

# PUFF OR PASS



**SHOULD  
CHRISTIANS  
SMOKE POT  
OR NOT?**

**BY MARK DRISCOLL**

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*Puff or Pass: Should Christians Smoke Pot or Not?*

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# **INTRODUCTION**

When my home state of Washington legalized the recreational use of marijuana, this, of course, led to a host of pastoral questions and issues.

I have been asked these questions for years, as Mars Hill Church has always reached out to a high (pun intended) percentage of single young guys living typical, irresponsible urban lives. These guys are generally not very theological, but curiously they tend to know at least two Bible verses:

1. **Genesis 1:29 (NIV)**: “Then God said, ‘I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth.’”
2. **Luke 6:37**, the catch-all, in-case-of-guilty-emergency-break-glass verse, (paraphrased): “Thou shall not judge.”

Over the years, my default answer has been **Romans 13:1–7**, which basically says that believers must submit to the laws of government as long as there is no conflict with the higher laws of God in Scripture. This was a simple way to say “no” to recreational pot smoking. But now that recreational marijuana use is no longer illegal (according to my state laws, at least), the guiding question is now twofold:

Is using marijuana sinful, or is it wise?

Some things are neither illegal (forbidden by government in laws) nor sinful (forbidden by God in Scripture), but they are unwise. For example, eating a cereal box instead of the food it contains is not illegal or sinful—it's just foolish. This explains why the Bible speaks not only of sin, but also folly, particularly in places such as the book of Proverbs. There are innumerable things that won't get you arrested or brought under church discipline, but they are just foolish and unwise—the kinds of things people often refer to by saying, "That's just stupid."

## **FULL DISCLOSURE**

I have smoked pot as many times as I have been pregnant. I grew up next to the Sea-Tac airport before the area was incorporated as a city. Practically, this meant there was no local law enforcement. Drug deals took place openly and frequently on Pacific Highway South, which was also legendary for brazen prostitution. I grew up in a home where my then-Catholic parents warned my four siblings and me about drug use. I had many friends who ranged from recreational drug users to addicts. I saw drugs used in front of me numerous times. I even buried one friend who overdosed as a teen. However, by God's grace, I have never touched any drug of any kind, including marijuana. I have never even taken a puff of a cigarette, though I did try one Cuban cigar over a decade ago while in the Bahamas. That's the sum total of my entire life's smoking experience.

Simply put, my view of recreational marijuana use is not motivated by guilt from my past or present, nor do I have any desire to partake in the future. I have never smoked weed, I will never smoke weed, and I will strongly urge our five children to never smoke weed. As a pastor, I would never encourage anyone to smoke weed recreationally. (Medicinal use is another matter, which we'll deal with later in this book.)

## **POT AS SELF-MEDICATION**

Frankly, I think that our entire Western culture is addicted to self-medication with food, alcohol, pot and other drugs, sex, prescriptions, etc. My doctor is a naturopath, and I am one who prefers to avoid prescriptions for anything, except as a last resort.

Furthermore, as a pastor I have noticed that people tend to stop maturing when they start self-medicating. Everyone has very tough seasons in life, but by persevering through them we have an opportunity to mature and grow as people. Those who self-medicate with drugs and/or alcohol (as well as other things) often thwart maturity as they escape the tough seasons of life rather than face them. This explains why some people can be biologically much older than they are emotionally and spiritually.

## CHILDISH WAYS

Practically, what also concerns me is the fact that young men are the most likely to smoke weed and, by seemingly all measurable variables, are immature, irresponsible, and getting worse.

Young men are less likely than their female peers to attend college, work a job, or attend church. For the first time in America's history, [the majority of births to women under the age of 30 are now out of wedlock](#)—meaning the majority of those kids have no experience of their father ever being married to their mother.

Paul's words in [1 Corinthians 13:11](#) are timely, "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways." There is nothing wrong with being a boy, so long as you are a boy. But when a man acts like a boy, that's a real problem. [A recent article even noted that young men are now less likely than ever to own a car](#), as taking public transportation allows them to use their smartphone more hours every day playing video games and downloading porn. The last thing these guys need is to get high, be less motivated, and less productive; instead, they need to "act like men, [and] be strong" ([1 Cor. 16:13](#)).

## **POT: IT'S NOT BEER**

Also, many will attempt to treat marijuana usage as analogous to alcohol. But while the Bible does speak of alcohol, it never mentions marijuana, which means the issue requires a great deal of consideration before arriving at a thoughtful Christian position.

