human beings into the kind of Christ-exalting, Spirit-dependent, God-glorifying people who freely choose not to apply cultural norms ABOVE personal opinion or governmental legalization! That we have no addiction or desire for a DRUG — whether caffeine or alcohol or cannabis to escape into a world where...
 - Christ is less clearly perceived
 - The Scriptures are less understood and precious, and...
 - The Spirit is less personal
 - And the glory of God is less satisfying, the way of righteousness is less defined, and the path of obedience is less compelling.