

# Christian Liberty and Marijuana

**Introduction** – As a church, we have distanced ourselves from the temperance movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries which still play a strong role in certain American fundamentalist traditions. In doing so, we are not caving in to a culture that tolerates all kinds of sin. We must not be a people who simply react to culture, and we must never grow complacent. We want to be principled in our beliefs and practices. So, with the legalization of marijuana, as well as the growing cultural acceptance of its recreational use, it would do us well to understand what we believe the Bible teaches. And this means we must address the larger issue of Christian Liberty, teachings in the Bible on wine and strong drink, drunkenness, and wisdom in applying these matters to things like cannabis.

**Jesus Christ Brings Liberty** (Col 2:6-23) – Jesus is sufficient for our salvation and sanctification. At the very center of it all, we protect ourselves from all kinds of false teachings and temptations by walking in Christ, rooted and growing in Him with all thankfulness (vv6-7). Beware of cheaters out there who would add to Christ's work as ways to continue in our spiritual journey; our fullness and completeness are all in Christ alone (vv8-10). The works of our flesh have been put away by the work of God made without hands (vv11-14) which was a death blow to the prince of this age and his principalities at the cross (v15). Misapplying the ceremonial laws and feasts of the Jewish calendar can no longer bring you closer to the Lord, nor will mystical pursuits including asceticism (vv16-19). Paul makes clear what Jesus had made clear: you do not become more holy or pure by keeping substances out of your body (vv20-23, Matt 15:17-20). Jesus lived this way even when it hampered his reputation (Matt11:19) because "...wisdom is justified by her children."

**Do Not Add to the Gospel** (Gal 1:6-8) – Paul took this very seriously. To add to the gospel any additional requirements was damnable. In Paul's day, this meant that crab and pork were now acceptable foods to be received with thanksgiving. In contemporary terms, refined sugar and fatty foods are not sins or sinful to enjoy. In addition, enjoying a glass of wine, a good cigar or a tobacco pipe, and joyful dancing are all appropriate gifts from God.

**The Blessings of Wine** – We are told that wine cheers the heart of God and man (Judges 9:13, Psalm 104:15). In Deut 14:26 the Israelites were told to spend some of their tithe money on "*wine or strong drink*" and then "*rejoice*" with your household. Jesus turned six huge waterpots filled with water into wine as his first recorded miracle (John 2) and we are told to partake of wine as a part of our Christian liturgy (Matt 26:27-29). God gave mankind alcohol as a gift and He knew what He was doing when He did so.

**Drunkenness is a Sin** – Every gift of God can be perverted, misused, and exploited for evil purposes. Wine is, of course, no exception. Eph 5:18 commands us not to get drunk (which assumes we might be drinking something with which we could get drunk) and contrasts that with being filled with the Holy Spirit. This command is a synecdoche (a part for the whole), prohibiting a sinful influence of anything (and not only wine) of this world over our thinking and actions. Drunkenness is a lifestyle of unbelief and a picture of a lifestyle of unbelief – lazy, blurred, indistinct, leading to reckless living that would darken the very light we are claiming to be in Christ. The words, songs, entertainment and actions of the drunk do not get progressively more and more pure – quite the opposite.

**Marijuana and Biblical Thinking** – Part of the problem of knowing what to do about the use of marijuana is due to an unbiblical premise that has permeated our culture: the idea that alcohol and tobacco are drugs just like marijuana or cocaine. They are not. Today, cocaine isn't legal, but marijuana now is, and this can be confusing. But biblical wisdom confronts this premise: God has no problem with the moderate and appropriate use of alcohol (and I believe we could include a substance like tobacco). God has a problem with the very intentions of drug use like marijuana. The purpose in smoking marijuana is to disobey Eph 5:18. We are called to be "*self-possessed*," or "*sober*" disciples (1 Thess 5:6-8, 1 Pet 1:13). Brain-fog, whether by the misuse of alcohol, or the use of mind-numbing drugs, is not being in a state of "*ready for action*" which is Peter's point when he says to "*gird up the loins of your mind*."

**Applying All of This with Wisdom** – We must learn to stop listening to the foolishness of carnal man's traditions. We must not fall into the trap of slavery to man's desires. But this includes our own personal desires. We must learn wisdom.

**Pursuit of Holiness** – Remember Col 2:6-7 in this, as well as Rom 14:17, "*for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*." The point of all parts of our lives is to bring glory to God. Foolish men are warned not to use their "liberty for a cloak of maliciousness" (1 Pet 2:16).

**No Apologies for Wine** – The Scripture commends it, and we encourage all families to cultivate its use in the partaking of the Lord's Supper and in times of feasting and celebration before the Lord.

**Growing our Children Up in Wisdom** – 2 Pet 2:19 warns us of a false liberty that often sucks young men and women into sin. Boys and girls, you would do well to always submit to your parents in these things. Too often, the cries for freedom from young men do not come because they want so desperately to be more like Christ (Luke 1:74-75), but rather, so they can look 'cool'.

**Conclusion** – Feasting, thanksgiving, hospitality, toasting, resting, and wine. These should be some of the words that describe the life of those celebrating another Lord's Day. We have been set free. Let us use such freedom to enjoy, proclaim, and live the gospel of holiness and joy to which we were called.