

## 6 - If It's OK, Is It OK?

Question to be asked: OK, now that marijuana has been legalized, is there anything wrong with using it?

**Intro:** I'm driving up Perryville. There, on the right-hand side, there's a line of people standing out in the cold. I've noticed them there since very early on this year, nearly every day. They seem to be walking there from several blocks away. Police are even directing traffic around there at times. What is it they're waiting for? What could compel them to stand there like that? Free medical care? Free puppies? A sale on warm coats? Nope. It's a marijuana distribution center.

If you're conscious and breathing, you already know that Illinois became the 11<sup>th</sup> state of the Union to legalize the production and sale of cannabis - marijuana, weed, pot, grass, Mary Jane, Ganja, 420, broccoli, oregano, and any of about 1,200 nicknames used for it. In Illinois, people 21 yrs and older can purchase it, in limited quantities, and use it, in limited settings, and not be arrested for it. Also, 11,000 people who had earlier low-level convictions of marijuana are now pardoned.

So, I was encouraged to deal with this question as one that's actually on the minds of a lot of students and young adults. That's what I want to do today. I want to give you a way to approach this question that will help you be on your feet and make good decisions. And to an older generation, I want to encourage you to listen carefully, to learn, and to give this subject some serious thought for the sake of having solid answers for the younger people around you - your students, your children, your grandchildren, who need you to say something other than, "That's just wrong and you shouldn't do it!" Because they're asking questions like, "Really? What's wrong with it? Why is it being made legal?"

This question is a good example of dealing with ethics - that's the study of the principles that govern our choices and behavior. Basically, ethics is trying to answer the question of *what I ought to do*.

When it comes to making decisions about ethical issues, people might try several approaches. Here are a few common approaches people try to say that certain activities are OK:

My friends are all trying it. Well, bless their hearts!

My friends' parents are trying it. Bless their hearts too!

Most people think it's OK. So did lots of people who owned slaves 250 years ago.

It's not near as bad as a lot of other things. That's true. Try picking a spouse that way.

It's a personal matter. That's also true. So is every choice we make, of course!

Nobody got hurt. "I survived it!" That's how you decide if something is a *good* choice?

It's legal. That means it's OK. Let's talk about that one...

When people in positions of authority decide something, it impacts the way we look at it. In 1998, President Clinton gave a new definition to "sexual relations" that liberated the thinking of a lot of young people. "If the President can get away with that, why shouldn't I?"

And when the government passes a law that says something is now "legal," that tends to sanction it in the minds of citizens. But whether something is legal or not really doesn't settle a more important question. There's a whole list of things that are legal in our nation: drunkenness, abortion, adultery,

prostitution (in Nevada), lying, cursing, worshiping Satan, eating beets. They're *legal*, but that doesn't make them *right*.

Here's why it's important to understand that today: God wants you to be holy, and the God-given purpose of government isn't to make you holy. The government is never going to be able to accomplish that. If you're looking to the government to decide for you what's right and wrong, you haven't looked at politics much lately, have you?! If you're looking to the government to provide the moral compass to society, you're already lost at sea. Don't accuse me of getting political here; *the point is that politics is NOT the answer!*

In 1920, the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment made alcohol illegal in the US. For 13 years, that was the law. Then, it was repealed. You can argue if prohibition was right or not, but the point is the government couldn't be relied upon to make that moral decision for you.

Law-giving and Law-keeping will never achieve holiness. You and I have already blown that from the time we first sinned. Holiness will certainly make us people who will keep God's law, but that's quite different from thinking that laws or rules are what makes us holy. Listen to how Paul describes what we really need in...

Colossians 2:20-23

If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations—"Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

Parents, that's why I keep saying it's so important for you to teach your kids at home and to get them here *consistently* for Sunday School and kids' worship! It's on you to get this done! They need hearts that are turned to the Lord. They need to know Him so that they can love Him! You can impose rules on them until you're blue in the face, but without turning their hearts to the Lord, all you've done is modified their behavior. God has a behavior modification program - it's called putting to death the flesh and being raised up a new person with a new life, with a changed heart that belongs to Him. Then, from the inside out, our behavior is changed.

