

Going to Pot

The rush to legalize the recreational use of marijuana in our society could have a long-term impact on our youth. What does the Bible say on this subject?

“They did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts” (Rev. 9:21).

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8).



As more and more states legalize recreational marijuana use, Christians are confronted with the question of how to respond to this cultural shift. Our concern here is not with the legal or political issues surrounding this topic. Nor do we seek to address the potential medicinal use of chemicals derived from marijuana. Rather, we want to explore the ethical dimensions of a personal decision that faces all of us, especially our young people: Is the recreational use of marijuana compatible with my identity as a follower of Jesus?

Let's start with Rev. 9:21. The Greek word here translated “sorceries” is *pharmakeia*, from which we derive our English word *pharmaceutical*, the science of drugs. Thayer defines the word as “the use or the administering of drugs.” Moulton & Milligan quote an ancient document in which this word is used to describe a man who, “having taken a dose of medicine, . . . is unable to leave the house” (*Vocabulary of the Greek NT*, p. 664)—i.e., he's too stoned

to function. In ancient times, sorcerers used hallucinatory potions (*pharmakon*) on their subjects to intensify the effects of their black arts. That's why, in Gal. 5:20 and elsewhere, this word is paired with idolatry, suggesting a connection between mysticism (including drug use) and the debauchery of pagan religions. Getting wasted and having a “good time” have a long history together.

Today some satanic cults use drugs to maintain control over their subjects, which is a clear example of what the Bible condemns. But most cannabis users have no interest in going there. They're just looking for a little fun. What's the big deal?

The danger is, Satan has more than one way to lure people away from God. Take a closer look at Peter's warning: “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). The NIV renders the first part of this verse, “be alert and of sober mind.” When we are high on mind-altering drugs, our brains are not capable of thinking straight, and Satan can take full advantage of that condition to lead us into more destructive behaviors.

First responders and emergency room doctors can testify to the risks involved in marijuana use. A recent study conducted by UC-San Francisco found a significant increase in overdoses and car wrecks related to marijuana use. The author of the study concluded that “we need to think carefully about the potential health effects of substantially enhancing the accessibility of cannabis” (see <https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2019-05-15/study-ties-legalizing-pot-to-car-accidents-injuries>).

When Jesus was taken to the place of His execution, someone offered Him a concoction of wine and myrrh—a mild narcotic—to dull His pain. Under normal circumstances, this would have been an act of mercy. But these were not normal circumstances. Until the moment He died, Jesus faced the temptation to escape this ordeal and turn His back on humanity. He knew that if God's plan was to be fulfilled, He *had* to remain “sober and vigilant” to the very end. Consequently, Jesus refused the drink, maintained His will power, and completed His mission (Mk. 15:23).

That should be our policy, too. Be sober. Keep vigilant. Stay in control. Don't allow Satan to gain a foot-hold in your life by letting recreational drugs becloud your thinking.

— David King