

Is Tobacco Use Wrong?

Introduction. Before I begin to explain why I do not use tobacco (and therefore why I do not think you should use it), let me first speak a word of commendation. Only a few short decades ago, brethren trying to find men to participate in the worship service would have to go outside the building where several men were smoking to ask them for their help. Brethren now are doing far better at this than years ago, but there is always room for improvement.

There are some subjects in life that you just do not do, and one of them is to preach against the use of tobacco if you want to be a popular preacher with those who use it. But no gospel preacher should seek to be a popular preacher and tickle men's ears (Galatians 1:10; 2 Timothy 4:1-5). Tickling people's ears will not help them get to heaven.

In preaching the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:26-27), we must address this subject. It is possible to react in many different ways to this lesson and many of you may not like what is said. In this lesson, I would like to explain why I do not use tobacco (cf. 1 Peter 3:15), and this answer cannot be based upon personal likes and dislikes, or opinions and feelings.

I. ***It Harms The Body***

- A. It cannot be successfully denied that generally there are serious health risks associated with the use of tobacco products.
 1. There are some exceptions to the rule, but these exceptions tend to prove the rule.
 2. Some of you could probably name some who have "smoked like a chimney" and have lived to be 90 years old. But they do it in spite of not because of their use of tobacco.
- B. The evidence is conclusive and compelling that the use of tobacco harms the user, and in some cases, even those around him.
 1. We should not be surprised about that if we know anything at all about tobacco itself. Even using "light cigarettes" and "smokeless tobacco" does not remove the health risks associated with tobacco.
 2. Life insurance companies give special, reduced rates to non-smokers. These people make their "bread and butter" by knowing the facts.
 3. One does not have to cite statistics, read quotations, and look at photos to prove this; your body told you that tobacco is harmful with the very first puff or chew. Do you remember how sick it made you?
- C. There is no passage of scripture that explicitly says, "Thou shalt not harm the body," but this principle is implicitly taught in God's word.

1. It is taken for granted that man will naturally and normally care for his body.
 - a) Jesus said, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matthew 22:39)
 - (1) He does not command love for self; He assumes it as unquestionable.
 - (2) If one may abuse his body, may he also abuse his neighbor?
 - b) Paul said, "Even so ought husbands also to love their own wives as their own bodies" (Ephesians 5:28-29).
 - (1) Paul does not command or attempt to prove that we should nourish and cherish our own body; he assumes it as unquestionable.
 - (2) If one may abuse his own body, may he abuse his wife?
2. A Christian's body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).
 - a) By saying that our bodies are the temple of God, Paul's argument is not that we should not destroy this temple, but that we should not use God's temple to sin. Our bodies should be free of any sinful habit and separated to the Lord's service.
 - b) This passage teaches that the body of the Christian is not his to do with as he pleases. We are merely stewards of our body, and we must be found faithful in the end (1 Corinthians 4:1-2).
3. Our life and health are gifts from God (James 1:17).
 - a) We must be good stewards of these gifts (1 Peter 4:10).
 - b) Will God be pleased if we knowingly and unnecessarily abuse these gifts?
4. God created us to serve Him (Acts 17:26-28; Ephesians 2:10).
 - a) Will God be pleased with us if we knowingly and unnecessarily cut short our time of service?
 - b) Common sense will tell you that it is wrong to knowingly, intentionally, and unnecessarily harm the body.

II. ***It Harms The Influence***

- A. No one can honestly deny that a Christian is to be a strong example before others (Matthew 5:13-16; Philippians 2:14-16; 1 Timothy 4:12, 16; Titus 2:7; 1 Peter 2:11-12).
- B. Smoking harms the influence of a Christian with many people.
 1. It harms your influence with non-Christians.
 - a) You will have little, if any, influence for good on a Jehovah's Witness, a Seventh Day Adventist, or a Pentecostal if you use tobacco. Joyce Dunagan wrote, "While talking with a Jehovah's Witness concerning differences in our beliefs, she brought up the

subject of smoking. She said, 'You don't see people standing outside our building smoking. What about your church?'"

- b) On February 18-19, 1974, David Harkrider took a survey on a radio station in Denver, Colorado. Twenty different religious groups were represented. He asked two questions ("The Harkrider-Cheatham Debate On Smoking," *The Gospel Anchor*, September/October, 1975, 2:1-2:37-38).
 - (1) "Would the fact that a Christian smokes hinder his influence with you?"
 - (a) Fifty-two said "YES."
 - (b) Two said "NO."
 - (2) "Would the fact that a preacher smokes hinder his influence with you?"
 - (a) Fifty-three said "YES."
 - (b) One said "NO."
- 2. It harms your influence with brethren.
 - a) Men who use tobacco have to consider how they are perceived by their brethren in preaching, praying, teaching, leading the singing, etc. Would you have hired me if I used tobacco? Why is it different for me than you?
 - b) Smoking weakens the influence of a Christian so much that I feel it disqualifies a man to be an elder (1 Timothy 3:7; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 5:2-3). If you were an elder who smokes or uses tobacco, what would you say to our young people?
- 3. It harms your influence with your children and grandchildren.
 - a) How can you consistently and effectively dissuade your children and grandchildren from smoking or chewing if you do so? Actions speak louder than words!
 - (1) Medical Opinions: "One survey found that children are most likely to start smoking if one or both parents smoke, or if an older brother or sister smokes, or if a child comes from a broken home" (via "The Harkrider-Cheatham Debate, *The Gospel Anchor*, September/October, 1975, 2:1-2:13).
 - (2) Maura Christopher: "Children are three times more likely to smoke or chew tobacco if a parent does" ("Make Sure Your Kids Never Start Smoking," *Reader's Digest*, June 1992, 140:842:182).
 - b) Many tobacco-using parents in the Lord's church get very upset when they learn that their children are following in their own footsteps.
- C. Even if you have the liberty to smoke or chew, if it harms your influence and example, will you exercise that liberty if it is a hindrance to the gospel (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:19-23)?

