

Why Christians Should Avoid Marijuana—Even If It's Legal

Marijuana has recently become legal in many states, forcing many Christians to determine whether it's a sin—or whether, as many argue with alcohol, it may be acceptable in moderation. In a recent video produced by The Gospel Coalition, pastors Thomas Terry and Joshua Ryan Butler explain why they would urge churchgoers not to use marijuana.

Butler begins by noting that Scripture does not explicitly prohibit marijuana usage—although in states where it is still illegal, Christians are called to obey the laws of the land. But Butler says he would have major personal and pastoral reservations regarding the wisdom of using marijuana.

“People often make the comparison to it being like alcohol,” Butler says. “We see that there are appropriate uses of alcohol in Scripture and all, but I do think there's some important differences and distinctions. One of those would be I think it's a lot harder to use weed, to kind of toké up, and not get the equivalent of what with alcohol would be intoxicated, right? Seems like it's a very low bar to reach that level of intoxication with weed. Likewise, I don't know for every individual, but it does seem like in our culture, much of the use of weed and marijuana is geared towards kind of disconnecting and disengaging from life and from people. You see, in alcohol, even in Scripture, when it's used appropriately in moderation and all, that part of the goal was community and celebration and bringing people together to celebrate what God's done, to celebrate the life that He's given and all. Yet in contrast to that, marijuana seems to have kind of an individualistic bent that pulls you away from people, pulls you within yourself, causes you to become more disengaged not only from people but also kind of from life in general.”

Butler tells the story of a high school friend who he saw disconnect from his friends and relationships over three years, until all this friend wanted to do was “sit in his room all day and smoke out.” While Butler says this is not applicable to all marijuana users, he believes weed encourages people to move in this direction.

Terry agrees that whether or not to use marijuana a discretionary, “wisdom” call, but he would have strong reservations about recommending it to congregants.

“I could never as a pastor say to one of the members of my congregation, ‘Yeah, feel free to enjoy marijuana recreationally,’ just because I also feel like you really can’t have sound mind when you’re high. I think a lot of people gives you this false idea that there’s a functional high, and it just kind of keys you out and you’re OK. But I’ve never experienced that personally. ... The challenge with marijuana is it’s kind of like a ‘one hit and done,’ so you’re immediately in that place of intoxication.”

Terry says he should know, as he used to smoke marijuana before he came to salvation in Christ. His goal at the time was to “disengage.”

“I would actually ask people in my congregation, ‘What is the reason for the desire to unhinge from community and unhinge from reality?’” Terry says. “And then begin to ask the deeper and more significant questions like, ‘Where does this desire come from? What are you experiencing in your life that is causing for you to want to escape?’ I mean, it’s the same question you would ask somebody who consistently would be intoxicated: ‘What are you running from? What is it that you are escaping?’”

Terry also acknowledges that his pastoral advice might change in the context of medicinal usage versus recreational usage.

“There’s some unique challenges medicinally,” Terry says.

“Some people use it for medicinal purposes, and that—I would really have to flesh that out with a member of my congregation. But in the category of recreational, I couldn’t in good conscience tell them to partake in marijuana recreationally.”

What do you think? Let us know in the comments.