

A Study Of Moral Issues: Tobacco And Substance Use

Introduction. Ephesians 4:1 says, “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.” Walking worthy means avoiding many of the common moral issues that plague Christians.

Sometimes I wish we could go back to simpler times. Sermons by the hundreds have been preached and published about tobacco use. But now, there’s so much more out there that our children see and experience in school and in society — not to mention all the adults in the room. A comprehensive lesson is needed that warns about the perils of these addictive dangers.

I. The Plague Of Tobacco And Substance Abuse

A. Regular and smokeless tobacco.

1. Just 13.9 percent of the US population smokes cigarettes, according to a recent government report which said the American smoking rate has reached the lowest level ever recorded.
 - a) The dangers of cigarette smoking have been known for a long time.
 - b) With hundreds of chemicals processed into tobacco, smoking accounts for about one-third of all cancers, including 90 percent of lung cancer cases.
2. However, smokeless tobacco use remains popular, especially among young men ages 25-44.
 - a) The dangers of smokeless tobacco use entered the national spotlight after the death in 2014 of baseball hall-of-fame player Tony Gwynn, who died of salivary gland cancer after spending years dipping tobacco on the field.
 - b) A can of snuff contains as much nicotine as 60 cigarettes, so dipping may be more addictive than smoking. The amount of nicotine absorbed from smokeless tobacco is three to four times the amount delivered by a cigarette and stays in the bloodstream for a longer time.

B. E-cigarettes and vaping.

1. E-cigarettes work by heating liquid in pods which produces a vapor that can be inhaled, hence the name “vaping.” While vape pods do not contain tar or carbon monoxide, two of the most harmful elements in tobacco smoke, many of them do contain nicotine, which is addictive.
2. The rise in teenagers vaping has alarmed health officials. Vaping increased nearly 80 percent among high schoolers and 50 percent among middle schoolers since last year.
3. Ominously, nearly 9 percent of students surveyed in 2016 said they used an e-cigarette device with marijuana. While there’s not solid evidence to show that vaping is a gateway to harder drugs, children who vape are more likely to become known as drug users and make friends with drug users — and hanging out with drug users is a substantial risk factor for future drug use.

C. Marijuana and methamphetamine.

1. People who use marijuana frequently often report irritability, mood and sleep difficulties, memory problems, slowed reaction time, decreased appetite, cravings, restlessness, and/or various forms of physical discomfort, bronchitis, lung irritation, increased lung cancer risk, and a weakened

immune system. Marijuana use among youth can adversely affect learning and memory and may impair later academic achievement and education.

2. Marijuana potency, as detected in confiscated samples, has steadily increased roughly three times over from the early 1990s to 2014.
 - a) K2 and Spice are names used to describe a group of drugs known as synthetic (lab-made) cannabinoids. They're made from dried plant materials that have been sprayed with mind-altering chemicals.
 - b) These synthetic drugs were originally designed by scientists to use in research. Once the production methods were published in scientific journals, enterprising drug manufacturers used the directions to make illicit drugs they could sell.
 - c) In 2008, the first reports of these drugs appeared in the US. Between 2010 and 2011, calls to poison control centers due to synthetic cannabinoid use jumped by 240 percent.
 - d) Synthetic cannabinoids can be up to 100 times more potent than THC. Each product can contain one chemical or a cocktail of different chemicals, and it's like playing Russian roulette with your life. Some of the side effects include agitation, anxiety, paranoia, hallucinations, and psychosis. And that's just the psychological effects.
3. Recent data suggest that 30 percent of those who use marijuana may have some degree of marijuana use disorder, and 9 percent of people who use marijuana will become dependent on it, rising to almost 20 percent in those who start using in their teens.
4. The number of people hospitalized because of methamphetamine use is skyrocketing in the US, but the resurgence of the drug has largely been overshadowed by the nation's intense focus on opioids. Hospitalizations jumped by about 245 percent from 2008 to 2015. Methamphetamine overdoses are the most common in our emergency rooms.
5. The federal government estimates that more than 10,000 people died of meth-related overdoses last year. Deaths from meth overdose generally result from multiple organ failure or heart attacks and strokes, caused by incredible pulse rates and skyrocketing blood pressure. Other stimulant-type drugs that are often abused are Adderall and MDMA (Ecstasy, Molly).

