



**ROUND TABLE**

**Legalized Marijuana**

**June 5 2018**

## Table of Contents

Opening Letter.....	pg 2
Cannabis Legalization (official release from the Government of Ontario).....	pg 3
Scripture Used to Support Marijuana Use.....	pg 7
Scripture Used to Oppose Marijuana Use.....	pg 9
The Medical Side of Things.....	pg 11
When Pot is Legal, What Do We Say?.....	pg 16
Can Cannabis and Christ Co-exist?.....	pg 20
Marijuana to the Glory of God?.....	pg 25
Questions to Wrestle Through.....	pg 29



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Hello everyone!

On **Tuesday, June 5<sup>th</sup> 2018 at 7pm**, we will be having a round-table discussion about the legalization of marijuana, which is coming to Canada soon. How do we grapple with this and approach it as Christians, as parents, as a church? We wanted to take some time to get together and talk about the issue.

We are not gathering on this night to argue, or to craft an official policy, or to solve the matter once and for all. This will be an ongoing conversation for all of us, requiring prayer and careful thought, and it is likely not going to be settled in one evening! We are simply wanting to get together to chat, as brothers and sisters– to look at some Scripture, to look at some various views, and to wrestle through a tricky issue that will affect all of us soon.

This booklet has been put together for you to look over before we gather on June 5<sup>th</sup> (we will not be reading through it all that night, although we will likely reference it, so please bring it!) It has some practical information, some Scriptures to be thinking about, and some articles and opinions for us to be looking at as we ponder the issue.

Don't be surprised if there are things in here that you disagree with it – the intention was to share a variety of info on the topic, both pro- and anti-, and no one will agree with everything here. **Just because something is in here does not mean that Meadow Brook is endorsing it** – we are simply trying to engage with all sides for the purpose of education and conversation.

Please be praying for us as we jump into the conversation, and please join us on June 5<sup>th</sup>!

Thanks,

Chris

# Cannabis Legalization

Article taken from: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/cannabis-legalization>

## Overview

Ontario has passed new laws (following extensive public and stakeholder engagement) about how, where and who can buy, possess and consume cannabis in the province. These rules are similar to those in place for alcohol and tobacco, with some differences.

**Medical cannabis** will continue to be subject to different rules **than recreational cannabis**.

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## When cannabis will be legal

The **federal government will decide when cannabis will be legal in Canada**. We will update this page once we have more information on the timing.

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### Minimum age will be 19

You will need to be **19 and older** to buy, use, possess and grow **recreational** cannabis. This is the same as the minimum age for the sale of tobacco and alcohol in Ontario.

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### Where to use it

You will **only** be able to use recreational cannabis in:

- a **private residence**, including the outdoor space of a home (for example, a porch or back yard)
- your **unit or on your balcony**, if you live in a multi-unit building like an apartment or condo, but that **depends on your building's rules or your lease agreement**

You will **not be allowed** to use recreational cannabis in:

- any public place
- workplaces
- motorized vehicles

These rules will be in place to protect people from second-hand cannabis smoke, and reduce youth and young adult exposure to cannabis.

Using cannabis in public can result in a fine of up to:

- \$1,000 for a first offence
  - \$5,000 for subsequent offences
- 



## Driving

**It is illegal to drive drug-impaired and it's just as dangerous as driving drunk.**

Cannabis, like many other drugs, slows your reaction time and increases your chances of being in a collision.

If a police officer finds that you are impaired by any drug, including cannabis, you will face serious penalties, including:

- an immediate licence suspension
- financial penalties
- possible vehicle impoundment
- possible criminal record
- possible jail time

Police officers will be authorized to use oral fluid screening devices at roadside. Once a federally approved device is available, we will implement the use of those devices to help police enforce the law.

## Zero tolerance for young, novice and commercial drivers

You will **not be allowed to have any** cannabis in your system (as detected by a federally approved oral fluid screening device) if you are driving a motor vehicle and:

- you are 21 or under
- have a G1, G2, M1 or M2 licence
- the vehicle you are driving requires an A-F driver's licence or Commercial Vehicle Operator's Registration (CVOR)
- you are driving a road-building machine



## Where to buy recreational cannabis

When it's legal, people 19 and over will be able to **purchase cannabis in-person or online** through the Ontario Cannabis Store. Online orders will be delivered safely and securely. You will be able to purchase up to **30 grams (about one ounce) of dried recreational cannabis** for personal use at one time.

The Ontario Cannabis Store will be the **only store that can legally sell recreational cannabis** and will follow strict rules set by the federal government.

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## How much cannabis you will be able to possess

You will be able to have a **maximum of 30 grams (about one ounce)** of dried cannabis in public at any time.

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## Growing cannabis

You will be able to grow up to **four plants per residence** (not per person). You will be able to purchase legal seeds and seedlings from the Ontario Cannabis Store.

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## Rules for the workplace

We already have strict rules in place to make sure workplaces are safe. Consuming **recreational cannabis in the workplace is illegal**, and will continue to be after legalization.

Employers (and supervisors):

- need to know the rules for medical cannabis
- will be required to address workplace hazards, under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA)*

Employees and workers:

- who are unable or unfit to work safely could be a hazard to themselves or to others in the workplace
- have a duty to perform work safely and to report any hazards to their supervisor or employer under the OHSA

See additional rules related to cannabis use in the workplace, including for commercial driving, where you can use recreational cannabis and using medical cannabis in the workplace



## Medical cannabis

Medical cannabis is subject to different rules than recreational cannabis. The production and sale of medical cannabis is regulated exclusively by the federal government.

**If a health care professional has already authorized you to use cannabis for medical reasons, your access will not change when recreational cannabis is legal.**

The **only** way to purchase medical cannabis is from:

- a **federally licensed producer online**
- by written order
- over the phone and delivered by secure mail

You can also receive a licence from Health Canada to grow medical cannabis on you own, or designate someone else to grow it on your behalf.

Learn more about accessing cannabis for medical purposes.

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## What you said

We consulted extensively to inform our approach to the legalization of cannabis. The province engaged with:

- other jurisdictions that already legalized cannabis
- public health experts
- law enforcement
- Indigenous communities and organizations
- Municipalities

In addition, we held a survey so Ontarians could share their views on legalization.

Some key results from the survey that informed our plan included:

- 86% of people said they support a minimum age of 19
- 74% believe there should be restrictions on where cannabis can be consumed
- 61% of respondents agreed that drug-impaired driving penalties should be stricter
- 69% believe that keeping cannabis out of the hands of youth is important

## Scriptures Used to Support Marijuana Use

Some like to lean on unclear references as support of marijuana in Scripture, such as:

- Some feel the “calamus” referred to in Exodus 30:23 is actually referring to cannabis. There is no evidence given as to why this should be so, as calamus is its own well-known plant.
- Ezekiel 34:29 in the King James Version of Scripture (and only in that particular translation) speaks of a “plant of renown” which some feel is referring to marijuana (almost everyone feels that this is a poor translation, and the better interpretation is “land of renown,” referring to land that produces crops, with no specific crop mentioned). Even if it *was* interpreted as “plant of renown,” there’s no reason given as to why we should assume that it is referring to marijuana over any other more likely crop that Israel harvested.
- From the book of Revelation, in John’s vision of Heaven he sees the Tree of Life, “and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations” (Rev 22:2), with proponents arguing that this is referring to marijuana leaves. Once again, there is no reason given as to why it is assumed that marijuana is what is being referred to here.