This morning, what we're really doing is bigger than discussing marijuana use. This is really a look at *how we make ethical decisions about all kinds of non-biblical subjects*. Yes, the Bible doesn't say if you should recycle, what to do with the internet, how big your carbon footprint should be, at what age you should retire, whether it's wrong to use eggs from caged chickens, whether or not you should home school, own a time-share, or have cable TV - to name a few. Those questions just didn't come up during the time that the Bible was being written. Neither did the use of marijuana. But that doesn't mean we're without help to make good choices about those kinds of things! There are still principles, absolutes, and foundational truths that we can learn and apply to most every situation life can throw at us.

I have a feeling that most of us here aren't marijuana experts, nor aspiring to be. But I would suggest that to make good decisions you need truth. Here is some, as best as I could gather it together...

The only psychoactive substance the Bible gives us any guidance on is alcohol. It's very clear about the wrongness of drunkenness, because that involves giving over control of a person's mind. Scripture is very clear that we're supposed to do just the opposite:

Romans 12:2

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

1 Peter 1:13

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.

1 Peter 5:8

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

1 Corinthians 16:13

Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.

Getting drunk means you hand over control of your mind to something else. The point of using marijuana recreationally is the same. After alcohol, it is the 2<sup>nd</sup> most commonly used psychotropic drug used in the US. In 2018, more than 11.8 million young adults reported using marijuana in the past year. Nearly 4% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders say they vape THC daily, starting at the average age of 16. About 10% marijuana users will become addicted. For people who begin using before the age of 18, that number rises to 17%.

THC, tetrahydrocannabinol, is the chemical in marijuana that produces the high. The level of THC in today's marijuana is, on an average, more than 12X stronger than it was on the streets in the '70's. THC affects certain areas of the brain associated with thinking, memory, pleasure, coordination and time perception. It can cause hallucinations and delusions.

A study from New Zealand conducted in part by researchers at Duke University showed that people who started smoking marijuana heavily in their teens and [became addicted] lost an average of 8 IQ points between ages 13 and 38. The lost mental abilities didn't fully return in those who quit marijuana as adults. Those who started smoking marijuana as adults didn't show notable IQ declines.

A 2014 article in *Psychology Today* -

The study found reduced grey matter volume in nearly all brain regions that are rich in the "receptors" that can trap and respond to cannabis-based chemicals...a network that controls motivation, emotion, and emotional learning...Long-term, heavy users had the same reductions in grey matter volume as lighter users who started in their teens...So let's revisit our two questions. Is marijuana addictive? Yes, and there's a real, visible change in the brain's reward system. And is marijuana safe? No, and the younger you start, or the more you use over time, the more dangerous it is to your brain.

Someone still might want to contend that there are even bigger problems with other drugs that seem more acceptable - alcohol, and opioids specifically. When you consider the numbers, it's interesting how our culture shapes the way we look at things. So, I want to point us to some helps from Scripture that will deal with this very big question - "If it's OK, is it OK?"

The first help is...

### **An overriding principle**

Matthew 22:35-40

And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

If you've been around here in the past 10 years, you might be saying, "You sure refer to that a lot." Yes. I do. It's on our walls too, have you noticed? "Loving God...Loving people." When Jesus says, "This is the greatest commandment..." and then says, "the whole OT hangs on these 2 commandments," that tells me that those are pretty foundational commandments from the mind of God to us. It's like lining up the first button to the first button hole on your shirt. If you *don't* get those 2 right, everything else is going to be off.

James says,

James 2:8

If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well.

So, let me say this to you today. If you don't love the Lord with everything you have, and if you don't love your neighbor as yourself, then trying to talk about whether or not you should use marijuana really doesn't make a whole lot of sense in your case. You're out of the plane and trying to figure out how long to count before you pull the ripcord but you don't have a parachute! You've got a much more important, much more basic question to deal with - the greatest commandment, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> greatest.

So much of what we do in life can be affected just by asking ourselves if what we're deciding demonstrates that we love God with everything we have, and then that we love others as we love ourselves.

Apply that principle to this question today. Does using this show that I love God with my whole self - heart, soul, and mind? Can I engage in this and also be sure that I'm loving my neighbor too?

Here's a second help:

### **A question of who's in charge**

Colossians 1:15-18

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in

him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

Ask this important question when you're dealing with questions of ethics. *Is your decision giving Jesus His rightful place as the head of all you do?* If whatever you choose to do somehow puts aside the authority and the desires of Jesus behind what *you* or *anyone else* wants, you need to stop the ethics truck and try again.