D. Opioids.

1. Opioids are a class of drugs that include the illegal drug heroin, synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, and pain relievers available legally by prescription, such as OxyContin, Vicodin, codeine, morphine, and several others. Purple drank
2. In 2015, more than 33,000 Americans died as a result of an opioid overdose, and an estimated 2 million people in the US suffered from substance use disorders related to prescription opioid pain relievers. And since 2007, overdose deaths related to heroin have been increasing. To underscore the danger, 80% of heroin users started with a prescription painkiller.
3. The CDC estimates that the total economic cost of prescription opioid misuse in the US is around \$80 billion a year, including the costs of healthcare, lost productivity, addiction treatment, and criminal justice involvement.

II. Problems With Tobacco And Substance Abuse

A. They harm the body.

1. It cannot be successfully denied that there are serious health risks associated with the use of these substances.
 - a) There are some exceptions to the rule, but these exceptions tend to prove the rule.
 - b) 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.
2. The evidence is conclusive and compelling that the use of these substances harms the user, and in some cases, even those around him.
 - a) For example, life insurance companies give special, reduced rates to non-smokers. These people make their money by knowing the facts.
 - b) One does not have to cite statistics, read quotations, and look at photos to prove this; your body told you that tobacco and drugs are harmful with the very first use. Do you remember how sick they made you?
3. There is no passage of scripture that explicitly says, “Thou shalt not harm the body,” but this principle is implicitly taught in the Bible.
 - a) It is taken for granted that man will naturally care for his body.
 - (1) Jesus said, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matthew 22:39).
 - (a) He does not command love for self; He has no need.
 - (b) If one may abuse his body, may he also abuse his neighbor?
 - (2) Paul said, “Even so ought husbands also to love their own wives as their own bodies” (Ephesians 5:28-29).
 - (a) Paul does not command or attempt to prove that we should nourish and cherish our own body; he has no need.
 - (b) If one may abuse his own body, may he abuse his wife?
 - b) A Christian’s body is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).
 - (1) 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.
 - (2) 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 have to be found faithful in the Lord’s service (1 Corinthians 4:1-2).
 - c) Our life and health are gifts from God (James 1:17).
 - (1) We have to be good stewards of these gifts (1 Peter 4:10).
 - (2) Will God like it if we knowingly and unnecessarily abuse these gifts?
 - d) God created us to serve Him (Acts 17:26-28; Ephesians 2:10).
 - (1) Will God be pleased with us if we knowingly and unnecessarily cut short our time of service?
 - (2) Common sense will tell you that it is wrong to knowingly, intentionally, and unnecessarily harm the body.

B. They harm the influence.

1. 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).

2. Tobacco and substance abuse harms the influence of a Christian.
 - a) It harms your influence with non-Christians.
 - (1) You will have little, if any, good influence 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?'"
 - (2) If you were to ask anyone in society if a Christian using tobacco or other substances would hurt their influence with them, the answer would be a resounding, "Yes."
 - b) It harms your influence with brethren.
 - (1) Men who use these substances 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 or vaped? Why is it different for me than you (1 Thessalonians 5:22)?
 - (2) 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, vapes, or uses tobacco, what would you say to our younger members?
 - c) It harms your influence with your children and grandchildren.
 - (1) How can you consistently and effectively dissuade your children and grandchildren from smoking, vaping, or dipping if you do so? Actions speak louder than words!
 - (a) 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).
 - (b) 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).
 - (2) Many substance-using parents in the church get very upset when they learn that their children are following in their own footsteps.
 3. Even if you had the liberty to smoke, vape, or dip, if it harms your influence and example, would you exercise that liberty if it is a hindrance to the gospel (cp. 1 Corinthians 9:19-23)?
- C. They can be a stumbling block to others.
1. 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).
 2. By your example, you do not dissuade others from smoking, vaping, or dipping. Instead, you weaken the impact of preaching on the subject.
- D. They are addictive.
1. The addictive nature of these substances can hardly be denied, and have been discussed in a previous point.
 2. The Christian is not to be addicted to anything.