Other than these supposed examples (which are very poor at best!), marijuana does not appear directly in Scripture, so arguments made supporting it are implied arguments, rather than direct arguments.

The essence of the pro-marijuana biblical argument is that marijuana is a natural plant; that it was created by God and it is therefore good; and that it has been given to us as a gift from Him. God obviously knew that it had certain qualities when He created it, and He created it for humanity’s benefit. Since marijuana can bring peace, joy, and even has purported health benefits, how can it be wrong to enjoy a plant that God created which can bring us blessing?

Key Scriptures to support this are:

*Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.*  
(Gen 1:11-12)

*God blessed (Adam and Eve) and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” 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.” (Gen 1:28-29)*

In addition to these verses, since marijuana itself doesn't appear in Scripture, comparisons are often made between marijuana and wine, which appears often in Scripture, since both are potential mood-altering substances.

Wine in Scripture is viewed at times as a blessing from God (Ps 104:14-15; Pr 3:9-10; Dt 7:13; 11:14; 33:28; Judges 9:13; etc); it was used for offerings to the LORD and in worship ceremonies (Ex 29:40; Lev 23:13; Num 15:5; Dt 18:4; 1 Sam 1:24; 2 Ch 31:5; Neh 10:37; etc.); it is sometimes used a symbol of the blessing of the age to come (Isa 25:6; Amos 9:14; Jer 31:12); and it was something that Jesus actively created and consumed, as well as used as a symbol of His blood, by which we would drink it and commemorate Him (Lk 22:20; Jn 2:1-12; 1Cor 11:25-26).

So, drinking wine would appear to be something that at least is biblically permissible, and marijuana and wine share some similarities: both begin naturally in plant form, created by God; both are harvested and have some man-made changes/procedures added to them; when this happens, both products have the ability to alter our moods. Given that wine seems to appear in Scripture as a gift of God (at times, at least), why not marijuana as well? What is the difference?

Also, as a way of challenging arguments that comes against them, pro-marijuana advocates will point to 1Cor 6:19-20: *"Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies."* This passage is often used in the argument *against* marijuana use, but marijuana advocates will point out the hypocrisy and inconsistent way that this Scripture gets applied. Many Christians are fine to fill their bodies with caffeine, sugar, junk food, wine, etc.; why single out marijuana when it comes to treating our body as a "temple"? It is easy and hypocritical to judge another's pollution of their bodies without being willing to purify our own temple from our own pleasures and addictions, even if they seem like "lesser" problems such as caffeine.

## Scriptures Used to Oppose Marijuana Use

In the past, Christians leaned heavily on Romans 13:1-7, which speaks of obeying our governing authorities and submitting to the laws of the land. Marijuana has been illegal, and so Christians should not partake for that reason alone. Once it becomes legal, however, this argument no longer carries any weight. How else can we approach this biblically?

One can acknowledge the God-created nature of the marijuana plant (Gen 1:11-12; v.28-29) while still acknowledging that we can abuse His gift to our detriment. We would also acknowledge that sex is a gift from God (Gen 2:24), but it can certainly be sinfully abused. Just because something came to humanity as a gift from God does not automatically mean that every use that humanity finds for the gift is good or godly.

It is also worth noting that the Scriptures mentioned above from Genesis 1, where God creates the plant, calls it good, and gifts it to humanity, are also all taking place *before* the fall of man, when sin entered the world (Gen 3). Once evil entered the picture, all of Creation has fallen under the corrupting effect of sin and death (Rom 8:19-21). The good and perfect earth that God created has been changed for the worse. So now, extreme weather occurs, animals kill one another, sickness exists, and even plants (like poison ivy!) can have an effect that was not a part of life in Eden, when God declared everything “good” – which He did *before* sin entered the world and corrupted Creation. So marijuana can’t be claimed to be good alone, since it too is now a part of a fallen world.

As the previous pages indicate, it is difficult to read Scripture fairly and not come to the conclusion that wine itself is not forbidden; at the same time, there are still stark warnings concerning alcohol as well, such as Proverbs 23:31-33:

*Do not gaze at wine when it is red,  
when it sparkles in the cup,  
when it goes down smoothly!  
In the end it bites like a snake  
and poisons like a viper!  
Your eyes will see strange sights,  
and your mind will imagine confusing things.*

So even if wine can be a blessing, it can very easily “bite” us as well, and no doubt we have all known people who have been “bitten” badly by alcohol. For this reason, it can be good and godly to avoid it altogether, as many Christians do (Mt 5:29-30).

And although wine may be celebrated at times in Scripture, what is trickier is that drunkenness is looked down upon and thoroughly condemned throughout Scripture (Deut 21:20; 32:30-33; Jdg 12:25; 1 Sam 1:13-15; Ps 60:3; 69:12; 107:27; Prov 20:1; 26:9-10; Ecc 10:17; Isa 5:11-12; 19:14; 24:20; 56:9-12; Ezek 23:42; Ho 4:10-11; Am 6:6; Nah 1:10; 3:11; Hab 2:5, 15-16; Rom 13:13; 1Cor 5:11; 6:10; Gal 5:19-21; 1Tim 3:3; 1Pet 4:3; etc.) - just to name a few!

This raises thorny questions: how much wine does it take until I cross the line into “drunkenness?” Is “relaxing” with a glass of wine alright if my mood is altered by it, but not to the point of getting drunk? How do we define “drunk?” How much is too much? Where does “enjoying a blessing from God” cross the line into sin?

These questions do not have easy answers, and we should be engaging with them as well, but for our discussion on marijuana, it seems reasonable to assume that any biblical prohibition against drunkenness should also be applied to getting high through marijuana, as the principle of it is essentially the same: using a substance to alter our mood. And given that the sole purpose of marijuana is to alter our mood (unless it is being used medicinally), then perhaps the fact that marijuana alters our reality so fast means that we should avoid it as Christians.

Instead of using substances to alter our mood, Scripture says "*Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit,*" (Eph 5:18). In other words, our "mood-altering" experience in life is supposed to come from the Holy Spirit, who fill us with peace, joy, and love (Rom 14:17; Gal 5:22-23), and we are to seek Him alone for these things. If we are looking to substances (*any* substances – alcohol, marijuana, sugar, caffeine, etc.) in order to achieve our sense of well-being, physically or otherwise, then we are falling short of what God desires.

So when it comes to marijuana, the question becomes "*Why* do we want to use it?" There may be medicinal benefits when used in certain contexts, but if we are looking to it primarily in order to give us feelings that are meant to come from the Lord, then how can its use be good for us as Christians?

Beyond just potentially using marijuana as a substitute for the Holy Spirit, we can also use it as an escape from reality, as a break from our problems or stresses. By contrast, we are warned by Scripture to "*Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour,*" (1Pet 5:8). We should therefore always be wary of anything that causes us to lose our sober mind, that might cloud our judgment or our common sense, as these are moments when the devil is ready and willing to pounce. Goodness knows that the clouded judgment of drug use (and alcohol use, of course) has led to all manner of poor decisions and sinful behaviour. Again, the question becomes, "Why do we want to use this?"