All that said, the following is a brief book on marijuana use. It is not meant to be the definitive, comprehensive word on the subject, but I offer it in hopes of helping Christians think through the matter in an informed way.

**PART 1:**  
**STATISTICS**

# LEGALIZATION OF MARIJUANA

According to a 2011 survey from Pew Research Center on a representative sample of the United States population, 45 percent responded that they were in favor of marijuana legalization, while 50 percent opposed. The older the respondent, the less likely they were to favor legalization<sup>1</sup>:

- Ages 18–29: 54 percent in favor
- Ages 30–49: 48 percent in favor
- Ages 50–64: 43 percent in favor
- Ages 65+: 30 percent in favor

In 2010, when asked whether marijuana should be made legal, 33 percent of Protestants and 39 percent of Catholics responded in the affirmative. The specifically evangelical opinion was slightly different, with only 25 percent of evangelical respondents in favor of legalization.<sup>2</sup>

## MEDICAL MARIJUANA

“Nearly three-quarters of Americans (73 percent) say they favor their state allowing the sale and use of marijuana for medical purposes if it is prescribed by a

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<sup>1</sup> “Fewer Are Angry at Government, but Discontent Remains High,” *Pew Research Center* (March 3, 2011), <http://www.people-press.org/2011/03/03/section-3-attitudes-toward-social-issues/>.

<sup>2</sup> “Broad Public Support For Legalizing Medical Marijuana,” *Pew Research Center* (April 1, 2010), <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1548/broad-public-support-for-legalizing-medical-marijuana>.

doctor, while 23 percent are opposed. Support for legalizing medical marijuana spans all major political and demographic groups, and is equally high in states that have and have not already passed laws on this issue.”<sup>3</sup> In particular, 68 percent of Protestants and 73 percent of Catholics were in favor of marijuana being available for medicinal purposes. Furthermore, 64 percent of evangelicals supported the availability of medical marijuana.<sup>4</sup>

## MARIJUANA USAGE

According to Pew Research Center’s 2010 survey, “Four-in-ten Americans say they have ever tried marijuana while 58 percent have not. Men are more likely than women to have tried marijuana—nearly half (48 percent) of men have tried marijuana compared with only 31 percent of women.”<sup>5</sup> Age drastically affects whether a person has tried marijuana: “About half (49 percent) of young people admit to having tried marijuana, as do 47 percent of those ages 30 to 49 and 42 percent of those ages 50 to 64. By comparison, only 11 percent of people age 65 and older say they have ever tried marijuana.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> “Broad Public Support For Legalizing Medical Marijuana,” *Pew Research Center*.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

**PART 2:**  
**EVANGELICAL**  
**VIEWS**

There are two main issues surrounding the question of evangelicals' relationship with marijuana: *legality* and *morality*.

The two issues should not be confused. Just because marijuana is deemed legal by the government does not mean that Christians ought to smoke it. Similarly, just because the government says that it is illegal does not automatically mean that marijuana use is necessarily immoral (though it is immoral to disobey the government under many circumstances, as we will see below).

Let's consider the legal question first.

## **THE LEGALITY QUESTION: SHOULD MARIJUANA BE LEGAL?**

Should marijuana be treated as an illicit drug or a recreational controlled substance? There are three general views on this issue:

### **OPTION A: MARIJUANA SHOULD BE LEGALIZED AND REGULATED**

There are some people who argue for the legalization and regulation of marijuana based on the socioeconomic impact of such a policy. However, such

positions say little to nothing on the actual moral issue associated with the use of marijuana.

Pat Robertson recently said, “I really believe we should treat marijuana the way we treat beverage alcohol. . . . I’ve never used marijuana and I don’t intend to, but it’s just one of those things that I think: this war on drugs just hasn’t succeeded.”<sup>7</sup> Robertson’s argument for the legalization of marijuana, however, is primarily economic: “Mr. Robertson has now apparently fully embraced the idea of legalizing marijuana, arguing that it is a way to bring down soaring rates of incarceration and reduce the social and financial costs.”<sup>8</sup>