- a) We exercise self-control (Acts 24:25; Galatians 5:22-24; 2 Peter 1:5-11).
 - b) A lack of self-control is condemned (2 Timothy 3:1-7).
 - (1) A Christian is not to be brought under the power of anything (1 Corinthians 6:12; 9:25-27).
 - (2) Anything that enslaves a Christian is wrong whether it be coffee, cokes, television, cigarettes, cigars, pipe tobacco, vaping, dipping, marijuana, or prescription pills (2 Peter 2:19).
 - (a) 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 or other drugs, that does not justify the use of tobacco or other drugs.
 - (b) No one sells his wife’s wedding ring to get coffee. No one hurries out between Bible class and the rest of services to drink coffee. No one’s family is in financial trouble while he spends \$50 a week on coffee. No one is medically depressed for lack of coffee. All these happen with substance abuse — and that’s addiction.
 - (c) Two wrongs never make a right. To prove that other actions are wrong does not prove that the use of tobacco is right. “If the use of tobacco is so bad, why do you not withdraw from the offenders?” 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?
- E. They violate the conscience.
- 1. A Christian cannot violate their conscience (Romans 14:22-23; 2 Corinthians 4:2; Hebrews 13:18). To think that something is right does not make it right; but to think that something is wrong does make it wrong.
 - 2. I cannot use any of these drugs because I believe them to be wrong.
 - a) 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 are acceptable to God?
 - b) I really doubt that many, if not most, Christians who use these drugs are “fully assured” in their own minds that it is right.
 - (1) They will not advise others to use drugs; in fact, they discourage them.
 - (2) They will not defend the practice and will admit that they should quit.

III. Overcoming Tobacco And Substance Abuse

- A. Never forget the power of God (1 John 4:4) and His communication to us (Hebrews 4:12). It does have the power of salvation (Romans 1:16). When Jesus taught that someone who was wealthy would have a difficult time finding the kingdom of God, He responded to the disciples’ question of who could be saved by saying, “With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26). With God, someone can overcome dependency.
- B. But from a congregational point of view, dealing with someone with a dependency will be difficult. There will have to be forbearance while they pull

themselves away from a physical bond with drugs (Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:13).

1. First, understand that it is a process and that the user must be encouraged to be patient with themselves. Accepting that the user has a problem is a major part of recovery.
 2. Second, understand that people use some sort of substance to mask a pain or a feeling. The user will get to a place where they have to feel the pain or emotion they have been working so hard to cover, and it will be hard, so they must have support that understands addiction and that there will be setbacks. Their support cannot give up on them.
- C. For the person with a dependency, these recommendations are very helpful:
1. Lean on others when feelings of temptation and weakness come (1 Thessalonians 5:11). Allow them to talk about the urges, and the reasons why they feel they need to use again.
 2. Seek help if needed, whether with a primary care physician to help you via medication or a treatment facility to assist in your detox properly and safely.
 3. Understanding that you are an addict is very hard to do. Once you are sober, the rest of your life is lived in recovery, consistently helping others in their own recovery. By helping others resist substance abuse, it will help you stay sober. Furthermore, in many ways, being “addicted to the ministry” of God’s church is a way to replace the pull of substance abuse (1 Corinthians 16:15).
 4. Most users have gone through life while high, so you may not know what certain situations feel like while sober. It will be a learning process, like learning to see with glasses versus finding your way with blurry vision.

Conclusion. Christians, do not be deceived by the allure of tobacco and substance abuse. They do not honor your body, they harm it. They do not promote righteousness, they hinder it. “Come out and be separate” is more than a slogan. It is God’s will for those who intend to perfect holiness in their lives (2 Corinthians 6:17-7:1).