As well, Scripture says that just because something is permissible doesn't mean that it is profitable for the Christ-follower (1Co 10:23-33). Just because marijuana is becoming legal doesn't mean that Christians should jump right in! To beat a dead horse: why do we want to use this recreationally? How is it profitable for our Christian walk, our Christian witness, and our Christian mission?

We also must be very wary of doing anything that might cause another believer to stumble (1Co 10:32). If my marijuana use causes another brother to fall into drug use, then I am no longer acting in love (Rom 14:15). If my use causes someone who struggles with addiction to feel justified in abusing drugs, then I am failing them as their brother. The apostle Paul makes clear that we should be willing to sacrifice our own desires out of loving service to others (1Co 8:9-13), and if that means we give up marijuana (or alcohol, or anything) in order to help someone else walk more uprightly, then this is the godly and Christ-like thing to do.

This was mentioned in the previous section, but we should also consider 1Cor 6:19-20: "*Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.*" While acknowledging that we could and should apply this passage consistently to wine, sugar, caffeine, or anything else we are putting into our body, that doesn't mean that we shouldn't also apply it to marijuana use, which as we will look at next, can have a major negative impact on the mind and the body. Can actively polluting our body fulfill this Scripture? It seems unlikely

## The Medical Side of Things

*Here at Meadow Brook, we are connected to a number of Christian medical professionals in our church and community, so we asked several of them to share their professional and personal opinions on this topic. We asked them a few questions, which are below, as well as their answers (we didn't include every person's answer to every question, as there were many similarities, but these quotations will briefly summarize what was said.)*

*Quotations have occasionally been edited for brevity or clarity.*

*The following thoughts came from doctors, nurses, and nurse practitioners, and from some of the medical resources that they shared. You will notice that not every comment may be in agreement with others, as we are hearing multiple opinions.*

Important medical terms:

**CBD** (Cannabidiol) – refers to an element taken from the marijuana plant, commonly used in medical marijuana for its purported health benefits. It does not have intoxicating effects. Medical marijuana is often referred to as CBD in order to distinguish it from recreational marijuana.

**THC** (Tetrahydrocannabinol) – refers to the intoxicating element taken from the marijuana plant. This is the element of marijuana that makes us “high.” It may or may not be found in medical marijuana; it is typically always found in recreational marijuana.

**How do you feel about the marijuana plant itself?**

“Just because marijuana is a plant does not make it automatically safe. Hundreds of medications made by “Big Pharma” originate from plants. Digoxin, a cardiac drug, comes from the foxglove plant, and is lethal in amounts slightly over the usual therapeutic dose. Aspirin comes from willow bark and can cause bleeding ulcers, high blood pressure, and strokes if used inappropriately. Therefore, marijuana is a plant made by God, but like all plants, it needs to be studied and used safely.”

“It’s what we choose to do with the plant that can become an issue. It’s like a lot of things in our surrounding environment. Fire can be used for warmth, for cooking etc but can also be used to destroy.”

**As a medical professional, what are your thoughts on medicinal marijuana?**

“First of all, the only marijuana medications that are prescribed in Ontario are Nabilone, Sativex and Marinol. These are all tablets and are reserved for palliative care. They have Drug Identifying Numbers and very high quality standards. Other forms of marijuana (burned, baked or oils) are “authorized” but they are not federally monitored, and have no D.I.N number and nobody can be absolutely sure what you are getting - whether it be spray, smokes, oils or edibles.”

“The current trend is to refer to medicinal marijuana as CBD (cannabidiol) as a way to distinguish from recreational marijuana. I do not prescribe CBD, nor do I want to; most medical providers I know are

referring patients to specialized CBD clinics for prescriptions. Patients are also able to self-refer and they will be assessed by a doctor or nurse practitioner to determine the appropriateness of CBD and/or CBD/THC combo for the patient's medical issues. The patient has to sign a contract and then they are given a prescription and follow up appointments. From what I understand, determining the appropriate dose is a bit of a trial and error process. The product is usually delivered directly from the supplier to the patient's house. Formulations of marijuana include oils, vapor, and dried product for teas or for cooking into foods – most common are the oils and vapor. I know of people who claim to have benefited tremendously from CBD for chronic pain, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), anxiety, insomnia, nausea, and muscle rigidity from Parkinson's. Concerns I have are mostly that there is limited evidence that CBD is actually effective for the wide range of conditions that people are using it for (if something claims to cure everything then it likely cures nothing). Another concern is cost – very few insurance companies are covering medical marijuana; out-of-pocket costs can range from \$100-\$300 per month.”

“The Canadian Family Physician journal (cited below) has taken a conservative view (too conservative in my opinion) that medically prescribed CBD should only be administered in very limited cases, largely due to the lack of high-level research proving its validity. This view is perhaps too conservative, but it is certainly very “safe.” The journal also notes the known harms of adverse affects associated with CBD, and that because of the lack of research and the known harms, medical marijuana use should be limited at the current time.”

“When I think about any medication I weigh the benefits verses the harms. Serious adverse effects to consider with marijuana include a significant association with the onset of psychosis and even schizophrenia in new users. If you have an irregular heart rhythm called atrial fibrillation the medication is contraindicated as it can destabilize it. If you are elderly it can worsen the function of the autonomic nervous system causing postural hypotension (drop in blood pressure when changing positions), light headedness, and feeling off balance can lead to falls. For those with lung disease there is increased respiratory secretions, bronchitis, rare but possible pneumothorax, and accumulation of pulmonary toxins. Some people are intolerant to the plant and this is expressed by hyperemesis syndrome. Hyperemesis syndrome is vomiting and dehydration when consuming the plant and is relieved with cold showers and avoiding the plant.”

“The evidence does not really show that marijuana is the standard of care yet. I am seeing it utilized by the local pain specialist in my area quite often. In fact, my neighbour who has suffered greatly after having throat cancer surgery and radiation has finally experienced relief with cannabis oil.”

“I have seen so many people who have suffered with chronic pain who were on multiple pain meds who could not find effective relief. Medicinal marijuana has offered effective relief. These patients are not using the drug to get the high. They do not abuse it; they use as prescribed and are able to live life again. Benefits.... a) offers effective pain relief; b) Allows people an alternative to multiple opioid type medications. Concerns..... a) possible abuse or misuse.”

“Following the guidelines for management of nausea, pain, anxiety and other conditions, I have found other medication options besides marijuana have been sufficient. Patients who are refractory to all options are often referred to a local pain specialists who may try even more options prior to suggesting cannabis.”

**As a medical professional, what are your thoughts on *recreational*/marijuana?**

"I do not see the attraction to recreational marijuana; I have never tried it and do not ever plan to. I do enjoy an occasional alcoholic drink but I drink very responsibly so in some ways I suppose recreational marijuana use done responsibly is no more detrimental. The big difference between medical marijuana and recreational marijuana is the CBD/THC ratio; CBD does not provide the "high" sensation but the THC does. Medical marijuana has high CBD and low or almost no THC; recreational marijuana has higher THC components which produces the "high" feelings. I do think having regulated recreational marijuana available for those people who enjoy it is better than them buying street marijuana that may be laced with other harmful components and drugs."