Robertson said his primary reason for making this decision was that the nation “has gone overboard on this concept of being tough on crime. . . . It’s completely out of control. . . . Prisons are being overcrowded with juvenile offenders having to do with drugs. And the penalties, the maximums, some of them could get 10 years for possession of a joint of marijuana. It makes no sense at all.”<sup>9</sup> Robertson went on to say, “I believe in working with the hearts of people, and not locking them up.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Jesse McKinley, “Pat Robertson Says Marijuana Use Should Be Legal,” *New York Times* (March 7, 2012), [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/08/us/pat-robertson-backs-legalizing-marijuana.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/08/us/pat-robertson-backs-legalizing-marijuana.html?_r=0).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

Robertson is not alone in his position. Paul Armentano, deputy director of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML) **had this to say earlier this fall**: “Many Americans have grown justifiably weary of the federal government’s war on cannabis. Since 1970, more than 21 million US citizens have been cited or arrested for violating marijuana laws. Yet more than 100 million Americans—including the president—acknowledge having consumed cannabis. One in 10 people older than age 11 admits to having used it in the last year.”<sup>11</sup>

Interestingly, according to the *New York Times* article, “Conservative groups that usually align with Mr. Robertson . . . were largely silent when asked for comment on his stance. For example, Focus on the Family—a Christian group whose disdain for same-sex marriage and support for family values are in line with Mr. Robertson’s—declined to respond beyond saying that the group opposes legalization of marijuana for medical or recreational use.”<sup>12</sup>

It is important to understand that Robertson was “not encouraging people to use narcotics in any way, shape or form.”<sup>13</sup> However, he saw little difference between the legality of alcohol and marijuana: “If people can go

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<sup>11</sup> Paul Armentano, “3 Views on Whether States Should Legalize Marijuana: 1. Yes; Follow the model of tobacco regulation. Its use is at a historic low,” *The Christian Science Monitor* (September 10, 2012), <http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/One-Minute-Debate/2012/0910/3-views-on-whether-states-should-legalize-marijuana/Yes-Follow-the-model-of-tobacco-regulation.-Its-use-is-at-a-historic-low>.

<sup>12</sup> McKinley, “Pat Robertson Says Marijuana Use Should Be Legal.”

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

into a liquor store and buy a bottle of alcohol and drink it at home legally, then why do we say that the use of this other substance is somehow criminal?”<sup>14</sup>

Armentano’s argument is this:

*Marijuana prohibition hasn’t dissuaded the general public from experimenting with cannabis or hindered its availability, especially among young people. Consuming cannabis may temporarily alter mood and pose other risks. However, such concerns are hardly persuasive arguments for maintaining the plant’s illegality. Numerous adverse health consequences are associated with alcohol, tobacco, and prescription pharmaceuticals—all of which are far more dangerous and costly to society. That’s why these products are legally regulated and their use is restricted. A pragmatic regulatory framework that allows for limited, licensed production and sale of cannabis to adults, but restricts use among young people, would best reduce risks associated with its use or abuse. Society already imposes similar regulations for tobacco, a legally marketed yet deadly recreational drug. Doing so has reduced consumption to historic lows. Why would we not apply these same proven principles to cannabis?*<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> McKinley, “Pat Robertson Says Marijuana Use Should Be Legal.”

<sup>15</sup> Armentano, “3 Views on Whether States Should Legalize Marijuana.”

## OPTION B: MARIJUANA SHOULD BE ILLEGAL

Some worry whether legalization will actually increase use and affect health, social, and economic costs.

David G. Evans, a special adviser to the Drug Free America Foundation, **says that** while many claim that the drug war has failed, “evidence shows that marijuana use has decreased in America by almost 50 percent since its peak in the 1970s. This is thanks to a three-pronged approach of prevention, treatment, and law enforcement.”<sup>16</sup>

Evans worries that, “if marijuana were to be legalized, businesses might attractively package it to increase sales by including marijuana candy, soft drinks, and ice cream (sold now in some ‘medical’ marijuana states). Based on experience in Europe and Alaska, the number of young users will double or triple. Drug treatment facilities are already full of young people dependent on marijuana.”<sup>17</sup>

Legalizing marijuana, in Evans’ estimation, would lead to a variety of health issues that would negatively affect the economy. He says:

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<sup>16</sup> David G. Evans, “3 Views on Whether States Should Legalize Marijuana: 2. No; Legalization will increase use – and health, social, and economic costs,” *The Christian Science Monitor* (September 10, 2012), <http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/One-Minute-Debate/2012/0910/3-views-on-whether-states-should-legalize-marijuana/No-Legalization-will-increase-use-and-health-social-and-economic-costs>.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