The majority of marijuana use is tied to a pursuit of personal pleasure. We live in a culture that's preoccupied with the pursuit of happiness. So many people turn to any of a number of pleasures in that pursuit - alcohol, sex, eating, shopping, and, some have decided to search for it in marijuana. God doesn't call us *away* from happiness, but He does call us *to* holiness. Happiness is temporary, just like getting high is temporary. Real joy is an outcome of having the HS in our lives; it's the position of the mind and heart despite what changes.

Psalm 37:4

Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Put your delight in other things, and there's no promise at all that you're ever going to have it fulfilled. But delight yourself in the Lord, and look at what it says!

So, ask the question of who's in charge. What place are you giving Jesus in your life? Is He preeminent in your life as you engage in whatever it is that you're doing?

Here's a 3<sup>rd</sup> help:

**A choice to serve others ahead of self**

1 Corinthians 10:23-24

"All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.

Paul goes on to apply that instruction to something most of us aren't faced with, just like he wasn't faced with marijuana. It was common, in big cities of the Roman empire, for an animal to be taken to the local pagan temple and sacrificed to the gods there. Typically, the meat from that sacrifice was then taken to the local meat market and sold. Christians living in Rome and Corinth were faced with a question: should they eat that meat that had been sacrificed to false gods? It was legal, by the way, but was it *right*? They were supposed to choose to serve the people around them, not themselves. Really, that meat hadn't been changed at all, so it really wasn't a matter of the meat itself. But Paul told them to direct their concern to how it affects others. He wrote to the Romans...

Romans 14:15

For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.

Romans 14:19-21

So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.

Something might be legal. It might even be OK morally. But the moment that you make your freedom to pursue it more important than the way it impacts others, you're no longer walking in love. You've gone to serving yourself instead of loving your neighbor as yourself.

Parents, think about it. You might find it OK to do any of a number of things. But if *your* choices in any way are going to encourage your children to make poor choices, you need to choose better. You do realize that you gave up some freedoms when you became a parent, right?

Every one of us can use this principle to help us make choices that aren't specifically addressed in Scripture. How it applies may vary with who is around you, but the question will pretty much remain the same: "How might my choice here impact the people who are around me?"

### **Conclusion:**

The ultimate example of this is Jesus Himself. He didn't regard His equality with God something that He would cling to. Instead, He emptied Himself and took on the form of a human. He made it clear, that His mission on earth wasn't to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.

The reason we wrestle with tough questions here is because we want to please our Savior by the way we think and live our lives. That's what this is really all about. What does Jesus want us to do?

To be sure, if you're not already living life for Him, the first and most important thing He wants you to do is to commit your life to Him. We're going to have a time for you to consider that in a few minutes. Right now, we're going to prepare for our time around the Lord's Table together.

### **Lord's Supper Thought:**

How many of us who come to the Lord's Table with an attitude that we deserve this? I think, more often, I've run into people who felt they weren't worthy and stayed away because of it.

I was in India, preaching at a church in Tirupati on Sunday morning. There I was, with my translator, explaining to me all along the way what was going on. It came time for the Lord's Supper. Some words were spoken, and about ½ the people stood up, while the rest remain seated on the floor. I asked my translator what that was about, and he told me, "These are the ones who are going to participate today. The rest remain seated because they don't feel worthy."

I didn't get a chance to follow up on that thought, but I really wanted to. We're commanded in Scripture to walk in a manner worthy of our calling and worthy of the gospel. But there's not much that says we're somehow just inherently worthy of anything that God has given us, like worthy to sit around the Lord's Table. If our presence around His table depended on our personal merit, none of us would be there. None of us can say "I deserve this."

The Lord's Supper is several things - a time remembering Jesus, a time for unity of the members of the Church, a fellowship in the body and blood of Jesus, a testimony about Jesus' death and our conviction that He's coming again. It's also a time for self-examination. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 11 that this is supposed to be a time that each of us examines ourselves. That's where "worthy" fits

into this picture. We don't look at ourselves and decide we deserve this. We consider our need for Jesus, our need to grow in Him, and by examining ourselves honestly, we are gathering together in a worthy manner.

Do you want to be sure you're pleasing God here today? Be sure that you examine yourself. God already is. Maybe your prayer here today will end something like the words that David wrote...

Psalm 139:23-24

Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! 24 And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!