"I do not see any benefits to recreational marijuana. Taking a potentially harmful drug with uncertain properties and interactions and effects just for fun sounds like a bad idea to me. Smoked marijuana has over 400 known chemicals causing all kinds of reactions in the body. There may be a possible increased risk of cancer, just like any substance that is burned."

"Another concern – recreational marijuana is usually smoked; I would worry about same health concerns as I would with smoking cigarettes."

"As a society, allowing a substance to be recreationally consumed with nobody monitoring for safety puts us all at risk. People are liable to drive cars or operate heavy equipment while under the influence potentially causing accidents and killing innocent people. There is also a burden on the healthcare system as people cause other problems such as psychosis or physical injury that requires medical intervention."

"Recreational marijuana raises a lot of red flags for me both as a medical professional, a Christian and a parent. Working in the ER, I see so many young kids come in with side effects of smoking marijuana. Many of these kids are having problems concentrating at school, suffer from cyclical vomiting, high heart rates, intense anxiety, panic attacks and depression. Marijuana for these kids is often just a starting point. It's the "innocent" drug because it's so common but can lead to other drug or alcohol use, especially for those that develop the extreme downer effect/depression from frequent use. It's very sad for me as a parent to watch this happen to so many of our youth while their brains are still developing. These kids are so full of potential but are being inhibited from reaching that potential."

"A major concern I have regarding recreational marijuana is the minimum age of 19 yrs; medical marijuana is rarely prescribed under the age of 25 yrs due to concerns about long term impacts on brain development. There seems to be pretty compelling evidence of increased risk of schizophrenia in young people who are heavy users of marijuana at a young age."

**As a *Christian*, what are your thoughts on recreational marijuana?**

"I don't think it is necessary for a Christian to get "high". Some people have the same argument for alcohol so I understand that my stance may seem to be a double standard. If people are RESPONSIBLE users then I think I would be able to get over my concerns (I hope). My understanding of the New Testament is that as Christians we are to avoid becoming "impaired" regardless of the product that causes the impairment."

“In the Bible it says we are fearfully and wonderfully made (Ps 139:14). Over the years that I have studied the human body, I have been awestruck at just how much complexity and beauty the Lord has created. Our nervous system has the ability to relay messages and respond to impulses at the speed of light. We can generate many of the same chemicals found in cannabis and opioids to modulate the pain experience. I have learned biblical principles such as sleeping, eating well, moderate living, meditating, all help to heal the body, control anxiety and decrease our pain experience. When we turn away from how the Lord tells us to live, and don’t seek Him for the answers, we replace His best intention for our cheap imitation. Initially the replacement substances seem to work, but there are always side effects and our bodies build up tolerance requiring more medication. The natural process for all these medications is that they need to be eventually removed as they become intolerable in adverse effects and cease to produce good benefit. I do not think God’s plan for us was to manipulate our nervous system for a temporary high or experience risking harm of His beautiful creation. Therefore, there is a place for all medicines, but we always need to take great care.”

**If you are a parent, how will you be talking to your kids about recreational marijuana?**

“A peer-reviewed study from the Up to Date medical journal has shown that there is a significant connection between cannabis use and failing grades, lower educational attainment, withdrawal from school activities, and lower income levels. Cannabis users are more likely to have depression, mood disorders, anxiety disorders, and/or schizophrenia. Cannabis use can result in psychosis in some users. Teenaged users have lower educational attainment, increased use of other drugs, and cannabis use is associated with later development of schizophrenia.”

“I will definitely stress the age 25yr to avoid potential cognitive, brain impairments that have been well-documented by the medical community in younger users. I don’t care that the legal age is 19 yrs; this age limit is in opposition to every medical community’s findings. I will pray diligently that my kids wait until 25 yrs and that by that time they have reached a level of maturity that they do not feel they need to try marijuana. If they want to try it I would prefer that they do it in our home with us present so we can have a discussion about the effects after.”

“I have discussed with all my kids all of these things. It has been quite difficult as they are receiving mixed messages from the media, from the government, from their teachers and their friends. Cannabis is everywhere in my community and we all know that unique skunk smell. It seems completely normal to them and they all think it is natural and safe.”

“As a Christian parent I will be teaching my kids that they should never consume anything that can alter their ability to make right choices. Marijuana when used recreationally can compromise their ability to make strong Christ-based decisions.”

**As a medical professional, is there anything else important you would want people to know about recreational marijuana use?**

“The biggest thing is that the minimum age of 19 yrs to purchase and use marijuana, which was chosen by the government, is NOT based on any medical providers’ input, in fact, it is the advice of most medical groups that the minimum age should be 25 yrs. I think 19 yrs was chosen as a convenience as that is the minimum age to buy alcohol in Ontario and the LCBO model has been chosen as the distribution model for recreational marijuana in Ontario.”

“Smoking or ingesting recreational marijuana results in cognitive impairment so DO NOT DRIVE while you are high!!!”

“It is addictive, it is potentially harmful, it is associated with poor judgement and accidents, it is associated with poor job performance, there are uncomfortable adverse effects - there are many purer, safer medications out there. My medical recommendation is to seek the advice of a trained, regulated, educated, experienced health care provider. As a Christian, I recommend seeking God for His guidance and answers in His Word to help guide decisions in partnership with a health care provider. I am not wanting to scare anyone, but I do want people to use their brains and make a well-informed choice.”

#### Medical References

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# When Pot Is Legal, What Do We Say?

by Ben Tertin

Article taken from: <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2013/november-online-only/what-would-jesus-smoke.html>

Three years ago, "Mike"—a 20-year-old newcomer to the faith—stepped into my church office.

He sat down on my office couch, distressed.

"What's going on, man?" I asked. The fact that he was hiding something couldn't have been more obvious.

"Well," he muttered. "Umm ... I've been smoking too much pot lately."

"Just 'too much'?" I asked with a wry, confident smile. "Listen, friend, *any* pot smoking is too much pot smoking. It is illegal, after all."

"Actually," he said, "it's not illegal for me. I've got my medical marijuana card."

*Uh-oh*, I thought.

Sure enough: he was legal. He had come by the "license to toke" fairly. He didn't lie or exaggerate to get it. We have newspapers in Portland printing advertisements from doctors: "Headaches? Nausea? Pain? Come get your prescription!" I could get a prescription if I wanted one. Two blocks from our church's sanctuary is a lucrative legal pot dispensary. There are at least a dozen more within a five mile radius.

"Just say no!" was powerless sloganeering for this fellow, especially when he could easily point to Christian drinkers. Without the "obey the law" fallback, what was left?

"Well, just because it's legal," I said, "does not mean it's profitable."

Based on new public opinion stats from Gallup, opinions about marijuana use are changing. For the first time in U.S. history, the morality scales now tip in favor of legalization. More than 58 percent of people now favor it.

If you're a Washington or Colorado pastor, you can already legally fire up a reefer at your next staff retreat. By December 1 of this year, Washington producers will be legally licensed to grow marijuana for recreational use. You can bet your life that the indoor-hydro guys will be cranking those sodium halide grow lights day and night for about three months, until the winter snows melt and their "first" legal buds are vacuum packed and priced to sell. Based on the polls, it won't be long before other states—and eventually the federal government—will follow suit.