*Marijuana use, especially regular use, can impair problem solving, concentration, motivation, and memory, and can cause birth defects. Teen users are more likely to become delinquent, schizophrenic, depressed, and suicidal. Marijuana is the most prevalent drug found in drivers killed in crashes. Thirteen percent of high school seniors admit to driving after using marijuana, while only 10 percent admit driving after having five or more alcoholic drinks. Employees who tested positive for marijuana use had 55 percent more accidents, 85 percent more injuries, and 75 percent higher absenteeism rates. . . .*

*The potential benefits of legalizing and taxing this drug are far outweighed by the costs of expanded use. Alcohol and tobacco, while legal, are still deadly and still abused, and the tax revenue on them is far outweighed by the costly damage they cause. Legalization of marijuana will have a substantial and irreversible adverse impact on our social and economic well-being.<sup>18</sup>*

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<sup>18</sup> Evans, "3 Views on Whether States Should Legalize Marijuana."

## OPTION C: ALLOW MEDICAL USAGE WITHOUT FULL LEGALIZATION

A third position argues that, while marijuana should not be available on the open market, it should be available for medicinal purposes.

Citing the same views as the anti-legalization position, **drug policy adviser Kevin A. Sabet writes**, “Marijuana should not be sold on the open market. Legal alcohol, tobacco, and prescription drugs kill more than 500,000 people a year. Research tells us that access and availability lead to greater use, and big tobacco showed that legal industries can play down harmful health effects of their products. Neither is there any assurance, under legalization, that the underground market would disappear, because that market could very easily adapt to and undercut a legal, taxed product like marijuana.”<sup>19</sup>

At the same time, Sabet acknowledges that strict enforcement can also be harmful as well. “Few people are in prison or jail for mere possession of marijuana,”

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<sup>19</sup> Kevin A. Sabet, “3 Views on Whether States Should Legalize Marijuana: 3. A middle path; Find ways to access medical benefits without legalization,” *The Christian Science Monitor* (September 10, 2012), <http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/One-Minute-Debate/2012/0910/3-views-on-whether-states-should-legalize-marijuana/A-middle-path-Find-ways-to-access-medical-benefits-without-legalization>.

he says, “but even an arrest record can hamper chances for employment, education loans, or other public assistance. Laws that provide for a sanction but do not penalize an offender’s future should be considered. Drug courts—which offer treatment with accountability—and probation programs that focus on intervention also make sense.”<sup>20</sup>

Sabet also believes that the chemical compounds in marijuana plants are medically useful. He advocates research that focuses on exploring the medical benefits of marijuana. For instance, “Nonsmoked formulations (like Sativex, a mouth spray under Food and Drug Administration review) offer a safe, scientific, tested way to properly medicalize cannabinoids. Such drugs may not mollify marijuana enthusiasts who want a ‘medical’ excuse to smoke marijuana. But they represent a common-sense marijuana policy that the US would do well to follow.”<sup>21</sup>

## **THE MORALITY QUESTION: SHOULD CHRISTIANS USE MARIJUANA?**

As is the case in Washington State, when the government legalizes marijuana use—either recreational or medicinal—Christians cannot embrace

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<sup>20</sup> Sabet, “3 Views on Whether States Should Legalize Marijuana.”

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

the practice simply because the government approves. Instead, we must ask whether the practice is one that Scripture views as morally acceptable.

This is because what is legal in the eyes of government is not always moral in the eyes of God. For example, both adultery and abortion are sinful in God's eyes, but neither is a crime according to the government.

The four positions that follow represent the ways Christians generally address the question of morality when it comes to marijuana. Option A would apply to contexts where marijuana is illegal, while Options B, C, and D presume that it's permissible under the law.

## **OPTION A: ANY ILLEGAL USE OF MARIJUANA IS IMMORAL**

The Christian's decision about marijuana is simplified when the government takes a stance on the issue. As long as marijuana is regarded as illegal by the government, Christians are required to abstain from using it. In the same way, alcohol consumption is wrong for persons under age 21 in the United States because the government has declared such usage illegal.

Christians are to be obedient and submissive to governing authorities, and may disobey those authorities only when the governmental restrictions or requirements entail direct violation of Scripture, either

by prohibiting one from doing what Scripture requires or by condoning something that Scripture forbids.