III. ***It Can Be A Stumblingblock To Others***

- A. It is wrong to cause someone to stumble (Matthew 18:4-7; Romans 14:13, 15, 20-21; 15:1-2; 1 Corinthians 8:9-13; 10:23-24, 31-33).
- B. By your example, you certainly do not dissuade others from smoking or chewing. In fact, you weaken the impact of preaching and teaching on the subject.

IV. ***It Would Violate My Conscience***

- A. A Christian cannot violate their conscience (Romans 14:22-23). To think that something is right, does not make it right; but to think that something is wrong, does make it wrong.
- B. I cannot smoke because I think that it is wrong.
 - 1. When Paul said, "Let each man be fully assured in his own mind," he did not mean to be sure that something is wrong before you quit; he meant be sure that something is right before you start. In your heart are you sure that you please God?
 - 2. I really doubt that many, if not most, Christians who use tobacco are "fully assured" in their own minds that it is right.
 - a) They will not advise others to use tobacco; in fact, they discourage them.
 - b) They will not defend the practice.
 - c) They will admit that they really ought to quit.

V. ***It Is Addictive***

- A. The addictive nature of tobacco can hardly be denied.
 - 1. Users of tobacco tacitly admit their own addiction.
 - a) "I have tried to quit and I cannot."
 - b) "I cannot hardly make it through worship services without a cigarette."
 - 2. Why would anyone continue to use tobacco if they are not "hooked"?
 - a) Why is it so hard for so many to quit smoking and/or chewing?
 - b) When doctors tell someone that he is going to lose his leg if he does not quit smoking and he keeps smoking, does that not suggest that he is "hooked"?
 - 3. Users of tobacco who quit suffer from withdrawal symptoms much like a drug addict.
- B. The Christian is not to be addicted to anything.
 - 1. We have to exercise self-control (Acts 24:25; Galatians 5:22-24; 2 Peter 1:5-11).
 - 2. A lack of self-control is condemned (2 Timothy 3:1-7).
 - a) A Christian is not to be brought under the power of anything (1 Corinthians 6:12; 9:25-27).

- b) Anything that enslaves a Christian is wrong whether it be coffee, cokes, television, cigarettes, cigars, pipe tobacco, snuff, or chewing tobacco (2 Peter 2:19).
- (1) Someone may say, "You drink coffee, cokes, etc., and that is just as bad!" If it is really true that coffee and cokes are just as harmful and just as addictive as tobacco, that does not justify the use of tobacco.
 - (2) Two wrongs never make a right. To prove that other actions are wrong does not prove that the use of tobacco is right. "Well, if the use of tobacco is so bad, why do you not withdraw from the offenders?" The apostle Paul instructed the Corinthians to withdraw from the covetous (1 Corinthians 5:9-11). Have you ever known of a congregation to take that action? If not, does that prove that covetousness is right?

Conclusion. Would the footsteps of Jesus lead you to a cigarette machine (1 Peter 2:21)? When you behold the image of Christ, do you see a cigarette in His mouth? Do you smell smoke on His breath or in His hair? Does He have chewing tobacco between His cheek and gum?

I have tried to give Bible reasons for my convictions on this subject, now I ask those of you who use tobacco to do the same. I really do not have to prove that the use of tobacco is wrong. If you use it, you have to prove that it is right (Ephesians 5:8-10; 1 Thessalonians 5:21; 1 Peter 3:15). The "burden of proof" is on your shoulders. To prove your position you cannot argue that smoking is enjoyable because the drunkard, the gambler, the fornicator, and the homosexual could surely make the same argument.

If you cannot prove your position, you need to repent and quit. It will not be easy, but you can do it (Matthew 18:8-9; Philippians 4:13). Thomas C. Schelling said, "Half the men who ever smoked in this country have quit, and nearly half the women. At the end of World War II, three-quarters of young men smoked; the fraction is now less than a third and going down. Fifty million people have quit smoking, and another 50 million who would have become smokers since 1945 did not ("Addictive Drugs: The Cigarette Experience," *Science*, Jan. 24, 1992, 255:430).

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