Growing up in the 8,000-person town of Burlington, Wisconsin, I learned just how against-the-law pot can be. I've had no trouble pointing to penal terms and state statutes for herbal debates in the past. It's been a sweet moral trump card for pastors. When a red-eyed brother in Christ asks how pot is different from other substances—like alcohol—"Obey the law of the land, son," the pastor says. "Like it or not, God calls us to obey our authorities. Hooch is legal; the marijuana cigarettes are not."

But the trump card is gone for many of us. Likely for all of us soon. For our neighbors and church members, there will be no more need to stash baggies above ceiling tiles to keep them hidden from mom. No more secret lingo, "420" rendezvous, or clandestine hook-ups with Mary Jane. It's possible to imagine the host of your next home community meeting happily setting a jar of pot and a glass pipe next to the bottle of merlot on the refreshments table.

So what are you going to say when the issue gets personal? Should hip pastors spark a bowl with the lost to be "incarnational"? More importantly, are we ready to intelligently discuss recreational pot use with our youth, young adults, parents, and singles? Even more importantly, can we talk about it without oversimplification?

### *Gross oversimplification*

When a pastor's advice on a moral issue fails, the usual culprit is oversimplification. I feel this keenly on the pot question, having fought on both sides. As a non-believing protester marching on Wisconsin's state capitol with a giant pot-leaf shaped *Legalize it!* sign, I saw dozens of otherwise law-abiding friends serve lengthy prison terms for buying, selling, and smoking pot. Now, as a pastor I see the destructive power of the substances that people use to medicate themselves. Now I'm learning to grow past oversimplification from either side.

Here are a few common oversimplifications, followed by the legitimate objections you'll encounter if you use them:

"Pot is bad for you, and our bodies are temples that we need to take care of."

*So is alcohol, tobacco, coffee, and sugar. What in this world is not bad for you? Bus exhaust causes cancer, and according to California, so does everything else. My missionary friends in Nepal constantly fall seriously ill due to contaminated water, bacteria, chemicals, etc. Should they abandon their post? Super smog in China is killing thousands of people daily. Is it immoral to choose to live in a Chinese city? Should I avoid tap water to stay free from the chlorine and fluoride?*

"Pot is worse than alcohol. You can't use it in moderation."

*Worse specifically how? Certainly not according to any study (or basic, cursory glance) at the impact of either substances on our society at broad or individual levels. And what about using THC in a way that does not require smoking, such as vapor, brownies, or pills? What about using THC in small doses, equivalent to an IPA or glass of wine? Who measures intoxication? Is it a certain percentage? Is it a particular hindrance on one's capacity to function? Is it OK to drink two beers? Three? Is tolerance different for different people?*

"Pot is never mentioned in the Bible, but wine is."

*T-shirts and coffee are not in the Bible, either. Take off your shirt; throw away your mug!*

"Pot is legal now, which means it is OK for Christians to use."

*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?*

"Pot has medicinal qualities. It should be seen as helpful, not destructive."

*Don't many substances have "medicinal" qualities? What do you even mean by "medicinal"? Tylenol is helpful until its acetaminophen eats your liver. Even if pot does help in some way, it can also make you lose control, right?*

We could go on and on. Blanket declarations or position papers will not address the complexities of individual human lives. Oversimplification on this issue will necessarily neglect truth, and we want to be people of truth.

*A green-pasture strategy*

After "Mike" stepped out of my office, I felt uneasy. I had been unprepared for his legal status, and all I really did was exchange a new law for the old. Rather than asking "Is this legal?" because of my counsel to him, he was now only asking "Is this profitable?" I wish I could go back to that conversation and instead invite him to ask: "Why do I do what I do?"

It's one thing to agree that we should stop oversimplifying. So what, then, should we start doing? We should consider the impact of substances upon the virtue and excellence that our Savior intended for us.

My colleague Bill Clem talks about a woman that he counseled during his previous ministry position. She suffered from multiple sclerosis. Bouts of physical stress caused flare-ups, each of which irreparably damaged her nervous system. Stress was literally killing her. With her medical marijuana card, however, she could legally counter that stress with a couple hits of legal pot smoke.

"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.

You have heard it said, "Thou shalt not be 'blazin' the ganja." But I say to you that everyone who seeks pleasure outside of the gospel loses his life.

Pot smokers will never be convinced that drinking is healthier, more "Christian," or better for society. Neither will I, and I'm not even toking these days. Nor will they be swayed by warnings of impending doom and destruction. But you can make great headway with the Christian pot smoker along the lines of self-control. We need to bypass the "What are you doing?" question in areas that are morally ambiguous and drive directly into the core: "*Why* are you doing this?"

"Am I allowed to?" creates legalists. "Am I allowed to?" needs to change to "Is this helpful for my neighbor and me?" The former question forces me into a deadly self-obsession; the latter moves me toward the spirit of goodness and sacrificial love.

This is one reason that I silently welcome legalization; it forces me to thoughtfully help people where they really need help rather than tell them how to bow down to a statute. Jesus did not say, "I am the way, the truth, and the perfect adherent to state and federal laws."

My trajectory was proper when I asked the 20-year-old Christian pot smoker the *what* question: "What does or does not make your dope smoking profitable?" But he and I have spoken very little since. I think it's because I failed to get past the epidermis and into the chlorophyll, past the superficial question and into his heart.

I've realized that he, like many others, hear little more than a self-help suggestion in the profitability question. "What will make my life better?" is a fair inquiry, for sure, but it is also a myopic sub-point within the comprehensive complexities of a true gospel person. I have been commissioned to help my eternal family members move beyond the tired and worn plots of cracked and dusty self-love, to guide them toward good works and the rich, peace-saturated sustenance of truly green pastures. Here's how I will do things differently as weed continues to gain favor in the public square, legally and otherwise.

*I will teach my people profitability* in terms of others; help them practice putting on their neighbors' shoes. Any question related to consuming drugs must first and foremost be: "How does this benefit my neighbor, physically and spiritually?"

*I will show them the greatness of self-sacrificial love*, denying personal pleasures for the sake of others' well-being. "You must love one another," says Jesus. "Just as I have loved you, you must love other people in the same way." We all know that Jesus did not love others by running around protesting, crying about rights violations, or demanding that his life be more comfortable. Instead, he denied his right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness because loving humanity mattered more.

*And finally, I will lead them to the Bible in all I say and do.* Oversimplification looms large from any angle, and subjective anecdotes will flood most people's minds like a tsunami. Hear me now: You cannot debate this issue with physical science, social science, or strained comparisons to alcohol and other substances. We must trust the transforming power of God's Word to ground the Christian ethic. Expose the Scriptures to your people; it will train them to love others and the Lord their God in all that they think, in all that they do, and, yes, in all that they smoke.

Did I offer words of truth that day? Sure, but I have since learned that I can do much better by driving to the heart of an excellent Christian life. My preaching, teaching, and counseling too often veers toward the simplistic way. And when it does, the beauty and greatness of our salvation and life with the Savior is lost.