Author, pastor, and educator Douglas Wilson claims that the government does not stand in direct contradiction to Christian Scripture when it outlaws marijuana; as such, the faithful Christian has no warrant for disobeying the governmental ruling on the issue.<sup>22</sup>

## **OPTION B: RECREATIONAL USE OF MARIJUANA IS IMMORAL; MEDICINAL USE IS IMMORAL UNTIL SCIENCE IS MORE CONCLUSIVE**

Some Christians believe that marijuana usage is wrong in all circumstances because the whole reason one uses the drug in the first place (to get high) stands in contradiction to Christian principles.

As Wilson sees it, because people use marijuana for the effect, it is a sin to seek such an effect. “It is a sin to seek the strong forms of it—getting loaded—and it is a sin to seek the mild forms of it—getting a pleasant, euphoric buzz. If it has done its work as a drug, then that work has been a sinful one.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Douglas Wilson, *Future Men*, 173–74.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

Some may wonder whether a position like Wilson's means the rejection of caffeine, cigarette, and alcohol use. He is clear that he does not intend to go this far. "Unlike wine, for example," he explains, "marijuana has an immediate effect, within minutes. Two sips of wine tastes good. Two hits from a joint, and the process of intoxication has begun."<sup>24</sup>

The effects of marijuana are present much longer than those of alcohol, which is another reason some consider marijuana objectionable. Wilson explains:

*The half-life of THC in the body is three to seven days. Contrast this with the half-life of alcohol, which is about an hour. Marijuana smokers frequently think that they do not have a problem with the drug because "they only smoke on weekends." But by the next weekend half the THC is still in the body and is still having an effect. Even after the high has worn off, THC continues to impair the body's ability to function. For a chronic user, it can take months before the THC is out of the system, and even then, permanent effects on the ability to think can be measured and observed.*<sup>25</sup>

Wilson appeals to [1 Thessalonians 5:6–8](#), and argues that Christians must be sober, a word that, he writes, "means to 'be self-possessed under all circumstances.'" Being sober is utterly inconsistent with every form of

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<sup>24</sup> Wilson, *Future Men*, 175.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

mental and spiritual drunkenness. Someone who is affected to any extent by marijuana is not sober in the sense that Paul uses that word.”<sup>26</sup> He continues, “The use of wine in moderation is consistent with *nepfos* [sober]. But nothing in what we know of marijuana makes it consistent with this biblical requirement. To smoke marijuana to get *any* level of euphoria from it is clearly a sin. Reasoning by analogy, we can also see that drug use is excluded because it is designed to bring about the one state—brain fog—which is condemned as a lawless application of alcohol.”<sup>27</sup>

Wilson also has words for those who point out that, while Paul explicitly says not to get drunk with wine, he does not directly prohibit getting a buzz from marijuana. “This is a good illustration of the legalistic, hair-splitting mindset of those who are attached to their sin,” Wilson retorts. “We too often think that legalism, the drawing of unscriptural boundaries, is the province of the overly righteous. But legalism is a sinful frame of mind, and it does not disappear even in the midst of licentious behavior. . . . When someone says that Paul prohibits ‘drunkenness’ and not ‘getting high,’ we have an example of this kind of catching at words. Paul also says not to get drunk with *wine*. Does that mean that gin is all right? Beer? Rubbing alcohol?”<sup>28</sup> According to this stance, the thrust of Scripture and its intent rules out recreational marijuana usage for Christians.

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<sup>26</sup> Wilson, *Future Men*, 176.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

## THE MORALITY OF MEDICAL MARIJUANA

But what of marijuana's purported medicinal value? "Marijuana *could* be scripturally lawful *if* it were being used in a genuinely medicinal way," Wilson says, but he is skeptical of the motives driving those who advocate such use. "The current political push to allow for the medicinal use of marijuana does have a hidden agenda behind it," he believes. "The issue is not medicine, but rather the legalization and normalization of marijuana use. The current science indicates that the proposed medical value of marijuana is greatly overrated. It is being pushed as a medicine for non-medicinal reasons."<sup>29</sup>

Such skepticism is common, and others argue that the science behind medicinal use is inconclusive, at best. For instance, ethics professor **Dónal O'Mathúna** writes:

*The U.S. Institute of Medicine in 1999 and the British Royal College of Physicians in 2005 published in-depth reviews of previous medical marijuana research. Because most of the studies reviewed were not controlled studies, the report concluded that there is little evidence to support the medical use of marijuana. However, products purified from marijuana, most notably a prescription drug*

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<sup>29</sup> Wilson, *Future Men*, 179.

*called dronabinol, appear to be helpful. These products are legally available and have legitimate uses. . . . In 2007, the first randomized controlled trial of marijuana smoking was published. Patients with painful HIV-related neuropathy smoked either marijuana or placebo cigarettes daily. Patients' pain scores decreased an average of about one-third with marijuana. Since then, a few other controlled studies have produced beneficial findings for medical marijuana. However, these studies also showed that medical marijuana does not work well for everyone and has side effects. The prevalence and seriousness of the side effects is still debated.<sup>30</sup>*

Because of this, O'Mathúna concludes that Christians should hold open the possibility that scientific research could provide sufficient grounds for the moral case for medicinal marijuana.

## **REMEMBER YOUR WITNESS**

Even then, however, some believe that Christians should exercise caution and wisdom regarding medicinal use, simply because of marijuana's reputation and the connotations it implies. **As author Brett McCracken puts it:**

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<sup>30</sup> Dónal O'Mathúna, "Should Christians Smoke Medical Marijuana? Not unless proven ..." *Christianity Today* (June 14, 2011), <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/june/vg-medicalmarijuana.html?paging=off>.

*Christians should be cautious about using marijuana. Marijuana is associated with vice and unseemly activity. Christians are called to be above reproach, “without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation,” shining “as lights in the world” (Phil. 2:15). . . . The issue is not the relative danger of marijuana itself; it is about witness. If Christians use marijuana as a medical aid, it should be done in a quiet, private manner, without flaunting. Christians must be mindful of pot’s controversial and hazardous reputation in culture, and be sensitive to the perspectives of both other Christians and unbelieving observers. Christians should take note of the food offered to idols issue in 1 Corinthians 8–10 and strive to abstain from arguably innocuous activities that are nevertheless contested in culture. It is not worth offending or making someone stumble.<sup>31</sup>*

A variety of churches agree with this position. As Torie Bosch notes in Slate, “The Catholic Church says that drugs ‘constitute direct co-operation in evil’ and does not seem to make exceptions for marijuana. The Vatican has condemned legalizing ‘soft drugs’ like marijuana, and its newspaper, *L’Osservatore Romano*, recently scolded Italian lawmakers for liberalizing pot-possession laws. The Mormon church (whose

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<sup>31</sup> Brett McCracken, “Should Christians Smoke Medical Marijuana? No—It’s a bad Witness” *Christianity Today* (June 14, 2011), <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/june/vg-medicalmarijuana.html?paging=off>.

members consider themselves Christians) also strongly advises members to refrain from smoking marijuana, though it has no established position on medical use.”<sup>32</sup>

## **OPTION C: RECREATIONAL USE IS IMMORAL, BUT MEDICINAL USE IS PERMISSIBLE**

Some Christians are less skeptical of the current scientific evidence and say that Christians can use marijuana medicinally but not recreationally.

“There are biblical rationales for such a position,” Bosch writes. “The Presbyterian Church’s [USA] position on pot-smoking, which they adopted during a June 2006 General Assembly, notes that [Matthew 25:35](#) calls for people to give aid to those who are suffering. Many Christians in favor of medicinal marijuana use this line of argument, saying that if it helps ease the pain of people dying from cancer, it’s a good thing.”<sup>33</sup>

In fact, a variety of Christian denominations and groups have supported the medical use of marijuana: “The Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Methodist Church, the United Church of Christ, the Progressive National Baptist Convention, and the Episcopal Church have all either issued resolutions or signed

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<sup>32</sup> Torie Bosch, “What Would Jesus Smoke: The Christian Doctrine on Bong Hits,” *Slate* (March 20, 2007), [http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/explainer/2007/03/what\\_would\\_jesus\\_smoke.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/explainer/2007/03/what_would_jesus_smoke.html).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

statements supporting the use of marijuana under the supervision of a doctor. The Episcopal Church's 1982 resolution even delves into politics by saying that it 'urges the adoption by Congress and all states of statutes providing that the use of marijuana be permitted when deemed medically appropriate by duly licensed medical practitioners.'"<sup>34</sup>

While allowing for marijuana used medicinally, many in this camp are skeptical of its benefit for recreational usage. Bosch says, "Churches that support prescription cannabis don't always endorse bong hits just for the fun of it. The United Methodist Church considers marijuana a gateway drug. At the Episcopal Church's 1982 General Convention, a resolution was passed 'proclaim[ing] there are harmful effects which can be permanently disabling with the use of marijuana.' The Presbyterian Church is less strict; it stated in 1971 and again in 2006 that 'marijuana is not properly classified . . . and conclusive evidence is lacking that it produces physiological effects or automatically leads to the use of more serious, addictive drugs.'"<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Bosch, "What Would Jesus Smoke: The Christian Doctrine on Bong Hits."