# Can Cannabis And Christ Coexist? These Devout Southern Christians Think So

by Alyson Martin

Article taken from: [https://www.buzzfeed.com/alysonmartin/cannabis-reform-and-religion-in-the-south?utm\\_term=.pjxgXrwP9#.of7Rw3OmN](https://www.buzzfeed.com/alysonmartin/cannabis-reform-and-religion-in-the-south?utm_term=.pjxgXrwP9#.of7Rw3OmN)

Lydia Decker couldn't miss the man in the motorized wheelchair as he whirred down the aisles of a West Texas grocery store. As someone with lung problems herself, she noticed his oxygen tank and wondered about his illness and his meds. They got talking, and Decker mentioned Genesis 1:29, the organization she heads that uses religion to preach the value of medical cannabis. This was one conversion that wasn't going to happen.

"Oh, that trash!" Decker remembered the man saying as she tried to reason with him in the pharmacy aisle. The nurse with the man "politely" asked Decker, who suffers from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, to leave. She did, but not before handing the nurse a Genesis 1:29 business card, which features a map of Texas covered with a large cannabis leaf and the words "One Mission End Prohibition!"

"Do you know he almost ran over me with the cart?" Decker said, laughing. "My goodness, he flipped a U-ee in the aisle."

Decker, 49, tells anyone in Texas who will listen why cannabis is, in fact, a permitted therapy for Christians — not a sin. She hopes her openness will help generate support for medical cannabis among state lawmakers, and in April she submitted passionate testimony in hopes of swaying them. She described being rushed to the ER, "gasping for air" on New Year's Day in 2014, when her COPD was first diagnosed, and the blur of medications and treatments she's endured since then. "I live 80 miles from a legal state line," Decker wrote, referring to New Mexico, where medical cannabis is permitted. She questioned why such treatment should be off-limits to her, "just because I choose to live and work in Texas, where I was born?"

Genesis 1:29, which Decker formed in 2010, is named after a Bible verse that's oft-repeated by Christians in favor of medical marijuana: "And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat." To Decker, a nondenominational Christian who follows the Bible's verses in a literal way, it means that cannabis is "meant to be eaten, whether in oil, whether in an edible," she said.

Obviously, not everyone in Texas is receptive to Decker's interpretation of the Bible — none of the laws covering medical or recreational cannabis were likely to pass before the legislative session ends in late May.

"People in the Bible Belt say, 'You're using the Bible to promote drugs,'" she said, drawing out the word "drugs" for emphasis. Decker disagrees. "We're using the Bible to promote what God gave us. We say that God made the perfect medicine. Man is the one that made it illegal."

The South is the last frontier for cannabis law reform. And it is no coincidence that it is also the most religious region in the country, according to Pew Research. It's a place where interpretations of God's

word can be as powerful as law, and where preachers have long proclaimed the evils of marijuana. So as pot takes hold for medical use in more than half the country, and for recreational use in eight states and Washington, DC, both are nonstarters in much of the South. Only Arkansas, Florida, and West Virginia have full medical marijuana programs, and recreational use is not even on the horizon.

The president of the organization that represents the largest evangelical group in the US won't budge on calling marijuana a sin.

"The scripture speaks against drunkenness, and marijuana is a mind-altering substance with the purpose of achieving, essentially, what the Bible would describe as drunkenness," said Russell Moore, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.

To get the votes they need, pro-legalization groups can't just preach to nonbelievers; they also need to court people of faith, says Morgan Fox of Marijuana Policy Project, a lobbying group that is behind most of the cannabis laws in the country. Support from religious groups has become as key as support from law enforcement groups, addiction specialists, and parent groups. "I know that most of the major policy reform organizations are working on that right now — trying to build coalitions with faith-based groups," Fox said.

After all, marijuana has never been more popular with young people — recent polls show the 18–34 crowd overwhelmingly in support of legalization. At the same time, young people's church attendance is dropping. As much as pro-pot groups need religious support, religious leaders need to hold onto their flocks, and sometimes that means loosening opinions on controversial issues.

In Utah last year, the Church of Latter-day Saints weighed in on competing medical cannabis bills and made the unprecedented move of expressing support for one, albeit by backing the stricter of two pieces of legislation. And a group of Muslim undergraduate students at the University of South Florida, where medical marijuana was on the state ballot, tackled the question of whether cannabis use is haram last year during an event called "Contemporary Issues in Islam: A Discussion on Medical Marijuana." Some faiths have expressed varying degrees of support for medical marijuana, including the Episcopal, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Unitarian churches. In New York, one of the first medical marijuana dispensaries had the cannabis blessed by a rabbi. And globally, to respect the traditional use of cannabis by Rastafarians, Jamaica legalized cannabis for religious use in 2015.

But to bring cannabis to the region of the US where states are deeply red and religious and where pot is both a social taboo and a ticket to jail, Decker and others are harnessing their devotion to their faiths to evangelize for it.

If the South seems hostile to change, at least when it comes to cannabis, it's partly because of places like Dothan, Alabama. Leah Graves, 32, lives in Dothan, and grew up in a tiny town about 30 minutes away. Like her neighbors, Graves was a "hardcore" Baptist. It was "basically mainstream to be super religious, go to church all the time," she said, pouring extra cranberry sauce onto her Cracker Barrel turkey special. "There was something wrong with you if you didn't." And you definitely didn't smoke marijuana. She has her work cut out for her as executive director of the Alabama chapter of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML), which pushes for both recreational and medical marijuana. There's no voter initiative process in Alabama like the ones that put legalization on ballots in other states, so she's been limited to managing Alabama NORML's Facebook page and trying to rally support to sway legislators. But religion is getting in the way.

Often, friends privately express support for Graves' efforts on marijuana but then refuse to take a public stance because they fear being judged by fellow churchgoers.

"So many people are afraid to be ostracized. *I don't know what so-and-so is going to think so I won't say anything.* But meanwhile, so-and-so is tokin' up and he's not talking and they're not talking," Graves said.

Graves stands out in this conservative corner of Alabama as much for her pro-pot attitude as for her shocking pink hair and the two necklaces she wears each day: One is a Star of David, representing her Messianic Jewish faith, and the other is a pendant of the chemical compound for THC. She uses the sparkling baubles as conversation starters to pull people out of what she calls a "cannabis closet" and to show them that one can be both religious and in favor of cannabis. Without exposure to and education about marijuana, she said, "reefer madness" will persist in the Heart of Dixie.

It's possible that Graves is onto something when she says that more people support cannabis than admit it openly. Local news site al.com launched a project in February called "Marijuana in Alabama," which included a dozen stories that dove into what cannabis means to Alabamians.

The report resonated. A total of 14,000 comments were posted on the site, along with thousands of shares on social media platforms. Readers' responses to polls were unexpected: A majority didn't think marijuana was a gateway drug that could lead to future addiction, and favored legalization. And, perhaps most interesting, 89% answered "no" when asked if they thought smoking marijuana was a sin.

Still, religious opposition continues to influence drug policy throughout the region. The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention spoke out against the nine legalization initiatives put before voters in November. "I think when it comes to marijuana I'm, of course, for criminal penalties for marijuana use and for continuing criminalization of marijuana," Moore told BuzzFeed News, specifying, though, that he is not in favor of the "incoherent mass incarceration that we've had as a result of the drug war."