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

## **OPTION D: LEGAL MARIJUANA USE (IN MODERATION) IS MORALLY ACCEPTABLE**

The fourth and final position is by far the minority Christian view. According to this view, marijuana, like almost everything else in life, is a neutral thing that can be used for good or evil. For social smoking and medicinal use, marijuana is completely harmless, but it can be abused when used in excess, when it leads to addiction, or when one uses the high caused by the drug to escape reality.

### **EVERY PLANT**

Proponents of this view cite Bible verses like [Genesis 1:29](#) to support their position: “And God said, ‘Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.’” While it is far from clear that marijuana is the referent of this text, the principle still remains: God has given his creatures dominion over everything on earth, and such dominion can be abused.

From this perspective, marijuana is viewed like many other substances or things: alcohol, cigarettes, caffeine, food, television, sex, etc. Each has a proper use, but when abused, sin arises. Christians in this camp often argue that we rely on cultural assumptions

to shape views on morality, which leads to mixed messages and double standards (for example, obesity is no problem but controlled marijuana smoking is a sin).

## HOW HIGH?

As noted above, Douglas Wilson believes that marijuana is inherently wrong because, unlike alcohol, it provides an immediate high. Some may respond by saying that alcohol also begins its intoxicating effect on the first drink, and that Wilson's argument draws an arbitrary line in the sand along the continuum of sobriety to "drunkenness" (or "highness"). Christians who condone legal marijuana use in moderation may read the same verses Wilson cites about drunkenness and sobriety and interpret these passages as referring to patterns present in one's lifestyle; there may not be anything inherently wrong with smoking or drinking that induces a mild high or buzz.

Interestingly, the Rastafarian religion has dietary laws in which marijuana is a religious sacrament while other substances (such as coffee) are not permitted. *As Marc Emery writes in Cannabis Culture magazine:*

*The most observant Rastas follow a dietary law called Ital (from the word 'vital'). Ital food is completely natural, not canned, free of chemicals and preservatives and eaten as raw as possible. Old Testament prohibitions*

*against pork and shellfish are part of Ital; most Rastafarians are vegetarians or vegans. Coffee and milk are also rejected as unnatural, and Rastafarians condemn the use of alcohol, since it is a fermented chemical that does not belong in the temple of the body, and it makes a person stupid, thereby playing into the hands of white leaders. This is contrasted with the holy herb of marijuana, which is natural and believed by Rastas to open their mind and assist in reasoning.*<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Marc Emery, "Rastafari: The Secret History of the Marijuana Religion," *Cannabis Culture: Marijuana Magazine* (August 28, 2009), <http://www.cannabisculture.com/content/rastafari-secret-history-marijuana-religion>.

# CONCLUSION

*Should marijuana be legal?* I would advocate that the soundest Christian response to the legal question is Option C: that recreational use should be illegal but that medicinal use may be allowed. Based upon Christian convictions, I do not support the legalization of recreational marijuana use. Regarding medicinal use, while I have studied this issue, the truth is that I am not a medical doctor and therefore do not feel comfortable debating the potential medicinal benefits of marijuana. I'll leave that aspect of the conversation to others more qualified.

*Should Christians use marijuana?* I would advocate that the soundest Christian response to the moral question is Option C: that recreational is immoral, but medicinal use may be permissible. In other words, my answer is “no” for recreational usage, but again I am open to the possibility of medical benefits in some cases, under a doctor’s supervision.

Finally, I am aware that this brief book will trigger some discussion and debate. I welcome that. These thoughts are not meant to be comprehensive, or even unchangeable. I have a lot to learn and consider on these issues, and along with many fellow Christian leaders am seeking to develop thoughtful and helpful answers to these questions. I want to thank in advance those who will contribute to the conversation so that we can all become more informed and better counselors by God’s grace, for God’s glory, and for the good of God’s people.

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