The Catholic Church has also come out against legalization; in 2014, Pope Francis remarked that "drug addiction is an evil" and "attempts, however limited, to legalize so-called 'recreational drugs,' are not only highly questionable from a legislative standpoint, but they fail to produce the desired effects." The Catholic diocese in Arizona and Massachusetts came out against legalization in fall 2016.

While this "didn't swing the pendulum in Massachusetts," where legalization squeaked through in November, "it very well could have in Arizona," where legalization failed, Fox said.

A component of cannabis called cannabidiol, or CBD, might be the key to bringing cannabis to the South. Unlike traditional cannabis, it comes in oil form and doesn't give the user a high, so moralistic arguments don't apply. Laws permitting CBD have spread rapidly since 2014, even in the South. Almost every Bible Belt state has one of these CBD-only laws, which mostly apply to children who have seizures that can't be controlled with traditional pharmaceuticals. Advocates who pushed the drug below the Mason Dixon argued that passing CBD laws to help sick kids was "compassionate" — perhaps something Jesus himself would've done.

Rep. Allen Peake, a self-described conservative Republican and devout Christian, is the man leading the charge in Georgia. His crusade started when a constituent pleaded with Peake to help her daughter, Haleigh, now 7, who had near-constant seizures. Peake's granddaughter is around the same age as

Haleigh, and the situation hit home as he questioned what he would do if his granddaughter was the sick one.

Peake said his faith “compelled” him to push for access to CBD oil. “People who have debilitating illnesses struggle on a daily basis with pain because of their medical condition,” he said. “Why would we not use every effort to help make their life a little better?”

When Peake says every effort, he means it. He has taken the unusual step of obtaining a medical cannabis card himself, to help obtain CBD oil for patients who can’t get it. On a particularly warm and sunny April afternoon, Peake opened a drawer in his Macon, Georgia, office and held one of the bottles of CBD oil destined for a young patient with seizures. A framed news article about Haleigh’s Hope Act – the legislation he spearheaded in 2015 to help patients like Haleigh – was hanging on the wall.

“I feel so strongly about this issue because I have seen the results and the changes in the lives of so many people,” he said.

Peake is up against vocal religious groups that have joined with law enforcement to oppose cannabis cultivation. In his efforts to get Haleigh’s Hope Act passed, those groups argued against allowing in-state growing of marijuana to produce the oil, saying it would put the state on a dangerous and “slippery slope” toward full legalization. So, when the act passed, it didn’t include a provision for growing cannabis to ensure a CBD supply. As a result, Georgia residents may possess and consume CBD, but they’re forced to violate federal law by bringing it in from other states – a legal conundrum that isn’t unique to Georgia. Many of the South’s half-baked CBD medical marijuana programs inadvertently encourage patients to break the law.

In May, Georgia added 16 medical conditions – including AIDS, autism, and Alzheimer’s – to the list of qualifying conditions for CBD. Peake insists that the laws still don’t go far enough. To get to a point where cultivation is permitted in Georgia, he’s going to have to be even more persuasive in the face of religious and moral opposition.

“In the faith-based organizations, it usually comes down to: Is there someone in that church or that organization who has been affected? And when there is someone who has been affected, either with a diagnosis or a medical condition, and has chosen to use cannabis as an option, there is a lot more sympathy and openness to this issue than those who have never been personally affected,” Peake said.

Sometimes, a personal connection is not enough. Faith Bodle, 64, of East Texas, talks about the T-shirt that got her membership to her Seventh-day Adventist church revoked. It says “Cannabis is medicine, make it legal.” Bodle is a retired truck driver who describes her life in periods of pain: She was born with scoliosis and one working lung, she was hit by a drunk driver decades ago, and in 2013 she was diagnosed with trigeminal neuralgia, which causes pain in her face so severe that all she can do sometimes is scream. Still, she considers the diagnosis a “blessing” because it finally steered her toward cannabis.

“God knew what it would take to get me to step out of the box and try something that was off the grid,” said Bodle, who considers her body a temple of the Holy Spirit. “We should not be defiling that which belongs to God.”

Bodle had been on opiates for years, increasing her dosages to the point where she was nodding off at home, into her plate, at church, and even while driving. When she read prescription labels that warned

of vomiting, dizziness, suicidal thoughts, or even death, she remembered thinking, *How can we possibly think that that's God's will for us?* So she told her doctor that she could feel herself “slipping into a coffin” and wanted to quit opiates, and her doctor suggested a six-week hospital stay to wean her from the painkillers, followed by methadone. Marijuana isn't legal in Texas, so it wasn't mentioned as a possible alternative.

Patients in the pain clinic kept suggesting that Bodle “go buy a bag of weed,” Bodle remembers, until one day, during an excruciating flare-up, her son brought over a pipe. Bodle tried two “tiny hits,” she said. “It stopped the pain instantly.”

Fellow churchgoers noticed she swapped a walker for a cane and commented on how well she looked. Bodle vaguely referred to new herbal remedies she was trying, but questions about her remarkable recovery persisted, and she finally told them that it was medical cannabis. Then, Bodle's fear came true. “When they heard about the cure, they rejected it,” she said.

A pastor at her church asked Bodle to remove a Facebook photo in which she wore the shirt that said “Cannabis is medicine, make it legal.” Then, Bodle received a letter from the church asking her to “cease and desist from using cannabis” and from talking about it, including on social media. Bodle remembers saying, “I'm not taking the drugs — I'm taking what God made as medicine.” But the church didn't see it that way, and Bodle was dropped from her church's membership.

Now, Bodle still goes to a Seventh-day Adventist church in a different city. She uses cannabis oil inside of veggie capsules, which she can take anywhere, even at church, though she's been asked not to talk about it there. Bodle said she “respectfully declined.”

“I want to educate. That's what this is about. It's not about ‘You hurt my feelings by kicking me out of church, so I'm not going to come anymore.’ That would be just hurting me. And then what, they win? That's not going to happen,” Bodle said, laughing. “God made me more tenacious than that.”

# Marijuana to the Glory of God?

by Jeff Lacine

Article taken from: <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/marijuana-to-the-glory-of-god>

I used to smoke marijuana every day.

Sixteen years ago, when I was in my late teens, cannabis was a big part of my life. Today it continues to confront me as a pastor in a city where recreational marijuana is legally celebrated. Our church office is directly across the street from a dispensary where I can legally buy a pre-rolled joint for seven dollars.

How are we to think about recreational cannabis use in the church? A growing number of Christians today believe that it is biblically permissible to use cannabis recreationally. Are they right?

## *Cannabis Versus Alcohol*

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).

However, evangelical churches sometimes have prohibited the use of *alcohol* among members because the Bible forbids *drunkenness*. This is a mistake. The Bible warns us against such extrabiblical prohibitions (1 Timothy 4:3; Colossians 2:16–23). Scripture permits the moderate use of alcohol, when it can be enjoyed in faith, even though it has psychoactive effects.

Does God, then, also permit the recreational use of cannabis? Should we treat cannabis like alcohol in the church? Is it okay to light up around the campfire just like it may be to enjoy wine at a wedding?

## *Similarities and Dissimilarities*

Let’s examine this commonly used comparison between alcohol and cannabis. The following are ways that cannabis and alcohol are similar and dissimilar.

Ways that cannabis is like alcohol:

- Cannabis, like alcohol, is an organic substance.
- Cannabis, like alcohol, has the potential to intoxicate and distort reality.

- Cannabis, like alcohol, has different effects on someone who uses it regularly than someone who uses it occasionally. (In other words, tolerances can be built up with regular marijuana use similar to the way tolerances can be built up with regular alcohol use.)
- Cannabis, like alcohol, can be habit-forming (see 1 Timothy 3:8).

Ways that cannabis is unlike alcohol:

- Unlike alcohol, you can't blackout or die from an overdose of cannabis.
- Unlike alcohol, there are many different strains of cannabis. The same amount of cannabis smoked or ingested from two different cannabis plants can have different effects on an individual – even if both plants have the same exact amount of THC (the primary psychoactive chemical in cannabis).
- Unlike alcohol, marijuana has many different effects on an individual due to its 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.
- Unlike alcohol, cannabis has not been a staple in cultures all around the world for use in celebrations and ceremonies (like John 2:9).
- Unlike alcohol, regular cannabis use is strongly correlated with mental health disorders such as schizoaffective disorder. While heavy drinking (alcohol abuse) has also been linked to mental health disorders, moderate drinking has not.
- Unlike alcohol, cannabis has been a cultural symbol of rebellion for a large part of the last century.
- Unlike alcohol, cannabis was not used by Jesus in his Last Supper, which is to be regularly commemorated by the church (Mark 14:23–25).
- And perhaps most importantly, unlike alcohol, cannabis is not directly addressed in the Bible.

It is unhelpful to make direct correlations between cannabis and alcohol, as if all the Bible's teaching on alcohol applies to cannabis. Not only are cannabis and alcohol vastly different chemical compounds, with vastly different effects, but the Bible gives us clear and direct permission for the moderate use of alcohol while never directly referencing other psychoactive compounds such as marijuana.

### *The Big Picture*

Even though cannabis is never directly mentioned in Scripture, we do have God-revealed principles to guide and direct our thinking about its recreational use. We often get help on specific questions when we keep our eyes on the big picture. What is the endgame for the Christian life? What should we be aiming at in all things?

As Christians, our goal is knowing and experiencing the full and *undistorted reality* of the glory of God in our resurrected physical bodies (1 Corinthians 15:12–49; Philippians 3:20–21; 1 Corinthians 13:12). This is our trajectory as Christians. This is our aim.

God is glorious beyond measure, and Christians seek to experience the reality of his glory, for the sake of his glory. Sin has distorted our vision and corrupted our world. Ever since sin first entered the world, all of us have been born spiritually dead, unable to discern the true glory of God (Ephesians 2:1–5; Colossians 2:13; 2 Corinthians 4:4). When we experience the redemptive work of Christ through the Holy Spirit, we are awakened to the reality and beauty of God (2 Corinthians

4:6). But until we see him face to face, we still see his glory as through a glass dimly (1 Corinthians 13:12). As redeemed believers, we are on a journey to knowing him without obstruction. Therefore, we do not want to distort reality; rather, we aim to know him as he really is. *We want to see things as they really are.*

The Christian use of any kind of psychoactive substance should always align with this gospel goal of looking to see things clearer. We do not want our vision of reality distorted.

### *Christian Cup of Coffee?*

Consider this principle in terms of a psychoactive substance most American adults use every day: caffeine. Why do people drink coffee in the morning? To help them to see things as they really are, rather than through the fog of grogginess. The right and proper use of this God-given substance helps us see things as they really are.

But how does this principle apply to alcohol? At times moderate lubrication in Godward celebrations can be in keeping with the reality. People don't drink wine at funerals, which are a reminder of the curse and consequences of sin. If someone drank wine at a funeral, I would wonder whether they have an unhealthy relationship with alcohol.

But people do drink wine at weddings, in which we celebrate the profound parable being played out before our eyes: the great Bridegroom is coming for his bride, the church (Revelation 19:7)! And wine (explicitly) will have a God-given role at the final consummating celebration (Mark 14:23–25). In this way, the proper and moderate use of alcohol can be a clarifier, not a distorter. It points us to the joy, fellowship, and celebration of the great coming feast.

### *What About Weed?*

Is there a proper and moderate use of marijuana that can actually serve to *clarify and point to biblical realities* like alcohol may in certain circumstances? Or does the recreational use of marijuana always distort?

I believe, both from research and experience, that recreational cannabis distorts reality and numbs people to the ability to experience life as it truly is. Even a relatively small amount of THC puts the infrequent user into a fog. A larger amount can potentially cause paranoia.

What about more regular, high-functioning users who have built up a tolerance and experience a less intense high when they smoke or ingest cannabis? While cannabis won't induce hallucinations or the same intense high for frequent users, we have other troubling factors to consider with persistent use.

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.

It doesn't surprise me when a regular marijuana user tries to refute the reality of cannabis's reality-numbing effect. When you are in the numbing cloud of regular cannabis use, it is hard to realize that you are in such a cloud — even when it is obvious to close friends and family. Cannabis may distort reality in a more subtle way for the regular user than for the occasional user, but the subtlety of it makes the negative effects all the more insidious and deep.

### *Counsel and Hope*

Though the Bible does not forbid the use of every substance that affects the mind, the recreational use of cannabis seems to violate the Christian value of sobriety (1 Thessalonians 5:6–8; Titus 2:2; 1 Peter 4:7). As our culture celebrates the casual use of cannabis today, and does so increasingly in the coming days, we should be vigilant not to be deceived as a church. We should not idly stand by as we watch brothers and sisters who profess faith in Christ enter into a mind-numbing, reality-distorting cloud of cannabis. We should encourage one another to peer through the dim glass and discern the glory of God with all our might as the Day draws near (Hebrews 10:25).

However, it is worth saying that we should also be careful not to make the same mistakes that churches made by previous generations with regard to alcohol, adding extra prohibitions to God's revealed word. Because of the many variables involved with marijuana use (for example, its medicinal use), I believe we should be very slow to make a firm prohibition policy for members of the church, such that we would *automatically* proceed with church discipline upon unrepentant use. However, it should be clear that unrepentant marijuana use could easily lead to church discipline.

We should be quick to engage with individual members who use marijuana, asking them questions and seeking to understand, being ready to exhort and rebuke them if it becomes apparent that they are violating the biblical standards of sobriety and integrity.

The details and nuances we'll encounter will be complex, but Jesus's church, holding fast to his word, led by a team of wise pastors, will be up for the challenge. God will have new mercies for us as we walk together by faith in the age of legal marijuana.

# Questions to Wrestle Through

*We won't be answering all of these in one night, of course,  
and some of these may require more time and thought than others.  
No doubt there are also other questions beyond just these ones!*

*But here are some things that we will all need to figure out as we tackle this issue!*

Why did God create the marijuana plant?

Is it appropriate for a Christian to use medicinal marijuana?

Is it appropriate for a Christian to use recreational marijuana?

What are the health implications of marijuana use?

What are the spiritual/biblical implications of marijuana use?

Is recreational marijuana use any different from recreational wine use?

How might recreational marijuana use affect our Christian witness?

How might recreational marijuana use cause others to stumble? (1Co 10:32)

How will we talk to our children about marijuana?

What will our Christ-like approach to be towards people in our lives who use marijuana recreationally?